Letter from the Editor

Reply to J. Köller

Gaines S. Hubbell & Nicholas A. Hanford

Joe:

We share the majority of your criticism of academia; we don't think it's worth the trouble for everyone.

We're witnessing a time in Western, first-world societies when there is a mass intelligentsia that has made the formal institutions of academia seem burdensome. We're thinking of formal institutions like professorships, tenure, administration, admissions, and, most of all, pay-walled and for-profit publishing. These formal institutions offer places where the kyriarchies of societies can collect, solidify, and propagate. We don't know how to fix these formal institutions, but we'd like to. We think an academic journal can operate apart from many of these institutions.

On the other hand, academia has valuable informal institutions. Things like citation, statements of methodology, peer review, the pursuit of knowledge, and the use of specific language are still worthwhile patterns of behavior even if our imagined practice of them is less aware or successful than it used to be. With these come histories that we are trying to avoid replicating: For instance, peer review and citation have long been used as a way to keep people outside of academic presses through the establishment of canons, degree requirements, and the idea that there are certain kinds of texts that must be cited when discussing topics. Our review guidelines aim at retaining the good parts of these institutions, such as the quality of argument that peer review encourages and the clear history of knowledge from citation practices, and discourage the harmful parts.

We knew starting a middle-state journal would be hard, and we know it now better than before. We had expected some issues with appealing to our multiple audiences, especially when it comes to our audiences' motivations for submitting to the journal—Gaines spoke around this at Critical Proximity. But, one audience that we've never imagined reaching is a mainstream or universal audience.

When Kirk Hamilton talks about writing for a mainstream audience, he's not just talking about language choices: He's talking about epistemological choices, choices about ways of knowing something about games. Language for a mainstream audience eschews specificity, thereby keeping an ambiguity in its knowledge.

When we look at Critical Distance and Gamasutra, we don't see a mainstream audience. We see an intelligentsia communicating in specific professional and academic technical terms about complex situations. That the intelligentsia of games criticism and games design/development think of themselves as something other than academic means academia already controls the discourse. These are remarkable authors using Dr. Fiorenza's "kyriarchy" and Dr. Latour's actor-network theory to help them—and ourselves—understand the media ecology of games criticism.

The specificity of language allows critics to pinpoint the trends and phenomena of games, linking single words to these events and allowing for them to be called upon by themselves and other authors. It would be distracting if we were required to define the concept of the first-person shooter every time we mention an instance of one. However, we run into trouble when we become overly reliant on the specific language of game studies/criticism. When jargon terms fail to be challenged, they slide into a space of inertia, moving into areas for which they are ill suited.

But, it's true that academic writing style is sometimes obscure and awash in unnecessary language. We don't like that either. In fact, Gaines works with every author to help the author be clear and precise at the same time. However, where there's a trade-off to be made, it's for the sake of precision. The emphasis on well-crafted knowledge over well-crafted writing is one of the redeeming informal institutions of academia.

We believe that games critics, designers, journalists, and developers need a peer-reviewed, feed forward, middle-state journal as part of the media environment of their field(s). And, we think that we can provide that space without many of the negative parts of formal academic institutions.

The benefits of *JGC* to the online, non-academic criticism community are not as substantial as its benefits to academia itself. We are a bit selfish in our endeavor when it comes to that. We founded *JGC* on the notion that game critics could help academia and that academia could change what it values, what it attaches value to, and who it hires. *JGC* is attempting to be a flagship for a different kind of peer review, a different kind of citation, all while extending open access beyond what it has been. What do we offer to the already-thriving games criticism collectives online? Mostly a symbolic nod to their importance in creating knowledge. But what do we offer to academia? An extensive pool of knowledge from people who deeply understand games from the inside. Perspectives that are only available to those that have grown up playing and making and talking about games.

We understand the fear of academic colonialism and the distrust of anything or anyone who's part of academic institutions. But, honestly we're interested in colonizing academia, not the other way around. We want and value your language—we see your craft of writing

as a craft of knowledge. But, if authors from outside of academia don't send submissions, academia will continue on, unmoved. This has been the most frustrating part of trying to provide a middle-state publishing space: It won't happen without like-minded, participating authors.

Sincerely,

Gaines S. Hubbell & Nicholas A. Hanford, on behalf of the editors.