The Play's the Thing:

The *Arden* "Failure" and the Future of the Educational Games Movement

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1. INTRODUCTION

On October 2, 2007, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that the MacArthur Foundation was pulling out of an ambitious plan for a multiplayer game that would teach digitally savvy students by presenting Shakespeare's works in a 3D virtual world full of opportunities for interactivity in the form of questing, crafting, card playing, and trivia games (Foster, 2007). As soon as this funding cut-off to the Synthetic Worlds Initiative at Indiana University was announced, it stimulated hand-wringing throughout the "serious games" field about the viability of the entire educational videogame movement.

After the MacArthur Foundation refused to renew funding for *Arden*, the director of the project issued a public *mea culpa* about the project's failure on a prominent collaboratively written blog about virtual worlds. As a political economist, who had studied massively multiplayer online role-playing games, he had hoped to use *Arden* as a social laboratory to test different economic models and to find insights into the way that money worked in the real world. Unfortunately, as Edward Castronova explained his diagnosis of the failure, his game's function as an economic simulation was insufficient to justify its existence. He summed up his perspective on the problem simply: "It's no fun . . . You need puzzles and monsters" (Castronova, 2007b). Obviously, *Arden* raised many organizational and managerial issues about the limits of the expertise of the

university, play's relationship to philanthropy, and the circulation of units of value in real and virtual worlds (Naone, 2007), but this "failure" also bears on philosophical questions about game design, particularly those related to the principles governing the adaptation of literary works. Furthermore, for some working on *Arden*, videogames were seen primarily as representations of dramatic action that featured characters, settings, and plots. For others, videogames were experiences that involved interacting with rules. Those who focused on questions of aesthetics viewed the game's pedagogical mission one way, while those who focused on ethics viewed it in another.

For decades, promoters of instructional technology had argued that such games could provide more learner motivation and better measurement of pedagogical objectives by incorporating play to fulfill the obligations of formal education more easily that would normally be executed in a classroom setting. Thus, videogames were designed for military drills, preparation of emergency first responders, disease prevention, patient rehabilitation, sensitivity training, conflict resolution, and teaching and learning at all levels, even though – like other gamers – players often "cheated" once the affordances of a system had been learned (Consalvo, 2007).

However, even during the heyday of exuberant optimism in the educational games movement, many affiliated with game studies were already providing more nuanced readings of the potential value to learning and cautioning against uncritical acceptance of the sales pitches of one-sided boosters who thought that any learning objective could be combined with any videogame, which Scot Osterweil has characterized as the "Grand Theft Calculus" mentality (Osterweil, 2007).

For example, Kurt Squire and Henry Jenkins argue that game skills do not necessarily transfer fluidly to real world environments, although games help users participate in the social practices that are constituent of genuine learning (2003). They also point out that re-creating literary works in videogames should not collapse the differences between games and traditional storytelling media, and they acknowledge the critiques by ludologists of Janet Murray and the incongruities in her claims for the supremacy of narrative in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1998). Of course, ironically, much of James Paul Gee's much-cited pioneering work argues for the educational value of commercial games, rather than those designed specifically for classrooms. He claims that such videogames provide opportunities for "situated learning" or "embodied learning" and a pathway to higher-order forms of literacy. Yet Gee warns that games can be difficult for conventional educational institutions to incorporate, because learning and social transgression are closely related in videogames. (Gee, 2003, 2005). Furthermore, like Squire and Jenkins, Gee claims this literacy operates through the acquisition of general principles for social interaction and problem-solving not through memorizing discrete sets of facts or repeating specific skills.

Ian Bogost argues that in many ways Gee's position is not strong enough, in that videogames "offer meanings and experiences of *particula*r worlds and *particular* relationships" rather than just general operating principles. As Bogost explains his thesis about educational videogames, "The abstract processes that underlie a game may confer general lessons about strategy, mastery, and interconnectedness, but they also remain coupled to a specific topic" (2007). Furthermore, Bogost does not accept either behaviorist or constructivist approaches to creating educational videogames, even though

these have been the two dominant competing philosophies guiding the movement.

Instead, he proposes that these games have a rhetorical function closely tied to

expressions of ideology, which for Bogost is not a morally loaded, negative term, since

he asserts that we can never get outside ideology, just as we can never get outside

procedurality in the "real" world.

2. REPRESENTATIONAL AESTHETICS

2.1 The Hazards of Adaptation

For perspective, it is worth remembering that *Arden* has not been the only

educational videogame ever created to teach Shakespeare, so its "failure" may not be the

last word on the subject. In Canada, English professor Dan Fischlin created a scrolling

shooter game, *'Speare*, that encourages players to examine individual text fragments

from the Bard to better understand the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Although the plot centers

on the elaborate backstory of a "society based on knowledge and poetry" with two

warring planets Capulon and Montagor in the Verona system that have to work together

in order to save "the Knowledge Spheres" stolen by the invading Insidian Army, these

complicated narrative dynamics have little to do with the classic arcade-style action of

the central game (Whalen, 2007). Despite all the language that suggests speech act

theory, such as the declaration that "the power to speak is the power to do," or even

critical code studies, such as the assertion that "all resources are devoted to creating

poetic codes" (*'Speare*, 2006), the literacy practices associated with the game remain

relatively crude.

At MIT, a team of developers working with the Royal Shakespeare Company has

devoted thousands of man-hours to developing a Shakespeare-themed game based on *The*

Tempest. As Squire and Jenkins explain the more sophisticated literacy practices expected of their players, "*Prospero's Island* is a space of dreams and magic, and students are encouraged to decipher symbols, manipulate language, and uncover secrets (in short, to perform literary analysis)" (2003). Like 'Speare, there is no compulsion to set the action in Shakespeare's time or promote historical authenticity.   Although some of the scenic elements in *Prospero's Island* were inspired by Renaissance curiosity cabinets and servant, sailor, or courtier costumes owe much to the fashions of Shakespeare's time, Squire and Jenkins are careful to emphasize the importance of staging Shakespeare in ways that are relevant to the contemporary world. Squire and Jenkins also situate the game design process in the shifting discourses of literature departments: "There has been a significant movement in recent years away from conceiving the Shakespearian plays as sacred and unchanging texts, and toward studying Shakespeare as part of a living performance tradition" (2003),

Some might argue that Castronova picked characters and settings for his Shakespeare game, based on familiarity with a *World of Warcraft* player-versus-player combat aesthetic, that were cursed from the start. By centering the story on the four Shakespeare plays featuring Falstaff and Prince Hal, one could argue that Castronova unconsciously repeats many of the same mistakes that almost proved to be the undoing of the filmmaker Orson Welles during the international production of *Chimes at Midnight* (Anderegg, 1999).

Certainly, the translation of Shakespeare's works to other media and genres has often generated controversy, even though these works are very frequently adapted for stage and screen. For example, over the centuries many arguments have been made about

attempting to even stage parts of *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus* on the grounds that the extreme violence depicted is both socially and logistically not feasible to reproduce.

Moreover, in the early Nineteenth Century, William Hazlitt famously argued that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* should never be staged. Hazlitt claimed, "Poetry and the stage do not agree well together." He argued that attempting to represent the magical actors and actions in the story would produce a failure "not only of effect, but of decorum (2007). Ironically, the *Arden* game opens with Peaseblossom, a fairy character from the very play that Hazlitt argues is only appropriate for the page not the stage.

2.2 Mimesis and Catharsis

Unlike films, plays, artworks, or novels, public debates in the mainstream media over videogames have been caught in a limited circuit of argumentative exchange that rarely gets far beyond the disputes rehearsed thousands of years ago by Plato and Aristotle about situated media. In his *Republic*, Plato argued that tragedies and epic poems could be harmful to the young, because they showed gods and heroes engaged in wicked and passionate actions that young people would be likely to imitate. Aristotle's *Poetics* took issue with Plato's claims and argued that the experience of pity and fear among young audience members would purge them of the urge to act out anti-social desires. The argument that the encounter with such representational media could be pleasant while also serving its educational purpose was made most forcefully by Horace, who argued that poetry was designed to "delight and instruct," a formulation that still plays a role in the thinking of video game designers (Foreman, 2004).

By choosing the *Neverwinter Nights* game engine, this translation problem from page to stage to computer screen may have become even more difficult. Thus

Castronova misses the opportunity to create a coherent computational work of art that mediates between real rules and fictional worlds (Juul, 2005) or exploits the matrix of binaries between diegetic and nondiegetic experiences and the activities of operator and machine (Galloway, 2006) to foster experiences that might draw potential audiences to games and not literature in the first place. In addition to struggling with establishing how features of the general game genre would be integrated, Castronova also seems to neglect what Bogost calls "special attention to the way specific aspects of human experience are represented in rules and code" (2006).

It seems as though the basic look and feel of *Neverwinter Nights* was much more radically redesigned when it was used in an educational game for MIT's *Revolution*, in which *Neverwinter Nights* served as a platform for exploring alternative histories and highlighting the practices of group deliberation that can be staged in game environments. In *Revolution* colonists debate about whether or not to support rebellious troops who are defying British authority, knowing that their decisions may have unanticipated consequences for members of different classes and professions.

How *Neverwinter Nights* comes to serve as the logical game engine for representing the historical past in educational games has its own history in the subculture of game development. What might be interesting to consider is the ways that that this digital "historicism" is constrained, despite the fact that the "New Historicism" for which Shakespeare Studies has been a proving ground opens up the potential field of study to include colonial possessions far away from the metropole of Shakespeare's London (Greenblatt, 1991) and interior self-fashionings made possible by the changes of the Early Modern period (Greenblatt, 1990).

3. TO DELIGHT AND INSTRUCT

3.1 Situated Learning

To Castronova's credit, he has been remarkably open about the perceived shortcomings of the project, with the stated goal of allowing other game designers to learn from his mistakes. To understand what went wrong in his mind, it is perhaps useful to look at the program's initial objectives, which are spelled out in an FAQ.

> *Arden* serves many ends. People who play it will get to know the greatest writer in the English language without really trying. 2) *Arden* will serve as a test bed for research experiments, a Petri dish for social science. 3) By helping to build *Arden*, cadres of students will be preparing themselves for careers in the game industry and academia. 4) The construction and administration of *Arden* will create a locus of public sector expertise about the technology of synthetic worlds. 5) Finally, *Arden* will be a fun game, a good thing all by itself. (2006)

Because Shakespeare has "battles, ghosts, dreams, elves, witches, drunks, sex, and pirates," Castronova believes "there's no reason it has to be boring." In the end, however, he declared Arden I to be a failure and "no fun" without the "puzzles and monsters" he loved. Subsequently Castronova began working on a less explicitly Shakespearian *Arden II: London Burning* (Naone, 2007).

Henry Jenkins has argued that in their pursuit of fun fan cultures are remarkably diverse in their interests and aims (2006), and certainly the continuing popularity of Shakespeare's plot, language, and characters demonstrates that the Bard continues to be a viable site for the kinds of fan behaviors characteristic of persistent games. Because of the possibilities for fun enabled by being able to choose genders, there are ways to

dramatize how the heroes and heroines in Shakespeare's world experimented with gender roles, as Marjorie Garber has pointed out in her work on the motif of cross-dressing in Elizabethan England (1992). It is strange that the "laboratory" that Castronova imagines doesn't have much to do with this form of experimentation, particularly when online environments explicitly allow participants to experiment with body morphology in the representational space.

3.2 A Theory of Fun

Raph Koster has tried to put forward a unitary theory of fun based on brain science and puzzle-doing pleasures (2005), but the question remains, fun for whom? For the game designers? For the Shakespearian scholars who served as consultants? For the school children who beta tested the game? For the teachers who had to give up classroom time for the exercise? Nothing draws attention to individual subjectivity quite like a theory of fun. Few things have generated more philosophical division over the millennia, since fun often appears to depend on each person's attitudes about pleasure, leisure, wish-fulfillment, the bounds of Dionysian experience, or social practices of the carnivalesque.

Certainly it wasn't fun for the game designers. Castronova says he made "some awful mistakes as a manager, which I don't hesitate to admit because, well, I am not a manager." The labor politics were clearly not any better for those below him, whom he described as "slaves" twice (Castronova, 2007b).

Castronova also assumes that it wasn't any fun for the Shakespeare scholars who worked on the project, who felt that the literature was trivialized or undervalued.

Emphasizing Shakespeare was a mistake. The burdens of a license! Everyone

thought it was World of Hamlet and the point was to teach high school kids

2B|~2B. But teaching Shakespeare has always been an ancillary benefit, not the

point. I thought it would be cute. But putting Shakespeare in the game, I found,

took away resources from fun. Lore, by itself, did not make a fun game.

Shakespeare also loaded us up with an entire community of expectations, people

who dig the idea of a digital Shakespeare. (2007b)

It's a user community that Castronova obviously dreaded interacting with, one who he

saw as "loaded up with expectations" and incapable of emergent play. Castronova also

perceived the texts of Shakespeare as ossified "lore" rather than a flexible rule set for

interpretation and interpersonal interaction.

4. RULES AND PHILOSOPHIES

4.1 Conflicts between Rule Sets Dictated by Valid Claims

Shakespeare has been important for philosophers outside of the Anglophone

tradition in ways that are relevant to principles of game design. Most notably Hegel

differentiated Shakespearian tragedy from the exemplary tragedies of classical Greece,

such as *Antigone*, although he still believed that Shakespeare succeeded in representing

the kinds of irreconcilable conflicts that were essential for great drama. Certainly many

videogames put the player in the position of grappling with an ethical dilemma in which

every outcome can have some catastrophic costs, as games like *Deus Ex* and *BioShock*

demonstrate.

For Hegel, the power of Shakespeare's work came from how seemingly

accidental contingencies like a wound in battle or unintended encounters with external

agents like witches and ghosts could make manifest the protagonist's deepest inner

wishes and thus intensify the conflicts of the play between competing claims of

conscience. From a design perspective, it could be argued that the superficial interactions

with *Arden*'s large number of non-player characters also contributes to some of the

potential inadequacies of the game. Players aren't even allowed to play the kinds of

external agents that Hegel describes when setting up their characters. In other words, one

can play a "druid" or an "ogre" in *Arden*, characters that never appear in Shakespeare, but

never the more potentially human and also Hegelian witch or ghost. And obviously,

Hegel's attitude that tragic conflict in drama is about justifiable positions and competing

moral interests can not be depicted with the limited nine choices that players have for

their character dispositions, which range from "lawful good" to "chaotic evil."

4.2 Dramatic Unities as a Rule Set

During the Eighteenth Century, there was an enormous amount of interest in

using Shakespeare's plays as a way to demonstrate various philosophical propositions,

especially when affordable editions of Shakespeare's works were becoming available in

print. For example, in his forwards to the various Shakespeare plays, Samuel Johnson

often advances his own philosophical principles. Thus, Johnson makes sweeping moral

judgments about human nature, as he provides context for this new generation of readers

of these dramatic works.

Rules about moral conduct were not the only rules of interest to Johnson for

understanding Shakespeare's literary value, however. It is significant that Johnson broke

with other critics of his time by refusing to accept the aesthetic superiority of plays that

observed what were known as "the Unities" in which dramatic productions had to be

constrained to a single place and limited span of time in order to make the action credible to the spectators. Johnson rejected this on the grounds that "he that imagines" actors are historical or legendary figures "may imagine more" (Johnson, 1968). Johnson's mocks the idea that violating these particular norms would induce a state of psychosis in spectators, given the activities of make-believe that are essential to performance. In explaining suspension of disbelief, Johnson claims that some rule sets involving the unit operations of the participants' imaginative leaps may have more aesthetic power than others, in this case, a rigid rule involving the Unities.

Of course, one of the powers of computational media that could be exploited while teaching how Shakespeare has been performed (or not performed) during different historical periods would be to draw attention to how Shakespeare has been seen to violate different rules for good literature and the aesthetic philosophies that were in vogue at specific times in the past.

Rather than spend time in the virtual world of Ilminster learning the rules of tavern games or playing Fortune's Wheel, as players do in the current prototype of *Arden*, what could be learned, for example, by playing *Arden* both with and without the Unities? How might Shakespeare's work be appreciated differently if certain conventions about what is acceptable to represent in a public theatre be applied to the world of the game?

4.3 Genre Trouble

The opening scene of the game announces its status as a Shakespeare mash-up, as the player converses with Peaseblossom, who explains some of the possible adventures that may unfold. The player can "talk to Falstaff to start a quest line involving Mistress Quickly," interact with the "rude mechanicals" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "see a

scene from *Love's Labour's Lost*," or start "on a quest that mimics the plot of *Richard III*." There are also references to other kinds of games, such as "Blackjack" and "Dungeons and Dragons." As Julia Lupton has pointed out, however, Shakespeare's own mash-up activities as a playwright are perhaps more interesting [26] This barrage of plays combined together at the start may obscure the ways that Shakespeare interweaves genres, media, literary traditions, and attitudes about the sacred and the profane in his works.

In a course he taught about adapting film and literary works for videogame genres, Ian Bogost has suggested that thinking about "procedural translation" is essential in order to make games that improve the "current marketplace of Hollwood-bound blockbuster IP" (2008). In other words, it is not enough to transfer characters, settings, and plots to videogames, according to Bogost, if there is no serious consideration of the procedural features of the literary experience of the original work. As a teacher of game design, he pointed students to the Emily Dickinson "challenge" at GDC 2005. *Gamasutra* explained the basic set-up as follows: "In the 2005 Game Design Challenge, Will Wright returned to face off against Peter Molyneux and Clint Hocking in a challenge moderated by Eric Zimmerman. The theme? Design a game around a highly unusual 'license' -- the poetry of Emily Dickinson (2006). As the introduction to the podcast of the panel explains, licensed material is conventionally thought of as derivative and thus inherently less interesting to game designers seeking creative opportunities. However, the GDC moderator also notes that this kind of intellectual property often has a great deal of market viability as well as an opportunity for invention.

Of course, like most game studies scholars who have approached this topic, I have my own ideas about literary works that are particularly well-suited to adaptation as games. One of the recurring motifs at many conferences about game studies is that quest play and world-building play are often in conflict. In other words, quests, raids, and epic journeys frequently interrupt building castles, fortifications, or off-world colonies, much to the annoyance of players who would rather spend their loot on the comforts of home rather than abruptly leave their base of operations to get some more. One of the more questionable truisms of videogames is that this divide is gendered, so that female players prefer nesting in *The Sims* or *Civilization* while male players would rather be out exploring dangerous and unpredictable new realms, such as *Counter-Strike* or *World of Warcraft*. (As a girl who preferred chess to playing with Barbies, I would have viewed this thesis with as much suspicion as the old phallic-obsessed study that showed that boys build towers while girls build enclosures.)

What makes *The Aeneid* story compelling is that both Aeneas and Dido have held social roles as questers *and* as city-builders. They've both been driven from home by the political and military force of rivals and have had to go abroad to set up the impressive built environment in the physical space that is appropriate for the grandeur of their cultural institutions. In Virgil's epic, of course, it's a zero-sum game. Only one of them can found the Roman Empire. When Dido is rejected by Aeneas, who wants to move on to Rome, she chucks it all in the spectacular suicide of the ultimate sore loser. But what if the two leaders have other options? Certainly, games can be a way to explore alternative histories. In their essays, students could write about the difference between the written epic and the narrative that unfolds during game play in class and the dorms. *What if the*

two of them choose to cooperate rather than compete? The two ancient rulers could 1) both stay in Carthage, 2) both go on to Rome, or 3) both travel back to Troy to try to retake it from the Greeks. What would change and what would stay the same if the students could rewrite the ending?

If there can only be one Dido or one Aeneas in each game, why might other students of the classics feel engaged with the game? Well, what if it were a game about their *followers*? What if it were about choosing to follow Dido or choosing to follow Aeneas. We already know from Virgil's text that these rulers had to mollify their constituents periodically with speeches, impressive deeds, social services, acceptable political agendas for foreign and domestic policies, including "bread and circuses" and the like. As one of the workshop members asked, "How would they build their reputations with us? How would they win our respect? How would they earn our trust?" Besides, Dido and Aeneas can't build their cities alone. They need to have *a critical mass for the labor force* and people with the right *distribution of players with specialized skills*. There should be something about cultural cooperation in the game, someone suggested. What would be the balance of group responsibility and the division of responsibility to particular individuals? What does Virgil tell us about the tradesmen and craft professionals of the ancient Roman world? What does he tell us about the roles of minor politicians? Students could look at evidence from online journals, scholarly websites about the ancient world, or primary sources in databases like *The Perseus Project*.

When I tested out this idea on a workshop with actual game designers, one team member asked how people in particular *social classes* would view issues about community and leadership differently. Would Aeneas start his sales job on the people of

Carthage with the poor or with the rich, and how would the excluded group feel about it? (Virgil already gives us some information about his strategy for ingratiating himself.) Could it be like one of those reality shows, another suggested, where people scheme and form alliances that aren't always apparent to the others? Workshop members posited that the game could use elements of *Survivor* or *Lost* to engage students with the text. There could be diplomacy and negotiation in the game. There could be uprisings and intrigues. Barracking may intensify these game dynamics.

Moreover, they asked, *who would be the facilitators of game play*? This is tricky, because people like to play games that are "fair" and yet academic environments often foster certain hierarchies. Actors often fill these plot roles in corporate settings, but the fifty plus discussion leaders could also function as "intelligent agents" with which players interact. Should Dido and Aeneas be played by pre-assigned leaders or should the game begin with royalty chosen from among the player population?

Much of what Castronova says about Shakespeare in interviews and on his blog indicates that perhaps he didn't take this kind of translation seriously enough or engage with the philosophical possibilities of adapting Shakespeare for a videogame, as a skilled stage director or filmmaker would have done. In fact, often Castronova sounds as if he would have rather adapted Tolkien for purposes of a videogame, even though he said in a 2006 FAQ that "Shakespeare, as a source of game lore, is richer than Tolkien." Although he tried to do more than adapt Shakespeare's works to some of the existing genres of the educational videogame, Castronova was disappointed when he wasn't able to realize a *World of Warcraft* style multiplayer game. In one of his postmortems on the project he presents the following catalogue of partial success: "Shakespearean quest

lines; historically accurate tavern games; NPCs and resources drawn from Shakespeare; Shakespeare Q&A games that give experience points; Shakespeare text objects that grant power (text-as-treasure); Shakespeare texts accessed verbatim, in summary, and in quest/plot form" (Castronova, 2007a). Although these are game procedures, they do not give us much of a basic sense of Shakespeare's specific proceduralities, even at the level of overarching plot, where the objectives are often simply achieving marriage or gaining access to the throne.

By 2008, Castronova was emphasizing very different aspects of the *Arden* project from the ones that he had originally promoted to his MacArthur Foundation sponsors and to humanities educators in higher education.

> Our experimental question (kept secret up to now) was: Are fantasy game players economically "normal"? Or on the contrary, when they make themselves into elves and dwarves and hobbits, do they stop taking economic decisions seriously? (Harford, 2008)

The idea of keeping a central research question funded by a large philanthropic organization "secret" may sound unconventional to most academics, particularly those engaged in research on human subjects that require consent procedures approved by boards of review, but Castronova argued that his use of game theory and scenarios to model problems in *Arden* was a logical extension of the work of economists in his discipline. Eventually he produced a paper, "A Test of the Law of Demand in a Virtual World: Exploring the Petri Dish Approach to Social Science" in which his team apparently "tested whether fantasy gamers conform to the Law of Demand" by manipulating the price of a given potion to see if "increasing the price

of a good, all else equal, will reduce the quantity demanded" (Castronova, 2008).

As a 2007 article in *Nature* makes clear, research questions from the social sciences had always shaped Castronova's disciplinary interests in the Indiana Shakespeare project, and his desire to conduct economic experiments may have been more important than the adaptation of a particular Renaissance author's literary works from the beginning. For example, the *Nature* reporter explains the objectives of the flagship program of the Synthetic Worlds Initiative as follows:

> With two versions of Arden with different prices for a particular good, theory says that demand should be higher in the world where the good costs less. This is just an example, as Castronova will not reveal exactly what experiment he is planning for fear of invalidating the study. (Giles, 2007, p. 20)

Of course, although this would prove to be the exact research question about which Castronova would be collecting data, the ambitious plan described in *Nature* for "500 people to play for 100 hours per month each" never entirely materialized, although he assumed that "players will be there because it's fun" (p. 20). The first substantive published research findings from the team in 2008 were actually based on a group of 43 players, recruited from undergraduate classes, who clocked a mere 10 to 12 hours of game play to finish a story loosely based on *Richard III* in which "players were told (by a non-player character or NPC, named 'Sergeant Bridgeford') that fires had broken out all over London and rioting had followed" and that "by order of King Richard III" "a quest to help quell these riots" must be completed (Castronova, 2008).

Despite his initial public admission of failure with *Arden*, by 2008 Castronova had retreated to emphasizing recuperative characterizations of the project. This stance is understandable, given how universities and granting agencies frown on trial-and-error approaches. Of course, within communities of game designers, there are those who intentionally create situations of failure for the *player* within the experience of game play, as Ian Bogost explains.

> If procedural rhetorics function by operationalizing claims about how things work, then videogames can also make claims about how things *don't* work, that is, how and why they are broken . . . As it happens, this technique has been especially popular in political videogames, perhaps because such games are often conceived as critiques of dysfunctional political practice. (2007, p. 85).

As McKenzie Wark has observed about the game *SimEarth*, inevitably catastrophic outcomes may cause players to be unlikely to purchase a given game and boost its performance as a commodity in the marketplace, but those who do commit themselves to attempting to save their doomed biosphere find themselves engrossed in profound mediations about the relationship of "gamespace" and "world" that would be impossible if winning were an option (2007). Although Rosalind Picard has argued that such frustration can be an important and strikingly emotional – although generally undesirable – part of a user's computing experience (2002), Castronova obviously wished not to interfere with the player's suspension of disbelief while immersed in an engrossing world of puzzles and monsters, and he certainly regretted the discontent that the game designers themselves expressed.

Nonetheless, at least one of *Arden*'s Shakespeare scholars is still interested in the idea of embodied performance using virtual worlds. Now pursuing participation in stagings of Shakespeare in *Second Life*, Professor Linda Charnes, who served on the project, still expresses enthusiasm for the ways that *Arden* could allow participants to rethink what acting and action means in Shakespeare's comedies and dramas.

It could be argued that the *Arden* conflict came down to the old battle between ludologists and narratologists that goes on in so many game development projects, but given the rich rule sets and complex stories of Shakespeare, it is certainly not the fault of the original literary work, at least on the level of its philosophical possibilities. At one point, while I was playing the game, long after the project was in deep hibernation, I left the keyboard and let my eleven-year-old son play as my character while I did some chores in another room. When I came back to resume play, he registered some disappointment. "This is a fun game," he said to me. What's interesting to me about his summary judgment is that my child had no idea that *Arden* was an educational game. It wasn't differentiated in any way from the other games on my desktop at the time, which included commercial games like *BioShock* and *SimCity Societies*.   Perhaps Castronova was wrong about what he had created, its potential for fun, and how players outside the narrow cognoscenti of play-testers may find pleasure in the game, even as a mere mod of *Neverwinter Nights*.

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