

Introduction to the Inaugural Issue of 'Loading...'

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The inaugural issue of *Loading...* features papers from a conference convened by the newly organized *Canadian Game Studies Association*, and held in September 2006 at York University in Toronto. The principle goal of the four-day SSHRC-supported symposium was to bring together scholars, artists, game designers, researchers and students from across Canada to examine the current and projected 'state of play' in Canadian Games Studies. This was the first time that Canadian scholars had been invited to share, through papers, workshops, exhibitions and demonstrations, current models, tools and methods for advancing theory, research and development in the area of digital games research, and to bring together in productive dialogue some of the existing networks already established in Canada. A further intent of these meetings was to broaden our relationships with others working in this area in order to better support our graduate students with a wider range of potential advisors, supervisors, teachers and examiners. Finally, we sought to build awareness about existing and emerging programs and courses in Canadian colleges, universities and institutes focused on game study, development, theory, and history and to invite and extend dialogue between researchers and industry partners.

The collection of papers in this first issue is testament to the strength and character of digital games research in Canada, demonstrating its inherently interdisciplinary, multi-method and multimodal approach. In this and future issues, the journal aims to support the work of both established and emerging scholars, to provide a venue showcasing contemporary Canadian work for the international games studies community, and to establish, thereby, a uniquely Canadian presence in a field dominated by European and American scholars. *Loading...* aims to be a *dynamically generative* site for Canadian digital games theory, research and development. It hopes to become a place we can reliably go to equip ourselves with new ideas, and re-acquaint ourselves with intellectual traditions whose foundational work is yet to be done to establish the keystones of the still very new field of digital games studies. It wants to be a place to 'load up' on information about the kinds of work being done here, the ways Canadian scholars are looking at and developing games, and as a place to find in this country like-minded colleagues, peers, collaborators advisors and programs. It is intended, as well, to be a place where digital game arts and sciences productively enrich one another, where people meet, and where conversations, discussions and debates happen. *Loading...* hopes in these ways and more, to help secure wider recognition of the contribution of Canadian scholarship in directing and shaping this burgeoning field.

In its relatively short life, digital gaming has generated a culture which so intensely immerses and absorbs its participants as to make it an enormously powerful mass entertainment industry, and one which increasingly extends into every aspect of our lives. In a global context, digital games are both products and producers of collisions between traditionally disconnected cultural spheres: work and leisure, fact and fiction, home and away, education and entertainment.

Digital games research has, in the past few years, become a legitimate field of study, not just of game design and development, but of player communities, individual game play, and its social contexts, the educative potentials of games, and games as an influential popular cultural force – and not just in the lives of young boys. One of the largest new media and digital technology industries, digital gaming offers the richest of immersive environments: games combine increasingly dazzling and sophisticated digital images and sounds, alongside textual communication, to generate extensive virtual worlds in which players must “read” these visual, aural, and textual meanings, as part of a playful engagement which is both pleasurable and challenging. As entertainment-oriented commercial gaming continues to advance exponentially in its ability to keep players immersed in these digital environments, knowledge, information, and skill development become increasingly accessible outside the confines of formal education and training. These cultural shifts call for a dramatic change of view as we reshape and rethink the study of digital games as information-rich cultural texts.

Loading... offers in its first volume, a collection of papers that directly addresses this rapidly changing landscape and so doing offers significant revisions to the ever-changing field of digital research. Studying digital games as artifacts always meaningfully situated within contexts which are themselves always changeable, and finding productive ways to elucidate and investigate digital games’ particular uses for and relations to their users is the challenge each of these papers takes up. Following the methodological lead well elaborated by researchers concerned with producing accurate, disciplined and fuller accounts of an agent’s relationships to an artifact (Brown and Duguid, 1994; Franklin, 2001; Taylor, 1998; Werstch 1998), we have demarcated within his larger set, three conceptual contexts that signal the different themes, questions and concerns with which these authors are concerned--though such boundaries inevitably hemorrhage. The papers in **Rebuilding: Foundations and Frames** approach digital games research at its base – narrative, content, players, play, gender – exploring and illuminating those foundations at times from its margins, and at others from the center. **Elements** describes the artifact (digital game) from different constitutive angles: development, sound, education, players, and objectives in an attempt to more fully come to understand the relation of its parts to player experience. And finally, **Borders** looks at the margins of digital games, play and players as a rich site for interaction, communication and action in digital games research. What the papers in this first volume illustrate is the important voice of Canadian scholars in the field: voices which are much less hampered by preoccupations with defining and demarcating a field of studies, and much more practically and critically focused instead on teasing out specific and significant relationships between and among play, players, game, content and context. To pursue that ambition is to engage the emerging field of digital games studies in all its rich complexity, a daunting mission best undertaken with the help of a strong, committed and cohesive community of scholars. This is what we hope to inaugurate here.