Rules Are Meant to Be Broken: Glitch as Procedural Resistance in Genshin Impact's Housing System

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INTRODUCTION

Serenitea Pot (teapot) housing system in *Genshin Impact* (miHoYo 2020) is a player housing feature that allows users to create and decorate a personalized virtual home. Drawing on a four-year (2021-2025) hybrid digital ethnography and autoethnography of Serenitea Pot community on HoYoLAB, Bilibili, YouTube, and X (Twitter), I argue that players actively engage in a form of playbour (Kücklich 2005) where values are generated not by complying with the procedural rhetoric (Bogost 2007), but by breaking it. In line with scholarship that treats alternative play as queerness (Ruberg 2019) and transgression (Aarseth 2007), teapot players understand glitches as "playable artifacts" (Leino 2012) rather than malfunctions. In practice, this gives rise to a distinctive form of player creativity – particularly among self-identified "teapot mains" – centered on exploiting game glitches (e.g. object sinking and floating item placement) as a means of pushing the boundaries of the designed system. Players discover that by leveraging these unintended loopholes, they can bypass the official building constraints and construct elaborate scenes far beyond the game's initial imagination. For instance, in an official housing design contest it was stipulated that using overlap or floating glitches would count as an illicit loophole and was prohibited[1]. Yet within the teapot player community, such techniques are celebrated for granting greater creative freedom.

Therefore, the technical manipulation of glitches constitutes a form of "procedural resistance", reshaping the game's internal rule structure to reconfigure its space of possibilities. By engaging with the materiality of codes (Newman 2008), players essentially turn the game itself into an object of play, subverting and repurposing the rules to serve their vernacular engineering. This bottom-up technical improvisation underscores that players perceive the game not as a closed product but as a malleable assemblage of tools and opportunities. Their clever manipulation of glitches challenges the developers' monopoly over creativity in the game, proving that even within strict programmed limits, there remain latent possibilities for innovative expression.

The research findings further illustrate that this procedural resistance becomes the player-driven collective creativity, and rule-bending grows into a significant force shaping the gameplay experience. Around glitch exploitation, a vibrant culture of knowledge production and sharing has emerged: players collaboratively discover,

document, and disseminate methods to trigger and use Serenitea Pot glitches via in-game chats, forums, and social media, all on a volunteer basis. While Meades (2013) identifies counterplay could be a valuable social activity, he also notes that our understanding of what constitutes a "well-played game" from the perspective of counterplay remains underdeveloped. This study addresses this question by examining the internal value system within the teapot player community. Notably, many *Genshin Impact* players expressed concern that future patches might remove these glitch capabilities, fearing that "fixing" the bugs would essentially "kill" the creative spirit and even "core gameplay" of Serenitea Pot[2]. In their value system, playing well does not entail strict adherence to designers' rules, but rather demonstrates mastery over codes and design creativity in breaking system boundaries. In practice, the community stabilizes these glitches and transforms them into essential design tools, effectively making them a prerequisite literacy for competent play. This communal exchange not only spurs innovative design but also strengthens social bonds and sustains a gift economy. Through the use of glitches, it fosters alternative game aesthetics, which retroactively influence game designers' future decisions. For instance, by 2022, the widespread technique of object overlapping – previously achieved through glitches – was canonized as an official mechanic.

The Serenitea Pot case thus provides a fresh perspective to Julian Kücklich's (2005) playbour theory. Playbour denotes a hybrid of play and labour in which players' unpaid creative efforts in the game generate values, often benefiting stakeholders without formal compensation. Previous discussions of playbour frequently cite game modding as a prime example (Bulut 2020; Münch 2013), but this case goes a step further to reveal that playbour is not limited to creating content within the given rules; it also encompasses players actively deconstructing and recombining the system's rules as part of their playbour. By using collective ingenuity to uncover hidden possibilities in the system and perform inventive "misuses" of the game, they push back against the confines set by developers and the game's code. During the aforementioned procedural resistance, teapot players are not merely providing free labour (Terranova 2000) passively, but rather leveraging their labour to actively counterplay at the game's rules, injecting their own creativity into the system's fabric. The Serenitea Pot community's glitch-driven innovations and knowledge-sharing behaviors thus expand playbour theory by adding a crucial layer of rule-level critique and creative politics. Players collectively transform their play into a form of creative resistance, thereby extending the concept of playbour to encompass the ludopolitics of rule-breaking and the democratization of creativity in game worlds.

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[1] *Genshin Impact* Customer Support confirms that overlapping and floating items are treated as a loophole in the official competition and can lead to disqualification. However, many players argue that such "happy glitches" enable greater creative freedom and should be considered a feature rather than a glitch (https://www.hoyolab.com/article/477279).

[2] For instance, The *Bug Hunter* manifesto positions glitches as a form of "aesthetic noise", arguing that errors can reshape interaction and meaning in games (https://www.thebughunter.ca/manifesto). In response to this insight, this paper takes a more radical step: the Serenitea Pot case shows that this unrecognized "noise" is not merely peripheral resistant, but becomes an indispensable core mechanic within the teapot player community.

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BIO

Yiru Zhao is a postdoctoral fellow in Applied Social Sciences at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests lie in digital sociology, platform economics, and media technology, with a focus on data fan culture, gamification, metrification and playbour.