Worlding through Speculative Digital Game Pedagogies

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INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial literary theorists have used the term 'worlding' to explain the effects all texts have in world-making. Edward Said (1983) argues that all texts are worldy, because they are compiled, composed and read in the world, while for Hayot (2012), worlding is not an act of replication or capture, but inclusion and exclusion, "To world is to enclose, but also to exclude. What falls in the ambit of those enclosures and exclusions will determine the political meaning of any given act of world-making" (2012, 40). Donna Haraway's (2013) use of worlding as a verb, and as a generative practice and a contributing factor in knowledge making and world making, is particularly important given this paper's interest in how digital games are played and studied in school-based contexts.

Worlding represents an apt frame with which to consider the ways that digital games have been included in formal learning environments and how new understandings of pedagogy might prompt us to reconsider their potential for transformative learning. Digital games have been lauded as tools for facilitating a wide-range of social and cultural practices associated with teaching and learning (Gee 2003; Squire and Jenkins 2011; Steinkuehler, Squire, and Barab 2012). An existing body of research has employed critical pedagogies and critical literacies as tools for teaching young people how games are complicit in systems of disempowerment and domination. These studies have explored how critical approaches to digital games' curricula can support students to: question representations of the world that are established by digital games (Berger and Mcdougall 2013; Beavis 2007), understand how digital games are constructed (Bacalja 2021; Marlatt 2018) and explore how digital games position their audiences in particular ways (Bacalja 2020; Apperley and Beavis 2011). However, historical criticisms of critical pedagogy's desire for "reassuring sureties" (Lather 1998, 489), and the quest for a praxis of "not being so sure", where questions are "constantly moving and one cannot define, finish, or close" (488), raises opportunities for rethinking how digital games are played and studied in schools.

Informed by new materialist perspectives that seek to problematize constructivist and anthropocentric thinking, discourses of speculation have emerged that are critical of humanist approaches to education that conceive of the endpoint of such teaching as almost always a version of Western Man, where knowledge is treated as stable and unproblematic (Snaza et al. 2016).

This paper asks if pedagogies of speculation, those practices that "move against the grain of traditionally conceived, tightly disciplined and narrowly focused human-centred/humanist education systems" (Carstens 2020, 78), can be combined with digital games to move us towards more open systems of knowledge production in education which are orientated towards a future that is "not only uncertain, but radically contingent" (Cortiel et al. 2020, 10). It explores how educators might embrace speculative pedagogies and speculative practices as tools for navigating the digital games classroom so as to imagine different worlds and particpate in worlding.

A synthesis of current approaches to speculative pedagogies will be employed to discuss how one game, *Surviving Mars* (Haemimont Games 2018), could be used for the purposes of speculative thinking. *Surviving Mars* is a city-building simulation game that allows the player the agency to colonise the red planet within certain constraints. Upon the arrival of a shuttle on the surface, the player is tasked with using drones and rovers to prepare the colony for the arrival of humans. Mining operations, electrification, oxygen and water generation and the construction of shelter become the first steps necessary to prepare the ground for colonists. Apporaching the gamestory, gameworld and gameplay through activities that encourage defamiliarization, cognitive estrangement and thinking otherwise (de Freitas 2017) raises many questions. What do such pedagogies look like? How will play be enacted? What will be the effect on the player/learner? What knowledge matters?

If the "experimental mode of practice/thinking" (Atkinson 2021, 10) associated with speculative philosophy is to transform a learner's (and thus a teacher's) experience, and provide opportunities for worlding that troubles the present and future, then perhaps the immersive world of digital games is a good place to start investigating the potential of such work.

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