Book Review

First Person (New Media as Story, Performance, and Game), N Wardrip-Fruin and P Harrigan (eds), MIT Press, 331 pages, $60.00 AUD (Cloth) ISBN 0262232324

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Game Studies, as an emergent field, exists somewhere between serious research and academic rigour and "boutique" learning and academic ridicule. Wherever you sit on the issue, it is quite clear that Game Studies is carving a niche for itself at all educational levels. How that field will be interpreted in five years is of course, an unknown. What we do know, however, is that a groundswell of academic support and discussion keeps Games research and learning very much in the front of our minds.

Given the impact that games (and here I am referring to games as they exist in the electronic field) have had on popular culture, social research and design, there is a place for a book such as *First Person (New Media as Story, Performance, and Game)*. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan have collected a series of "conversations" or "discussions" about games, narrative, ludology, interactivity and performance which loosely come together to discuss from where the performative elements of games have come, and very possibly, where they are going.

Using the argument that the performative nature of electronic games in part is a kind of interactive narrative, the editors position electronic games somewhere between text and film. This discussion includes submissions from the forefront of Game Studies (e.g., Espen Aarseth, Jesper Juul, Eric Zimmerman, Gonzalo Frasca etc) which serve to illicit a kind of conversation (or panel presentation) in the way that the subject matter is handled. Indeed, the editor's intent is to continue the life of the book after publishing by providing for an ongoing conversation (supported by this text), online.

By positioning this text as an informal conversation, the editors have set out to cover areas such as Cyberdrama, Ludology (and the relationship it has to Game Studies), Critical Simulation (Representation and Narrative), Game Theories (the development of a discipline of Game Studies), Hypertexts and Interactives (new media and storytelling), the Pixel / the Line (poetics and symbolism), Beyond Chat (online gaming and online communities) and New Readings (metaphoric networks and interactive fictions).

While many of these ideas are not new to the field of Game Studies, the approach the editors have taken leaves us, as readers, with the impression that this is the start of a much larger and more complex conversation. Each section is broken down in the following way: a statement is discussed by the primary author of that section (the "first person"). This is followed by a formal response from another author, and then, an online response from a third. This is all brought together by a final statement from the first person. This is an extremely effective method in that the information is presented in a very loose conversational way…and as a middle ground, this works well.

This "open" approach suggests a way of reading which is more a "line of questioning" (p. xi) than a conclusion. This open-endedness suggests that there still remains a long line of questions and conversations to be had.

Given the novel, almost playful approach to this text, it makes for an absorbing read, especially if approached as a series of statements and responses, which do not suggest any particular order of reading, or impose unsubstantiated ideas upon its reader. As such, this

would make an excellent text in a Game Studies subject, or for someone who is interested in untangling the seemingly endless layers of new game theories which seem so prevalent at the moment.

Indeed, the game-like structure of the text is totally deliberate. As the editors argue, "…we provide examples of textual/literary practices (including hypertexts) that in their internal procedures or audience interaction can be thought of as performative or gameplay, or that provoke us to reconsider these terms…" (p.xii). While the intent is certainly there, whether or not it is actually possible to achieve this in a text-based, immovable artifact, may or may not be arguable.

Overall however, it is not often we have access to the musings of some of the "superstars" of game theory, and *First Person* provides the reader with access to those and more. The next challenge, however, is to get the next generation of game theorists to take these ideas to the next level.