NB 1 x illustration = tube map produced by student for 'Digital Transformations' project – provided as separate file, permission has been granted by the originator.

Julian McDougall: *How does Boy 17 Read a Game?*

Introduction

Media literacy education has wrestled with an enduring ethical dilemma for many years. This problem was captured in Judith Williamson's comparison (1982) of her struggles with teaching her student Astrid about gender representation to Sissy Jupe's silence as 'Girl 20' in Dickens' *Hard Times*. As we attempt to provide transformative experiences for students to reflect on the negotiation of identity in their mediated lifeworlds, we risk alienating them through an undermining of their own media cultures. As Turnbull asks, "is it empowering to reject one's family and values?" (1998:100). The same applies to the risk of discrediting the textual lives of our students as we try to engage with new media literacy practices.

This precarious operation has been at the intersection of debates about literacy and digital media in this century. Here, I will reflect on my personal experiences of researching the teaching of the most 'popular' of culture, videogames, against the grain of a conservative curricular context in England. In so doing, I will return to four videogame literacy 'interventions' in this field and re-appraise them as part personal reflection on working in 'new hard times' (Gonnick, 2007), part re-appraisal of the questions raised by 'Girl 20'. If the male gamer can be understood as a latter-day Sissy Jupe, then how does Boy 17 read a game? How does the radical pedagogue wrestle with the conundrum of relating Boy 17's game life to questions of representation? Have the new media dynamics (Hartley, Burgess and Bruns, 2015) changed how young people perform their gendered identities?

Using '*What does Girl Number 20 Understand about Ideology*? (Williamson, 1982) as a frame will situate these current pedagogic concerns in the historical context of media education's many contradictions.

Where are we now?

I am not the first person to revisit Jupe via Astrid. It is helpful to enlist Gonick (2007: 433-3) for an account before proceeding:

> Girl Number 20 is a character in the novel Hard Times, written by Charles Dickens in 1854. Sissy Jupe is a young girl, living with a circus troupe, surrounded by horses, who when asked by the tyrannical school headmaster Mr Gradgrind to define a horse, is silent. Bitzer, a boy, steps in with an encyclopaedic definition of the gramnivorous, forty-toothed, coat-shedding, hoofed, quadruped. Girl Number 20 was first introduced to feminist debates by Judith Williamson (1981–1982) in her now classic piece, 'What does girl #20 understand about ideology?' Williamson's Girl

Number 20 was a student in a course she taught on representation of women in the media. Astrid, she writes, was her 'worst problem'. Feminist educators have over the 20 years since Williamson's piece appeared, periodically reinvoked Girl Number 20, with different names, in different contexts and places, but always a problem, to further a series of interrelated concerns about the relationships between girls' silence in the classroom, teaching/learning ideology and the reading of media texts.

The reflexive study of videogame play as literacy practice, by young people, with teachers, in formal educational settings in England, has been marginal and awkward, the subject of many pilot projects, often disseminated through the conferences and journals of associations such as the United Kingdom Literacy Association, but far from 'mainstream' practice.

In 2015 London-based Observer newspaper, published Robert McCrum's list of the 100 "best English-language novels of all time", the author reflecting that to many readers this was, as an 'enraged online critic' put it, "an elaborate headstone for a defunct way of thinking about literature" but then doing it anyway. Whilst a discussion around how to define a 'classic' is integrated into the feature, the idea of the canon existing, or literature even 'being a thing' is not questioned. Going further, McCrum observes that 'in the century that witnessed the making of the English novel, the genre was almost exclusively the work of upper or upper-middle class English writers, predominately male, and often with private means. Their novels were addressed to an elite minority, and expressed the concerns of a particular society". But he proceeds to construct his list of the best of this 'majestic art form' regardless, seemingly able to bracket this context with little discomfort.

In the same year, Jennifer Rowsell, writing in her edited collection (with Julian Sefton-Green) on revisiting literacy projects, reflects on her own interpretation of a participant's experiences of teaching classic literature (Dorothy, from Sri Lanka):

> Dorothy talks about how the canon … did not appeal to or interest all readers in her childhood classrooms … Dorothy is aware that teaching the canon, on its own, cuts out students who prefer vernacular texts like video games or texts that exhibit more cultural or racial diversity … I implicate myself in the revisit because, having studied English Literature over the course of my undergraduate and graduate years, I have a bias for reading the canon .. which, of course, plugs into my account of Dorothy's story. (Sefton-Green and Roswell (eds), 2015: 154)

Meanwhile, and related to these canonical struggles, Peim (2015), writing in the preface to 'Doing Text" (Bennett and McDougall, 2016), observes the failure, in England, of 'Subject English' to fall on its sword in the wake of digital media :

> That the more restricted forms of textual engagement that English offers remain at the core of the National Curriculum and that English retains a relatively elevated academic status are testament to the strange but powerful grip of an educational order that has been and remains difficult to shake off. The so-called 'long revolution' has indeed been 'long' as the young people say. We don't know if the happy playground of Media Studies might in the very long run have some serious impact on the established academic order and might seriously challenge what Derrida has called the 'violence' that attends 'the legitimization of canons'. At present – and from

a certain detached perspective – it doesn't look like it. My own inclination is to be grimly pessimistic on the matter. (in press).

These two examples serve to demonstrate the obvious point that teaching videogames is problematic for reasons most powerfully bound up with teacher identity, taste and how our own textual and educational experiences as children influence our practices as teachers. The 'established academic order' is as much about our own sidestepping of the 'necessary symbolic work' (Willis, 1990) of claiming a cultural space required by those with less cultural capital than us as it is to do with imposed structures and educational management 'from above'.

Going further, at the time of writing, I am acutely aware that the research informed recommendations this chapter will make could not be further away from the educational reforms being implemented in English school and college classrooms. Changes to the curriculum and assessment for students aged 14-19 include three highly significant adjustments for teachers of popular culture, media and new literacies:

(1) The study and production of popular culture and digital media in the institutionalized, form of Media Studies, assessed at GCSE and A Level [1] with progression routes to related courses in Universities, is to be substantially revised so that creative production will be reduced to the margins of teaching specifications and the study of 'lesser quality' texts and forms (including videogames) will be difficult to include.

(2) The removal of any requirement to engage with digital texts during the study of English.

(3) Aligned to the reduction in coursework and group learning, prominence of 'traditional' subjects, examined through written essays and attacks on teaching training and teaching unions. At the same time, a return to less 'progressive' pedagogy in the classroom is encouraged / obligated through the essentialist curriculum, assessment regime and comparing pupil performance with countries favouring didactic teaching methods.

At a broader level, the potential for immersive, virtual and networked digital media engagement to be embraced as an affordance for the 'Long Revolution' has most certainly not been harnessed. In re-appraising his own project in the wake of new digital media at the turn of the century, Raymond Williams observed, hopefully:

> What is now happening, in the existing institutions, is a steady pressure from the late capitalist economy and its governments to reduce education both absolutely and in kind, steading excluding learning which offers more than a preparation for employment and an already regulated life … but use of the new technologies can add diversity and permanent availability to the most comprehensive institutions, above all in making them outward-looking taking their best knowledge and skills to a wider and

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[1] General Certificate in Secondary Education (taken at 16) and Advanced Level (taken at 18).

more active society. (2015: 110-111).

There is a strange 'double think' at work behind the current reforms that can only be briefly explained here, whereby media *literacy* is taken seriously as a hybrid discourse of protectionism (cyber-bullying, radicalization, distraction) and economic growth contribution (creative industries and coding) whilst at the same time Media *Studies* is derided. Likewise, the production of digital media is legitimated within a 'digital / creative economy' discourse and annexed to the ICT curriculum, with particular emphasis on coding. But a less functionalist, more critical or reflective learning about, with or through digital media in either a discrete subject or within English - where digital media production and coding would be conceived as literacy practices and text-conscious disciplines might 'open out' - is way off limits.

Clearly, then, the interests of this chapterare somewhat on a limb and, I think, more so than progressive popular culture teaching has ever been thus. Starting conversations about what it means to be literate, agentive and (potentially) civic in the 'fused' playing, study and production of digital games (see Potter et al, 2015) is very difficult in the current climate. Likewise, a keen, theoretical and pedagocial interest in how this impact is experienced at home, in school and in the "third space" (Gutierrez, 2008) between the two is, to say the least, at the margins of England's highly conservative epistemological environment (in which young people's media engagements are marginalized by a drive for 'enrichment' through exposure to high culture).

Still Just Gaming?

Recent work in the related fields of literacy and media education has taken a turn to looking back at how we have responded to the affordances of digital, networked media in the classroom and to taking stock of the lived experience of this for both students and teachers set against the progressive, even emancipatory claims we made at the '2.0' moment. I have written elsewhere In this chapter I return to projects that sought to ask questions about the situated literacy practices of young people who were being asked to recontextualise the familiar by working with videogames in classrooms with teachers. In each case, research questions explored discursive and pedagogic tensions as well as opportunities. The 'writing up' and various forms of dissemination shared the work in physical spaces to teachers, academics, students and, during the heady New Labour / OFCOM days (Buckingham and Wallis 2014), MPs at Parliament. In sharing findings, we fought – often against the odds – to foreground the complexity of young peoples' relationships with gaming practices, the many differences between game players and the importance of understanding gameplay as a performative, often highly reflexive, sometimes frivolous, frequently ironic and usually social form of literacy.

This has always been very difficult. Audiences for this research have generally desired straightforwardly positive outcomes for the project of reframing literacy, often with problematic assumptions about engaging 'non academic' (code for working class) boys. Or the opposite – we got more

attention for our project with *Grand Theft Auto* players (Kendall and McDougall, 2009) than ~~for~~ for any other piece of research, but 'stakeholders' were generally unresponsive to our non- judgmental thick description of the gender troubling we observed.

These returns to completed projects fall short, however, of the kinds of longitudinal 'revisiting' exemplified by Burawoy (2003) and exemplified in Sefton-Green and Ro~~ss~~well's recent edited collection (2015). Literacy researchers in those cases re-connected with their participants to find out about the longer term impacts of literacy interventions but were mindful of ethical issues and that "*the change we are interested in observing is as much a dynamic property of the observer as it is of either of the sites or the people we work with over time*". (Burawoy, 2003: 4). Although I have not sought out my participants from these projects, and in any case insufficient time has lapsed to offer a longitudinal view, inevitably the act of relating, retrospectively, the findings of the projects, always-already filtered and constructed, to 'Girl 20' as a framing metaphor is a distance away from involving research participants in every stage of the research (~~– as~~ Pahl and Khan ~~(Sefton-Green and Roswell~~, 2015) ~~propose~~.

I choose 'Girl 20' for a number of self-serving reasons:~~;~~ it was a formative piece in my own trajectory as a media educator with particular political intentions:~~;~~ it fits with my interpretation of the current political context for my field; and for another collaborative project (Bennett and McDougall, 2016) I am working with representations of austerity in contemporary popular culture, 'Hard Times Today', so Sissy Jupe is in my thoughts. Here, I will adapt Girl 20 to 'Boy 17' as a device to explore the 'correspondence principle' between gaming practices outside of education and the study of games as a media literacy 'educational encounter'. Boy 17, then, will be evoked as a singular metaphor to represent groups of students in order to reflect back on four projects over eight years, each two years apart.

Smethwick Village Life (2007)

> I think that if you are going to have a game which is educational then there needs to be more fun than there is learning built into it so that people don't notice it as much. (student interview, Smethwick Village project).

My first research project (McDougall, 2007) explored gaming as literacy practice (see Gee, 2003), whereby *the relationship between reader and text (player/game) is differently mediated so that the 'player as reader' of the 'game as text' is positioned as an agent in knowledge making practice rather than a recipient of 'knowledge'.* (Kendall, 2008:18). This involved interviews with teachers and students and lesson observations in two phases at two further education colleges in England. In both c~~olleges~~ases, students who self-identified as gamers were studying games as textual objects within the Media Studies curriculum at A Level – this was an optional topic chosen by a small minority of teachers.

The key research questions were:

1. What degree of <u>insulation</u> between 'pleasure learning' and classroom learning exists?

2. What is the relationship between game literacy and study and does the classroom experience r*einforce, challenge or abstract* such relations?

The two games being compared, for their representational qualities, were *Medal of Honor* and *The Sims.* My focus was on students' experiences of formal educational study reaching out into their informal situated literacies in this way.

In analyzing their statements, I witnessed the discursive tension between common ideas about young peoples' use of digital media and the 'mission' of the curriculum to enrich and survey students' tastes. In addition, traditional epistemological and pedagogical discourses set up the teacher (albeit often a non-gamer) as the one who knows, and learning by / reading as playing is configured outside of this dynamic. BAs both teachers and students returned frequently in their discussions to 'the exam', and this served toas a delimiting of the pedagogic work. Boy 17 was able to speak, in the classroom, about gaming, but within the frames of reference available – the workings of the game industry and how the games' themes relate to ideology. Unlike Sissy Jupe, these game players could articulate game literacy beyond factual definition, but like Astrid and despite the progressive intentions of their teachers, they were compelled to apply a new 'preferred reading' of games – as carriers of ideology, and often this was at odds with their thinking about the games as 'just' players. Students often said, and saw this as a failing on their part, that they were not really thinking any differently about games outside of the unit of study. Nevertheless at this early stage in the inclusion of game literacy in Media Studies, potential for these reflexive outcomes was evident, as this teacher observed:

> It is hard because on the one hand you have constantly got in your mind the fact that you have got to prepare them to write an essay in an exam, but on the other hand you I really like the open ended possibilities that this generates.

The project was funded by the University where I worked at the time, I was an early career researcher and this flavour of new territory pervaded the study – I was new to research, games were new as objects of study in Media Studies and the teachers and students were working in this way for the first time. There was a feeling of us being at a key moment in the genealogy of textual education, a sense that within a few years new digital media forms would obligate new configurations of text, literacy practice, teaching and learning. At the time, the New Labour government were giving media literacy credibility, funds were available for educators to develop games for learning or to engage with 'serious games' and teachers were sharing good practice in cross-disciplinary, student centred approaches to 'reframing literacy'.

The Baroque Showman (2009)

> Last night I began the story of Nico Bellic… (student blog post, 'Just Gaming' project).

The question of gender performance in gameplay was the focus of the second project (Kendall and McDougall, 2009) I will reflect on here. For this study, we worked with male teenage gamers, sixth formers again, playing the infamous *Grand Theft Auto*. The game was not the object of study within their college curriculum but the participants were all students on English and Film or Media. We wanted to know more about how male players who were used to analyzing texts as representational would articulate a meta-literacy, specifically around the gendered figured world at stake in GTA. How would Boy 17 understand this? Our motives were to challenge what we saw as a reductionist orthodoxy emerging in educational approaches to games. The multiple voices from research into how 'digital literacies' are developed from early ages were insufficiently heard in the development of an overly 'pragmatic' agenda, we observed at the time. Our intention was to inform the media literacy community by offering data that would be more discursive, complex and theoretically grounded.

For the 'Just Gaming' project, ten 16/17 year old players of *Grand Theft Auto 4* were recorded blogging about the gaming experience. They were and then interviewed to elicit data about their perceptions of their performances and identity constructions in the narrative of GTA4 and in the online spaces provided by the game.

We found four literacy practices at work in our participants' talking and blogging about their gameplay. There was importantly, no one, fixed way of 'being Nico' (the protagonist in the game). Students demonstrated a tendency for switching and splicing, with the game, against or alongside the game. We encountered pastiche, first person (gamer), third person (character) or a combination (first person in character), knowing and frivolous provocation and 'grandstanding':

> I think to a certain extent there was a kind of competition because everybody wants their blog to be read and everyone wants people to laugh at their blog and they just want a chance to shine. (student interview: Just Gaming).

Participants adopted multiple positions both in their approaches to play and in their recounting of their play. We observed the centrality of performance in gameplay practices – bloggers evidently took pleasure in taking centre stage in these baroque performances (self-conscious, knowingly outrageous, even carnivalesque) and enjoyed the opportunity to re-tell their stories; sorting, selecting, editing and glossing their experiences for maximum reader impact, for example:

> OK, its here. The fifth and final hour, the big one…oh yes, you know what I'm talking about...

After shooting a few people down and evading various 1/2 wanted star levels, I get an invite to play online, fun. With the invite accepted I found myself in a lobby full of rowdy Americans wanting to kill me (in the game of course), the game mode is GTA Race meaning you race but can get out of your car at any point, picking up weapons along your way. Just as the game started I heard an overly-enthused American shout the words, "Holy shit, here we go!

I hit the gas and aim my car at there wreckage, when i hit full speed i leap out the vehicle and watch it carrear into the mess. With the remaining bullets i have i pump the gas tank full of lead and gaze at the explosions as one the flaming carcases of my enemies falls to my feet.

For these participants it seemed that gaming offered an opportunity for performance and achievement but at the same time some reflection, with 'knowingness' as important to the performance as the events in the game. This brought to the surface some interesting questions of identity - whilst the content of GTA and the 'effects' debate that surrounds it was not our concern, the blog postings in particular tended to share traits of the 'baroque showman' (self-conscious, outrageous, carnivalesque 'performances' to the wider blog community, an overlay of friends, college peers and facebook contact trails) and whilst the absence of females along with their circulation as 'other' appeared to reproduce conservative textual practices, it was clear from both the online data and the interview elaborations that a highly performed and playful 'male showing' was at work.

Perhaps because no assessment was taking place – the students were in college and studying texts but this project was 'extra' and they were incentivised with game vouchers – Boy 17 here was able to work reflexively with their experience, indeed that was the focus of the study. Whether we got further than Astrid is difficult to say because we were finding the kinds of gender troubling we expected and in this sense were doing the opposite of Williamson – we were kicking against the dominant view that male GTA players, looking for complexity, rather than trying to transform their relations to their own identities. And we weren't teaching them, or judging them in any sense and this was made clear.

Funded this time by two institutions and with the authors working across disciplines (literacy and media), the findings were shared with literacy educators, teachers from all sectors, game academics and policy makers. Whilst, as stated earlier, the latter group were generally less interested in the complexity, there was generally a readiness to see the potential for this kind of reflexive identity work in education and to move beyond the idea of reaching out to 'disengaged boys'. There was a sense that we were moving beyond the mere inclusion of games in education towards a more interesting 'curational' space (McDougall and Potter, 2015) for helping students understand their game performances as identity practices.

The Third Space Burger Joint (2011)

> Within Second Life it is exactly as it says – a second life; I would prefer to escape real life playing a game, than actually escaping real life to start another life (even if it is virtual) where you just play yourself, just wandering and exploring as you would do in reality. (Student Journal: 'What our students taught us about virtual worlds and learning' project)

This was the first project to be funded externally, through ~~a~~ the Higher Education Academy for a ~~'discipline~~ workshop~~'~~ (2011) on the use of virtual worlds in art, media and design education. In this project (written up in McDougall and Sanders, 2013) the emphasis shift~~ed~~ to the utility of the virtual world as a pedagogic space as opposed to bringing games from home into the classroom, but once again our interest was on the complexity of how students would situate themselves, as opposed to just whether or not it would work or could be transferable. The intervention consisted of teaching an undergraduate module in Second Life (at the time, this virtual world looked set to transform education but it has failed to deliver on its early promise), but as this module had Postmodernism as its focus, a double layering of student engagement was afforded. *How does Boy 17 curate his identity as an inanimate avatar?*

Our insider research enquiry here was into the extent to which self-identified gamers would feel more comfortable than other students with not only the experience in the virtual seminars but also the need to transfer game literacy into academic capital. We also wanted to know if the migration to the virtual realm would, in itself, to be emancipatory for those students who are alienated by features of the more orthodox curriculum or whether the 'rules of the game' would transfer intact to a Second Life context.

In the research we conducted to evaluate the intervention (McDougall and Sanders, 2013), students all described their retrospective feeling that they had 'been to' the lectures and were not sitting at home or in front of a laptop somewhere else. One student attended the sessions from her local McDonald's as the broadband connection was faster and it was interesting to hear about these details as we were not aware of them during the work, although students were offered a venue on campus to attend if they needed to do so. The experience fostered a significant depth of interaction around the ontological questions that the module raise~~ds~~. While interacting with a richly developed environment and artefacts of their~~your~~ own creation, combined with the requirement to represent their~~your~~ identity though ~~an~~ avatar~~s~~ of their~~your~~ own creation, it provided a unique opportunity for students to reflect on their own 'hyper-reality'.

However, the research suggest~~eds~~ that the degrees of cultural capital required to 'self-present' and to theorise ~~on~~ this practice were largely in keeping with those required for more traditional forms of academic practice ('book learning'). They required students for example – to articulate, to reflect, and to be 'self-knowing'. Students' with the ability to achieve through traditional forms of learning were generally better placed to benefit and succeed in the assessment. For 'non traditional' but game literate students, the benefits of the experience fell below expectations. These students found it difficult to get past the idea that the virtual seminar space was an inferior

version of a pastime they feelt passionately about. In this way, and with great irony since this was our only attempt among these projects to explicitly 'gamify' literacy, these gamers' reticence was the closest outcome to the silence of Sissy Jupe. As they struggled to translate their game literacy into academic capital, their non-gamer counterparts readily articulated the academic language game required.

Reading Cole Phelps (2013)

> I suppose in terms of looking at it as a text or otherwise looking at it as what you might call different types of text reader relations and I compare that to say 'a book' and does the author control the meaning of the book, audience reaction and it's not too dissimilar in terms of interrogating who controls the game and arguably on the surface at least it's the gamer that controls the game but then you're in a fictional world which is set by somebody else so I don't know if it's that dissimilar to looking at any other texts. But if you wanted to say 'here is *L.A. Noire*, the character here is Cole Phelps so let's understand Cole Phelps,' well you'd need a lot of gameplay to stand up in front of a group of people and say 'Cole Phelps is this kind of person'. (Teacher interview: Reading Games project)

The final project (Berger and McDougall, 2013a) was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under the 'Digital Transformations' theme. For the 'Reading games as Aauthorless Lliterature' study, the videogame *L.A. Noire* (Rockstar Games, 2011) was used by teachers and students as literature within the orthodox framing of the English Literature curriculum in further and higher education. We wanted to explore the potential for literacy or English(in the form of English) educators to understand and work with games as 'digital transformations' of literature and to investigate the implications of such a conception for the ongoing field of 'reframing' literacy.

Working with four groups of teachers and students in three geographical locations in England, our participants first contributed to a gameplay blog (the same method used for 'Just Gaming') for which they needed to wear two 'hats' – those of literature student and of gamer and to reflect on these overlapping domains of practice. Secondly, our students taught our teachers to play the game and then worked together with a series of study resources which we designed to match up to the academic practices of 'Subject English', locating the game firmly *as* a literary text within this analytical 'lens', along with some creative activities to make things more interesting, one of which led to the 'tube map' reproduced in Figure 1below.

Here, then, we were departing from the framings of the previous projects I have revisited. I — in those, we were dealing with games as other to literature and virtual worlds as other to classrooms. For 'Reading Games' the hypothesis was that a game of this kind could *be* literature.
Finally, selected participants were interviewed and the resources modified in response to their feedback. Resources in the form of a downloadable PDF (Berger and McDougall, 2013b) formed the main output of the project alongside academic dissemination.

Some important disclaimers. *LA Noire* is not any game. In taking *it* as our text

we were complicit in its commercial imperative to be received as 'literary' and thus we must situate this game as being the 'easiest' to study within the frames of reference of English Literature: the game has a clear set of noir genre conventions, its intertextuality is multi-layered and there is knowing' representation' of gender, place and time.

> Sticking to the standard that is set by a game which carries film noir characteristics, the main protagonist is a flawed justice seeking detective. The interesting twist however is that we, the players, watch his rise, fall and eventual redemption. We see him love and we see this reciprocated, but equally we see him despised as his 'bad behaviour' is uncovered. Phelps is an interesting character to play, especially as through the facial mapping technology we play as a digitised actor rather than an avatar (Student blog post: Reading Games project).

In the final week on the blog, the participants were set two 'subject English' style examination questions. The function of this final stage was to cement the research in the idioms of English Literature. Following the blog phases, the first interviews and trialling of the resources, the final set of conversations focused on the heart of the matter – the potential for games to be 'read' in the classroom (albeit extended online to digital spaces) in a traditional way.

We found many examples of what we might call partial reframing of the extent to which 'expert literacy' can adapt for gameplay. The teachers had no problem with the question of *L A Noire* as a literary text for study, but often reinforced the assumption that 'mastery' of the text is a pre-requisite for teaching – a very different response to the collaborative phase of the research whereby students and teachers appeared to be constructing much more of a shared kind of reader-reception. One teacher however offered a ~~more developed~~ critique of the premise of the research:

> My criticisms of the game would be from a literary perspective. I think there are two weaknesses as a literary text – the limitations on character interaction as he (student) taught me, you can read a character is lying from their facial gestures, that's Harry Potter-esque isn't it, where she drops in those big adverbs. There's a number of adverbs around the way Snape moves that tell you he's bad and I think *L A Noire* is in that country with the exaggerated facial gestures. Secondly, just having looked at the opening to *Things Fall Apart* and what we were trying to discuss is what Achebe's trying to put across, you know in post-colonial literature, so what the writer is trying to communicate is very important in literature, you're not just searching for one meaning, but trying to uncover what the novel might be about. In the game, you have a much more active participation as a reader you can determine the structure, you can digress to answer particular calls, you can't digress in a novel unless the author wants you to and that has a particular significance. (Teacher interview: Reading Games Project)

This teacher's response brings to our ~~attentio~~n both the intertextual nature of literacy and the permeable categories of reading. We are offered comparative judgments about the game, a novel and a play without the need for a separate critical discourse for each. Furthermore, the distinction between more active reading (of games) and less active reading but more apparently productive 'second-guessing' of author-intention (in literature) reinforces the elements of 'Subject English' (Peim, 1993) that most robustly deny learners' a genuinely critical voice. There is no sense here that the teacher wittingly reinforces this and, indeed, s/he muses on the interesting differences between the attractions of literature and gaming later in the discussion. But a key finding

was that the teacher's confidence in the clear difference between the two kinds of reading practice compared to the students ease with the blurring of such boundaries. Student responses to questions about the 'status' of *L A Noire* as a novel were more consensual than their teachers. They ~~— moving away from the simple affirmative to a shared~~ dismantled ~~ing of~~ the notion that it matters whether a game is 'like a novel'. Consider this 'tube map' produced by a student during the creative activity phase, and how it exemplifies a 'flattened textual hierarchy', beyond textual insulation, just 'doing text'.

Insert Figure 1 about here: ~~image (student tube map)~~ ~~Caption –~~ 'Just Doing Text'

At the conclusion of the 'Reading Games' project, the educational landscape was still such that we could speculate that obsession with authors in literacy education might be challenged by digital media reading practices. We suggested that the adaptation of literary texts into digital forms and their appropriation as critical frameworks for parodic, reflexive work could move the curriculum on from the 'delimiting' affect of its media-specific textual silos. Boy 17 was able to do something that neither Girl 20 nor Astrid could do – not only 'get to speak' but transform the educational discourse to an extent. That said, three factors put limits on any over-celebration. The game chosen, as stated, is knowingly 'literary' and thus there was some contrivance in the 'digital transformation' at stake. The educational conversation, whilst negotiated and non-hierarchical in the first three stages, was finally 'closed off' by the teachers' less open summations and, equally, the students' optimism was curtailed by recourse to the need for the teacher to be the expert. Games were not quite literature for the teachers, and because we chose a game that was literary / filmic and highly generic / narratological, there was little space for a serious challenge to the notion of literature itself in our design of the project. And even if there were, both teachers and students agreed in conclusion that a game cannot be taught without being read, mastered, 'finished'. Nevertheless the project had proven its hypothesis, there was no problem with *L. A Noire* being studied as literature, students and teachers had worked through traditional English resources and highly conventional exam questions had been set. It seemed this would be the start of something important, we'd develop the project on a larger scale and, in time, move from the limitations of the perennial pilot project to wholesale implementation. In the not too distant future, games could be read as literature.

But that was then.

Where are we now?

As described at the outset, at the time of writing these projects look more like the luxuries of a short-lived age of promise than part of any 'long revolution'. Students are being returned to a canonical diet of enrichment and the ideological construct 'literature' is once again a technology of moral training. And yet, for Raymond Williams, the revolution is long because popular culture

is not only the 'stuff' of texts but also the continuing resistant energy of the people:

'… in the generality of their impulses and in their intransigent attachments to human diversity and recreation, they survive, under any pressures and through whatever forms, while life itself survives, and while so many people – real if not always connected majorities – keep living and working to live beyond the routines that attempt to control and reduce them" (2015: 106)

I hope very much that my application of the Jupe metaphor through Astrid to Boy 17 is not a distortion of Williamson's feminist critique. In understanding male gamers as other and lacking voice in the textual classroom, I seek to draw attention to the urgent need to give voice to diverse textual practices in literacy education and how attempts to let students speak to gaming performance has been fraught with very similar "*risky complexities of enacting pedagogical transformations in the classroom*" (Gonnick, 2007, 451) to thoseas encountered by Williamson with Girl No 20.

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