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Situating co-creativity

Auran and *Dark Reign*

I was made aware of Auran in mid-1997 by gamer fans forming around *Dark Reign*, a then forthcoming real-time strategy (RTS) game co-produced by Auran and leading videogames publisher Activision, and published in September 1997 by Activision. The fans were in the process of establishing websites focusing on the game that included preview content, news and descriptions of game features; they were enthusiastic about the level of Auran's involvement with the online fan community. Auran was heavily promoting the fact that the game would include user-friendly editing tools, enabling players to create and share add-on maps. Auran had also committed to releasing an extensive user guide or manual, available for download from its website, providing detailed information about how to modify various game features.

Auran was experimenting with various methods of establishing and maintaining relations with the *Dark Reign* fans. Part of this effort included both Auran and Activision staff participating in a weekly Internet Relay Chat (IRC) meeting on the 'Dark Reign' channel. In these sessions, organized by a key figure in the fan community, programmers and designers would answer questions and discuss game features. Now, these discussions were obviously a promotional and marketing vehicle – it was a way of generating interest in the game. In discussions with me, gamers indicated that they were well aware that this strategy was part of the 'ramp-up-to-release hype'. But they were also encouraged by Auran's participation: they believed or hoped that the game developers were listening to them, and that their ideas might perhaps even influence game design decisions. The company impressed fans at the time with its willingness to enter into open-ended exchanges about the forthcoming *Dark Reign*. Since then, hard-core gamers participating in the online communities have increasingly come to expect that game

development companies will now actively listen to, engage with and support the fan groups that form around game titles. Fans expect to be increasingly involved in the game production process. In short, they expect a collaborative and co-creative relationship.

Auran's effort back in 1997 to build closer relationships with the fans can be viewed as a canny strategy adopted by an emerging small-to-medium enterprise developer as it attempted to increase its profile in the global game marketplace. This peer-to-peer marketing initiative certainly raised Auran's profile among the hard-core gamers of the online RTS fan community.

With all of this in mind I approached Auran and negotiated an opportunity to visit them and research the relationships they were exploring with online fan communities. At my first visit to Auran's inner-city Brisbane office in mid-1997 I recall noticing a cluttered open-plan layout. Auran was obviously quickly outgrowing its office space, as workstations were crammed together. In this initial meeting Auran's CEO, Greg Lane, was summing me up in an effort to decide whether to provide me with access to Auran and on what terms. I was nervous and Lane made an effort to put me at ease by discussing our common background as gamers. We discovered that we shared a boyhood hobby of playing board war games and the role-playing game *Dungeons and Dragons*. Lane had been very active in the Brisbane role-playing scene and had organized a large role-playing club in the mid-1980s. He pointed out that it was this involvement with role playing and gaming generally that provided him with an appreciation of the value and importance of fans.

The Auran development team had just returned from a trip to the United States where they had worked for a number of weeks with the Activision team, *Dark Reign's* publisher, putting the final touches on the game. *Dark Reign* was approximately six weeks from release.

It seemed to me that the discussion was going well, as Lane discussed *Dark Reign* and Auran in a reasonably open way. Lane then said: 'I guess you'd like to see the game'. He demonstrated various features that were standard in the RTS genre and a few new functions, then said: 'But I think this is probably one of the coolest things about *Dark Reign*'. He switched to the editing tools package and demonstrated how easy it would be for gamers to create new maps and modify various parameters. He spent a lot of time showing me how the game could be extended and modified – how the editor toolset could be used as a paint program to create new maps, and how players could access configuration scripts to change or modify various variables (including AI routines). He commented:

From the start of the project, developing the Tactics Engine [the games engine used to develop the *Dark Reign* design], we've wanted it to be as extensible and customisable as possible. The idea and importance of

a configurable game kind of emerged as we worked on the engine. I'm looking forward to see what the users do with this, what kind of content they create.

For the remainder of the meeting, we discussed the relationship between game developers and the online fan communities. Lane said:

Extensibility or customisability of a game engine is very important, I think, to attract the hard-core gamer group, particularly those whose gaming activities are internet based . . . We're not sure exactly how important our involvement with the fans will be to eventual sales of *Dark Reign*. But we do believe that it is important; it is something that we are very committed to . . . I think that the hard-core online gamers do have an influence, particularly the ones who run the major fan sites. They are opinion leaders. They influence the level of presence and credibility that a game title has online. The more fan activity around a game title (creating websites, making additional content), the greater is the title's credibility with gamers who are online. We believe that online gaming activity will only grow in the coming years. So yes, we do believe it is important to listen to the fans. But how important our involvement is for sales is anyone's guess at this stage. What's our return on investing in all of this – who knows really? I have a view that it will extend the shelf-life of games. Games have a relatively brief period in which to make their sales. Maybe fan activity, like content creation, can extend the interest in a game. But apart from that, it is a lot of fun. The fans obviously enjoy it and the guys here also have fun with it.

An important feature of the emerging gamer fan culture, and one which is now supported by many titles, is user-created content – extensions and additions to the game software (often described as 'mods' or 'add-ons'). This opening of the game architecture to the end user contributed to the success of ID Software's break-out title *Doom*. In *Joystick Nation*, J. C. Herz (1997: 90) observes that *Doom* marked a potential transformation in how games are made, becoming open-ended processes in which end users participate. ID released the source code of *Doom* in December 1997 under a not-for-profit license, allowing fans with programming skills to modify the game: 'They could create custom soundscapes, tweak the game's configurations, or even create new levels, entire episodes of the game . . . Players became a part of *Doom's* world not just because they played the game but also because they constructed bits of it.'

Game development companies now routinely include editing and modding tools with their game release software package. These are often the software tools that the game designers and artists use in the production of the release

title, and enable users to modify or produce new material for the game. Skins or textures modify and alter the graphics of elements and models in the game. More extensive modifications such as 'total modifications' include the ability to create new game levels or game units and objects that can be shared with other players. Games researchers recognize the value and significance of modding for the videogames industry and games culture (Banks 2002; Postigo 2003, 2007, 2008; Dovey and Kennedy 2006; Kerr 2006; Nieborg and van der Graaf 2008), often citing the multiplayer modification *Counter-Strike*, a counterterrorism themed first-person shooter, developed by amateurs Minh Lee and Jess Cliffe in 1999 for Valve's popular *Half-Life* (1998). As Nieborg and van der Graaf (2008: 178) note,

The success of *Counter-Strike* eventually surpassed that of *Half-Life*, and gamers started to buy the original game just to play the mod. Foreseeing a great future for *Counter-Strike* and its developers, *Half-Life*'s original developer Valve responded by offering the mod team a spot on Valve's professional development team and in so doing, acquiring *Counter-Strike*'s valuable intellectual property.

Commercially successful titles such as the retail phenomenon that is *The Sims* (Maxis and Electronic Arts: 2000) franchise rely heavily on gamers creating and sharing content. In 'Learning from the Sims', J. C. Herz (2001) suggests that the success of the popular phenomenon of *The Sims* is perhaps explained, at least in part, by Maxis's efforts to involve its customers directly in the process of developing and evolving the product. This reached 'the point where customers not only do a large portion of the innovation and marketing but also produce as much intellectual capital as they consume'.

The success of the Maxis developed and Electronic Arts published *Spore* (2008) thrives on user-created content. Players use 3D editors to design creatures and other in-game content, guide their creatures through stages of evolution and then share their creations with other players. Maxis harvests this player-created content to populate other players' games through a system they describe as 'pollinated content'. Since *Spore*'s release in September 2008 well over 100,000,000 items of player-created content were uploaded to the online Sporepedia repository within the first year. Players can also upload directly from within their game videos of their creature creations to the *Spore* YouTube channel. Creating and sharing content is such a core feature of *Spore* that the game is perhaps best understood as a social network generated from player creativity. The puzzle-platformer *LittleBigPlanet*, developed by UK-based Media Molecule and released in October 2008 for the PlayStation3 console, and its sequel *LittleBigPlanet2*, also rely heavily on user-created content. Players can use drag-and-drop level editors embedded throughout

the game to create and edit new levels. They then can share these creations with other players through the Playstation Network online service. LittleBig workshop, the game's official online community website, allows players to share their level designs and in-game videos. The site also provides video tutorials that help players as they learn to use the level editors and create their own levels. Since *LittleBigPlanet*'s release over two million player-created levels are available and the Game of the Year edition includes 18 of these levels.

The particular significance of titles such as *Spore* and *LittleBigPlanet* is that they integrate co-creative media culture into the very core of the gaming experience and the videogame business. *LittleBigPlanet*'s tag 'Play, Create, Share' foregrounds the centrality of this co-creativity.

Back in 1997, however, as I interviewed Lane and visited Auran, I was just glimpsing the potential of user-created content and its implications for transforming producer-consumer relations. After securing Auran's agreement to participate in the research, regular visits to the workplace were arranged, including the opportunity to interview programmers and designers working on *Dark Reign*. I was aiming to obtain a programmer's perspective on the open-architecture game engine design that Lane had been discussing with me. My fieldnotes record that on one of these early visits I approached a young programmer asking, 'what he was working on', and he gestured at the screen replying, 'You know, tracking down the last few bugs.' When I asked further about *Dark Reign*, the open-architecture Tactics Engine and Auran's plans to support the fan community's efforts to create add-ons and modifications, he appeared to be uneasy about how to respond. He said:

Yeah, the fan stuff is really cool and important. We want to put some effort into that area of the game. Like how we do the chats with the fans.

I then asked about the Tactics Engine technology behind *Dark Reign*, and how Lane had described it as being open and modifiable by the gamers. The programmer appeared to be somewhat uncomfortable, and said, 'I should be getting back to it, it's crunch time here and there's still heaps to do'.

On that note our discussion abruptly ended. As I left the main workspace area, I noticed that he was sitting back down in front of the PC, obviously back at it, whatever 'it' was. I assumed that he meant working on fixing bugs. The real action for him was there, working at the PC, coding. From my initial visits and similar discussions with the developers, I came away with the problem of how to engage with what the young programmer was doing when he was sitting in front of the PC coding.

Before I left Auran, Lane said: 'Take a look at this' and as on previous visits brought up on the screen the *Dark Reign* editor tools. 'We've done some

work on it since you last saw it, based on feedback from some of the beta testers. You know Leviticus and Hokkies from the community, right, they're beta testers as well.' He then demonstrated how quickly and easily a new map could be created. 'I really want to see what the gamers do with this. I think the editor and our support for the fan community post release should help to differentiate us from the competition. What do you think?'

What did I think indeed? This question raised uncomfortable dilemmas concerning my positioning between Auran and the gamer fan community. Lane clearly viewed the research relationship as a mechanism through which Auran could more effectively monitor and manage the fans. The fans, on the other hand, viewed their relationship with me as an opportunity to gain insider information about Auran that would then potentially improve their standing in the fan community. At the same time that I was undertaking the early interviews and dialogues with Lane, I was also actively involved in the *Dark Reign* online fan community. I participated daily in chat sessions on the *Dark Reign* IRC. I was in regular email contact with many of the community members who hosted fan websites such as 'Dark Reign Chronicles'. In these exchanges, it became apparent that members of the community viewed me as a mediator and contact point with Auran. I was regularly emailed questions about *Dark Reign* and the Tactics Engine on which I was asked to obtain information and responses from Auran. Lane would from time to time provide responses that I was then permitted to pass on to the fans. The issue of how academic research colludes with a range of agendas, both business and non-business, when undertaking ethnographic research in digital media commercial environments and sites – such as a game development company – is a problem and dilemma for this book and I am not sure that I manage to resolve it. However, it is not a problem that can be overcome or avoided by adopting a reflexive methodology. Nevertheless, the troubling question remains open: is participating in such research a case of co-optation to business agendas? I argue that logics of co-optation or opposition are not at all useful or helpful when negotiating how we participate in these networks.

I was increasingly aware that my research visits to Auran had also become an opportunity for both Auran and the online fans to explore potential relationships with each other. Initially, it appeared that I was caught up in a process of explaining or reporting on one to the other, and vice versa. For example, in December 1997, shortly after *Dark Reign's* release, one of the leading local fans, VR_Bones, contacted me expressing interest in my research about players creating modifications and content for *Dark Reign*. He visited me at my home to provide me with a 'demo of what we're doing so you have that perspective when you're discussing stuff with Auran'. He travelled a good hour or so by train with his PC box to show me various maps he had made with the editing tools and maps created by other players. He also

demoed for me AI scripts he had written to change the behaviour of various units in the game. He said, 'guys in the community are working on some great scripts, it won't be long before we've done the AI better than the devs [developers]'. It became clear though that he was also pointing out problems and limitations with the editing tools that 'needed fixing'. He commented:

It is great this open approach and giving us the tools. But if Auran really wants to see good content come out of this, they really need to fix these things. They're just getting in our way. Auran seems really responsive so maybe you could tell them about this next time you're in there. Who knows maybe they'll make the fixes we want.

Dark Reign was released in September 1997 and quickly became commercially successful, eventually selling over 700,000 copies. It received favourable reviews from online game-site press and offline game-review magazines. Auran released the *Tactics Engine Manual* that explained in detail how the Tactics Engine could be modified, and how users could access, modify and create game scripts to change and alter various key game parameters. Shortly after the release, new game maps created by users started to appear for download on the fan websites. Lane was hopeful that this was just the start of a growing source of fan-generated content that would support *Dark Reign*. However, fan content creation activity was lower than anticipated and never became a significant feature of the player activity around *Dark Reign*. Lane felt that a number of compromises had been made in the design of *Dark Reign* that made it somewhat difficult for players to modify or create add-ons. He commented in March 1998:

We learnt from that, it really needs to be simpler, easier to use, the barrier has to be lower, because we know if it is too difficult to use then, well most people won't give it a go, or they'll give up. All except the really hard-core guys . . . I still think the open architecture engine approach is the way we want to go. Involving fans, the gamers in the process is going to be increasingly important. It may well change how we make games and an open engine is important here. It amazes me what groups of fans are achieving, and the developers need to tap into that.

The new participatory culture?

My fieldnotes from these visits to Auran throughout 1997 and into early 1998 pose the question was I witnessing a significant change in the relations between consumers and producers that went beyond the cultural studies and

media studies active audience thesis? Were the very conditions of participatory media culture transforming? And if so, how were these changes being made. What precisely were the programmers, designers and producers doing that contributed to these changes? The term 'participatory culture' can be traced back to the subtitle of Henry Jenkins' influential 1992 study of fan cultures, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Through a series of ethnographic accounts of media fans' 'troubled relationship to the mass media and consumer capitalism' (1) and following Michel de Certeau's notion of active reading as a mode of 'poaching', Jenkins foregrounds the activity of media fans in appropriating and reworking the resources of commercial culture according to alternative and at times even potentially resistant agendas.

But Jenkins' work also emphasizes the conflictual relationship between fans and official media producers:

[Fans] lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment industry's decisions. Fans must beg with the networks to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters. Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors, a recognition which must contextualise our celebration of strategies of popular resistance. (27; also see 31–2)

Jenkins reminds us throughout his study that, although fandom's poaching, producerly, active modes of appropriating cultural texts are significant, we also need to acknowledge that they do 'not provide an adequate substitute for access to the means of cultural production and distribution' (27).

Did these emerging relationships between Auran and the *Dark Reign* fans indicate a profound shift in participatory culture relations between producers and consumers in which consumers were starting to enjoy access to the means of cultural production and distribution? This did not so much concern just the fact that the gamers were making and sharing content but more so the nature and character of the relationship, the *co-creative relationship*, with the developer company within which these participatory media practices were made and negotiated. How was this changing the conditions of cultural production?

In *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills (2002) provides a persuasive critique of Jenkins's figure of the fan. He argues that cultural studies' academic agendas have carefully shaped the figure of the acceptable, desirable fan: 'certain aspects of fandom are emphasised and other aspects are downplayed . . . in the polemical defence of fandom mounted by Jenkins' (8). According to Hills, Jenkins's work is structured around a 'moral dualism' of good producerly fans and bad

consumerly non-fans. As a remedy, he proposes an approach grounded in a factual basis that offers a 'more complex and less celebratory model of fandom' (9).¹ Hills encourages us to articulate a more complex understanding of the relationships between fandom, corporate commercial culture and academic researcher. He argues, for example, that Jenkins's version of fandom is designed to 'act upon particular academic and institutional spaces and agendas' (10). Jenkins's fan is not a cultural object to be understood and represented. Rather, it is modified into a 'shape which will allow it to act on the academic community'. Here the fan functions as a screen against which the political values of the cultural studies academic are projected (10–11).² Hills then poses the troubling question: what happens to these notions of the fan that have tended to dominate cultural studies research such as Jenkins's 'when fan cultures are themselves directly targeted as a niche market' (27)?

These criticisms of cultural studies work on fandom and the active audience thesis are not particularly new. Nor is the observation that fandom offers a tempting niche market for corporations (Ang 1996: 10–11; Nightingale 1996: 95–100, 126–30). Hills adds the concern that such an understanding of fandom also relies on an assumed separation between producers and consumers. Producers own the apparatus of production while consumers poach on the production space by appropriating the end products. He questions this reliance on de Certeau's work, observing that 'it seems too rigid to deal helpfully with any blurring of consumer and consumer-as-producer identities. It effectively cannot come to terms with the possibility that consumers can actively seek and adopt strategic positions in the official, production space' (39). Here Hills brings to our attention the fact that the conditions through which fandom is shaped are in the process of a significant transformation. We see this playing out in my initial research with Auran. Jenkins's work has also moved on from the *Textual Poachers* position to grapple with the implications of these changes for his understanding of participatory culture.

In 'Interactive audiences?' (2002) Jenkins takes up the work of Pierre Lévy to think through the transformed relations among interactive audiences and media industries. Lévy argues that, in economic terms, 'the production of added value is shifted to the consumer or, rather, the notion of consumption should be replaced by that of the coproduction of merchandise or interactive services' (80–1). For Lévy, these trends indicate 'the emergence of a qualitatively different transaction space in which the roles of consumer and producer are undergoing profound change' (78).

In *Convergence Culture* (2006) Jenkins develops an understanding of these changes in participatory culture that avoids an oppositional logic that sees consumers as either resisting or co-opted by the media industries. He unsettles such either/or logics – refusing to see media consumers as either totally autonomous from or totally vulnerable to the creative industries. Instead,

Jenkins approaches media users as pursuing complex and contradictory alliances and suggests that fans seek to open and explore possibilities for participatory alliances within these commercial networks. Problems then become those of access, and the terms and conditions of this participation, rather than opposition or resistance.³ This is a framework in which fan communities are not understood as either resisting the culture industries or being seamlessly incorporated to corporate interests and agendas. Instead, these participatory culture negotiations and alliances are perhaps becoming 'part of the normal ways that media operates' (246).

The particular strength of Jenkins' analysis is that it foregrounds the dynamic relationships between media consumers and media industries that define participatory culture. But is his work still open to the criticism levelled by Hills that it overly valorizes the productive activity of media consumers? This becomes clearer perhaps in recent work that picks up from Jenkins's work such as Bruns's (2008) idea of *produsage*. In an exemplary study that canvasses the increasing role of users and consumers in making and creating media content, from open source software development, news blogging and Wikipedia, through to Flickr, YouTube and the videogames industry, Bruns argues that the very term production is itself a problem as it locks us into industrial model understandings of production. What he describes as '*produsage*' so thoroughly involves and integrates users in the process of making content in their own right that it exceeds and fundamentally breaks from industrial modes of organizing production. But in the effort to foreground this productive agency of media users and consumers does Bruns perhaps too quickly overlook that much of this activity still predominantly occurs through commercially owned and produced platforms and tools. Furthermore, media professionals remain central to creating and making the various media products and practices that he discusses.

The level of abstraction of a concept such as *produsage*, while its very strength, perhaps overly abstracts it from the very relationships and media production practices, which make many of the activities possible in the first place. It also postulates production as something of a static form rather than itself a complex and evolving set of relationships that are not necessarily and finally defined by a particular form of industrial fordist organization. Bruns is describing an evolving *production-consumption relationship* and perhaps too quickly rejects categories such as producer, consumer and user as unhelpful and outmoded, commenting 'the role of "consumer" and even that of "end user" have long disappeared, and the distinction between producers and users of content have faded into comparative insignificance' (2). When Bruns analyses the videogames industry as an 'outright trailblazer of these processes' (289), briefly referring to *The Sims* and touching upon Auran's *Trainz*, he acknowledges this is somewhat problematic as these are commercial products and platforms in which the 'producers' making the content are also

consumers purchasing the game software. Professional game developers and the work they do also figure prominently in the practices that Bruns describes. The very generality of the concept of produsage starts to get in the way of describing and analysing the precise characteristics of these changing production and consumption relationships as they emerge and are negotiated across different media industry sectors. There is no sense, for example, that the specificities of the videogames industry may require us to revisit the idea of produsage for some fine-tuning – it provides another example to illustrate the general principles detailed in the book's second chapter. But that said general principles are important and in the concluding chapter I will offer some general principles about these emerging modes of cultural production myself. However, I hope that productive tensions will remain among the empirical detail of the ethnographic case studies and the proposed principles.

We need closer and more detailed accounts of how these co-creative relations work and of how they are negotiated in creative industries workplaces. Important studies such as Thomas M. Malaby's (2009) *Making Virtual Worlds: Linden Lab and Second Life* point us in this direction by offering a richly textured ethnographic account of how the employees of Linden Lab grappled with the challenges and complex processes of making virtual worlds such as *Second Life*. I am offering these observations, however, not to reject either Bruns's or Jenkins's foregrounding of consumers' increasing role in making and circulating media content and experiences – this is certainly fundamental to the idea of co-creativity. But my starting point with the idea of co-creativity is not in such a rush to leave behind categories such as production and consumption; it is rooted in the uncertainties and controversies about how these emerging cultural and economic relations are made. Malaby's account of Linden Labs is significant precisely because it foregrounds the Linden designers' uncertainties as they attempt to craft a virtual world that at its core and in its very usability sought to encourage users to creatively make the world of *Second Life*. Malaby describes this as a 'contrived architecture' (8) in which the somewhat top-down design intentions and goals of the Linden staff meet and collide with the often-unanticipated practices of the users. As Malaby notes, 'Second Life *depends* on unanticipated uses by its consumers' (8). However, as he describes so well, the efforts of Linden designers to control or direct user practices often have quite complex and unintended consequences. Malaby's ethnography then is an account of what this user co-creation activity means not simply for the users themselves, the participatory culture and produsage emphasis of Jenkins's and Bruns's work, 'but for the increasing number of such architects of digital environs, all of whom may be charting a new way to design this open-endedness' (8). He carefully foregrounds the craft skills and practices of the professional Linden Lab employees in making these worlds and rigorously describes their diverse understandings of these emerging practices.

Malaby explains that control and authority over cultural production are at stake here. To craft these open-ended worlds the professional developers need to give up some aspects of control. By embracing the contingency of these relationships they are remaking cultural production firms and organizations in a less hierarchical, less top-down fashion. This concerns the changing conditions of cultural production and the implications of these changes for professional cultural producers and cultural production firms and organizations. Malaby argues that Linden Labs and its employees are pursuing a mode of governance that rejects the traditional control imperatives of business management. He hopes that his book contributes to our being

in a better position to understand the emerging institutions that are ever more able to shape and govern our increasingly digital lives. It explores how an organization that set out to create a deeply and complexly contingent environment is then itself remade by its creation through that domain's emergent effects, in a constantly reiterative process, but without losing its position of greatest influence. (9)

This also is the ambition of this book. The themes that Malaby identifies of architecting open-ended contingency and the associated dilemmas of limiting control are also central to this book, as will become apparent throughout the ethnographic material, including the interviews with game developers that are the centrepiece of this chapter.

Professional game developers – programmers, designers, community managers, animators, producers and managers – contribute to the crafting of co-creativity. The co-creative choices and behaviours of the gamers that I briefly mentioned in the introduction and develop more fully in the final chapter are configured by these designed 'choice architectures'. However, I would add that the players themselves contribute to the architecting of these domains. The players and the professional developers are in a co-constitutive relationship.

The ethnographic accounts in the remainder of this chapter, and indeed throughout much of this book, foreground the practices and understandings of professional developers. I provide the detailed accounts and at moments quite lengthy interview extracts to emphasize these professionals' diverse understandings of crafting co-creative media. I also try to draw out the uncertainty and indeed contingency that characterizes their understanding of these emerging relationships. Greg Lane, for example, observed in many of our discussions in late 1997 and early 1998, his uncertainty about the merits and aims of exploring these co-creative relationships with gamers. He acknowledged that there is a 'bottom-line' here: 'This needs to contribute to selling game boxes, that's why we are doing it, and I'm still unsure if it does

that or how it contributes to that, but look the guys (gesturing around the office) are having fun with this, the chats and so on, and the fans are having fun with it too, but where it all goes from here and how far we can take it, who knows?’

This ethnographic material does not provide a comprehensive account of Auran from 1997–2007 nor is it a comprehensive study of the games industry over this period. I draw on the ethnographic material to illuminate the complex processes and practices of co-creativity. Many of the following chapters descriptively foreground the various ways that games developers and gamers wrestle with the opportunities and challenges of emerging co-creative relationships. Other chapters, especially the final three, draw on this material to propose and develop an analytic model of co-creativity. I want to be clear here on the relationship between ethnographic description and theory building. The thick detailed description and interview extracts should not be reduced to simply exemplars for the analytic and theoretical propositions. The ethnographic material informs and guides my theoretical account but there is a necessary tension between the ethnographic material and the theory. It is a tension that cannot be overcome through appropriate methodological reflexivity. Furthermore, although I have carefully selected the interview extracts from the many hours of recordings and hundreds of pages of transcripts, (ethnographic accounts are as the earlier Rabinow quotation suggests ‘fashioned’), I do not think this material is seamlessly reduced to my accounts. Drawing on Meghan Morris’s (1988) work, John Frow (1995) warns that the ethnographic object of study (he is examining the category of the popular) can become ‘the textually delegated, allegorical emblem of the critic’s own activity. Their ethnos may be constructed as other, but it is used as the ethnographer’s mask’ (69). The risk here then is that the interview and descriptive material from these game development workplaces may be my mask. However, I do not think we are stuck in a stark opposition between representational ethnographic verisimilitude and theoretical or critical analysis. Nor do I think that is what Morris or Frow are necessarily getting at here. I am not, I hope, appropriating these game developer accounts as a stand in for my academic discourse that ‘denies its own expository and analytic – its intellectual status’ (Frow 1995: 69). My aim is that this ethnographic account builds from this constitutive tension and dilemma. The analytic risks Frow and Morris identify are not necessarily an impediment or objection to undertaking ethnographic research. I think it also a mistake, however, to reduce ethnography to what Frow calls ‘its intellectual status’. My position in the making of this account is far more diverse and multiple than an academic proposing theory. It also comes from my experience as an employee of Auran games in the role of online community manager seeking to both understand and participate in the craft of making co-creative media relationships. This

employment opportunity came out of my dialogues with Greg Lane and other Auran staff as we sought to better understand their co-creative relationship with gamers. So in this book I seek to provide room for the voices and accounts of professional games developers. There is the possibility for constructive dialogue here.

In his recent book, *Together: The Craft and Politics of Cooperation*, Richard Sennett (2012) explores the craft of cooperation by focusing on people's responsive and communicative skills. He worries that conditions of contemporary labour – short term, project-based and precarious – weakens our capacity to cooperate. I think co-creativity may provide an opportunity to learn and experiment with new ways of cooperating, including in workplaces. Co-creativity may be up-skilling people with the skills and craft needed to make our complex, increasingly networked and distributed society work (Sennett: 7–9). Sennett suggests that the craft of cooperation requires dialogic listening skills, which he contrasts with dialectic, assertive forms of conversation. Dialectic, he argues, on the one hand seeks to reach a common understanding and establish common ground. Dialogic discussion on the other hand does not seek resolution by the imperative to find a common ground or to reach shared agreements. Sennett (22–4) also notes that the pleasures of dialogic interaction and exchange are often experienced in ethnographic fieldwork. I hope the following interview extracts, from my fieldwork with games developers invite dialogic listening as an interpretive activity that encourages a kind of discussion and exchange that perhaps also characterizes the cooperative potential of co-creativity.

Visiting Maxis

The research for this book culminated with visits in June 2009 to Maxis in San Francisco and Will Wright at his new company, Stupid Fun Club, also in San Francisco. Wright had recently parted ways with Maxis to pursue new possibilities for advancing co-creative engagement with audiences in the domain of cross-platform media. Wright described Stupid Fun Club as an R&D lab to experiment with co-creative media across toys, comics, film and TV, mobile devices such as the iPhone, social network platforms such as Facebook, and game platforms such as consoles and the PC. In my time at Maxis and with Wright I had the opportunity to conduct semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with some nine staff including Lucy Bradshaw, general manager; Morgan Roarity, chief operations officer (COO); Caryl Shaw, senior producer; and, Dan Moskowitz, lead engineer. I want to take care with not claiming too much for these interviews, as they certainly do not amount to anything like an extended ethnographic case-study

engagement with the daily work practices of these professionals. From my more extensive research with Auran games, I have learnt that what is shared in semi-structured interviews and how those ‘big creative ideas and visions’ play out in day-to-day workplace relationships can be very different. I am not saying that the interviewees deliberately set out to mislead or misinform – it is more that interview settings tend to elicit certain kinds of response and also certain expectations on behalf of the participants about the kinds of information and commentary they believe will be of value to the researcher. I will draw on this material at various points in this study, particularly over the final chapters and conclusion, as I think it helpfully contextualizes various claims that I will make. It also advances a somewhat different perspective from that provided by the Auran games case study.

The opportunity to visit Maxis and Will Wright happened because of a meeting with Caryl Shaw (senior producer propagated content on the *Spore* project), when she visited Australia in December 2008. As part of her time in Australia, Shaw spent a few days attending a workshop seminar with Australian games researchers at which we focused on the significance and challenges of emerging co-creative relationships between game developers and gamers. At the time *Spore* had been recently released and were witnessing the phenomenal growth in the amount of player-created content for the game. Shaw expressed the Maxis development team’s surprise at the amount of content created by the players over such a short period – a matter of two months. She also said that the designers were surprised by the speed at which the players were discovering unexpected applications and uses of the tools – Malaby’s (2009) unanticipated contingency:

They were very quickly discovering things that we missed or even knew were in there, but you know considered to be bugs [laughs], and then picking-up on that and coming up with creative uses to makes this really cool content. So these bugs become features that we then have to think about supporting or developing further.

An illuminating aspect of these informal discussions with Shaw was how she highlighted and personified all the *professional work* that supports the making of co-creative media culture. She discussed, for example, the challenge of designing and making editing tools that enable the players to create and enjoy all of the *Spore* content. She also raised the difficulties of scaling-up and rethinking their web and server infrastructure and systems that enabled the player-created content to be shared:

OK, so now that we’ve got this massive amount of content and we’re populating the players’ games with it, how do we help them sort through it

all and find that exact item that best suits their version of the *Spore* world? This is a big problem and it is getting bigger [laughs]. Then on top of that, how do we give all that content a meaningful and fun context or game play environment? The players don't want to just create; they also want to play with it and do stuff with it. With *Spore* I think we got the creating part right, the team really nailed that with the editors, they did a brilliant job. But I think we've got some way to go with figuring out how to provide meaning and value for all that content and then to give players' some kind of creative involvement in that.

When I visited Maxis in San Francisco from 22 to 26 June 2009, the team was dealing with the release of *Spore's* first expansion pack, *Galactic Adventures*. This expansion provides players with a set of tools that they can use to design their own mini-game adventures or levels with supporting stories, incorporating content they have created or has been created by other players. They then upload and share these adventures with other players. The following extracts from interviews with various staff provides a useful overview of many of the issues and challenges that characterize co-creative relationships in the videogames industry and that form core topics and issues in the following chapters. These include: the technologies and tools that contribute to making and shaping co-creative relationships; the nature of the value exchanges and transactions among the players and professionals; the players' creativity in exploring the potential of content creating tools; and, the role of professional developers in supporting and enabling these co-creative practices.

Lucy Bradshaw – Studio head

'The relationship'

Bradshaw started out the interview by emphasizing that these co-creative practices in the games industry have a history. For Maxis this goes back to Will Wright's *Sim City* series:

I think it was 97 or thereabouts. The first game I worked on was *Sim City 3000* and that was still at a time when there wasn't as much user generated content. But *Sim City 2000* had actually included the *Sim City* urban renewal kit (SCURK), a tool-kit that people were using to create their own content. So we were seeing little bastions of people starting their own sites, building creations for the game and they were sharing them. And I reached out to that particular community of players to understand what it

was they wanted out of the next *Sim City* and how could we engage with some of the things that they found interesting because I also looked at them as a sort of word of mouth channel . . . I felt that a word of mouth channel would actually be a very good thing because experiencing *Sim City* is a magical experience. It's this game that kind of pushes back at you and you create something just by playing the game, not even by using the tools that we made as ancillary products to go along with the game like SCURK. So I tapped into that web community and even hired one of the people who was doing that and he still works with Electronic Arts and he works on some of the *Sims* titles.

I asked Bradshaw to expand on this relationship Maxis was exploring with the content creators:

Well from there we embraced this idea that players really did make incredibly great content if we could give them tools that enabled to do so and if we kept somewhat of an open mind as to how they would get those assets into the game. So when we did *Sim City 3000*, the way we made the building tool, we revealed the way they could adjust the files to incorporate them with the game. And we made it about sharing content; we embraced it as a feature of the game. And really we've gone on from there exploring that relationship with the players. In *The Sims* back in 2000 or so we continued along that vein, we had people sharing content, houses and such, before the game even shipped. We created a tool called the Transmogrifier, which allows people to further adapt and customise objects in the game. It is kind of a creativity tool that lets you change the appearance of objects in the game. But this time it was different from *Sim City* – a lot more large scale. OK, it was still only you know a small percentage of creators doing this content-creating, whether it was story-telling or making skins, but they started to organise more so than they had on *Sim City*. They were creating websites like *Sim Resource* and *Seven Deadly Sims*, all sorts of websites, and they were organising the content of multiple creators in a way that Maxis hadn't done. These creators also started specialising in the types of content they created and people started going to their sites to source content and they started making ad revenue money from that. All this changed the relationship yet again with our user creators.

I queried how precisely did this relationship change and what did she mean by 'the relationship'. She replied,

Well what's the status of these assets because the assets really were derived from tools that we created? Hence you have this very sort of odd

intellectual property and trademark issue. Where did we draw the lines? Basically the legal position stated, in the end-user license agreements and so forth, that all the content is essentially *Sims* content, Maxis and EA, but we therefore now have a moral relationship with our user base and creator base. We don't use their content in the sense that we don't ship it as our own; we don't use it as our own. It was out there on websites, attracting people to these content aggregation sites, and they were able to ultimately monetise those websites by advertising revenues . . . So when *Sims 2* came out, we made an even more advanced version of the content creator tool called the Body Shop and we launched that prior to the game and they were able to really go in there and make unbelievable content . . . Then the relationship changed again with *Spore* when we built the tools for making content right into the game. We embedded them so tightly into the game that we kind of changed the way that players generated content. These are the tools that our own team use and we wanted to put this into the hands of everybody and make it core to the game play experience.

When I asked Bradshaw to elaborate a little more on how the relationship with the players changed with *Spore*, she again returned to the topic of the tools commenting:

We had to really work hard on those editors. We tried hard to emphasise the players' creativity, but to enable that under the hood through our procedural animation approach. It makes it easier for players to see their ideas come to life. So there's this handshake kind of relationship between the underlying technology and enabling player creativity in the broadest possible way. Then there was the pollinated content side of things – how we developed systems for the sharing of content. We do it behind the scenes so when you share something it goes up to our servers and it goes to other players' games even though they're playing on their own client, entirely solo, their content is constantly refreshed with whatever is on the Sporepedia on Spore.com. But this also gives the content creators control on when they want to publish the content, so they can finesse and fine-tune it. Then we put in place systems so they can see the sort of attention their content is getting and the kudos they get from that . . .

I think we made this making and sharing of content really seamless with the core game. But then the share amount of content the players made and wanted to share caught us by surprise [laughs]. But then we didn't take advantage of all those assets and give players a context and environment for exploring what they could do with those assets, you know really playing and exploring those creations – all that content, now over a 100 million assets, you know, the planets, the buildings, the vehicles and

the creatures, all become the actors in your set and you can choose from anything that you want and all of a sudden it's like, you bring it to life with the meaning and the import and the game play that you want. It is that whole thing you mentioned earlier with that quote from Will Wright, about the players' feeling like they are George Lucas rather than Luke Skywalker; I don't think we quite got there with *Spore* but we're addressing that side of things with this expansion *Galactic Adventures*, we're going deeper in enabling that player creativity.

Bradshaw evaluated the success of what she described as this 'tough project' in terms of the 'unexpected' and 'surprising' results the players achieved with the tools. Bradshaw comments:

With the editors and the creativity, I think that's what I'm most proud about what the team accomplished here, making sure that those things stood at the fore and making sure that we didn't compromise on any of that. I continue to be surprised and amazed at how ingenious the player community is. They find bugs that we didn't find, they find bugs and they turn them into absolute features.

Asking for an example of this, Bradshaw (the community manager, Therese Durringer, also offered this example in her interview with me) described how players developed their own in-game communication network, abandoning as inefficient and clumsy the Maxis designed feature of adding comments to individual player-created assets. Instead, a player used the editing tools to make a 'mailbox creature', requesting other players to 'leave comments and messages here please'. Very quickly other players followed or replicated this example, making variations of the mailbox creatures. Bradshaw commented:

All of a sudden there were these creature mailboxes, and they actually looked like mailboxes, popping up all over the Sporepedia. One guy actually used it to propose to his fiancé and then created a building with a billboard on it that said 'she said yes' and so communicating back to the community of players. So they are using the content to kind of tell their story and then get it populated to other people's computers as a means of communication. It is fascinating and also well just almost surreal at times.

After recounting this same story about the creature-mailboxes, the community manager, Therese Durringer, described how players were using the tools to create content that conveyed their protest about particular features in the game they wanted changed. If the content became popular through the game's rating and approval system, it conveyed a strong message to Maxis

that the community supported the requested change. Both Bradshaw and Duringer were clearly impressed by this method of lobbying Maxis for changes. Duringer commented: 'Look it got our attention a lot better than just the standard forum post', and Bradshaw said, 'you've got to pay attention to that, it is artistic and after all – what a creative way to get our attention'.

Throughout our discussion Bradshaw often returned to Maxis's 'changing' and 'evolving' relationship with the player community. She commented that this had a 'moral dimension to it'. I asked her to clarify and she responded:

Maxis has a real respect for the player community . . . it's interesting because they are so passionate and I think that's something that we respond to and many of them are creators who have helped the word of mouth about the games. They also go beyond the boundaries of what it was that we shipped. We feed that but they feed it back to us, so it really is this sort of two way street. So we listen, we also really do try to make sure that we're playing by what I would say are a balanced set of rules. Obviously we have an IP that we need to own and defend and yet there is this relationship where they're adding something and we benefit from that, so you know, how do you ultimately respect that?

Dan Moskowitz: Lead engineer

'It's a trick'

Dan Moskowitz, the lead engineer working on the editors, described in some detail the technical and design difficulty of making editors that 'were accessible to people who had never built anything in 3D before but that could also be powerful enough for an expert to create something unbelievable'. He emphasized that the challenge was giving the player a strong sense of creative possibilities and yet also putting some parameters and constraints on that. He said:

That was the balance we were dealing with, a lot of our focus as toolmakers was thinking about how far you can turn off the constraints and allow the player to essentially build whatever they want. But that also had to be balanced with game play needs; you know like what did we want the content to do.

Moskowitz also described in some detail the technical achievement of ensuring items of content were of a small data size so they could be quickly

and seamlessly uploaded to the Sporepedia and downloaded to other players' PCs. He said,

For example, when you want to paint your creature with the editor it's really just six pieces of data that we store, there's basically three coats of paint that you can select and each one has a colour associated with it. So all we end up storing is like this six bytes of data that gets sent up to the server but what happens when we actually reconstitute the creature is that we say, oh this paint script, and it's actually a text file that one of our technical artists make, that has the instructions for how to like drip paint down the spine of the creature so that you can have these stripes appearing in the right places, following the contour of the creature's vertebrae. And that's just one small aspect of the technical and design achievement. After all that I think these tools that we've made really opened up a lot of people's imaginations as they had been more used to tools where things are a bit more static, you know you have a main character and you can kind of strip them down and the dress them back up. But what we did that was really different was let you actually define the body, the body shape and the limbs and so on of your creature. And then on top of that is this whole other system that Chris Hacker was involved in, which is procedural animation. The editors we created were one thing, but without the procedural animation they'd just be this static creature, the fact that it actually walks around and moves is a whole other technical feat that the procedural animation team handled. Well you see the achievement of *Spore* I see it like this, it is a sort of union of making 3D modeling really, really accessible to people and the decisions about how to do that so the creativity of the players is unleashed when the tools get into their hands.

I commented that this was 'obviously successful because of all that content players are making' and Moskowitz interrupted,

But it's a trick, it's a great trick right, I mean because we sort of define this possibility space and what people can make and it's really large so people feel like they have complete freedom to sort of do whatever they want, but there's lots of things you can't make in this world with the creature creator. Then it is about getting these great tools out there so everybody can start using them without necessarily having a certain level of technical expertise. But then that trick thing changes because very quickly after we released the creature creator tools, you know the players they start finding their own tricks and start using them to make this fantastic content; within weeks we're seeing them do things with the tools that took us like three years to figure out [laughs] and we would look at our own content and

laugh and say this is such crap as the players' are creating stuff that's so much better. And that's it; you know that is so satisfying. I'm a big proponent of that, I mean basically we've made a good tool and just like unleashed it on the Internet; they're going to make amazing stuff with it that you could never even imagine. So there's a cost-benefit to that, taking your tools and polishing them to the level that they can be released to the public. That's the mindset we have, that the team has while developing it. These hundred million assets, the number gets so big it becomes kind of meaningless, but the mindset is seeing and supporting how people will then take that to the next level.

I asked if he would clarify why he meant by 'it's a trick':

OK, so when we are designing that possibility space you also need to constrain all that, you need to cut and prune. It cannot just be like OK here you go, do anything you like . . . ummm [pause]. But for the programmers there are these moments when we were like, OK if I remove this line of code I'm basically pruning an entire possibility space of things that I know could happen when the players get to exploring it. So it's like you feel this weird responsibility, and you had to be very careful about what things you left in and what things you took out. So some of the things we left in were these kind of awkward keystrokes that you can use to do certain things with and we just knew that someone would figure it out and, you know maybe that one percent of people, they would find it and appreciate it and build some cool things from that. But then you know those techniques spread so quickly. The content using it gets voted up to the top and becomes popular and then you see heaps of people using it. Then you see these YouTube clips, like tutorials showing people how to do it. There were a bunch of cases like that and some that really surprised us.

By trick Moscowitz did not mean dishonest. It is interesting that he struggled somewhat to describe the dynamic relationship between the professional technical skills that engineer these tools and environments and the gamers' often unexpected and creative uses of them. This is very close to Thomas Malaby's (2009) account of Linden Lab and *Second Life* that I discussed earlier in which he foregrounds 'unanticipated uses by its consumers' (8). Malaby (14) describes the work of architecting these environments and tools as 'new institutional techniques', noting that the 'apparent freedom' perhaps 'belies a significant innovation in techniques of governance' (14). It is here that I depart somewhat from Malaby; the dynamics and creative relationships the Maxis developers describe are not just an '*apparent* freedom' (my emphasis). Nevertheless, the creative freedom offered by *Spore* requires the craft skills of the programmers, designers, producers and community managers. These

professionals are most certainly innovating to craft and co-ordinate 'new institutional techniques' that in collaboration with the gamers co-creatively make products and experiences. The fact that this is 'contrived' (Malaby 2009: 86), or in Mosowitz's terms 'a trick', does not mean it is misleading or manipulative.

Morgan Roarity: Chief operations officer

'We haven't got it all figured out, we don't know'

Morgan Roarity, the COO of Maxis, emphasized the development team's passion and excitement for what the players were achieving with the editors:

There's really great satisfaction as a producer when you see something made in the editors because its almost as if, I don't know what a good analogy is, but I was partly responsible for creating the tools that made that possible, it's a really cool feeling. It's just a great satisfaction to see what people make; we've given them that ability to express themselves . . . It's just a different relationship when you see the content people are creating and the enjoyment and expressiveness in that. All that feeds back into development and that really drives guys like Dan [Moskowitz].

Morgan then discussed the various roles and skills that contribute to this player creativity, particularly foregrounding the importance of embedding the 'community perspective and feedback' across the development teams:

Our community managers, you know the Theresa Duringers and Meghan McDowells, they have that interface daily. They're very interactive across our teams. Theresa is a great story, she came in through a testing background then worked her way into the community manager role and now she's an assistant producer. And you know she's on the various internal team email lists and so she sends that perspective from the community to *Spore* engineering. Having people like that embedded through the development yeah that's a whole part of it. It is huge actually.

I discussed with Roarity the 'cost-benefit' of the player-generated content. He responded:

The interesting rub here is that the games industry is a big business right. You know EA [Electronic Arts] is a business, we want to make money

you know, I mean we want salaries so we can continue to work here. So I can buy my house and feed the kids and all that. Then there's all this community stuff kind of for free and the ideas that come out of the community for more features. But this takes a lot of work and resources from our end as well; like all of the work going on at the moment around asymmetry. Do you think all that is selling any more copies of *Spore*? I think we're trying to still figure all that out and with these sorts of games, like *Spore*, we are going to start figuring it out. I mean it's really expensive to do a patch or update – by the time you add testing and the launch it's really expensive. It's this sort of engineering balance as well, yeah we can put in more features, yeah we can do all this stuff responding to the community but at the end what does the business look like? All this is still kind of evolving and we're still kind of figuring it out.

I asked Roarity if there were anything he would like to add to our conversation about user-created content and the development team's relationship with the player community. He replied, 'I hope you take away that it's still evolving. We haven't got it all figured out, we don't know, OK we've put some plans down with *Spore* and then learnt from that, from what the players are doing, and we're trying out some things with *Galactic Adventures* but you know it will change'. Roarity helpfully reminds us that all of this co-creative activity occurs in the context of a broader videogames industry involving major publishers such as Electronic Arts. There is a political economy to this. But I do not want to rush to such an analysis that perhaps forecloses describing and understanding the professional craft of making co-creativity, including the uncertainty and experimentation that Roarity alludes to.

Stone Librande – Lead designer

'I really hope it becomes kind of an education in game design'

Similar to many of the Maxis staff I interviewed, Librande expressed his surprise at the amount of content created by the players and the speed with which they uncovered unexpected uses of the tools:

First of all everything surprises us. When, from the very first day we started seeing stuff that just amazed us. Like 'oh we didn't even think of that', the players you know figured all the tricks quickly that we thought might take them weeks or months to get to, because it took us sometimes months to figure that you could do something.

I asked him for a specific example of this:

Oh OK, well like mounts. Like you could make a creature that another creature looked like it was riding on top of. But in the editor it is just one creature, it just happens to look like two. Before that people had asked us for mounts in the game, to make that a feature. We're like 'no, no it's too expensive, we can't really do it, you know we don't have the engineering and animation resources to get to that right now'. One of our testers internally here came up with a mount, how to do that and published it around the office, everybody was like 'oh look we have mounts in the game now'. It took us months to figure that out but the players uncovered that very quickly. And then these mounts started appearing all over the servers [laughs]. You get this sense of like 'oh we're really cool, we're ahead of everybody else' when we figured out the mounts thing, *Spore* wasn't even released at this point right. So it will probably take our users a few months maybe to find these same tricks, but really it took them days to figure that one out [laughs].

Librande explained that the speed at which players were innovating created challenges for his job designing the expansion pack. The team was on a tight schedule of some nine months or so from prototyping to getting the expansion on the store shelves. As he explained, this limited 'our reaction time' to what the players do with the game. He commented that the original idea for the expansion was very different and Maxis changed direction because of the massive amount of content generated by the players:

While it was cool seeing all that content coming out, there's a feeling like what are they going to do with all that content. You know we were slurping it down and putting it back into other player's world, but it felt kind of atomized; just these individual models and items of content being thrown together.

With *Galactic Adventures* the idea is the player can mix and match from this hundred million items of content and make their story from that. So we kind of end-up with a game creator. It is kind of like what *LittleBigPlanet* is doing so well. But as a game designer, I know it's really hard to make a game, it seems like it's fun and easy to do, but when you really start working on it, it's a lot of effort. But almost everybody wants to tell a story; you're capable of telling a story. So this tool [pointing at the screen], it really needs to be about the story. Not about games even or about movies like making a machinima or something like that, it's just telling a story, something about your creations. It is basic and open and flexible – you're just using the models to give some kind of solidity to the experience. So

we'll see how that one works, letting people tell stories, you know *Spore* as a galaxy full of stories.

But this is also about kind of teaching people by playing with *Galaxy Adventure* and putting their stories together with all the content, teaching them how to design a game. I teach a class in game design, mostly for students with no experience of game design at all. It is a series of 15 lectures over the course of a semester. So a lot of that knowledge, that approach to teaching design, I've tried to get it in there into *Galactic Adventures* because here we're not just making a game we're making a tool that lets people make their own games. So how do I make that knowledge you know part of the UI [user-interface] so that as you start playing around with and exploring the 'goal palette' like this – you drag goals in the world and order them- well as you're playing with these goals you're now a video game designer. I really hope it becomes kind of an education in game design. It makes the threshold for getting into this and exploring it a little lower. Maybe *Galactic Adventures* is going to be that thing that lets them make a game or see that they can make a game. It is a set of tools they can explore and play around with in a very easy way, you know compared to something for modding like the Unreal editor, the Half Life editor and things like that. Like it is a little step towards someone using a more advanced tool in the future. That's my hope.

A few days after my return to Brisbane from visiting Maxis, Librande emailed me a link to a YouTube clip showing one of the player-created adventures: a Mario-Cart themed racing game. The players had yet again surprised the Maxis team with the speed at which they generated such content. But as I wandered in and out of interviews over the week that I was at Maxis, as interviews were interrupted by phone calls and reminders of meetings that the staff needed to attend or tasks that needed to be completed, as I overheard snatches of conversations about server and network issues, I was reminded that terms such as user-created content, user-led innovation, produser and even participatory culture can overlook the work of designers, programmers, producers, COOs and community managers as they produce and co-ordinate these co-creative media practices. This is not to deny the creative role of media consumers, but this role is not simply taking over from or replacing media professionals.

Co-creativity is thoroughly entangled with commercial enterprises and the jobs of media professionals. Co-creativity is a site of dynamic and emergent relations between market and non-market, professional and amateur, which are evolving uncertainly.