FCJ-050 Cameras, Radios, and Butterflies: the Influence and Importance of Fan Networks for Game Studies

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Collecting and Interpreting: Walkthroughs, CliffsNotes, & IMDB

2 As a new medium, video games can be analyzed under some of the similar rubrics of other media. However, because of the fundamental differences between video games and older media, including the requirement of skilled user action, alterations to this categorization prove necessary. The study of games has been approached from many aspects, including the study of narrative in games and the study of game play. Both of these aspects complement each other and additional studies, such as studies of video game audiences, further complement game studies as an emerging field. Because video games require skilled user interaction, studying games requires game play. Game play in turn necessitates that players and students studying video games use additional resources to play particular games, and especially to complete particular games or to explore the games as texts to even a reasonable degree needed for study. Essentially, because games are interactive or mutable texts- in the sense that game play is open and a stable text is not available in the manner in which it would be for most films or novels- game play and additional resources are necessary for players and scholars. The additional resources offer a sense of how a particular game functions for various players and for repeated game play through its many permutations. This is particularly important for game studies because, while games often include stories, games are first predicated on game play. Because the emphasis is first on game play, the gaming walkthroughs and other resources offer a sense of the manner in which the games are played, and a sense of how the games operate for different players. For the many games with narratives, walkthroughs also offer plot points and information on the narrative progression. Additional resources for play can often be found on the official websites of games and in official game walkthroughs, like those published by Bradygames and Prima. However, many older and even many current games do not have enough information available through official sites or through official walkthroughs. For these games, fan sites provide needed academic resources in much the same way that databases do for scholarly studies of films and literature and in the same way that CliffsNotes – printed books and now an online site with notes for use in studying particular literary texts – do for students studying literature and that the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) does for students studying film. As Donna E. Alvermann and Margaret C. Hagood argue, students can often benefit from producing fan works and connecting to fan cultures (2001: 436-446). While scholarly databases, CliffsNotes, and IMDB all differ from each other in important ways and cannot replace the engagement with particular texts, just as fan sites cannot replace actual game play, each of these does often serve as a necessary complement for scholarly studies and for pedagogical purposes.

3 Firstly, gaming fan sites aid academia by serving as 'museums or archives, collecting and sharing information about the games, and providing information that is contextualised within a gaming culture's perception and reception of the games. Despite their intention to archive and collect materials, these sites are often unstable; however, the fluidity of the sites often leads to their archival on other sites. This is akin to the function of *Nintendo Power*'s early Nintendo cartoons, and gaming paratextual materials like gaming memorabilia, free games, and game websites.[1] Fan sites often include information on the place of a particular game in gaming history along with the importance of particular gaming culture artifacts in shaping the game and its reception. Fan sites also act as appendices and archives, collecting press releases, game screenshots, hints, clues, and mentions of particular games in different media. As Henry Jenkins demonstrates, fan communities have relied on the internet as a means for discussion within a large, geographically unbounded community with, 'the Web as a means of annotation. The succession of new media technologies since the late 1970s has encouraged the emergence of a culture based on the archiving, annotation, transformation, and recirculation of media content' (2001: xvi-xvii). Jenkins shows that online fan communities serve several functions. They create a culture of collection and annotation that operates with a larger interpretive community. In doing so, I would argue, they create resources that are archived, utilised, and reviewed by the gaming community in such a way as to function as a community-based peer review, especially given the forums wherein players and

fans discuss the games and the sites supporting the games. The forums provide a format for discussion that can encourage sites to alter their information based on commentary from readers. The resources facilitate interpretation, and the multiplicity of voices producing the resources eschews simplistic readings of a single ideal text. These gaming resources- as collections, archives, and peer reviewed resources- can be seen in the fan walkthroughs and websites for *Fatal Frame*.

4 Game walkthroughs and fan sites are useful resources for game studies because they provide information on game play permutations, lists of game items, character lists, lists of in-game texts, and more. In exploring a possible methodology for game studies, Espen Aarseth cites walkthroughs as one of several types of game studies resources (2003). Aarseth notes the problem that players may miss certain critical game elements. However, fan sites and walkthroughs ease these problems, aiding academic game studies by analyzing games, particularly because they often do so in an academic, albeit informal, manner. In games like *Fatal Frame* and *Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly*, the abundance of text- photographs, the camera's background, notes, stones used in spirit radio, video clips – all add up to an abundance of data. Each bit of data resituates the game during game play and with game studies. Because the pieces add to the patchwork to create a cohesive narrative world, but are often unnecessary to the game play and game progress, the array of pieces informs both the individual game and game studies as a field, as games and game studies balance issues of narrative and game play. The data is not necessary for much of game studies- as the incompleteness of the texts is part of game studies- yet these resources do serve other studies. While the walkthroughs themselves are invaluable resources, the larger fan sites within which the walkthroughs are often contextualised provide additional material and insight for game studies. Thus, the data archived and created by fan sites inform game studies, as do the process of creation for fan sites and the cultures that create and foster the fan sites.

5 Two of the more popular and more extensive fan sites for *Fatal Frame* are *Beyond the Camera's Lens* (https://cameraslens.com/) and *Chou* (https://www.akaichou.net/chou/). *Beyond the Camera's Lens* covers all of the *Fatal Frame* games, including the recently released *Fatal Frame III: The Tormented* (released as *Rei shisei no koe* in Japan, and as *Project Zero III: The Tormented* in Europe). *Chou* – the Japanese word for butterfly and the title of the opening song for *Fatal Frame II* with its narrative and game play elements that follow the 'crimson butterfly – focuses more closely on the second game. In both cases, these fan sites can act as archives and sources for research, including academic research. The emphasis on the collection and archiving of materials can be seen clearly with *Chou*, which has neither a section for fan fiction nor a forums section for fans to discuss the games. Instead, *Chou* acts as an archive of game materials that can only be edited by fans who contact the site owner to have the material reviewed and edited for accuracy or completeness. *Chou* does have one page of fan art work. However, this is obviously not the site's emphasis because the site has dozens of pages on various topics: lyrics from the games; music from the games; screenshots; background information on the characters; background information on the locations; lists of the game memos, scrapbooks, photos, maps, and spirits; and more. As an archive of materials, *Chou* aids academic researchers and students studying games by providing material that researchers would otherwise have difficulty accessing, like the lyrics for *Fatal Frame II*'s opening theme.

6 The lyrics for *Fatal Frame II* would be difficult for researchers to find, especially in both the English and Japanese versions. However, *Chou* provides both versions and provides them within the context of a fan website where many other fans would collectively provide comments so that the site creator can correct any errors in the lyrics in much the same way that Open Source software is shared and critiqued, and in much the same way as academic articles are critiqued within the academic community. Even simply collecting elements like the texts of each of the in-game notebooks, diaries, and reports would prove a tedious task for game researchers because the *Fatal Frame* games are available only on consoles. This means that an academic game researcher would not be able to access the notebooks without playing through the entire game – or downloading game saves which are now available for some games – and finding all of the texts, a difficult task in itself. Then the researcher would need to type up the text from each of the notebooks, diaries, and reports. Computer games often allow for cheats that allow players to access all materials, so that would immediately lessen the time demands for this sort of collection. Other games also have 'official game walkthroughs, so the text would be accessible through those. Official walkthroughs

and guides present valuable benefits to game scholarship; however, scholarship on other games is bereft of these. Fan websites both satisfy the limited needs for the archive materials while also providing additional resources on the games. Not all of this archival research and interpretation is useful to game studies; however, much of the material is needed for different studies of gaming and for the overall development of different analytical communities.

7 While *Chou* offers many resources for those studying *Fatal Frame II, Beyond the Camera's Lens* offers even more resources, resembling a scholarly archive and research project in its complexity. Like *Chou*, *Beyond the Camera's Lens* acts first as an annotated archive of material on the *Fatal Frame* games. It covers all three of the *Fatal Frame* games and has little fan fiction material. *Beyond the Camera's Lens* has a page for fan images; however, the page links to only three fan fiction stories and only a handful on fan artworks. By comparison, the dozens of pages on the *Fatal Frame* games themselves are clearly the site's main emphasis. In addition to the gaming materials that aid fans and researchers in studying and playing the games, *Beyond the Camera's Lens* also offers supplementary information on aspects of the game. This includes information on ritual suicide in Japanese culture, since this is a large theme in the games, and pages on the cultural influences on the games. It also includes information on the term 'camera obscura and the relevance of the term as it is used to label the camera in the game. The information listed under the cultural influences includes such information as the importance and relevance of the butterfly symbolism in the games. Further, *Beyond the Camera's Lens* includes information on the determination of the elder twin in Japan, information that directly impacts aspects of game play and game narrative, 'December 13th, 1874 – Meiji law passed deeming the firstborn twin is eldest' (2003: timeline.php). On the page about the butterfly symbolism, the web creator even includes references to other resource materials (2003: butterfly.php). Both *Chou* and *Beyond the Camera's Lens* provide material that is otherwise inaccessible or difficult to find. As such, they act as extremely useful academic and pedagogical resources for the play and the study of the *Fatal Frame* games.

8 *Beyond the Camera's Lens* also hosts game walkthroughs and hints. Gaming walkthroughs are common game paratexts that can be consulted during, prior to, or after game play. For more strictly action-based games, the walkthroughs often include more focused information on how to defeat particular enemies or where certain enhancement items can be found. For games with an abundance of embedded media like the *Fatal Frame* games, the walkthroughs also provide narrative information, information on where to find particular notes, audio, and video files, and information on how those files contribute to game play and to the game narrative. In cases where the walkthroughs would be far too cluttered with all of this embedded information, fan sites tend to emerge as a complement to the informative aspects of the game walkthroughs. In these instances, the walkthroughs serve as abbreviated versions of the fan sites like *Beyond the Camera's Lens* because the walkthroughs provide the information most pertinent to game play, but not to the overall gaming experience as it is explored on the *Beyond the Camera's Lens* and *Chou* sites.

9 As CliffsNotes or IMDB aid in providing, collecting, and connecting information on books and films, fan sites provide players, students, and academics with a sense of the games.[2] Similarly, fan sites and walkthroughs cannot supplant the actual gaming experience, yet fan sites and walkthroughs do aid in making even difficult games- in terms of game play and cultural information- more accessible for players. While CliffsNotes and IMDB are study guides and a database, respectively, the increase in access they provide aids in the creation of analytical communities. Fan networks aid accessibility and then build on that accessibility to create internal communities of review. While doing so, fan sites and walkthroughs aid external communities- including academic communities- in the teaching and studying of games. Further, recognizing the importance of gaming fan sites and gaming walkthroughs acknowledges their place in the history of gaming and in the instance of game play. In his foreword to *Interacting with Babylon 5*, Jenkins notes that the current generation of scholars have grown up with interactive fictions like those found in the pen-and-paper role-playing games that Kurt Lancaster mentions in his study of *Babylon 5, Interacting with Babylon 5* (2001: xix). Likewise, game studies scholars have grown up or into using gaming walkthroughs and fan sites in their game playing. Using these resources allows game studies scholars to create a more fully fleshed-out study of game play with its many peripheral components, including the importance of fan culture, fan communities, and the archives and arguments they produce. Fan sites may also afford other game studies scholars better sense of the game by which to assess the

scholarship when reviewing articles on a particular game with which they have less experience. With games like those in the *Final Fantasy* series, which may each take over forty hours to complete, gaming walkthroughs and fan sites can give a greater sense of the game so that game studies scholars may more easily respond to game specifics of unfamiliar games, even if only to pose questions.

Canon, Fanon: Fan Sites and Peer Review

10 In addition to an emphasis on the skill required to play games, and the walkthroughs and shared knowledge resources that follow from that, the interdisciplinary and audience driven nature of gaming requires immediate engagement and discussion with other fields that shape games and gaming. As Matteo Bittanti contends, 'it is necessary to rethink the *cooperative* interplay between game scholars and game designers, game journalists, game artists, and, last but not least, game players, whose importance is systematically neglected in the ongoing debate' (2004: para. 14). Studying players aids not only in analyzing how the players play and use games, but also in analyzing how players shape game studies and game design.

11 Bittanti's argument for an emphasis on the players is mirrored in much of the work on fan cultures for various media. For instance, Matt Hills demonstrates that the majority of scholarship on fan cultures divides fans and scholars even when fans are operating as scholars. Hills shows that studies of fan cultures position fans both within and outside of academia, stating that most fan studies assume that, 'Elite fans are scholars, yes, but they are still *not quite* academic scholars: they are not systematic or sustained enough, being only capable of flashes of theory' (2002: 17). Like many fan culture scholars, Hills argues for the authority of fans as scholars and for their skill at academic analysis. Fan cultures themselves exist within what Jenkins has termed 'participatory culture, and which he argues derives from the connection between several aspects, including new tools that are available for fans to manipulate media and fan cultures that promote media production (2002: para. 4-5). While Jenkins examines these tools more closely in relation to fan fiction production, the same structures of participatory-culture resonate within gaming cultures and their production of fan sites and walkthroughs.

12 Within gaming's participatory cultures certain community rules shape the creation, review, and distribution of fan materials. The gaming materials covered in this article are the non-fiction archives created on gaming websites, and these are essentially 'fanon. For fan communities and studies of fan writing, 'fanon is a term that refers to the canon of fan works within a particular fan community as canons exist within particular academic cultures. While the term fanon itself is generally read as a combination of 'fan-fiction and 'canon, it also more generally combines 'fan writing and 'canon to cover the non-fiction works created by fans like the science of *Star Trek*, the geography of *Twin Peaks*, and the description of the characters in the *Fatal Frame* games. In order to exist as fanon the works- whether they are fiction or non-fiction- must be accepted by the fan communities according to the fan community's rules. Academic study on fan-produced texts often focuses on the fictional works created to extend source texts. Rebecca W. Black studies fictional fan creations in language learning (2005), as do Kelly Chandler-Olcott and Donna Mahar in their analysis of the acquisition of multiliteracies (2003). However, fan creations are also valid texts in themselves; and, both fiction and non-fiction fan creations operate within their internal review communities akin to academic communities.

13 The participatory culture of fan sites like *Chou* and *Beyond the Camera's Lens* becomes increasingly valuable for academic studies when researchers note that the sites themselves are fanon, meaning that they are effectively peer-reviewed via the members of their participatory cultures, thus assuring the quality and accuracy of the information. The peer review operates within the community discussions, links from one community member site to another, explicit webring links, and through the community interaction in the development of particular sites. Like walkthroughs, fan sites generally list acknowledgements and generally list corrections and the people who submitted the corrections; thereby acknowledging the community and the importance of community review.

14 Both *Chou* and *Beyond the Camera's Lens* belong to *SPECTRE*, the web ring for *Fatal Frame* fan sites. Other sites within the web ring focus on specific aspects of the games, like Faces, which focuses on the dolls in the games, and *Drifting Away*, which focuses on the relationship between the two sisters in *Fatal Frame II*. While *SPECTRE* is a webring that connects the *Fatal Frame* sites, it also

stipulates rules and directions for those interested in making their own *Fatal Frame* fan sites. Citing the problems many people have in finding information about *Fatal Frame*, *SPECTRE* states that it seeks to collect the *Fatal Frame* sites so that players can more easily find the sites and information and so that site owners will easily be able to find other sites about *Fatal Frame* (2003: para. 5). It continues on to list the rules for any sites wishing to join the webring:

- You must own a website with *Fatal Frame* or *Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly* concept.
- You site must be original in content and design. Give proper credits when needed to. Stolen works are inappropriate.
- Your site must be user-friendly. Meaning no sticky caps, long loading time, confusing navigation, flashy/pastel layouts and hard to read context.
- No content regarding to sex and nudity.
- Please put up the code on your main page or webring page (where it can be seen easily) before applying. (2003: para. 6, emphases in original)

15 The rules for *SPECTRE*'s webring members illustrate that the fan sites are regulated by the webring as well as by the fans reading and using the sites. The rules for *SPECTRE* also parallel the typical rules in academic discourse. The first rule is that the text must be on topic, as any academic journal would require an article that is pertinent to the journal's theme and to academic discussions. The second stipulates that the site must be original, as with academia's requirements for proper attribution, articles that add to the current discussion, and for articles that are written by the author and not plagiarised. The third and fourth rules state the proper format, in much the same way this article has citations in a manner required by the *Fibreculture* rules for formatting. The final rule is perhaps the most interesting because it requires that those applying to the webring must, before applying, acknowledge their place within the webring's community. The writing and submission of academic articles to journals inherently, and often transparently, assumes the writer's place within academia, just as the webring code immediately places a site creator within the fan community, and with the possibility of being accepted or rejected by that particular community.

16 Regulation by the fans is part of a much larger process of fan community building. As Jenkins contends, 'Fandoms were virtual communities, 'imagined and 'imagining communities, long before the introduction of networked computers' (2002: para. 9). Matt Hills shows that fan culture is a community and a hierarchy based on fan placement within that community, stating, 'fan culture [functions] not simply as a community but *also as a social hierarchy* where fans share a common interest while also competing over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status' (2001: 46). As a community and a social hierarchy, fandoms have standards for both behavior within the fandom and standards for fan works. As Jenkins notes, 'fandom has long maintained an ethical norm against producing erotica about real people rather than fictional characters' (2002: para. 11). Jenkins continues to explain that newer fans have sometimes created fan erotica, and that this causes a rift between the older and the younger fan communities. For gaming, fan communities may include or forbid erotica, as *SPECTRE* determines that its webring of *Fatal Frame* fan sites forbids erotica.

17 For gaming sites, the community rules and social hierarchies also establish a system of review for placement of fans within the gaming hierarchy. Placement is determined largely by contributions-contributions that are then reviewed by the fan community, with the reviewing process itself as a measure of fan contributions. Illustrating connections between fan communities and academia, Lelia Green and Carmen Guinery argue, 'Fan communities thrive on the power of the individual fan to project themselves and their fan identity as part of an ongoing conversation' (1998: para. 12). They continue to state, 'fans become famous and recognised within their own community for the quality of their work and the generosity of their sharing with others' (1998: para. 23). While Green and Guinery are discussing the *Harry Potter* fan fiction phenomenon, these same principles also apply for the non-fiction archives that are created with gaming fan sites. Like Green and Guinery's analysis of the *Harry Potter* fan fiction, Kristi Lee Brobeck studies one fan community where all fan fiction is reviewed in a systematic manner:

18 > a member can access other writers' particular knowledge about geography, warfare, poetry, food [...]. Writers can find beta readers, or proofreaders, to look over his/her work, as well as post comments about one's stories and await criticism or enthusiasm for one's works. [...] one can read

> stories which have been accepted into the public realm of the archive after going through a nine-person, self-selected reviewing pool and have been accepted by at least five of the reviewers. (2004: para. 3)

19 While most gaming fan sites do not have such a systematised version of peer review, the sites do still undergo peer evaluation and review using forum, email, webrings, and general fan discussion. Fan sites are generally reviewed more informally through fan networks and fan communities; however, the larger sites do undergo a more formalised system of review. *GameFAQs*, as the largest online compendium of game walkthroughs and hints, requires that walkthrough and hint writers be registered with the site in order to submit any information. The major component of this registration is the writer's email address so that *GameFAQs* and other players can contact the writer. Then, *GameFAQs* requires that all contributors follow strict guidelines and then have their material reviewed before the material is posted to the site (2005: 'Contribute'). The guidelines for submission stipulate the 'golden rule of writing, which is, 'Provide credit where it is due' (2005: 'Help').[3] Like *GameFAQs*, the fan sites and fan resources rely on the power of the fan and gaming communities to both provide and review content.

20 The use of webrings and links from site to site further encourage review by bringing more players to the sites to evaluate the sites. Jenkins shows that fandom is often intertextual, a process encouraged by the internet and by webrings, 'While some fans remain exclusively committed to a single show or star, many others use individual series as points of entry into a broader fan community, linking to an intertextual network composed of many programs' (1992: 40). The intertextual nature of fan communities leads to an increase in information from multiple sources and leads to a great number of voices contributing to any particular fan text. Like *Wikipedia* and other online compendiums, the intertextual connection between these sites increases the number of readers and thus their ability to contribute to the sites. This also means that the skill set for any fan site is augmented through the many voices of the fans, some who can translate Japanese fan pages, some who can provide computer coding information on the games, some who can provide historical information, and some who provide information on gaming cheats or on difficult gaming maneuvers. The linked nature of the internet allows other fans with those particular skills to access and then evaluate the work done by other fans.

21 Fan sites encourage other players to play the games and to have a relationship with both the games and gaming communities. Accordingly, the games industry itself encourages fan sites and fan works because, 'The games industry, which sees itself as marketing interactive experiences rather than commodities, has been eager to broaden consumer participation and strengthen the sense of affiliation players feel towards their games' (Jenkins, 'Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans, 2002: para. 21). This drive to strengthen consumer participation leads to official game websites that provide images fans are allowed to use, or are at least not strictly prevented from using, in creating fan sites. The official sites, like *Fatal Frame II*'s official site, retain a copyright notice, but they do not include a notice stating that others cannot use the images. Additionally, they do provide image galleries, desktop images, and other media files that are available for fans in their creation of fan sites. However, the official sites, as in the case of *Fatal Frame II*' s official website, prove lacking in the quality and quantity of material that interests fans. In examining *Babylon 5*, Kurt Lancaster notes that fans, 'also create fan clubs online, which usually revolve around particular characters and the actors who perform them. Entire Web sites with multiple pages and links may be devoted to one character or theme' (2001: 132). Like the *Babylon 5* sites, gaming sites often include detailed information on particular characters or themes that augments the often inadequate official resources. Lancaster also posits that, 'The formality of these [the official *Babylon 5*] sites lacks the creativity of fan-designed Web pages' (2001: 136). While gaming fan sites are very creative, other aspects are highly formalised, like the format for walkthroughs and the structure of the sites. Fans thus create their own sites by drawing on the resources provided by the official websites, and then supplementing those with resources created and gathered by themselves, all of which are reviewed by the larger fan community.

Conclusion

22 In the creation of walkthroughs and fan sites, fans often raise interesting questions about the particulars of a single game, about gaming as a whole, and about game players or game communities. While this article has directly addressed the value of walkthroughs and fan sites as

resources for game scholars studying and teaching games, fan sites also often present academic arguments of their own, including arguments about the value of open discussion taking place on fan sites. As a new field, and as a field developed alongside the expansion of the web, one of the great promises for game studies is that it could allow for fully interdisciplinary scholarship both within the academy and with others outside of the academy, including fans and those in the gaming industry. Bridging the gap between different discourse communities often proves difficult because of different methods and different terminology. However, fan sites offer a nexus point in that they operate by similar means as academia and to develop similar texts. Thomas McLaughlin has argued that non-academics often present valid theories and questions for academia:

23 > I claim that individuals who *do not* come out of a tradition of philosophical critique are capable of raising questions about the dominant cultural assumptions. They do so in ordinary language, and they often suffer from the blindness that unself-conscious language creates. But the fact that vernacular theories therefore do not completely transcend ideologies does not make them different in kind from academic theories. They manage in spite of their complicity to ask fundamental questions about culture. (1996: 5)

24 In the same vein as McLaughlin's argument for the validity of discourse from outside of academia proper, game studies itself could in turn argue for the value and significance of voices from outside of academia. The peer reviewed nature of fan sites both mirrors peer review in academia and serves as a model for academic work. It serves as a model for academic work because it shows how communities can create peer reviewed texts that are resources for their own communities while also creating texts that affect communities outside their own. While peer review can be seen as a means of setting academic discourse apart from other discourses- because it requires its participants to use specific codes- the level of and criteria for exclusion is the primary difference between traditional academia and fan sites. The differences in exclusivity for writers also correspond to the differences in reader exclusivity, with fan sites more easily connecting to readers. Game walkthroughs and fan sites are an essential part of game studies both as resources for studying games and as models for the potential form that game studies could take in connecting academic game studies with scholars, game players, students, and the gaming industry.

25 While fandoms began prior to the use of networked computers, networked computers have made fan cultures easier to access for both members of the fan culture and for those outside of the fan culture; 'Internet fan cultures are user friendly; fans don' t need to seek out and subscribe to obscure fanzines, they don' t need to travel to meet other fans, and they don' t have to negotiate the negative stereotype of the nerdy Trekkie' (Sara Gwenllian-Jones, 2003: 185). This is particularly important because it shows how fan cultures can connect to fans, students, and academics using the same model. Academia can utilise this model because, 'Online fanfiction has, ' as Julianne Chatelain argues, 'a culture of relentless reviewing that is frequently supported by customised code and tools' (2003: para. 1). Other fan culture scholars argue from similar positions. Hills calls for 'academic commitment which is modeled on fan commitment' (2002: 184). Green et al. claim:

26 > Academic work on popular culture pays a price for its insistence on isolating itself from other kinds of critical discourse: We sacrifice both the ability to understand experientially and the ability to more fully participate in public debates about popular culture. As the academy turns toward a reassessment of the role of the 'public intellectual, ' we need to accept that not all expertise resides within the academy. We, thus, urge a more open dialogue between academic writing and other modes of criticism. (1998: 14)

27 Game studies in conjunction with fan cultures has the potential to explore new areas, to break down boundaries, and to more fully explore the role of the public intellectual.

28 Game studies remains uncodified. At its current stage of development, it parallels the early days of film studies. Film studies, Robert Ray argues, has lost much of its impact because film criticism itself cannot compete with the power of Hollywood's stories. In order to do so, Ray suggests 'experimenting with the *forms* of criticism' (1995: 9). For game studies, experimenting with the forms of criticism has already begun. The same fan site discussions are being emulated in the game studies blogs which also connect academia to players, students, and game fans. The prevalence of academic blogs on gaming and of academic web journals that include articles on gaming are only part of the large transformation and expansion of game studies taking place. Not

only do blogs like *Grand Text Auto*, *Terra Nova*, *Gameology*, and others use formats similar to fan sites to study and discuss games, they also do so using language that is both accessible to non-gamers and is presented in a format that does not restrict access. Even when the discussions use technical terminology and jargon, the open discussion format allows for clarification. Like the movement of fandom publications from zines and newsletters to online discussions, academic arguments can also move from the more limited print journals to online journals and blogs. In turn, game studies scholars could continue to utilise walkthroughs and archives while academic game blogs could offer fans, game players, and the game industry insight into game reception, representation, and critique. However, in order for true cross-domain discussion to occur, academia would need to support fan and fan-like endeavors, offering some sort of publication or service rewards for scholars who publish blogs, and offering support to archive and maintain the often too ephemeral fan sites. Until then, game studies and game fan cultures will continue to operate as parallel processes with frequent, yet often unacknowledged, cross-over.

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Notes

[1] For discussions of Nintendo's creation of a fan culture, see David Sheff's *Game Over: How Nintendo Zapped an American Industry, Captured Your Dollars, and Enslaved Your Children* (New York: Random House, 1993), and Chris Kohler's *Power Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Brady Games, 2004).

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[2] The value of CliffsNotes, like *Wikipedia*, as pedagogical tools is contentious because these resources can be used to avoid engaging with the original text. The particular resource, for instance a particular CliffsNotes or particular literary text with scholarly readings, also tend to suggest a certain way of reading a text – often through specific theoretical approaches.

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[3] Along with the several lengthy pages on composing and submitting walkthroughs, *GameFAQs* provides pages for hints, cheats, and game credits submissions. As a new media form, games often do not provide full attribution in the games themselves or within the game paratextual materials. Thus, if a researcher were interested in looking at all games made in connection with a particular conceptual artist, that researcher would have difficulty operating through the normal academic channels like the primary texts and game journalism. However, the fan networks through sites like *GameFAQs*, *Moby Games*, and *Wikipedia* provide a partial solution because they allow fans to research and submit this information. Thus, game studies students and researchers can work in concert with thousands of fans who are all researching and compiling information. Similarly, if a game studies scholar finds information on a particular conceptual artist or game developer, the scholar can submit that information to sites like *GameFAQs* so that fans and researchers can mutually benefit.

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