An Inclusive Perspective on Gameplay: Towards a wide understanding of gameplay in theory and praxis

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ABSTRACT
In this paper we want to argue for a more inclusive understanding of the notion of gameplay which implies practices that are normally considered non-default, marginal, transgressive, subversive, or other forms of gameplay. Instead of considering these practices of gameplay as non-standard forms which exist at the margins of whatever could be considered gameplay, we argue that these practices should very much be considered as standard forms of gameplay or simply as "normal" gameplay. We believe that these practices are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the medium. While this idea seems not to be controversial in game culture or in the realm of game praxis it seems that especially computer game theory and the computer game industry are driving this form of "othering". In both cases the distinction which comes with this provides certain discursive agents (such as theorists and industry representatives) with power over other agents (practitioners and players).

To show these mechanisms we will first re-read common notions of gameplay and show how non-standard practices of gameplay are either given different, at times derogatory names, or they are completely omitted in order to mark them as "other" forms of gameplay. We will then look at notions of non-standard forms of gameplay such as spoil sporting, cheating, innovative gameplay, transgressive, subversive play, authentic gameplay and show how this othering is here perpetuated on the theoretical level while although most of the authors of these analyses paradoxically intend to rehabilitate these practices as belonging to a wider notion of gameplay.

Eventually we will suggest an inclusive perspective on gameplay which is based on a wide notion of gameplay and which not only includes practices that are commonly considered marginal but puts them in the center of gameplay.

Keywords
non-standard gameplay, othering, cheating, modding, gameplay-loop

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INTRODUCTION

As the reality of the gaming community shows, rule-breaking and repurposing of gameplay mechanics are common practices in the gaming world. Examples would be events like the “Speedrunning Marathons for Charity” (https://gamesdonequick.com) called “Awesome Games Done Quick”, where the best players of the speedrunning community get together to show their skill and knowledge in given games, exploiting bugs, glitches and other “features” of the software algorithms games are made of, while hundreds of thousands watch these runs at home in front of the screens. Cheating is a daily occurrence in the world of online games and E-Sports and dictates a big part of the online discourse between players. All the while a whole world of subcultures creating their own ecologies by programming and selling cheating software is always only one click away. At the same time there is a huge community of avid modders, creating new content for games like character-models, maps or gameplay mechanics, fixing or updating older games so they can still be played on modern systems, or using game engines as a framework for entirely new games they share for free or install on their systems to manipulate the gaming experience to their likings.

Saying that these phenomena are only a small part of the gaming world would be a massive understatement, as it is already part of the daily business of every game developer to handle these gameplay practices with the appropriate attention (Sotamaa 2009, 82–86). The way the industry handles cheaters or supports modders can determine a game’s success or failure on the market, and "[...] the out-game player behaviour has become very significant in seeking success within the game industry" (Sotamaa 2009).

Practices like these are still viewed as non-standard gameplay in most of the research literature. In the literature there are many names describing different phenomena. Subversive gameplay (Smith 2007), transformative gameplay (Salen and Zimmerman 2010, 301–7), transgressive gameplay (Aarseth 2007, 130–32), to name only a few. No matter in which way those practices are described, it always seems to be clear that there is a “normal” form of gameplay and a “not normal” form of gameplay, that players can play their games in the right way and in the wrong, or at least non-default way.

Independent from the positions the individual texts take, we would like to argue that this is a form of othering. As Alison Mountz describes it, "[t]o other is to mark, separate, identify, discriminate, exclude or label a person or group as deviant. To other is to place power at the center and deviance along the margins" (Mountz 2009, 338). Othering describes a discursive process that creates differentiational factors (i.e. morality, intellectuality, sexuality, race, etc.) to draw a line between two groups. Most often, “powerful groups, who may or may not make up a numerical majority, define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribe problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these subordinate groups” (Jensen 2011, 65).

The problem with this othering with regard to gameplay is that it marginalizes phenomena that are, in our view, not only an important part of the gaming culture, but also fundamentally important when trying to understand gameplay and gaming cultures. Even though research has been done to get a better understanding of those allegedly abnormal gaming practices, there is still no consensus over whether they should be seen as a normal part of the gaming process or not. Paradoxically, even research literature in favor of a more comprehensive perspective on gaming practices is taking part in “othering” these strategies. By drawing a line between standard forms of gameplay and non-standard forms of gameplay via different names (cheating, modding, etc.), different gameplay models (subversive gameplay, transgressive gameplay, etc.) or different player models (active player vs. rational player), as we will elaborate in the following sections.

Mia Consalvo argues the way in which gameplay is understood does not only have relevance for research. On the dynamics between players taking agency over their experiences and industries trying to keep control over their products, she writes that "[...] various industry elements work to constrain certain readings or activities, promoting certain ways of seeing gameplay and ways of playing that are valued over others" (2007, 2). Labeling certain practices in a specific way in order to achieve or keep power over a general consensus is an indicator of "othering" (Mountz 2009, 328–38).

It is our belief that practices like these are not only a side effect of gaming cultures or gameplay mechanics. Instead they should take a central part in analyzing the gameplay process. Understanding them as an extension of processes that define gameplay in its core, they can point us in the right direction for a better and more comprehensive perspective on the daily practices of videogame players.

To show this we will first summarize and analyze common notions of gameplay, divided by notions of standard and non-standard forms of gameplay. Then we will review the gameplay process in detail, emphasizing the way in which creative player involvement, rule-breaking and repurposing are part of the common process.

Since it is not the goal of this paper to get a complete overview over all scientific literature researching forms of standard and non-standard gameplay we limited our research to some of the most common definitions. Even though this does leave out some research, we assume that the findings we get in this paper are representative of most of scientific research literature.

NOTIONS OF STANDARD GAMEPLAY

As we've suggested in the introduction, most literature makes a distinction between standard forms of gameplay and non-standard forms of gameplay. To examine these definitions, and to elaborate where and what forms of othering are practiced, we will begin by reviewing common perspectives on the standard gameplay process.

Neither play nor games are specifically new occurrences, and so most often theories from Huizinga or Caillois are used as starting points to develop more sophisticated models of this process. Notably the distinction between freeform, chaotic play and playing a game according to its rules, what Caillois called paida and ludus (2001), is still widely used as a frame to examine the gameplay process. In view of the notion of gameplay, Caillois suggests with his two categories, that there are games which allow to be played in a more freefrom and chaotic manner (paidia) and there are other games which are more rigidly structured and allow for less spontaneous improvisation but require practice. Huizinga distinguishes between the standard player who follows the rules, the player who cheats (while still accepting that there are rules she can undermine), and the spoil-sport, spoiling the fun for everyone else and by that destroying the game itself (Huizinga 2013, 20). Huizinga thereby distinguishes between desired ways of playing a game and two kinds of undesirable gameplay: cheating and spoil-sporting. The latter can hardly be called a form of gameplay, since in a moment of spoil-sporting a game is already destroyed. This distinction between desirable and undesirable gameplay we also find in present day definitions of computer-gameplay.

Jesper Juul points out that rules are a central concern when speaking about gameplay since they shape the way the player uses a game. Rules do not only limit a player in her actions, but also, and perhaps more importantly, allow her to act in a meaningful way. While the limitations and affordances allow and forbid certain actions on the level of the code, they are giving the process of gameplay in that they provide the player with

goals she can achieve.. Therefore, Juul describes gameplay as resulting "[...] from the interaction between three different things: 1. The rules of the game. 2. The player(s)' pursuit of the goal. [...] 3. The player's competence and repertoire of strategies and playing methods" (2005, 90–91). It becomes clear that Juul's idea of gameplay consists of two mutually dependent components: the game (consisting of its rules) and the player (in pursuit of a goal and equipped with different skills and strategies how to play a given game). Juul does not point out which kind of goal the player pursuits – The game goal? An own goal? Etc. But as he is speaking of "the goal" we can assume he speaks the main goal of a given game like winning in soccer by scoring more goals than the opposing team. Making this component an essential part of the definition of gameplay implies that pursuing another goal means this would not be gameplay. In other words it seems that Juul is thinking of an implied player who plays a game as it has been envisioned by its designers. This implies that players who do not follow the game's rules, or do not pursue the goals as defined by the game, are not playing the game. A less extreme interpretation would be that while these practices could still be called gameplay, they do not reflect the gameplay as supposed by the game object. Therefore, these practices could be anything, but not standard gameplay. Even though Juul does not make it explicit but this idea of gameplay in our view opens the door to some "othering" towards specific gameplay practices as mentioned in the introduction.

However, Juul is not alone with his approach. Game designers Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings define gameplay in a very similar way. Gameplay to them consists likewise of the interplay of two elements: "The challenges that a player must face to arrive at the object of the game. [And] the actions that the player is permitted to take to address those challenges" (2010). On the player-side they emphasize that gameplay consists of "actions that the player is permitted to take." Like Juul, Adams and Rollings emphasize a distinction between permissive actions and prohibited actions. But who decides which actions are permitted to take? In a single-player game the materiality of a game or its code decides which actions are permitted and those which aren't. One could say permitted actions are all actions which are possible by a given game. This means that what counts as gameplay possibly cannot count as gameplay in multiplayer contexts. In multi-player games, and especially in competitive contexts like E-Sports permitted actions are subject to an agreement of the player community.

Many follow this concept of a distinction between standard and non-standard, permitted and prohibited gameplay. Olli Leino, for example, draws the line between "computer game play", as in "playing a game," and "playing *with* a game," (Leino 2010, 133) with the help of the gameplay condition. Here again, a game object imposes specific conditions on the players activities which she has to subdue to given she wants to play the game. Playing with a game means using a game to follow different goals and to reshape the experience independent of the imposed conditions. This reflects the reverse conclusion we took from Juul's definition. Leino's argument for this distinction states that "[i]f the involvement of a particular kind of object was our only criterion, we would be grouping together phenomenologically un-related activities" (2010, 121).

While it does not make sense to group together unrelated activities, we would like to emphasize the risk of othering that is implied when separating different ways in which players play their games, without reflecting if there is a distinction that should, or should not be made.

In an article on Vice.com, author Lara Keilbart describes how she joined specific servers in the game *Overwatch* (Blizzard Entertainment 2016) that are set up, modified and populated by players who do not want to play the game in the way it is intended, but to simulate sexual encounters instead. Here they deactivate the damage dealt by the in-game weapons and use the voice chat to reenact specific sexual practices with their

avatars. After some interviews with the players, Keilbart states that it is her impression that most of the players have a LGBTQ-background and come from societies in which they feel oppressed (2017). These players specifically chose this game for its avatars and its interactive potential, its limits and affordances, and its property as being modifiable enough to serve the specific demands these players have. This is by far not the single case of players repurposing games by setting up their own rules and goals. In-game photography, using cheats in *The Sims 4* (The Sims Studio and Maxis 2014) to play it as an architectural simulation, creating machinimas or speedrunning are just some of them.

According to Leino, one could argue those "users" are not playing merely the game but they are "playing *with* the game" (2010, 133). But this only seems to be true in this quite narrow perspective of gameplay. Perhaps in a broader understanding, activities like these could be implemented. Since we already covered the relevance of practices like these for the gaming community, this argument should not be hastily decided. We shouldn't jump to conclusions, if these conclusions mean marginalizing a huge part of the gaming community, and perhaps to overlook an important part of the gameplay process.

For example Jonas Heide Smith makes a strong case for the distinction between the active player model and the rational player model (2006). He points out how there is a trend in research literature to prefer the idea of an active player, who engages with a game in ways not predicted by game designers. The rational player, in contrast, shapes her gameplay mainly in ways that improve her chances to succeed, or to win in which way the game dictates (2006, 21–42). Although choosing the rational player model as perspective for his research, Smith takes some effort to not devalue either side. Nonetheless he describes the rational player model as a norm, as an approximation to the truth, a rule of thumb, while other practices should be considered exceptions (2006, 8).

Othering in this sense does not mean to not give attention to these practices, but to make a clear distinction between standard and non-standard play, and by that marginalizing specific forms of gameplay. Paradoxically, even research literature explicitly discussing forms of non-standard gameplay, and pointing out their possible relevance for an understanding of the medium participates in this form of othering of these practices. This we will discuss in the next section.

COMMON NOTIONS OF NON-STANDARD FORMS OF GAMEPLAY

In this section we will examine common perspectives on non-standard forms of gameplay. By that, we try to find out what is understood as being different from standard gameplay, and how these definitions act in the context of practices of othering.

There is some literature researching non-standard forms of gameplay. These gameplay practices commonly are described as practices that do not follow the rules of the games, or players who "[...] have a relationship to the formal system that is different than the relationship that the formal system itself presupposes and endorses" (Salen and Zimmerman 2010, 267). The deviation from standard-gameplay seems to be an important point when describing these practices, and demonstrates the need for a new term to be fully understood.

Espen Aarseth, for example, makes a distinction between player behavior which is a result of a game's presuppositions, the implied player, and the real player. The real player, the one who cheats, uses glitches or does other unexpected things represents a transgression of the implied player. Here we can see the paradoxical definition at work. While the "unreal" player is practicing gameplay, the real player is practicing

transgressive play, which needs its own name even though, as Aarseth argues, it should be seen as standard gameplay (2007, 130–32).

Mia Consalvo investigated cheating from two perspectives – the game as an object, and the player's views on cheating. As she states, what should and what should not be considered cheating is debated among players. While for one player it might be acceptable to use exploits in order to get an advantage in certain games, other players might call this cheating. While some players already regard using a walkthrough as a cheat, others only refer to cheats when using external software to alter the code (2007, 113–27). Consalvo herself defines cheating as breaking the rules of a game, as represented by the code of the game (2007, 84–86), and as "[...] players going beyond the 'expected activity' in the game" (2007, 95). Last but not least, she writes that external "tools are generally explicitly against a game's terms of service, and so their construction as a cheat is all but assured" (2007, 126).

Here the definition of what is against a game's rules ultimately lies in the hands of the developers, in their terms of service and the code written by them. Every deviation should be considered an undesired activity (or a cheat, a non-standard form of gameplay). Consalvo herself states that while the industry tries to define what acceptable gameplay is, the players do have their own definitions and arguments. This is a great example of othering specific forms of gameplay since this demonstrates the hegemony of game developers when it comes to defining permissible forms of gameplay. In doing so they simultaneously mark other forms of gameplay as non-permissable and engage in othering.

The concept of transgressive gameplay is adopted by Salen and Zimmerman. Regarding rule-breaking they list five types of players: The standard player, the dedicated player, the unsportsmanlike player, the cheat and the spoil-sport. While the former three adhere to the formal rules of the games, the latter two do not (2010, 267–75). While the cheater breaks the rules of the game but acts like she does not, "[...] committing crimes in order to attain the object of desire [...], [t]he spoil-sport returns the game to its pre-game state as a collection of parts, no longer the embodiment of the space of possibility set out by the rules of the game" (Salen and Zimmerman 2010, 274).

Even though Salen and Zimmerman take the perspective of game designers, and later theorize that perhaps rule-breaking can be seen as a normal part of gameplay, the way it is described clearly indicates a negative connotation these practices often are associated with.

Smith, for example, describes cheating, grief play and irresponsible participation in multiplayer games as subversive gameplay. Being dilemmas in social contexts he discusses the phenomena mainly as negative influences on the gaming world. Though stating that "[c]onflict is the essence of drama, and it certainly is at the heart of gaming [...]" (2007), the term "subversive gameplay" only makes sense in this specific context. For example in the speedrunning community, cheats and exploits are not only accepted but a basic necessity for players to participate, even though this is a highly social context.

Then again, the performative moment a player transgresses from standard to non-standard gameplay seems to be vague. Leino and Möring developed the model of authentic gameplay. Here the player stays inauthentic as long as she plays within the limitations the game imposes on her gameplay. Only when she outstrips the game's influence on her gameplay and plays the game by her own rules, she becomes the authentic player (Leino and Möring 2015). This notion of authentic gameplay strongly

follows Leino's idea of the importance of the gameplay condition (see above). Later, Möring investigates how and when games can be understood as experimental systems. Seeing authentic gameplay as a form of skill level, being innovative in a game means being a player with such a high degree of knowledge and skills, that playing with the gameplay condition instead of playing according to it and by that true experimentation with the game becomes possible (Möring 2016).

Again we see a clear distinction between standard forms of gameplay and non-standard forms of gameplay. Here the player's practices become authentic or innovative with a certain level of mastery of a game, while being inauthentic means playing according to the gameplay condition. Does this mean that the moment a novice player uses a cheat to change the difficulty level of a game, or to roam the virtual world more freely, her gameplay becomes abnormal?

As we've seen in this section, othering, as in separating one group of players from another group of players, seems to be prevalent in literature discussing these forms of gameplay. Different ways to distinguish standard gameplay from non-standard gameplay have different consequences for the way in which they practice forms of othering. While most of these examples do not explicitly try to marginalize or depreciate these forms of gameplay, implicitly these definitions do exactly that. This is paradoxical, since most of the scientific literature researching non-standard forms of gameplay seems to be quite affectionate regarding these player strategies and their importance for understanding gameplay.

A player exploiting a bug in the artificial intelligence of a game may never know she is doing something that's not intended by the game designer. Or she might know exactly what she is doing, perhaps because she is a spreedrunner. Or else she might know it, but she simply does not care, because she likes using an external cheat software and building and decorating houses in *The Sims 4* (The Sims Studio and Maxis 2014) more than playing it the way it was intended to. Does this really make a difference on a formal level? We will discuss this in the next section.

INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVE ON GAMEPLAY – WHY WE SHOULD CONSIDER RULE-BREAKING AS PART OF STANDARD GAMEPLAY

In this section we would like to argue for an inclusive model of gameplay. As shown in the introduction, rule-breaking or repurposing of gameplay mechanics are common practices in the gaming community and part of the discourse among gamers. This section is not about seeing modding, cheating or other forms of creative player involvement as part of what should definitely be considered when analyzing games. This is about how rule-breaking, repurposing and players taking control over their gameplay experience should be considered an integral part of gameplay itself.

Let us begin with an example. The Youtube-video "Super Mario World -- Credits Warp in 5:59.6 (First Time Ever on Console)" (SethBling 2015) shows how the speedrunner who goes by the name "SethBling" performs a very specific "any%"-run[1] in the game. In the video he moves specific objects in the game into pixel-perfect locations, to get access to the game's code and to rewrite specific parts of it. That way he triggers the beginning of the ending credits, and by that he finishes his run. In this example the player is not doing anything that falls outside of the actions he is allowed to do in the game. Instead he is exploiting the game's materiality to rewrite the game itself by playing it, on a normal console and without the help of external software. The speedrunner is reconfiguring and reprogramming the game object, so this clearly cannot be considered standard gameplay. But he is doing so by playing the game and there is nothing non-standard about his way of "using" the game. An unskilled player

could perform the same actions by chance, only by interacting with the game, perhaps with the goal to learn how it works. This extreme example perfectly shows how an assumed distinction between standard and non-standard gameplay can be problematic. Additionally we argue that gameplay strategies like the one described are fundamentally important not only to understand game cultures but also to understand the gameplay process. For this we need to look deep into the process that happens when a player interacts with or plays a game.

What happens during gameplay is described by Perron and Arsenault as a heuristic and hermeneutic process, in which the player gets an output from the game, reacts to it by analyzing it, acts by implementing the results of his analysis via his actions and gives input to the game. The game then uses this player input to change its state and to create a new output. Using time as a dimension, this loop transforms into a spiral which widens more and more since the player learns more about the game's behavior. Doing so the player forms a mental model of the rules and mechanisms that determine the game's behavior, which Arsenault and Perron call Game', since it is a fictional image of the game's mechanics, not the real game code (2009, 113–23).

For them gameplay, or the process of playing a game, is "[...] a symbiosis between the gamer (with all his background, expectations, preferences, knowledge, and skills), the gameplay (with all the spectrum of possible actions and reactions) and the Game′ (with all its varying shades of understanding)" (Arsenault and Perron 2009, 126).

Here Perron and Arsenault explicitly disagree with Lev Manovich, who wrote that "[a]s the player proceeds through the game, she gradually discovers the rules that operate in the universe constructed by this game. She learns its hidden logic - in short, its algorithm. Therefore, in games in which the game play departs from following an algorithm, the player is still engaged with an algorithm albeit in another way: She is discovering the algorithm of the game itself. I mean this both metaphorically and literally [...]" (2001, 222–23).

Perron and Arsenault argue that, contrary to Manovich, players never truly know, see or learn the algorithms of the game they are playing, hence the strict distinction between the real game and the mental model of the game, the Game'.

It is true that most of the time players do not learn the real code of the game they are playing[2]. However, Manovich does call the algorithm the hidden logic of the game. By understanding the code of a game as a (programming) language that describes the logic of the game, this argument makes more sense. For example, a player who knows that building a specific building in *Sim City* (Maxis 1989) earns her 100 virtual dollars per in-game hour, or a player who knows that collecting the star item in *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo 1985) makes Super Mario invulnerable for a limited amount of time. While it is true that the player does not know the specific lines of code that dictate these game behaviors, at some point in her gameplay she learned the logic behind the game mechanics that the code evokes. Building this building results in getting this amount of money in this amount of time. Collecting this item results in invulnerability. These statements are another way of describing the same game logics or game mechanics that are constructed by the underlying lines of code.

Following both arguments, Game', the mental model of the game and the logic of its underlying algorithms, is learned by the player in the process of the gameplay. Aarseth calls this process "real-time hermeneutics" or "[...] analysis practiced as performance, with direct feedback from the system" (2003, 5), which means that the player is learning the game while and by playing it.

This process as a playing-time dependent widening spiral is described by David Myers as recursive contextualization (2005, 133–38). Here the player is confronted with the game's mechanisms and has to react to them. Since game behavior (implicit and explicit) changes all the time, the player has to learn and react to the rules again and again, and has to repeatedly review and iterate her already developed mental model of the game and her resulting actions.

Following Juul's concept of limitations and affordances, to play the game the player has to test what she can and what she cannot do to execute game analysis practiced as performance, or as Myers writes: "[...] breaking game rules is necessary to establish the presence and, related, the contextual (or experiential) function of rules" (2005, 136). Jonas Linderoth writes that every action inside gameplay has exploratory and performative aspects. "To engage in game-play is to perceive, act on, and transform the affordances that are related to a game system or to other players in a game" (2013, 8).

Let us look at two examples. The first example concerns a player of a football-simulation. A player playing a football game can foul another in-game character. In doing so, she breaks the explicit rules of the simulated game within the game, with the goal to learn the consequences of her actions. In another game, the player learns that by walking into a specific pixel she can walk (glitch) through a wall to reach unintended places of the level. The player transitions, or transgresses from the implied player to the real player, who can now chose to use this bug or glitch for her advantage, or decide against it, knowing that she breaks the implicit rules of the game. In the first case the rule-breaking has the function to learn the explicit rules of the game, while in the second case the rule-breaking has the function to learn the implicit rules of the game. In both examples the player never stops playing the game.

"[...] Although we might label the outcome of ignorant bad play to be rules learning (and thus functional) and the outcome of knowledgeable bad play to be rules breaking (and thus dysfunctional), there are no clear formal differences between the two" (Myers 2010, 22).

In this learning-process, players start by not knowing what counts as rule-breaking and what does not (Smith 2007), since there is no way for them to distinguish between intended and unintended game behavior. Only with growing expertise they are able to make this decision. For a player, finding a wall she can glitch through, exploiting a bug in the artificial intelligence of her enemy or building a building to find out what it does are essentially the same things, and essential parts in understanding the inner logic of the game she is playing.

At the same time, as shown by Arsenault and Perron, games are recognized by the player as a highly configurable medium. Interactivity in this sense means that, by varying degrees, the outcome of each gaming situation always depends on the player's actions. For the game object there is no difference between the ones and zeros that are in the software code and those that are a result of the player inputs. On a fundamental level, those parts of the code that implement player inputs into their algorithms change while playing the game. Playing the game is equivalent to constructing the gaming experience (Aarseth 1997, 94) on multiple levels of the game object. For example "[c]heating, or however such activities might be differently defined, constitutes players asserting agency, taking control of their game experience" (Consalvo 2007, 95). This is not something new, this is something the player already does when she acts inside the gameplay loop. Or as Olli Sotamaa argues, "[s]ince playing can be seen to be an integral element of games, any active engagement with the rules is arguably productive. Therefore, no easy dualism between non-productive and productive player activities should be drawn." (2009, 19).

Knowing this we can understand the described phenomena as a form of extension of already existent practices of standard gameplay. If the "standard" gameplay loop already implies rule-breaking and configurative practices on its deepest level, practices like speedrunning, modding or cheating aren't as exotic anymore, and seem to be rooted in the most basic properties of the medium. Players always experiment with and break the rules of a game while playing it. To learn the rules, to find hidden things, to change what the experience has to offer to them, or to play the games by their own rules.

CONCLUSION

By examining scientific literature regarding different forms of non-standard and standard gameplay it became evident that 1. some gameplay-practices that do not follow an assumed normal form of gameplay are often given new names to mark them as non-default gameplay and to emphasize different characteristics, 2. these names and descriptions of the practices often are deprecatory or have negative connotations, and 3. are always highly context dependent.

The first two points show the form of othering as described here in action. Even authors trying to emphasize the importance of such practices for the scientific and the gaming world most often do participate in this othering by distinguishing non-standard gameplay practices from standard gameplay practices in their model of gameplay, drawing an alleged line between what should and what should not be considered "normal". In addition, descriptions like subversive gameplay, crime-committing gameplay, prohibited gameplay or cheating are clearly derogatory, and imply a general negative impact by these practices. This fits into the described process of othering, where problematic or inferior characteristics are ascribed to a specific group. Presuppositions like these reinforce subjective and highly context-dependent perspectives. As we have shown, most of these implications only refer to very specific situations, while in other situations the same player strategies are not only accepted, but can be seen as a learning process and a sign of increased competence. Marginalizing specific practices means setting them aside and risking to align one's research with unconfirmed presumptions. Our examination shows that these presumptions were adopted from early work in this field into modern game study literature without any reevaluation.

This is not only related to scientific literature. One aspect of othering can be seen as a way to distribute power over a general consensus. Which practices should be allowed and which should not is debated strongly between players and the industry.

Take for example the incident that occurred when Valve tried to create an official marketplace for mods for the game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios 2011). A mod provides rule-changes or additional content for a videogame. The same could be said for a downloadable content (DLC), which generally is provided by the publisher of a game. But there's a clear distinction between a mod and a DLC, that is that mods are most commonly created by the users and shared for free. When Valve announced the newly added feature in the Steam Workshop that allows content creators to sell and players to buy mods in 2015, they received a huge backlash, resulting in an online petition with 132.476 signatures (Change.org 2015) to remove the feature, in a Reddit post from Gabe Newell himself trying to clear things up (Reddit.com 2015), and eventually in a post on the Steam website that announced the removal of the feature (Steamcommunity.com 2015). This shows how the industry has a big interest in implementing phenomena like these into their business models, and how gamers see their own ways to interact with the medium as something that shouldn't be controlled by anyone else but themselves. Ultimately this incident shows how the industry and gamers struggle for keeping power over what should and what should not be regulated in the realm of gameplay.

Whether practices like these are called modding, speedrunning or cheating is highly contextual, and depends on the subjective perspective on each phenomenon. Regarding cheats, Consalvo concludes that on a formal level and in the common discourse there is not always a clear distinction between what counts as cheating and what does not (2007, 126). On a practical level what is commonly described as a cheat could be seen as a mod or a skillful player who exploits the flawed game code. Then again, not all cheats exist solely for the purpose of reaching the goal as defined by the game. Many players seem to want to modify their individual gaming experience in a way so they can deepen their relationship with the game (Consalvo 2007, 99) and move more freely in the game space.

At their core these playing styles are all based on the same gameplay practices – the breaking of the rules (explicit or implicit) of a game on different levels of its materiality. We would argue that rule-breaking and repurposing are integral parts of gameplay. For that we tried to establish an understanding of gameplay that incorporates the creative involvement of a player in its core and regards specific practices as extensions of these core ludic activities.

Fundamentally, the described phenomena most often are indistinguishable from each other regarding the concrete practices players perform. Perhaps phenomena like these are simply the result of an even higher degree of involvement with the medium. On the level of its materiality, on the level of social interaction, on the level of the interaction with economics and on a cultural level. The more a player uses a videogame object to break out of the assumed boundaries, the deeper her involvement with the game becomes, and the less important the experience proposed by the game itself is.

This does not reduce the importance of the game object itself. The game object still defines the possibilities of the players and the common ground on which everything else builds up on. Speaking from the perspective of a game designer, this even increases the importance of the design of the game, as it defines how and in which ways players should be able to interact with the game. Aside from those trying to regiment gameplay practices, we have seen publishers incorporate cheat modes, features for speedrunners, tools to create mods or machinimas into their games, giving their players more freedom to interact with the medium and embracing player creativity. On a deeper level, games and gameplay should perhaps never be seen as linear and as goal oriented as some do.

As Salen and Zimmerman theorize, "[p]erhaps all players already play, not just inside the frame of a game, but with the frame of a game itself. If this is indeed the case, then all the varieties of rule-breaking players, from dedicated and unsportsmanlike players to cheaters and spoil-sports, are natural extensions of the flexibility of game structures. Rule-breaking is simply one of the ways that we play" (2010, 281).

With this paper we argue that there is no innovative, subversive, or transgressive gameplay. There is only gameplay.

ENDNOTES

1 “any%” refers to a specific type of run that starts with the beginning of the game and ends with the credits. Everything in between is up to the player. A different type would be a “100%”-run, where the player has to accomplish all the goals as defined by the game (i.e. defeating all bosses, collecting all magic stars, etc.) before she triggers the credits.

2 Sometimes a player is in fact confronted with parts the algorithms of a game, i.e. damage points showing up when she is attacking an enemy in a role-play-game, or the properties of an in-game-character shown as numbers. As Galloway points out, "[...] the nondiegetic is much more common in gaming than in film or literature [...]" (Galloway 2007, 8).

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