Emotions In Play:
On the constitution of emotion
in solitary computer game play

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Abstract

Computer games contribute to their players' emotions in diverse ways, ranging from sheer exhilaration to anger and disillusion. Our ability to enjoy computer game play that involves genuine intense emotions which in other contexts would be easily deemed as "negative" suggests that there is something in the ways in which we make sense of computer games that separates gameplay from other activities we engage in. Focusing on single-player computer games and situating within the emerging field of computer game studies, this dissertation starts from the assumption that emotions are always already intertwined with the experience of play and proceeds to describe, not any idiosyncratic emotional experience, but the means by which games can ensure their contents to be involved in players' emotions.

Emotions are taken as *intentional*, as always *about* something. From this premise follows that to understand an emotion it is necessary to understand the reasons the subject has for relating to the object of the emotion in the particular way. Building on game studies, existential phenomenology, and philosophy of technology, this dissertation postulates a first-person perspective from which to describe solitary computer game play and the emotions it involves in terms of their experienced significance. From describing the freedoms and responsibilities imposed by the materiality of the computer game artefact on its voluntary player, *the gameplay condition* emerges as an intersubjective baseline for the players' judgements about events, objects, and states of affairs in the game, potentially surfacing as emotions.

Rather than being explained in terms of their rules, computer games appear as technological artefacts which simultaneously extend the concrete limitations against which their human players are free to realize their projects, and shape the ways in which human mind can be directed at aspects of the world. However, this can go on only as long as long as the player fulfils the requirements of which the gameplay condition comprises. Based on this condition, game artefacts can be described as standing out from among all other technological artefacts which co-shape human intentionality.

By the conduct of *emotional investment*, the dissertation describes how voluntary players can end up experiencing emotions about aspects which would most likely seem trivial from a non-player's perspective. Finally, the dissertation postulates an experiential ontology of computer game content, distinguishing between game content that is *undeniable*: crucial in terms of fulfilling the gameplay condition, and *deniable*: game content whose taking seriously is mostly voluntary. Thus, *undeniable* game content can be safely assumed as being involved in the emotions' of all players.

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I dedicate this work to my parents Pirjo and Tapio.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Wim Wenders' movie *Wings of Desire* (1987) depicts two angels who have dwelled as immortals in the city of Berlin since the beginning of time. They wander around freely and provide comfort to individuals burdened by hardships in their everyday lives. One of the angels, however, is not content with the lack of human reality in his immortal life. He cannot enjoy holding a steaming mug of coffee in the breezy winter mist because, assumedly, he feels neither the cold nor the burning hot coffee mug.

The contrast between the immortality of the angels and the fragility of human existence is most evident in a scene where the angel consolidates a superstitious trapeze artist preparing for the circus' last performance of the season. While the trapeze artist has to overcome her fear of falling in order to succeed, nothing is at stake in the angel's immortal being.

Motivated by falling in love with the said trapeze artist, the angel decides to give up immortality and become human. As a human, however, he encounters problems to which no immediate solution can be foreseen: the circus has packed up and left Berlin. By assuming a human form, the angel assumes the ability to have human feelings, but has to face the uncertainty of the human condition. Seeking advice from another former angel, he is told that he fun of being human is to figure things out by oneself.

I will not spoil the experiences of those who have not yet seen the film, but proceed to an illustrative comparison between the angel and the computer game player. Given the contemporary selection of computer games, as players we can put ourselves into a variety of situations, ranging from being Second World War soldiers or top-class tennis players to acting as a mayor of a metropolis or a leader of a civilization. Now, as the quick comparison would go, in such experiences we lack something not unlike the angel in *Wings of Desire*: the home front at which the weeping takes place and which awaits the soldiers' return is imaginary. While the top-class tennis player playing out her condition using *Nintendo Wii* risks getting a modern variation of tennis elbow, a Wii elbow, her successes will not bring her world-class fame. The mayor cannot be held accountable for using the municipality credit card for private taxi rides, and the leader of the civilization cannot write the world history to her own liking as the last person standing.

Unlike the angel in *Wings of Desire*, we are to remain in our given condition and take computer games for what they are – computer games. I believe their primary attraction lies precisely there: it is well within our powers to inscribe the in-game encounters with whatever significance we can imagine in whichever quantities we desire. The more we care, the colder the winter breeze and the hotter the coffee mug. As voluntary players we can decide what is at stake.

The number one piece of advice often given to gamblers is to not bet more than could be comfortably lost. However, the risk of unacceptably large losses heightens the expectations for unimaginably large winnings. The emotional stake in computer game play escapes any attempts of quantification and keeping its dimensions under control can be challenging. It is not too unusual to find oneself in the midst of a sudden rush of emotion due to an unexpected game event, a rush which is often followed by a moment of self-reflection that reveals how much one actually cared for what was going on on the screen and reminds one of the unexpectedness of the turns of events in human experience. We might say that while computer games are

to us what world was for the angel, we still resemble more the trapeze artist afraid of falling.

1.1 Motivation and contribution

1.1.1 The "emotional revolution"

Back in 2001 BBC News reported that Sandy Duncan, the "head of Xbox Europe" at the time, said he "looks forward to the computer game that makes him cry". Since then, games have appeared, dubbed as "emotional rollercoasters"[1] and 'more emotional games' have been dubbed as the next milestone in the development of computer games. Freeman (2003) goes as far as to suggest that the next revolution in videogames will be emotional, not technological.

Apart from being a marketing buzzword, emotions have entered into game designers' considerations. They have become a staple topic for sessions and workshops at the Game Developers Conference events and articles published in Gamasutra and on other forums of game industry debate. Discussion in these circles are more pragmatic than they are critical and, quite understandably, centered around the craft of game design and the ways in which it can cater for the requirement for games being more emotional. Most often, these discussions draw on the tradition of psychology. Cook (2007), for example, by referring to what psychologists (*cf.* Eysenck 2004, 153) know as arousal-interpretation theory, suggests that a "potion for emotion" is to be found in the combination of "appropriate physiological response" and the "desired cognitive label".

However, the sought-after "emotionality" of games, as referring to a particular quality of a game that can elicit emotions in a different fashion than most other games, is an ambiguous property unlike colour or shape, which can be easily designed onto products. But the "emotionality" is not something existing only in the mind of

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[1] *cf.* Ubisoft's tagline for *Boog & Elliot* (2006)

the player either, given that we are talking about emotions *about* a particular game. It seems fair to suggest that the emotionality is a highly subject-dependent property of a game; different players will have different emotional experiences with the same game. Having accepted this notion, the design cookbooks (*cf.* Freeman 2003), which guide the designers to include proper stimuli to achieve the desired reactions, as well as the attempts to create "games that can make their players cry" seem reductionist at best.

The emotions experienced by the player are expectedly elicited by the interplay between the game system, the player's subjective psychosocial context and the actions of possible other players. This creates challenges for design, as the recipes in design cookbooks cannot possibly cater for all the variables. A solid foundation for designing more emotional games could be found from a holistic understanding of why and on which grounds some objects or events in games are more prominent in the player's experience than others.

In recent years, player's experience has become a target of constantly increasing interest of empirical research.[2] Empirical experiments can reveal us facts about the player's bodily state at a given time, and coupled with data about the inner workings of the game artefact, the resulting knowledge can shed new light on the psychology of computer game play.

Furthermore, it is not only game *design* research, which, when it comes to emotions, tends to draw on psychology. Most of the relatively few approaches that have been made toward emotions from game studies, understood as a tradition inclined to humanities, consider emotions and emotional experience by borrowing the vocabularies, methodologies and attitudes of psychology. (*cf.* Perron 2005, Frome 2007, Järvinen 2008a, 103-125) While such approaches excel in producing clear and concise arguments, which can be thought of an achievement considering the alleged

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[2]In this context, player experience is often understood as a subset of a larger discourse on user experience, colloquially known as *UX*. For a review of these developments, see Drachen and Nacke (2009) and Law et al. (2009)

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elusive or "ephemeral" (Hassenzahl 2004) nature of subjective emotion, they can be subjected to the general criticism concerning psychology's ability to account for the first-hand experience of meaningful emotion. Sartre (1962 [1939], 11) notes that "for a psychologist emotion signifies nothing, because he studies it as a fact; that is, by separating it from everything else."

While the psychological method excels in observing states of affairs from an external viewpoint and can provide us results of scientifically accurate measurements, it severely lacks understanding of the personal context of subject of the emotions. While we may accept that the psychological method can tell us for example which emotions the players experience and when, we cannot see it accounting for *why* a particular emotion was experienced.

There is yet no scientific method that could distinguish my love toward my partner from my love toward my parents. Thus, the experienced significance of emotions, the subjective interpretations the players make of the game's materiality, remain hidden. For the attempt of fully comprehending the player's emotions, the scientific attitude needs to be complemented with an *understanding* of the emotions. In other words, to understand player's experience, being interested her emotions themselves is not enough – one must focus on decoding emotions as they deal with something in play.

For the purpose of arriving at an *understanding* of emotions, we have to look at games from the player's perspective. Only then can we see the judgements and interpretations that underlie emotions. From such a perspective, emotions are not the next big thing to be implemented, but have been ingredients of player's experience since the first iterations of the game *Spacewar* (1962). Thus, the efforts of those wanting to elicit more emotion with computer games, should not be targeted at *eliciting* emotions, as if the player was a *tabula rasa* and it was necessary to somehow "create" them from scratch, but perhaps instead at *harnessing* the player's caring about events, objects and states of affairs in the game in order to transform it into emotions.

1.1.2 Understanding games as played

Understanding games from the player's perspective implies an epistemological shift, which I articulate in this dissertation with the concept of *game as played*, as referring to the object of study for game studies from the player's perspective. While computer games can be meaningfully studied as systems, processes, or objects, framing the object of study as games as played suggests a focus on the *relationship* between the player and the game artefact. I conceptualise this relationship from the player's perspective in terms of freedom and responsibility originating in the materiality of the game artefact.

I postulate a framework that sheds light on the ways in which the properties of the game artefact become experienced as significant within player's emotional experience. While I concentrate on single-player games and thus pay less attention to the social aspects of computer game play, I dare to call my framework holistic, as its key premise is not to isolate and decontextualise emotions into components, affects, and reactions, but to embrace their subjectivity and take them as they are, intertwined with the subject's being in the world.

1.2 Approach

1.2.1 Emotion as an experience

I adopt a phenomenological theory of emotions, which could perhaps be characterised as *cognitive-rational* as it conceptualises emotions primarily in terms of the experienced significance they involve: as always being *about* something. According to this approach, emotions play a large role in defining how we experience the world as meaningful. As "constitutive interpretations of the world" (Solomon 1977), they are involved in every meaningful encounter with the world (Calhoun and Solomon 1984). According to this view, emotions are not one-off reactions to stimuli, but ongoing

processes, which unfold over time and develop like a snowball growing as it rolls downhill. Individual emotions are not either isolated from other emotions and mental states, but are involved in a system of hopes, wishes, desires and intentions. Thus, to understand emotions, is to understand their role in the bigger mental picture of the individual. For the study of emotions in play this means that the seemingly extremely emotional moments, such as crying in front of a computer game, should not be elevated to any special position.

1.2.2 Game studies and the player's experience

To understanding emotions involved in computer game play from a subjective perspective, as intertwined with one's being in the world, it is necessary to look at computer games from a similar perspective. After, inspecting how games and play are conceptualised within the tradition of computer game studies, I demonstrate that in order to *understand* player's emotional experience, the *de facto* perspective of computer game studies needs to undergo a transformation, adopt an object of study that is an ontological hybrid; simultanously an artefact, a process, and an *experience*.

Given that emotions are subjective experiences and that games adapt to a wide range of usages from jolly pastime through artistic expression and cyber-athletics to political propaganda, games as experienced are rather muddy waters for lucid argumentation. Having been trained in new media research from an art and design perspective, I find it comfortable to study games as media objects, that is, interesting in their own right without engaging in ethnographic research about the practices in which they are used, abused, adopted and reappropriated.

There is no reason for game studies not to embrace the playing subjectivity, to which it has an undisturbed access already via accepting playing as a valid method of research. Drawing on existential phenomenology and post-phenomenology, with this dissertation I hope to contribute to game studies that breaks away from an impersonal perspective without having to resort to speculation, and grasps games as

played as ontological hybrids with the same precision and force of argument with which it is able to grasp games as systems and state machines.

1.3   Outline of this dissertation

This dissertation seeks to find out the circumstances under which computer game artefacts could be described as responsible for their players' emotions. It aims to articulate the ways in which computer games afford meaningful emotional involvement that is not only private and imagined but supported by the game's materiality and thus potentially inter-subjectively shared. In doing so, this dissertation sheds light on the *relationship between materiality and experience* in the context of solitary computer game play. It looks at the materiality of the computer game artefact in order to understand how it shapes the ways in which the player makes sense of its contents.

This dissertation asks the question: *how does the materiality of a single-player game artefact shape the player's emotional experience?* In more detail, given the phenomenological approach employed, this amounts to asking: how can we describe the materiality of the single-player game artefact as shaping and constraining the ways in which the player experiences game content as significant?

In chapter two, *Emotions and experienced significance*, I present, by drawing on Sartre (1962 [1939]), Solomon (2003), a perspective on emotions in terms of their experienced significance and the ways in which they are intertwined with the subjective experience of being in the world. From such perspective, emotions are characterised by their intentionality: they always *about* something. As intentional, emotions appear as ways in which we become aware and make sense of our surroundings. The main methodological tenet of such view, that is definitive for the angle of analysis in whole dissertation, is the assumption that we can understand emotions by understanding their objects (*i.e.* that *about which* the emotion is) and the reasons

the subject has for relating to them in the particular way. Another principle to be derived from the cognitive-phenomenological perspective is the assumption that the more we care about the object of the emotion, the stronger the emotion. Thus, the quest for understanding player's emotions becomes a quest for understanding the reasons she has for relating to game content in particular ways.

I identify *the human condition* as grounds for caring about particular objects in particular kinds of ways, inter-subjectively shared by humans confronting the requirements of the world. However, emotions like "enjoyable anger", which I discuss by way of an enigmatic example of encountering a barnacle, a monster in *Half-Life 2* (2003), present a slight challenge for the proposed perspective. In such cases, the integrity of the logic and significance of the emotion seems to break down if we try force them to be explained against human condition. In the case of "enjoyable anger", the constellation of dispositions and beliefs characteristic to the emotion do not initially make any sense at all: either the enjoyability or the emotion's status as anger seems ill-defined. However, even though initially incompatible with the human condition, my enigmatic example of enjoyable anger makes intuitive sense in the "world" of *Half-Life 2*. Thus, I set out to find a condition against which the logic and significance of emotions in play could be described as making sense and which would provide means to defend the intuitive sensibility of the example. This, in turn, implies looking at computer game play from an experiential perspective.

In chapter three, *Approaching gameplay*, I prepare ground for postulating an experiential perspective on computer game play. I look at the concepts of game and play, and how they are used in the contemporary game studies discourse. I briefly outline a contemporary debate about the epistemological and methodological differences between "those who study players" and "those who study games" (*e.g.* Aarseth 2006, 1-2, Calleja 2007, 12, Smith 2007b, 242, Aarseth 2007b, 131, Frasca 2007, 41, Bogost 2008, 26) to argue that the suggested perspectives are in fact similar in that they both proceed from the scientific third-person perspective. This amounts

to saying that neither of them represents the perspective I set out to find. As games as played are *experiences* of processes, systems, activities, artefacts, and texts, it is crucial to embrace the ontological hybridity of the object of study and proceed to unpack the relationship between the "objective" and experiential dimensions. Only this way it becomes possible to understand the experienced significance within emotions in play.

In chapter four, *Gameplay from player's perspective*, I postulate a phenomenological perspective on computer game play. To keep the experiential first-person perspective from falling into solipsism through turning the gaze excessively inwards into a mere introspection, I identify the computer game artefact's materiality as contributing to an invariant structure of games as played. After arguing for materiality, instead of processuality and transmediality, as a constant given to which inter-subjectively plausible arguments concerning player's experience can be anchored, I proceed to demonstrate how *the gameplay condition* is imposed on the player by the game's materiality. I identify the gameplay condition as an invariant and fundamental structure in players' experiences. Drawing on Juul (2007) and Levinas (1969), I briefly discuss the relationship between goals and enjoyment in computer game play. I observe that the features which define computer games as *computer* games are not the features characterising the empirical scope of the argument in this dissertation. For example, mechanical games, too, could impose a gameplay condition on their players.

I make this explicit by drawing on the notion of technological artefact postulated by Ihde (1990). Discussing the effects of *flashbang grenades* in FPS games via the notion of *hybrid intentionality* of Verbeek (2008), I arrive at a new definition of *game artefacts* as objects which stand out among all technological artefacts. This is because game artefacts, due to the gameplay condition, not only shape their contexts of use, thus making their materialities less ambiguous, but also, by intervening in the process of intentionality by mediating and transforming it, reserve themselves

the right to delineate the spectrum of intentionality, that is the ways in which the player's mind can be directed at the world.

In chapter five, *Game world as a metaphor*, I return to the intuitive sensibility of the first example, and proceed to unpack the notion of a "game world", as that "in which" the barnacle of *Half-Life 2* is frightening. After evaluating the paradigmatic solution of the "game world" as a category within the spatial, I suggest, by drawing on Wark (2007), Aarseth (2000), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008) and Merleau-Ponty (2005 [1945]), that the game world as experienced is defined by principles of gameplay instead of principles of existing in space. Based on the existential similarities of being in the world and playing a single-player computer game, or in other words between the human condition and the gameplay condition, I suggest that for the purposes of understanding players' experiences, the "game world" could be taken, following Black (1955), Peres (1998) and Lakoff (1992), as *an interactive conceptual metaphor* employed by both players and researcher-players. In this view, metaphors are not mere figures of speech, a role reserved for a metaphorical expression, but patterns in the ways in which humans grasp their surroundings as meaningful and share their experiences with other individuals.

Later in chapter five, I proceed to make this metaphor concrete by articulating, based on the notion of *facticity* postulated by Sartre (2003 [1943]), computer games as *extended facticities*, extensions of the "concrete details against which our freedom exists and is limited". I observe that the hybrid intentionality is directed at the extension of the player's facticity and argue that the game artefacts use the hybrid intentionality relation as a means to reward and punish the player by enhancing or reducing the cognitive and sensory modalities afforded by the very same relation.

In chapter six, *Emotions in play as interpretations of game worlds*, I present the *principle of relative intensity* as accounting for the range of the player's engagement with the game world. Building on this principle, I identify the *conduct of emotional investment*, referring to how the player elevates certain parts of the game content

from the game's overall contingency, and prepares ground for parts of game content to be experienced as objects of emotions. By looking at the ways in which games transform our desire to play into beliefs about events, objects, and states of affairs in the games, I postulate an *experiential ontology of game content*, or in other words an ontology that can be used to categorise the contents within the finitude of a game as played. By situating the practice of *transgressive play* into the framework that emphasizes the influence of the game artefact's materiality, I diffuse the worries of transgressive play challenging the explanatory framework postulated.

In the final chapter, *Conclusions*, I summarize the key parts of the argument and discuss potential paths for future research.

Chapter 2

Emotions and experienced significance

The goal in this chapter is to arrive at an understanding of emotion that can be integrated into a conceptual framework with which to inspect single-player computer games. The perspective on emotions adopted for the purposes of this dissertation is *phenomenological*[1], as emotions are seen from the first-person perspective, inasmuch as they are experienced as *significant* or as *involving meaning* (*cf.* Smith 1979, 435). The kind of knowledge this chapter attempts to attain is more methodological than ontological: more important than stating what an emotion "is" is to arrive at an understanding with conceptual interfaces that allow the articulation of how and why a meaningful emotion can come about within computer game play.

In the first section of this chapter, I briefly discuss the idea of emotions as irrational passions. Dealing with this idea seems necessary because it still enjoys rather prominent significance in our everyday use of language. From the alleged irrationality of emotions I can also derive the necessity to distinguish between emotional behaviour and emotional experience. I justify my emphasis on the logic within emotions by showing that the distinction between emotion and reason is not

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[1]I will elaborate on the phenomenological perspective in chapter 4

viable if emotion is understood as an experience rather than a kind of behaviour. By briefly discussing the problems of addressing emotions by their names, I argue for the necessity of going beyond the single words arbitrarily assigned to signify approximations of mental states into the rational and logical constitutive structures of emotional experiences.

In the second section 2.2, I outline a cognitive-phenomenological approach to emotions, according to which emotions are always *about* something. I argue that we can understand emotions by understanding their objects and the reasons the subject has for relating to the objects in particular ways.

I point out a distinction between object as existing and object as experienced, and discuss the relationship between the two as a process of *constitution*. However, by drawing on Solomon (2007) I acknowledge how emotion is intertwined with all the intricacies of being in the world. Thus, what we might conceptualise as the object as experienced, is only the emotion's primary focus, as the object of every emotion is ultimately the world. By briefly discussing the theory of "basic emotions" by Frijda (1986), I observe that the shared principles of being human, approximated as the human condition, provide a baseline that guides the constitution of objects as experienced.

In the third section, I introduce an example from my playing of *Half-Life 2*: the enjoyable emotions of fear and anger involved in an encounter with a monster. This example is enigmatic, as it cannot be explained in relation to the human condition. I review three solutions, denying the emotion's genuineness, its phenomenological integrity, and its object's reality, but dismiss them as each flawed in their own ways in regard to the goals and purposes in this dissertation.

I conclude this chapter by suggesting, in section four, that it is possible to describe emotions in play while holding to their genuineness and integrity, but for this kind of description to be possible it necessary to account for some different condition than the human condition as that which guides their objects' constitution. I suggest that

understanding what that condition could be requires looking at computer game play and the emotions it involves from an experiential perspective.

2.1 Approaching emotions

2.1.1 Context, behaviour and experience

In one word, emotions are *ambiguous* – meaning chiefly that they afford being approached from a multiplicity of directions, and from each of these directions the target of scrutiny, "the emotions", appears under somewhat different light. In this subsection, I begin the project of tackling this ambiguity by contextualising my area of interest, *emotional experience* in relation to the age-old idea of the distinction between passion and reason and to a perhaps more recent distinction between emotional behaviour and emotional experience.

When we talk about emotions, we often do so alongside reason. When the two are distinguished, emotion usually has to take the role of an underdog in what is thought of a 'civilized context' and becomes mystified as an involuntary occurrence hampering our lucid thought. An instance of the division between emotion and reason and as such a typical example of how emotion appears in everyday talk is documented by Vainik (2002), a folklorist who interviewed Estonian people about the notions and conceptions of emotion they employ in their everyday situations. Vainik (2002, 47) suggests that "the collective emotion landscape", referring to the interpersonally shared ideas of emotion, is largely shaped by language and common to all users of the language. Vainik (2002, 26-27) observed that "*emotsionaalne* 'emotional' tends to be used as an evaluative adjective", and that Estonians take emotions as something to which it is better not "to descend" otherwise "*võivad emotsioonid üle pea kokku lüüa* 'emotions could close in above your head'."

However it is not only the Estonians or those engaged in folk-psychology who tend to antagonise emotion: none of this kind of intellectual downgrading of emotions

mentioned so far is new in relation to the tradition of Western thought, especially to its branches that to some extent deal with human mind. Descartes, as a part of his theory centred around the role the *pineal gland* has in one's mental life, suggested emotions to belong to the category of "animal spirits". These animal spirits, according to Descartes, resided in the pineal gland, flowing in through the several tiny arteries that surround it (Lokhorst 2008). Comparing emotions to thoughts, perceptions, and such things, for Descartes the emotions, as animal spirits, were "clearly inferior products of the psyche". (Solomon 1977, 41)

Kant wrote off emotions as "pathological", he distinguished between the "love more properly commanded by the scriptures and practical reason" (Solomon 2006, 92) and the "pathological love" in which an individual falls and which may cause the individual to do things he would not necessarily do without being under the influence of the emotion. Especially if we understand the "pathologicality" of emotions as referring to the emotions' involuntary nature, and the way how they perhaps against one's will, can "take over" one's body, an undercurrent of "pathologicality" of emotions suggested by Kant can be described as floating through many other theories of emotions too, however not so much in the contemporary ones.

As an example of the "pathological" undercurrent we can consider James (1884, 189-190), who suggested emotions to be direct consequences of bodily disturbances: "the bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion."[2] While James acknowledged that a common-sense view on the turns of events in an emotional episode is as in the example "we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep", he suggested that kind of view to be incorrect. He suggests that a "more rational statement is" for example "that we feel sorry because we cry". According to this view, the emotion follows the bodily disturbance which follows the cause of the emotion.

Nowadays the Jamesian theory may be considered outdated due to the straight-

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[2]Emphases in the original text.

forward causality it suggests there to be between whatever cause the emotion has, the "bodily disturbance", and the experience of emotion. However, to dispel the straight-forward causality between a "bodily disturbance" and an emotion does not amount to abandoning the idea that bodily feelings are somehow involved in emotion. Like Solomon (2006) points out, "emotions have almost always been considered *bodily* phenomena and the physiological (as opposed to specifically neurophysiological) has always been part and parcel of the phenomenology of emotion".

An idea commonly accepted among both philosophers and empirical scientists is that of multidimensional emotions. Consider for example *fear*: one might say it involves at least perceiving something as a threat, the necessity of making quick decision whether to fight or flight, and the "gut feeling". However, how many of these 'dimensions' exist, what are the intricacies of these individual dimensions or aspects, and how are they related – causally, essentially or accidentally, for example – is still debatable. Whereas in a psychophysiological study of gameplay emotions Ravaja (2005) applied a three-dimensional notion of emotional experience consisting of physiological changes, the subjective experience, and expressive behaviour, Solomon (2006) includes more details, as he sees emotion as involving "the distinctively bodily, the judgements that structure the experience, the experience of the object of the emotion, and the social context of the experience."

From considering the idea of a 'multidimensional emotion' it is easy to arrive at an observation that the word "emotion" encompasses phenomena that are related but distinctively different, ranging from the private experience of one's body, such as 'butterflies in your stomach', to the collective cultural and linguistic conventions, such as what kind of ways of expressing positive emotions are appropriate in a particular culture. Diversity within the object of study calls for specificity in our attempts of making sense and a good start is to distinguish between (the consequences of) emotional behaviour in context and the (experience of the) emotion itself. The former we can evaluate as particular cases against particular contexts. We can say

that it is not rational for an aspiring academic to send angry feedback to reviewers, even though he thinks the reviewers had wronged him. The irrationality here is an evaluative label not unlike 'inappropriate' or 'impolite', that makes sense against a context in which the emotional behavior can have unpleasant consequences for the individual. The latter, however, does not follow the logic of social norms but has a logic of its own.

Aristotle, paraphrased in Solomon (2006), insisted that "only fools don't get angry", referring to the built-in rationality of emotions and the role they play in individual's mental well-being. Given one had a good reason to be angry, suppressing the emotion for an extended period of time would not supposedly be healthy. But as creatures capable of self-reflective decision-making living in a contemporary society with its peculiar values of 'coolness' and 'humility', we sometimes do decide to suppress an emotion. In other words, there are moments when it makes sense to play an Aristotelian fool on purpose. Acting according to my emotion may be unwise or irrational considering the situation I am in and the potential effects of my 'emotional' behaviour to other people and to my future. However, we would be seriously misguided to think that this would count as evidence about emotions themselves being irrational and thus best left mystified. Emotions do have a logic, which, "like all 'logics' – is objective and to be objectively evaluated" (Solomon 2003, 38).

Vainik (2002, 27) observed that the Estonians like to refrain themselves from "descending" to emotions. Now it seems to us that the target of their avoidance is emotional behaviour illuminated as inappropriate by the social norms and rules for behaviour in 'a civilized society'. This "acting according to the rules" is an inter-subjective and primarily social phenomenon, and we should not confuse it with the subjective experience of the emotion, which follows its own (rational) logic.

2.1.2 Surpassing ambiguity

We have now established, for the purposes of upcoming arguments, 'emotional behaviour in a social context' and 'emotional experience' as two separate aspects of the phenomenon of emotions. The focus of this dissertation is on the latter, the emotional experience. What kind of concepts could we use to describe the experience of an emotion so that the descriptions could be shared intersubjectively?

When we, engrossed in our everyday psychological conceptions, think about what kind of concepts are encompassed in the general notion of "emotion", we easily come to think of concepts like anger, fear, love, joy, and sadness.[3] We use these concepts to make sense of our ordinary encounters with other people and to share and communicate our motives, intentions and desires. Usually this works out in a sufficiently effective manner. Consider asking your colleague at work, someone with whom you do not consider yourself too well acquainted, why he is so happy today. An adequate answer might be 'I've fallen in love'. However, you are not gaining any accurate information about his feelings from such a reply. He might have fallen in love with a newer model of a lawnmower he currently owns, realised the personal value of his old marriage, or jumped into an extramarital relationship with a previously unknown person. The name of the emotion alone conveys a very arbitrary message.

It is the pervasive folk psychology and the social constructedness of emotion names (*cf.* Parkinson 1995, x), which seems to make it possible to study them with straight-forward empirical conceptual or verbal methods. Ermi and Mäyrä (2005) studied players' emotional experiences with digital games with a survey involving 203 informants, who were asked to evaluate the involvement of five different emotional components (fear, anger, pleasant relaxation, joy, and boredom) in their experiences with different games on a 7-point scale from "not at all" to "very much". The authors reported that while joy and pleasant relaxation dominated their informants'

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[3]This is what Vainik (2002, 31) suggests to be the case for Estonians, too.

experiences, *NetHack* (1987) offered a less relaxing experience than *World of Warcraft* (2005).

Considering the usages for this kind of information, we find that it may be useful for compiling a list of games that are said to be relaxing, or, for buying games for children in a tender age when one might want to avoid buying those that are reported to lead to anger and fear. However, this information can only act as a starting point for analysis that attempts to articulate the disposition toward the world the emotion of "relaxedness" implies and subsequently understand how the emotion came about – how the dialogue between the *NetHack* game artefact and its player contributed to the particular emotion.

This is not to suggest that the inherent ambiguity in emotion names was enough to stop us using them in a meaningful way. Our emotion vocabulary allows for conveying a significant difference between 'fear' and 'love', for example. However, "the words we use for emotions should not be confused with the emotions" (Solomon 2003, 117). Like the thought experiment about a colleague who had fallen in love demonstrates, the emotion names are quite often dangerously misleading, as they give us an illusion that we have gained meaningful knowledge about an experience, while we haven't in fact learned much. Building a methodology on emotion names would be dangerous and the project of making sense of emotions has to go beyond the names associated with emotions.

2.2 Describing and explaining emotions

> What is love?
> - Haddaway: What is love

Attempting to address emotions without relying too much on the names given to them involves a fine line to be trodden as "there is no way we can 'get at' our emotions apart from the language we use to identify and discriminate them" (Solomon 2003, 117). One might even take the linguistic emphasis as far as La Rochefoucauld (quoted

in Calhoun and Solomon 1984, 5), who asked "how many people would never have loved if they had not heard the word?". However, as this section demonstrates, the means with which we can articulate emotional experiences with language do not restrict us to the "top-down" perspective implied by emotion names

2.2.1 Intentionality as a fundamental structure of emotion

Consider again the acquaintance's statement about falling in love but let him have more attention to detail: 'I love my job!', he adds. Now we are better equipped to understand what he actually means, even if our understanding still leans a bit toward the abstract side. We understand him enough to emphasise his feelings – not only that he for example desires to be close to something (*cf.* Descartes) or is ready to give up important things for the benefit of that something, (as in the idea of love as willingness for self-sacrifice) but about the ways in which he relates to certain particulars. We understand that he enjoys spending time at the office and does not feel the urge to go home as soon as the clock strikes five.

This exemplifies the observation of Debes (2008, 1), that

> it would be unintuitive and difficult to explain emotions or the actions emotions purport to rationalize without [...] intentional references.

In other words, only by understanding the object of the emotion can we start to understand the emotional experience. Had our colleague told us instead, 'I've fallen love with my partner again', would we immediately have understood that he is referring to a different kind of "love" with a completely different target and implying a completely different view of his world.

Heinämaa and Reuter (1996, 149) successfully illustrate the limitations of the everyday concept of emotion by observing that "emotions can be individualised only by their objects and mode of directedness"[4]. The emotion's name, which is an approximation of what Heinämaa and Reuter (1996, 149) call the *mode of*

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[4]my translation from Finnish

directedness can lead us only half way there. The emotion's object is as crucial a bit of information as its name. This was observed also by Sartre (1962 [1939], 35), who asks:

> how can we speak about anger, in which one strikes, reviles and threatens, without mentioning the person who represents the objective unity of all those insults, menaces, and blows?

In the light of descriptions involving the mode of directedness and the object, emotions appear as relationships between the subject and the emotion's object, pointing from the subject toward the world. This kind of relationship, which might be approximated as 'aboutness', is commonly referred to as "intentionality". The idea of intentionality is often attributed to Brentano (McIntyre and Smith 1989, 148), namely to his book "The Origin of the Knowledge of Right and Wrong. (RW).". Brentano (2006 [1902], note 19) himself points out that "this term 'intentional,' like many other terms for important notions, comes from the scholastics". For Brentano intentionality was one of the many properties found in all mental phenomena, a viewpoint illustrated in the following passage, known as "Brentano's Thesis" (McIntyre and Smith 1989, 148).

> The common feature of everything psychical consists in what has been called by a very unfortunate and ambiguous term, consciousness ; *i.e.* in a subject-attitude ; in what has been termed an intentional relation to something which, though perhaps not real, is none the less an inner object of perception ; 'No hearing without the heard, no believing without the believed, no hoping without the hoped for, no striving without the striven for, no joy without the enjoyed', and so with other mental phenomena. (RW §19)

While certain disagreements prevail among philosophers about various details of intentionality, for example about the "intentional inexistence" of objects, referring to the dilemma one confronts when dealing with mental states that are directed toward an inexistent object (see *e.g.* Kim 1978, Morrison 1970), I have chosen not to go into the details of those debates.[5] I take emotions' intentionality as granted

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[5]That does not seem necessary because I am not concerned with all mental phenomena but more specifically with emotions, a kind of mental phenomena whose intentionality is, according to Solomon (2006, 2), an "idea that has been well-confirmed even by those theorists who set out to challenge it". However, should I go close enough to awaken the contested features of intentionality in this thesis, I will take the disputes into account to a necessary degree.

for the purposes of understanding emotions beyond their names, as relationships between the subject and the object of the emotion, or put more simply, for the purposes of understanding and describing *emotional experiences*. Intentionality is a viable premise for beginning to understand emotions not as mystified and ephemeral phenomena in the self-enclosed realm of private subjectivity, but as ways in which the subjectivity extends its cognitive tentacles toward the world.

2.2.2 Addressing intentionality – "objects as experienced"

By acknowledging the intentionality of emotional experiences and articulating its intricacies, we can shed light on the nuanced differences and subtleties which would remain hidden from analysis that addressed emotions in terms of their symptoms like behaviour and expression. Not only can we be more specific about the kinds of emotions we are referring to at a given moment, but we understand how emotions are intertwined with the subject's overall experience of being and doing in the world. For such a project, *objects* of emotions are important. If an emotional experience is defined, according to Solomon (2006, 301), as "primarily an experience of the object of emotion, from the peculiar perspective of that emotion", love for one's job appears as a different emotion than the love for one's partner, and so on. Another ramification of intentionality is, like Solomon (2006, 301) points out, that a single object in the world may serve as two different objects as experienced:

> the object of anger is different in kind from the object of love, even if the person who is the target of both emotions is ontologically one and the same.

Furthermore, some properties of the actually existing object, say, the colour of a shirt worn by the person at whom one is angry, are not necessarily relevant for the emotion, or in other words, manifested in the object of the emotion. This is possible, because the object the of emotion is not the 'mere' actually existing object, but has both mental and extra-mental properties and is 'determined' or 'constituted' within the individual's mental landscape as the object-as-experienced-in-the-emotion, as

in a "house *as one is proud of owning it*". (Solomon 2003, 52-3) Following Husserl, Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 24) define this *constitution* as

> a process that allows for the manifestation or appearance of objects and their signification, that is, a process that permits that which is constituted to appear, to manifest, and present itself as what it is.

The constitution of intentional objects out of objects consisting of inexhaustible amount of actual properties implies a distinction between an *object as it exists* and an *object as it is experienced*.[6]

The distinction between actually existing and experienced objects is also implied in how McIntyre and Smith (1989, 148-51) understand intentionality. They have characterised intentionality as a composite of two features: *existence-independence* and *conception-dependence*. They suggest that intentional phenomena are not as concerned with the actual existence of their objects as they are with the conception the individual has of the object. This can be quite well illustrated with an example of waiting at the traffic lights and feeling of great annoyance towards the assumedly red traffic light that is delaying our journey home, only to find out that while we were dwelling upon the annoyance toward the traffic lights and remembering all the things we could be doing instead of waiting, the light had turned green already. Thus the emotion of annoyance does not depend on the actual colour of the light that is lit at the moment, but on the conception one has about the traffic light. It is even possible that knowing that at the particular crossing we often have to wait a long time for the green arrow to appear, we were perhaps already approaching the crossing assuming the long wait with budding annoyance.

For the project of understanding emotions in terms of their objects, this suggests that if we were to equip ourselves only with the notion of intentionality, we would have to face ambiguity, as the object-as-it-exists' properties alone do not get us very far in unpacking the emotion about the object-as-experienced. Like Solomon (2003,

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[6]This distinction is echoed in chapter 4, where I discuss the difference between game content as it exists 'in' the game artefact and game content encountered 'as played'. There I look at how the materiality of the computer game shapes and constrains the process of constitution.

53) suggests,

> intentionality is a concise but hardly precise way of characterizing the fact
> that emotions are always 'about' something

The notion of intentionality alone can get us only so far as to acknowledging that being "about" something is central to emotion. Given that an emotion's object as experienced is a result of constitution, which adds our desires, motivations and expectations to the list of ingredients of the object as experienced, it is no surprise that intentionality leaves us with "the irreducible complex *being-proud-of-my-house*", a "unitary phenomenon" which is not divisible into components or individual atoms (Solomon 2003, 54-5). Thus it is crucial to acknowledge that even though we can conceptualise emotion by separating for example a 'mode of directedness' and an 'object' from each other, it does not mean that those "components" would be distinguishable in the actual experience: "emotional subject and the object of the emotion are united in an indissoluble synthesis" (Sartre 1962 [1939], 35).

Referring to the diversity of influences within the mental landscape of an individual experiencing an emotion, a diversity which escapes any atomistic accounts of the intentional experience, Solomon (2003, 72) points out that "what we call 'the object' is its minimal description, only its primary focus", as "the object of every emotion is ultimately the world". We should not assume that my emotion about "the annoying red traffic light" was really *only* about the red traffic light, but acknowledge also the multitude of other ingredients of the emotion, originating in my personal biographical experience of being in the world.

This ties in with a more general argument about the role of intentionality in human experience, that due to experience's intentionality the experience and the world it is targeted at can be understood only together. Verbeek (2008, 388), a Dutch post-phenomenologist and a philosopher of technology, formulates it as follows:

> the concept of intentionality makes visible the inextricable connections between
> them. Because of the intentional structure of human experience, human beings
> can never be understood in isolation from the reality in which they live.

Sartre (2003 [1943]) takes intentionality of consciousness as a premise for his phenomenological ontology, asserting that consciousness is nothing because it exists only by way of being directed at outside itself. Sartre (2003 [1943], 330) articulates the fundamentality of the relation between a human and the world as follows:

> We know that there is not a for-itself[7] on the one hand and a world on the other as two closed entities for which we must subsequently seek some explanation as to how they communicate. The for-itself is a relation to the world.

Sartre (2003 [1943], 330) sheds light on the methodological implications of acknowledging human intentionality by asserting that

> the world exists in front of consciousness as an indefinite multiplicity of reciprocal relations which consciousness flies over without perspective and contemplates without a point of view. *For me* this glass is to the left of the decanter[...] *for Pierre* it is to the right [...] It is not even conceivable that a consciousness could fly over the world in such a way that the glass should be *simultaneously* given to it at the right and at the left of the decanter, in front of it and behind it.

From this perspective, "emotional consciousness is primarily consciousness *of* the world" (Sartre 1962 [1939], 35), and to understand emotion we have to understand the world as the individual experiences it by way of his being in the world. Individuated emotion appears as an interpretation, judgement, (Solomon 1977, 46) or apprehension (Sartre 1962 [1939], 35) made by the subject of the world, where 'world' encompasses also the 'self'.[8] To further articulate the details of intentional emotion is to dig deeper into the subject's understanding of the world, to understand the beliefs involved in the emotion, to understand *how* the red traffic light is constituted as the 'traffic light one is annoyed with'.

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[7]We can use the notion of a 'human' as an approximation of the notion of "for-itself." I will elaborate on this term in more detail in footnote 11.

[8]Despite being ultimately about the world, the emotions' directedness toward particular objects should not be discounted, as that might lead to the inability to distinguish between *moods* and emotions. Solomon (1993, 70-71) suggests that moods are "generalized emotions", as they enlarge their grasps to "attend to the world as a whole, typically without focusing on any particular object or situation." It is through the objects that we can make a distinction between a mood and an emotion: "objects of emotions tend to be specific and determinate while the objects of moods tend to be general, amorphous and indeterminate." (Solomon 2007, 185). The relation between a mood and an emotion would sustain a much more detailed treatment, but that does not seem relevant for the purposes of this project.

This perspective, from which emotion is conceptualised primarily through its experienced significance or cognitive constituents, for example as an apprehension, judgement or an evaluation, is often referred to as a *cognitive theory of emotions* (Solomon 2003, 54, Solomon 2003b) or *emotional cognitivism* (Debes 2008, 2). Liu (2006) asserts that:

> The cognitivism of emotions describes what emotions are like without explaining 1. why the emotional judgment takes so diverse forms, 2. how it is possible to simultaneously hold affects and judgment in a single emotional sense. Despite its name, this cognitivism of emotions, while insisting that emotions consist in judgment, does not constrain how emotional judgment consists of.

A fundamental tenet of this position, which I have adopted for the purposes of this thesis, is the assumption that it is possible to understand and describe emotions by understanding and describing their objects and the reasons the individual has to relate to the objects in the specific way.

2.2.3 On the cause of emotion

We have now established the importance of emotions' objects to the project of understanding the experienced significance within emotions. This mode of analysis, which focuses on the constitution of the emotion's object is what Solomon calls *describing* an emotion, in contrast to *explaining* emotions. For explanatory purposes, it makes sense also to speak about causes of emotions, that is to distinguish the emotion's cause from its object. Whereas by description we can uncover how emotion is intertwined in the ways how the subject sees the world, explanation looks outside the subjective constitution to the *cause* of the emotion. (Solomon 2003, 73) What we could call the cause of an emotion is, according to Solomon (2003, 53), "whatever event, state of affairs, thing, or person incites the emotion, whether or not this has anything to do with what the emotion is about."

Calhoun and Solomon (1984) make a similar distinction between *intentional* and *causal explanations* of emotions. The difference between the cause and the object,

and similarly between intentional and causal explanations is most fundamentally an epistemic difference. Whereas we possess, or it is at least possible for us through self-reflective analysis to gain access to, special knowledge regarding the object of our particular emotion – namely regarding how the object came about via constitution – it is possible that we lack knowledge about its cause, despite our attempts to figure it out. This is the case in situations where the cause and the object are not the same: "where the cause is different from what I am angry about, I cannot know that it is" (Solomon 2003, 7).

I can be on the fringe of anger due to, for example, having given up smoking just recently without realizing the influence of the withdrawal symptoms and thus constituting encounters or objects which I normally consider neutral or pleasant into 'objects-I-am-angry-about'.

However, when a colleague makes a kind remark about the state of my nerves, I quickly realise that there has been nothing wrong with the objects and encounters – my computer is as slow as it usually is and my colleagues are their normal ironic selves – but it is the physiological cause, symptoms of nicotine withdrawal, which should take the blame. Like Solomon (2003, 9) observes, one can be angry only so long as one believes that what has caused one to be angry is what one is angry about. As soon as the disparity between cause and object is highlighted, the emotion disappears or turns into another emotion.

The question of causes extends beyond emotions onto all human activity. When speaking of causes and motives behind actions in general Sartre (2003 [1943], 459) observes that "in order to be a *cause*, the *cause* must be *experienced* as such." When evaluating the feasibility of causal explaining, we should be aware of the epistemological implications of relying on *causes*. As the "cause of an emotion is a function in a certain kind of explanation" (Solomon 2003, 7), we can use it to present emotion as a part of causal chain of events. However, when doing so, we deviate from the first-person point of view to assuming that we have 'better knowledge' of

the world than the subject does.

This is because the 'cause of the emotion' is always (f)actual event, and its (f)actuality is not measured against whether the subject is not aware of it or not: the cause is a fact, and as such "subject to certain lawlike generalizations in a way that objects of emotions are not" (Solomon 2003, 7). An example of this kind of lawlike generalisation would be that a nicotine addict who hasn't had his preferred dose during the day will be tense and get angry easily in the evening at the latest. Most importantly, we can observe that due to concerning 'mere' facts, causal explanations would not lead to uncovering any experienced significance within emotions. Thus, this project assumes the perspective of intentional explanations rather than that of causal explanations.

2.2.4 Goal, motivation and purpose of emotion

So far we have established emotion, in the vein of a cognitive theory of emotions, as a judgement, an apprehension, or an interpretation of the world. However, from personal experience we know that in our everyday encounters with the world we manage various interpretations or judgements of different things without a consciously experienced involvement of emotion. So what distinguishes emotions from all other judgements? To answer a similar question, Sartre (1962 [1939], 49) points at the involuntary nature of emotion, which we can think of as a characteristic of emotion not possessed by all judgements: "one cannot get out of [emotion] as one pleases; it fades away of itself, but one cannot put a stop to it." Thus, we might suggest that emotions are judgements that are *undergone*. According to Solomon (2003, 37), what distinguishes emotion from all other judgements is its "heightened sense of importance and purpose, its intense motivation".

Both Sartre (1962 [1939], 39) and Solomon (2003, 37), see emotion as motivated by and intertwined with *transformation*. Given that emotion was already described as connected, through the constitution of its object, with the way how the subject

sees the world, the transformative nature of emotion implies that to have emotion is to (desire to) change the world. Sartre (1962 [1939], 39-40), sees this change as a transformation into 'magical'. He suggests that an emotion arises from the realisation that "all the ways are barred and nevertheless we must act". As objective change is impossible, the consciousness

> tries to transform itself in order to transform the object[. . .] [to live] as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic.

Sartre uses an example of a girl with problems that she thinks need medical attention, however finding them difficult to speak about. Trying to speak up at a doctor's practice, she breaks into tears instead of sharing her problems to get help. In this example, the "magical world" where relations are not governed by deterministic processes is a world in which the problems do not exist and thus there is need to engage in the difficult conversation. We might read Sartre as suggesting that it is the magic of emotion which takes the problems away.

While Sartre's account might seem somewhat dubious when judged against contemporary psychology, it holds as a powerful example of how emotions are connected, on one hand, to the subject's conception of (her own being in) the world and, on the other, to motivation and goal-oriented or purposeful behaviour. Sartre's account of "magic" also succeeds in providing an explanatory frame for the rationality of emotion discussed earlier via Aristotle's statement that "only fools don't get angry". While in the social or empirical realm behaviour following the logic of the emotion might sometimes be foolish, if an emotion's logic is evaluated objectively, it makes sense *within* the "magical" realm. Thus, to assess the experienced significance of emotions, we must be willing to consider emotions not in terms of the deterministic processes of nature, but in regard to the meaning they have within the subjective and "magical" realms.

2.2.5 The biological "purpose"

The topic of *goals* and *emotions* is one that well illustrates the ambiguity and multi-dimensionality of emotions as a research topic. From the point of view of cognitive theory of emotions and its intentional explanations, the maximisation of self-esteem qualifies as a goal. If we were to conseptualise emotion primarily as a social phenomena, perhaps it would make sense for us to understand the notions of "goal" and "purpose" in relation to emotional behaviour in a social and cultural setting: perhaps the purpose of one's sadness was to have one's way in a particular social setting, for example. Furthermore, we can speak of purpose also in a biological or evolutionary context.

While in the analyses of Sartre (1962 [1939], 39) and Solomon (2003, 37), the purpose or goal of the emotion is understood as experienced by the individual experiencing the emotion, in other words as a *personal* or subjective goal or purpose of an emotion, it is possible to conceptualise the purpose of emotions in relation to impersonal concerns, by relying on biology and evolution, as for example Frijda (1986), a Dutch psychologist, has done. Frijda (1986) suggests that there is a biological purpose behind the fact that humans experience, or have, emotions. He postulates a linkage between emotion, survival and evolution. Building on this evolutionary linkage, Frijda postulates the existence of seventeen "basic emotions"[9], fundamental kinds of emotion of which other emotions consist of.

The 'basicness' of what Frijda 1986, 88-9 calls "basic emotions" is derived from how each of them is geared towards assisting survival in its own way. What we could approximate as a goal of an individual basic emotion is for Frijda (1986, 88-9) a composite of three different properties: "end state", "function" and "action tendency". The 'state' in the end state refers to the state of things in the world at the 'end' of the emotion, its function is the 'advantage' brought to human survival

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[9]Listing them here does not seem necessary. They are neatly laid out in a table in Frijda 1986, 88-9.

by the emotion, while the action tendency refers to the kind of activity the emotion prepares the subject to. This can be illustrated by considering *disgust*, one of Frijda's seventeen basic emotions: its action tendency is *rejecting*, which serves the function of *protection*. If the emotion of disgust unfolds in a prototypical way it leads to the end state of *removal of the object*.

The existence of "basic emotions" is perhaps one of the most disputed topics in the contemporary debates on emotions (*cf.* Ortony and Turner 1990, Ekman 1992, Solomon 2003, 115-42). For example, a perfectly valid question we can ask from Frijda's theory, even without subjecting it to any further scrutiny, concerns with its scope: whether the range of functions necessary for human survival is exhaustively and plausibly described by functions of the seventeen "basic emotions". This would amount to asking if the term "basic" is justified by evolution. However, in order to appreciate Frijda's theory in the context of this project, it seems that one does not have to, luckily, form an opinion about whether these seventeen "basic emotions" really are basic in one way or another. The value of Frijda's theory is elsewhere.

To demonstrate that value, I will apply Frijda's theory on an example. Consider that I set out to cook cabbage rolls, a dish whose main ingredient are fresh and crisp leaves of round cabbage. Upon picking up a cabbage from the fridge's vegetable compartment and turning it around in my hand, I find its underside rotten and transformed into brown liquid goo. I throw the vegetable away in disgust.

In Frijda's theory the *function* of disgust is to *protect* one from any kind of harm that might enter the body. It this context this function translates to ensuring that I won't get sick from eating rotten food. Had I not felt disgusted enough about what had happened to the cabbage, I might have eaten it despite its flaws and gotten a food poisoning. The *action tendency* of disgust, *rejection*, is pretty straightforward, and when translated to the particularities of the situation in our example, it refers to my making of the negative judgement about the cabbage's qualities as an ingredient in my recipe. The *end state* of the emotion, the *removal of the object*, was achieved

as the cabbage was moved into recycle bin.

This account which we can postulate by applying Frijda's theory on a particular instance of an emotion like disgust seems solid and well-founded but *impersonal*. It is devoid of any qualities depending on the involvement of any specific person. It seems to suggest that my disgust was a result in a simple cause-and-effect chain of events, that started to unfold as soon as the vegetable compartment was opened, as if the emotion was a *reaction* arising in response to the *stimulus* of encountering the property of being "rotten" as manifested in the cabbage as an ingredient in my recipe.

It does not shed much light on how the disgust, as an *interpretation of the world*, came about. It pays no attention to how this emotion relates to other, both temporally and conceptually adjacent emotions and to the ways in which I experience myself as being in the world. For example, it makes sense that, from being negligent to prepare the cabbage before it expired and thus wasting a good piece of foodstuff, an emotion of *shame* might arise in an informed person. That shame is something Frijda's theory cannot account for, because it can give us tools to *explain* emotions. While it can provide insights from an external viewpoint with which we can rationalize which emotion should come about in which case, it does not help us understanding the constitution of the object as experienced in the emotion, it does not facilitate *describing* emotions from the first-person point of view.

However, using the conditions by which human beings exist in the world as a baseline for one's insights on emotions does not mean one would have to stick to *explanations* of emotions. That which is common to all humans refers not only to biology and evolution, but also to a breadth of aspects that belong to the sphere of subjective experience.

Qua being humans in the world we are all subject not only to biological but also to *existential* principles.

While we can understand the impersonal biological functions of emotions by

conceptualising them in relation to the biological principles of being a human, we can assume to be able to understand the subjective aspect of emotions by conceptualising them in relation to the existential principles we share by way of being humans. Not unlike we can understand the *causes* of emotions by drawing on the biological but impersonal principles, we can supposedly understand the *constitution of emotions' objects* by drawing on the existential and subjective principles of being human.

The value Frijda's theory has for this project is that it is a proof-of-concept of analysing emotions against the backdrop of the conditions by which humans exist in the world, readily available for all of us to observe. Whether or not we subscribe to a particular formulation of evolutionary "basic emotions" or think that in addition to emotions X and Y a particular formulation should also include emotion Z, we can acknowledge, on a somewhat general level, that emotions are something which all humans have in common, some of them are even "part of our evolutionary heritage" (Solomon 2007, 15).

2.2.6   The human condition as a baseline for descriptions

> We are human. . .after all
> Much in common. . .after all
> – Daft Punk: Human After All

So far we have established that to give a plausible account of an emotion, we need to state not only the "mode of directedness" approximated in the emotion's name and its *object as experienced* but also describe the *constitution* of the object from the *first-person viewpoint* of the subject. If we have access to knowledge about the particularities of the world in which the subject is situated, we may also be aware of the *cause* of the emotion, possibly also of its *purpose*, whether personal or biological. Looking at an emotion in terms of the goal or purpose that underlie it gives us not only a framework within which to explain the objective facts, but opens up an interface onto constitution of the object, too:

> Between particular goals in an emotion and [the] common goal, one might
> formulate a crude means-ends continuum [. . .] Although all emotions share an

> ultimate end, their interconnection is a network of intertwined and mutually entailing judgements, more like a web than a chain, which constitute the basic structures of our experience. (Solomon 2003, 37-8)

Despite culture and all the diversity it brings along, all humans who survive the resistance of the world are tackling similar challenges and as a consequence are subject to same existential considerations. We may assume there being universal structures in the ways humans engage with the world through their emotions. Thus, even though the experience of the emotion is private, the interconnectedness of emotion with basic principles of being human, or the human condition, gives us an access to the foundation of the experience, based on which we should be able to decipher the constitution of the object in the "mutually entailing judgements" and thus describe the emotion to a meaningful extent.

A direct implication of the cognitive-rational theory of emotion is a law-like causality, or even a correlation, between the object's personal relevance and the emotion's experienced intensity. It can be articulated with more detail and finesse in respect to the constitution of the object-as-experienced, as will be done in subsection 6.1.2, but fundamentally it boils down to the observation that the more the subject cares about the object of the emotion, the stronger the emotion. In relation to this implication, the human condition appears as a rather broad category of "reasons for caring" endogenous within all lucid individuals by virtue of the individuals being humans, which can be taken as given when rationalizing about the constitution of the objects of emotions. Solomon (2007, 248) has gathered some examples of "common conditions and circumstances of human life", shared traits of human existence which can be used as a basis for understanding why individual humans experience emotions:

> the fact that we all need food and water, have needs and desires, the fact that we get hurt, get sick, and die, the fact that we are born only after a man and a woman have had sex and conceived and at least one of them has stayed around long enough to assist our survival, and the fact that we live in social groups.

With a nod toward the existentialists, Solomon refers to the baseline of the experience of living in a world implied by his examples as *the human condition*. There is an

ongoing debate (*cf.* Solomon, 2007, 249-69) on the linkage between evolution and emotions: *why* for example fear is a "universal" emotion across cultures, how the reasons for the universality are divided between biology and culture and which came first, and whether culture has for example already "fed back" to evolution over the course of time. While this debate is certainly interesting, and serves the purpose of pointing out that my argument may be disputed from the perspective of evolution, partaking in the debate does not further my project of describing emotions in play.

However, there is a slight obstacle that prevents us from directly applying the idea of the human condition as contributing to inter-subjective reasons for caring about certain kinds of objects for the purposes of understanding computer game players' emotions. That obstacle is the lack of real danger for survival, and the ambivalence of any "threat" that follows.

Regarding the possibility to experience proper emotions while playing, that is not a problem given that we accept the principle *the more we care, the stronger the emotion*. However, for the purpose of *understanding* the player's emotions as an inter-subjective phenomena rather than a series of idiosyncratic experiences the ambivalence of the "threats" poses a challenge. The problem is best presented in the form of a question: if all players can care as much or as little as they want, is it possible to describe there being a common baseline for their emotional evaluations, like we can describe the human condition as a baseline for our emotions about things in the real world? While it will take me almost a full chapter to answer this question, in the next section I will begin tackling it by discussing it through the example of *enjoyable fear.*

2.3   Enjoyable fear as a methodological challenge

> Maria Elena used to say that only unfulfilled love can be romantic
> – Woody Allen: Vicky Cristina Barcelona

We now understand an emotion as an experience about its object from the point of

view of the particular emotion. We have also noted that the object is an approximation of the "focus" of the emotion, as the true object of every emotion is ultimately the world as the subject sees (him/herself existing in) it. Thus we now understand what it means that an emotion is an interpretation of the world. We also pointed out that these interpretations or judgements do not arise out of the blue, but are made against and can described as making sense against, the backdrop of being a human in the world, the human condition, regardless if that notion refers to a set of biological or existential principles. For example, disgust guides us away from dangerous objects, and sense of pride can guide us, whether directly or indirectly, to decisions that enforce our chances to survive the resistance of the world. In the following, I will explore how these observations be taken to the context of computer game play.

2.3.1 On enigmatic premises

Sobchack (2000) discusses her experience of watching the opening scene of *The Piano* (1993), a blurred picture of hands and fingers moving back and forth, not making visual sense of what is going on but intuitively, as if in her own fingers, recognising the scene being about fingers touching the keys of a grand piano. Sobchack (2000, 65) recollects how the next shot clarified that piano playing was indeed represented. She proceeds to understand what exactly happened when her "fingers knew" about the piano playing before it was visually represented, and by doing so simultaneously gains insights on what she calls

> our common sensuous experience of the movies: the way we are in some carnal modality able to touch and be touched by the substance of images, to feel a visual atmosphere envelop us, to experience weight and suffocation and the need for air, to take flight in kinetic exhilaration and freedom even as we are relatively bound to our ears, to be knocked backwards by a sound, to sometimes even smell and taste the world wee see upon the screen.

We observe that Sobchack (2000, 65) proceeds to understand the "common sensuous experience of the movies" by choosing an enigmatic sequence, a "heightened instance" of the common experience as the target of her descriptive and analytical attempts.

Sobchack (1992, 28) describes phenomenology, her approach of choice toward the enigmatic sequence, as a *research procedure*, which

> calls us to a series of systematic reflections within which we question and clarify that which we intimately live, but which has been lost to our reflective knowledge through habituation and/or institutionalization. That is, the phenomena of existence are usually either lived as simply given and taken for granted, or they have been abstracted and reified objectively as the predicated constructs of what has come to be thought of a scientific inquiry.

She argues that by proceeding from phenomenological intuition, to analysis, and to description, we can attempt to *reanimate* "the taken-for-granted and institutionally sedimented" and by doing so critically investigate the assumed linkage between the established paradigm and the actual experience. I will proceed with my analysis of emotions in play similarly by following the intuition to the analysis and description of an enigmatic example to be introduced the next subsection.[10]

2.3.2 Encountering a barnacle

Following Caillois (2001 [1958], 6), we can understand playing, as experienced by the subject, as "free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement". However, playing often involves the kind of emotions that in many other contexts could be considered unpleasant, such as fear and anger.[11] When we, equipped with the understanding of emotions attained so far, the cognitive theory of emotions with its emphasis on the experienced significance of emotions, come to think of the emotions which arise in solitary computer game play, we observe that certain features do not seem easy to understand at the first sight. Given that computer games are quite harmless when compared to for example extreme sports, warfare, or owing money

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[10]If articulated with Sobchack's terminology, the third chapter of this thesis observes the "sedimentations" within the field, whereas the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters perhaps corresponds to what Sobchack (1992, 28) calls reanimation.

[11]Some might consider this statement, that fear and anger "could be considered unpleasant in many context" as actually to downplaying the issue at hand. In psychological literature on emotions, there is a straightforward category of "negative emotions" that includes emotions such as fear and anger. However, as Solomon (2007) points out, there is no such thing as a single negative/positive distinction, but a multitude of different polarities that can be too easily masked as one. Consider for example "righteous anger" or "forbidden love".

to criminals, how can we describe an experience of solitary computer game play as involving genuine fear and anger? Furthermore, if those emotions were "genuine", would we still be able to derive joy and amusement from playing?

In the gloomy canals under the City 17 of *Half-Life 2*, one may encounter a barnacle, a slimy and vertically flexible monster which suddenly drops itself from the ceiling above Gordon Freeman, the player's avatar and the game's protagonist, and begins to, supposedly, digest him starting at his head. During the process, the barnacle lifts Gordon Freeman from the ground towards what one could assume to be its mouth. This experience of having close encounters with a barnacle can be very traumatic, especially if one is caught by surprise, as one usually is.

A particularly disturbing quality in the experience of being attacked by a barnacle, at least when encountered for the first time, is that the usual agency the player has within the game is altered: the player is no longer in full control of the camera, as her avatar is stuck to the barnacle which lifts the avatar upwards as the eating proceeds. The connection between the player's hands, four particular keys on the keyboard (W, A, S and D) and a mouse together constitute a learned technique[12] to move, rotate, pan, and tilt the camera and operate within *Half-Life 2*. That this technique gets severed sends a strong message that something unusual is going on.

Once the player has undergone her first encounter with a barnacle, the fear of being surprised by another haunts her as she walks in the gloomy corridors. Certain locations seem potentially more infested in barnacles, and in those locations the player may feel encouraged to walk her back against the wall, as barnacles tend to inhabit the central part of the ceiling in a room. The fear of the barnacle, in its all forms ranging from being accompanied by surprise to the haunting feeling of potentially being in the vicinity of the creature, is what I consider a prototypical example of enjoyable fear.

Knowing that *Half-Life 2* progresses as if "on rails", we can rest assured that in

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[12]With the notion of technique, I, following Ishihara (2009, 1), refer to "an acquired ability of humans to adjust their body movements or to use tools for certain purposes."

addition to the first surprising encounter with a barnacle, there will be more. When the next encounter takes place, the player knows what to do and is able to shake off the barnacle with a couple of shotgun blasts. The emotion which accompanies the revelation of being under a barnacle attack and the subsequent response of drawing a shotgun and enjoying the comforting sound of vengeance in the form of a shotgun blast is a prototypical example of enjoyable anger.

Following the example of Sobchack (2000), I take the manifestations of enjoyable fear and anger involved in the barnacle attack as enigmatic events, "heightened instances" (*cf.* Sobchack 2000) of emotions in play, which I assume contain, due to their paradoxical nature, something essentially interesting about the emotional potential of single-player computer games.[13] Unpacking and describing these examples will supposedly teach us more than the sum of their parts about, if not emotions in play themselves, at least about their relation to the paradigms which surround them and with which we make sense of them.

While I do not consider the emotion of *fear* to be in anyway prototypical or paradigmatic[14] of *all* emotions, the reason why I bring up the enjoyable fear is primarily a methodological one, not therapeutical or ontological. If we acknowledge that the scope of the analysis is on an experience already lived as an emotional experience, we cannot, without causing the whole argument to dismantle, question the reality or genuineness of any emotion in play, in the sense that all they all are 'sincerely and honestly felt or experienced.' As the focus of this study is to describe emotions inasmuch they involve meaning, the core question related to enjoyable fear is "Why is the barnacle experienced as frightening?", or more accurately, "How can we describe the barnacle as fearful?" and not for example "Is the barnacle experienced as fearful?".

I propose the enigmatic nature of enjoyable fear and anger as a methodological

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[13]It is worth emphasizing that with "heightened instances" I do not refer to "extreme emotions", that is, emotions which would be remarkable or worth our attention because of the 'intensity' with which they are felt.

[14]For discussion on the particular topic of fear in computer game play, see *e.g.* Perron (2009)

challenge to the theory established so far. By forcing the understanding of emotions I have established so far to respond to this challenge, I can enhance the capabilities I have for describing and understanding the premises from which emotions arise in solitary computer game play. From the point of view of emotions and human condition it seems peculiar enough that we can be afraid of in-game barnacles, not to mention that we enjoy those emotions. That we can enjoy the experience of encountering a frightening barnacle suggests that there is something special in *the ways in which the barnacle is constituted as frightening*. Describing that is what I take as the methodological challenge implied by the idea of enjoyable fear.

Like the following subsections demonstrate, the methodological challenge posed by enjoyable fear is not too easy to avoid from the established perspective. I will identify two candidates for approaches that could solve the challenge. First solution is to question the genuineness of the emotions, and the second consists of either questioning the phenomenological integrity of the experience or the the nature of the threat posed. While these solutions may seem, at first sight, potentially feasibly, we find, in the theory introduced so far, grounds to dismiss them as not sustaining a detailed scrutiny.

2.3.3 Genuine emotions in play

If we were holding to the psychological understanding, that fear and anger are inherently negative emotions, as the first solution of choice we might consider that my ability to derive enjoyment from these situations in *Half-Life 2* indicates that the emotions arising from the situation are neither fear nor anger. This possibility is intriguing. I can imagine that at least for a non-gamer, or someone not familiar with what it feels like to play a computer game, it might make sense to disregard emotions in play as fake, ingenuine, or somehow lesser than emotions arising in real-life situations. "How could someone be afraid of a bunch of colourful pixels on a computer screen?" might a non-gamer ask, and, "Don't cry. No reason to be sad. It

wasn't really alive. You can spawn a new one by pressing that button", might be a well-meaning but however seriously misguided consolation to someone bereaved by the death of a Tamagotchi. The intrigue here is, that if it was the case that emotions in play were 'fake', we could brush off any signs of a paradox and be saved from having to respond to a methodological challenge.

Denying that the emotion I experienced when I got rid of the barnacle with the shotgun was anger would be to suggest that the situation in which the player concludes from the signs of disrupted agency and the aural indicators of slimy suction that she has been captured by a barnacle, draws her shotgun, shakes off the monster and heaves a sigh of relief as the tension is released, would not correspond to any established criteria for anger, for example Descartes' phenomenology of anger, quoted in Solomon (2006, 294), as "the perception of a slight and the accompanying desire to avenge oneself." The emotion involved would have a logic different from anger and the difference would be so radical that it allowed the emotion to be experienced as pleasurable.

The emotion would be genuine, as *sincerely and honestly felt or experienced*, but judged based on its phenomenological qualities or its "logic" (*cf.* Solomon 1977), it would not have the reputed or apparent qualities or character associated with anger. In other words, we would not be looking for ways in which the barnacle could fill the brackets of a 'slight', and the process of shooting the barnacle the brackets of 'desire to avenge oneself', but another kind of logic with another set of brackets that are to be filled in a different way.

This would be to say that the emotions of "fear" and "anger" experienced when being entertained by a computer game would not be really "fear" and "anger" but some other emotions. However, this position would imply that the players, who think they feel afraid or angry while playing, are being led astray. This would be incompatible with our attempts of analysis from a first-person point of view. Denying the nature of enjoyable fear as fear proper would mean that the existing conceptions

about the logic of emotions would need revising before being used for analysing emotions involved in computer game play. However, in my fair judgement, that does not seem to be the case. Two distinct rationales for this decision can be postulated.

While it does not necessarily prove anything regarding this particular case, contemporary neuropsychological research, according to Dreyfus (2009, 114), suggests that here are "brain-cells [...] that fire when one makes a meaningful movement and when one sees another person make that movement." Taking into account the reservation that contemporary neuropsychological methods have hard time distinguishing for example fear from anger, we can conclude that the results available in that area are in favour of ditching the explanation that the emotion of anger experienced while playing would not be anger but some other emotion.

The perhaps more convincing rationale or at least one that is epistemologically compatible with the argument is that emotions such as the enjoyable fear and anger involved in the experience of playing *Half-Life 2* do not only feel real, but can in fact also be unpacked in terms of their logic or phenomenological qualities, like those identified by Descartes in his description of anger. The barnacle's actions represent the "slight", and my shotgun blasts, deteriorating the barnacle one by one, constitute the "vengeance". This descriptions seems plausible.

Thus it is necessary and reasonable to hold that a computer game can elicit particular emotions which, are not only genuine, as *sincerely and honestly felt or experienced*, but can also be described, in terms of their logic, as genuine in the sense that they have *the reputed and apparent qualities* that characterise the particular emotions. This is why the methodological challenge cannot be dodged by saying the emotions of enjoyable fear and anger are not genuine fear and anger.

2.3.4 Two fallacies concerning emotions in play

Apter (1991), a psychologist concerned with adult play, has focused on humans' ability to enjoy danger. In the context of computer game studies, his work is perhaps

best known for its detail, *reversal theory*, according to which we constantly shift between contrasting motivational states. Devoting a whole subsection to strutinizing this particular approach seems justified, as in the preceding literature in the field of computer game studies, there are multiple instances of applying the approach of Apter (1991) as a means to account for the otherwise paradoxical aspects of the player's emotional involvement (*e.g.* Salen and Zimmerman 2003, Nieuwdorp 2009).

Before considering if a solution to the dilemma of enjoyable fear would emerge from adopting the reversal theory approach, I will briefly discuss reversal theory and the contrasting motivational states it presupposes. In relation to a discussion about being in a playful mood when at work and feeling like being at work when actually playing golf, Apter (1991, 16-18) has postulated the notion of a "paratelic state". The "paratelic state" is in contrast to "telic state", the 'normal' motivational state. These are the two states between which humans, according to the reversal theory, constantly switch as they go about with their lives. With being in a "paratelic state" Apter refers to experiencing one's actions as taking place within a "protective frame" and thus having no potential consequences beyond the present moment. While in paratelic state, "any form of highly felt emotion", also the seemingly unpleasant emotions like anger, disgust and horror, "will be pleasant". (Apter 1991, 17)

These initially controversial emotions are what Apter calls "parapathic". Their "valence component", the quality of being either positive or negative, has been inverted. From this perspective, the emotion I underwent when encountering a barnacle for the second time, when I knew that I could get rid of the creature with a couple of shotgun blasts, was phenomenologically anger proper except that it was "parapathic", meaning that its valence component had been inverted and thus the emotion has become enjoyable.

We might attempt to dodge the methodological challenge of enjoyable fear and anger I experienced while playing *Half-Life 2* by describing them as "parapathic". However this attempt is haunted by two fallacies underlying in the reversal theory

approach: the atomistic fallacy – that emotional experiences would be assemblages of discrete components, and the fictional safety fallacy – that I would not be worried because the encounter was merely fictional. I will discuss these fallacies in the following sections.

The atomistic fallacy

The notion of "valence component", inversion of which causes an emotion to be enjoyable, is best explained by situating it in a bigger picture. I am referring to what Ravaja (2005, 2), a Finnish psychologist, refers to as the "dimensional conception of emotion", an idea that all emotions "are fundamentally similar in most respects" and can be placed on a two-dimensional plane consisting of "valence" as one axis and "arousal" as another. The "valence" axis refers to the "hedonic quality or pleasantness of an affective experience", the emotion's experienced positiveness or negativeness, while "arousal" refers to the excitement involved, ranging from calm to aroused. 'Sadness', for example, would be calm and unpleasant, whereas 'inspiration' would be pleasant and aroused. "Valence component", thus, refers to that 'part of the emotion' which can be situated on the "valence" axis.

The dimensional conception of emotion is well established and I am not in a position to criticise it inasmuch it is applicable for example in the field of empirical sciences. There an agenda might be to choose physiologically measurable markers for the emotions' two "components", such as the electicity conductance of skin for arousal and facial muscle movements for valence, and by combining the two measurements arrive at a "location" on the two-dimensional plane which is agreed to correspond to a particular emotion. However, from the perspective of trying to make sense of emotions, as in understanding them in terms of the experienced significance within them, the dimensional conception appears to have two major interrelated shortcomings: it reduces the matrix of judgements involved in an emotion into a simple binary and completely overlooks the fact that emotions are always emotions

about something.

First of all, even though the empirically measurable markers may so suggest, the "hedonic quality" of a lived experience is not by any means as simple as the dimensional conception implies. Solomon (2007, 170) suggests that the simple distinction between positive and negative emotions attempts to "primitivize" the emotions and is "actually many distinctions masquerading as one". Righteous anger can be as pleasant as forbidden love can be painful: assigning a single "valence" even as signifying a "hedonic quality" onto those emotions would simplify the complex judgements involved in the emotion up to the point of stripping them of most of meaning they had.

Consider that we are at the front line of a demonstration in favour of an idea we esteem as personally relevant, shouting revolutionary slogans and furiously waving placards in front of newspaper cameras. In this situation, the "hedonic quality" of our anger about the politicians opposing the idea we are fond of would be at least ambiguous. Furthermore, there is a multiplicity of personally meaningful polarities in play, among which the hedonic quality is just one. Perhaps in an isolated setting of a scientific experiment in a laboratory, where there are is personal significance involved in that which the emotions measured are about, hedonic quality may arise as the most significant polarity. However, it goes without saying that the everyday experiences of computer game play are somewhat distinct from experiments in laboratories.

Even if we overlook the issue of "valence" as a primitivizing attempt, we are left with the complete lack of attention paid to intentionality by the dimensional conception. The dimensional conception ignores the fundamental role of intentionality in an emotion. For the dimensional conception the object of the emotion is largely irrelevant, as, according to Ravaja (2005) in the dimensional conception emotions are "fundamentally similar on most aspects". Perhaps this is because intentionality, as far as I know, cannot be measured with even the most advanced scientific instruments.

A way out would perhaps be to suggest that apart from the "valence component"

involved, there is an "intentional component" which takes care of the "aboutness" of the experience. However, endorsing this position would lead to a rather Jamesian conclusion that there was a non-intentional experience of the hedonic quality: basically that pleasure and displeasure are primitive non-intentional feelings, which is to say that their origins are outside the processes by which we make sense of the world. This would correspond to what Goldie (2002) has criticized as the "add-on theory" of emotions. Goldie (2002, 242) considers the add-on theory problematic, because the emotional feelings, for example pleasure and displeasure, and the world-directedness, *i.e.* the quality of being about something, of an emotion are inextricably intertwined. Their common origins as equal qualities rather than components of experience could perhaps be traced somewhere along the lines of fundamental meaning-making processes,[15] but that pursuit does not seem relevant for the purposes of arguing against adopting the dimensional conception of emotion for the purposes of this dissertation.

Furthermore, any talk about "components" of emotions can be easily misleading. Even though we might empirically observe different "dimensions", "components" and "aspects" of an emotion, these observations, however successful, do not mean that the meaningful experience of an emotion would adhere to any of our attempts of separation. Like Solomon (2006, 301) points out, "an emotion is not an assemblage".

The dimensional conception of emotion has its usages as a way to conceptualise the numerical findings attained by measuring bodily states with scientific instruments into linguistic form. However, we cannot say it can help us *describe* emotions, at least as that pursuit has been framed here so far. Thus we may conclude that as a way of explaining enjoyable fear and anger the idea of being in a "paratelic state" and experiencing one's actions as taking place within a "protective frame" without consequences, implies an *atomistic fallacy* about emotional experiences because of its reliance on the "inverted valence component".

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[15] *e.g.* that which Husserl characterised as *noesis*

The fictional safety fallacy

The "paratelic state", in which extreme emotions can be pleasant, has a prerequisite: the subject has to be in a "protective frame". Apter (1991, 15) writes that "in the play-state you experience a *protective frame* which stands between you and the 'real' world and its problems, creating a enchanted zone in which, in the end, you are confident that no harm can come." The particular detail that causes problems is the mystification of play and the drawing of a border between 'real' and 'less real' culminating in the suggestion that the protective frame is "supported by a fictional context." (Apter 1991, 17-21)

Let us return to the experience of encountering the barnacle. Certainly we can read a number of indisputably fictional qualities into my experience – for example that "I was Gordon Freeman and I was going to save the world" – but that kind of qualities are not necessarily the ones defining the experience. There is not necessarily anything fictional in the partial losing of control of the avatarial camera that is the first sign of being captured by a barnacle and the cause of anger in the second and subsequent encounters with the creature. The experiences of enjoyable fear and anger are not only about objects and events that reside in the totality of the "fictional".

While I will return to this question in section 5.2, at this point it suffices to observe that even if I was unsure of the ontological status of the thing which I am afraid of, the event that caused me to make the judgements surfacing as the emotion, was real and actual within the temporal continuum of my playing. Thus it seems that describing the experience of enjoyable fear and danger against a "fictional context" would not be justified.

For Apter (1991), who is interested in adult play as a kind of human behaviour in general, the "fictional context" might be a convenient way to deal with potentially troublesome aspects that are not at the core of his interests. However, explaining the enjoyable fear through safety attained from a "fictional context", as the reversal theory approach does, would open up more problems than it solves, regarding the

relation between not only fiction and games but also between fiction and emotion.

The relation between fiction and rational emotion is a can of worms and has remained as such for decades. Gendler and Kovakovich (2006) summarise the positions in the fictional emotions debate by postulating the paradox of "rational fictional emotion", which refers to the contradiction between the "coordination condition" that we must *not* believe that X is fictional in order to have genuine and rational emotions about X and the descriptive given that we in fact *do* have genuine and rational emotions about X while believing that X is purely fictional. Gendler and Kovakovich (2006) regard it a mistake "to think that feeling genuine emotions requires a belief, temporary or otherwise, in the actuality of its purported target", which is a view they see as held by for example Walton). By drawing on neuropsychological evidence, they suggest that the only way out from the paradox is to give up the coordination condition. If one subscribes to the view of Gendler and Kovakovich, the "suspension of disbelief" as a prerequisite for fictional emotions can be safely dispelled. As a consequence, there is no need for the evasive manoeuvre of arguing for "reversing" to take place between the "telic" and "paratelic" states.

Certainly the feeling of "safety" or "disconnectedness" from the real world is at the core of being able to enjoy fear, but fiction does not seem like a feasible way to account for this somewhat unusual relation between safety and thrill. Doing so would constitute what could be referred to as the *fictional safety fallacy*.[16]

2.4 Beyond human condition: on the necessity of a baseline shift

We have observed that it is not sustainable to deny that I was experiencing fear while playing *Half-Life 2*, even though that would dispel the methodological challenge

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[16]However, dismissing "fictional context" as a vague descriptor for something that explains 'unusual' emotions is not to dismiss "fictional" as a category of game content. I will return to the "fictionality" of game content in section 5.2.

of enjoyable fear. We do not have a reason to assume that the logics of emotions in play would be significantly different from those of emotions that arise in other contexts. Neither seems it feasible to invoke the "parapathic" nature of these initially problematic emotions, as that position would be haunted by false presuppositions: the atomistic and fictional safety fallacies.

It seems that we can safely assume that the barnacle is frightening *in relation to* something, even if not in relation the basic principles of existing in the world. Similarly, anger arising in computer game play is still perception of a slight and a possibility for vengeance: no matter if both the slight and vengeance are manifested primarily as pixels on the screen, they would constitute a "slight" and "a vengeance" in relation to something.

As stated earlier, to describe an emotion we must describe the object and the reasons the subject has for relating to the object in the particular way. We observed also that the more the subject cares about the object of the emotion, the stronger the emotion. As we know that the subject is a human existing in the world not, we already know something about her concerns, wishes, and desires *qua* her being a human. Based on this knowledge we can rationalize about the reasons she has for relating to the object in the way she does. For most lucid adults a raging person wielding a knife in a dark alley would be an object of fear because of human flesh is vulnerable to knife stabs and rage implies a lack of reason. The human condition can thus be conceived as an inter-subjectively shared set of reasons for caring about certain kinds of objects of emotions.

In relation to humans' being in the world, we have fair reasons for constituting a raging lunatic as an object of fear, in other words, a threat. If we assumed, like Solomon (1993, 160), that the ultimate project or goal behind emotions was not merely unreflective survival but maximisation of "personal dignity and self-esteem", the range of the knowledge we can take as given and utilise in our descriptions would expand even more.

Like Solomon (2003, 72) points out, that which we conceptualise as the "object" of the emotion is only "its minimal description, only its primary focus" and ultimately, every emotion's object is the world. Thus, not unlike describing emotions outside the context of computer game play, articulating the details of emotions in play requires us to look at the relation between the subject and the world.

However, like the example of fear arising while playing *Half-Life 2* exemplifies, some emotions involved in computer game play appear as irrational, trivial, or paradoxical if we try to make sense of them against the backdrop of the conditions by which we exist in this world as humans, or in other words against the human condition. The slight presented by the barnacle is only a trivial slight in relation to the human condition. In contrast, consider *PainStation* (2001), an artist-built game device which enhances the classical *Pong* (1972) by punishing the player with electric shocks, burns and slashes.[17] The slight presented by the punishment given by *PainStation* would not be neither trivial nor paradoxical against the human condition. The mix of fear and anticipation arising when playing *PainStation* and knowing that there will be bodily punishment but not knowing its exact time of execution, makes perfect sense in relation to human condition.

These considerations can be summarised as what is perhaps the key questions to which we can arrive based on the arguments presented so far as follows: Against what kind of conditions can we describe the logic underlying emotions in play as sensible and as retaining their phenomenological integrities? In the context of the enigmatic example of barnacle in *Half-Life 2*, it amounts to asking: In relation to what is the altered agency constituted as a slight and my shotgun blast as a vengeance?

2.4.1 The confusing "world" of *Half-Life 2*

Holding on to the notion of emotion as an interpretation of the world, it makes intuitive sense that the logics of emotions in play can be described as sensible if we

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[17]A detailed introduction about *PainStation* can be found in Laso 2008.

take them not as "interpretations of the world", but "interpretations of a 'world' of the game." Their logics do not seem to need further explanation if we evaluate them against the conditions of "being in the world" of *Half-Life 2.* Given what the barnacle is capable of, it is only lucid to constitute it as frightening in the "world of *Half-Life 2*". Thus, the approximation of emotions as "interpretations of the world" seems quite useful in that it manages to capture the coherence and meaningfulness of the experience.

To defend emotions in play as "interpretations of the world of the game", we would have to be more specific with what is meant with "being in the world" of a game. This kind of inquiry could begin with looking at the "world" as a separate notion, as in "world" of a game. Would all games have "worlds?" What would be the common quality that justifies the use of the notion of "world" to describe them? While the questions concerning the metaphysics of computer game "worlds" might be interesting from a philosophical perspective, these pursuits would not be relevant for the purposes here, as, in coherence with the principle of intentionality, the subject and the world should be retained in unity. Being able to hold to the viewpoint building on the principle of intentionality and bridging it with the paradigm of game studies might, perhaps amount to what Sobchack (1992, 28) referred to as reanimating the sedimented and reified scientific abstractions.

We have observed so far that the idea of emotions as "interpretations of the world" is an approximation that can be articulated in more detail by referring to the notions of, for example, intentionality and the human condition. In other words, the idea of "emotion as an interpretation of the world" makes sense only when unpacked with the more detailed notions. Thus, the single notion of 'world' taken apart from its original context, would not get us very far in unpacking the nature of the relationship between the player and the game. For example, even if we had metaphysical proof of the existence of a "game world", that proof alone would not help us understanding the contribution of the "game world" to the constitution of the emotions' objects.

To understand emotions in play as phenomenologically similar to all other emotions, instead of as somehow 'fake', 'simulated', or 'fictional', it is crucial to be able to describe the extent to which the experience of computer game play resembles the experience of being in the world. As the notion of 'world' is an approximation, a signifying shorthand for number of more fine-grained concepts, to understand the fear of the barnacle as an "interpretation of the world of *Half-Life 2*", it is necessary to understand how that approximation relates or translates to the experience of computer game play. In other words, it is necessary to find out how could we use the notions intended to describe being in the world to describe computer game play. Stressing the *in*-aspect of "being in the world" could perhaps lead to a spatial account of game world, but that might be too quick a solution, as we have no reason to assume that "being in" a game world would resemble being in the actual world.

Constituting a perspective from which the jump from "being in the world" to "playing a game" could plausibly be made, seems like one of the main tasks in making the proposed argument. Only once such a perspective is constructed and can be defended can we take the approximation of emotion as an "interpretation of the world" and adapt it to the study of computer game play. It seems interesting to be able to find out the extent to which the paradigm of game studies can assist us in this project.

2.4.2 Towards an experiential perspective to gameplay

This chapter is perhaps best concluded by rounding up the challenge for argument and analysis originating in the theory discussed so far as a need to embrace ontological hybridity in the object of study.

We have established emotions as fundamentally intertwined in all human activities and experiences, as means of making sense of one's surroundings. Thus, claiming that "emotions" would take place as discrete phenomena that can be taken apart from experience of being in the world would not be sensible. We must bear in mind

that when we use the concept of emotion, perhaps in a potentially successful way in the contexts of our personal projects like the one I am undertaking here, to refer to the particular kind of sense-making, we are constructing an artificial border around something which perhaps is not inherently separated from related similar mental phenomena, like judgements and desires. Atomism and forcing the experience into pre-determined categories are not the solutions, like we already discussed.

The experience and activity of computer game play are facilitated in a profound way by different technologies. One could not undergo the experience of computer game play without the computer running the software piece and all the other conditions that they bring along. Given that consumers are willing to push forward the technological developments by exchanging their monies to newest-generation gaming consoles, we can assume that the technology has in fact something significant to do with the players' experiences.

Thus, to understand and describe the player's experiences we need a conceptual framework which can account for the phenomenon of computer game play as extending from the technological to the subjective. This kind of framework would, in other words, understand gameplay as a relationship, perhaps a symbiotic one, between the technology and the human subject, an ontological hybrid consisting of both subjective and technological qualities.

To explain why a barnacle is constituted as a threat in the "world" of *Half-Life 2* we need a notion of the game being played with which it is possible to account for the experienced significance of in-game events and objects. This would be a notion that does not describe games as systems, objects, or processes, but as *games* as the player experiences them *as played*, allowing the description to make use of the concepts that lie behind the approximation "world of *Half-Life 2*". Developing this conceptual framework is the task of the upcoming chapters.

Chapter 3

Approaching gameplay

In the previous chapter emotions were conceptualised in terms of their *experiential* structures, as being about objects (*intentionality*) that are *constituted* out of things in the world, in relation to one's condition of being in the world. Attempting to apply concepts introduced in the previous chapter in the context of computer games and their playings without reducing games to "black boxes" or players into resembling Pavlov's dogs, calls for a perspective that can incorporate subjective qualities into the object of study.

In the context of this project, an object of study in which subjective and material qualities coexist, could perhaps be approximated as the overlap of the player's experience and the game artefact: grasping the emotion to the extent it involves the computer game and the computer game to the extent it is involved in the emotion.

As we discussed in the previous chapter, regarding the emergence of an emotion, the conception the subject has about the object of the emotion is more important than the properties of the object as existing in the world. This sets certain requirements: applying the phenomenological theory of emotions to describe empirical reality seems to call for a perspective that allows access to first-person experiential knowledge. The phenomena in empirical reality thus described would, subsequently, be characterised by "mineness" (*cf.* Moran 2000, 240). According to Legrand (2009, 91), mineness

refers to "pre-reflective self-consciousness", which "is an *intrinsic* feature of conscious mental states"[1]. Legrand (2009, 94) argues that due to pre-reflectivity, all conscious experiences which I undergo, regardless of their qualitative contents,

> share a specific dimension in the fact that they are all given from the first-person perspective, they are given (at least tacitly) as my experiences, as experiences I am undergoing: they feel like something to me.

In the context of this project, this implies that the only player whose perspective I can adopt for analytical purposes is myself as a player, and the emotions described will be, correspondingly, my emotions as they feel like something to me.

While focusing solely on my own emotions would perhaps be beneficial for therapeutical purposes, the challenge here is to attain inter-subjective plausibility for the claims made. In this chapter I postulate a difference between focusing on a game as experienced by its player and a game as existing/taking place in the world, and explore the possibilities of approaching games by embodying the player's perspective.

The player's perspective, differs in many regards from the "scientific perspective" from which the *de facto* methodological paradigm of humanities-inclined game studies[2] (*e.g.* Konzack 2002, Aarseth 2003, Consalvo and Dutton 2006) proceeds. The player's perspective is always tied to the temporality of a particular playing, and in comparison to the perspective of 'perfect knowledge' from which the methodological paradigm of game studies looks at games, it in the cases of some games offers only a

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[1]With "intrinsic", Legrand (2009, 94) means that pre-reflectivity can be neither peeled away from conscious mental states so that they would become non-conscious or added to non-conscious states so that they would become conscious. Rather, Legrand (2009, 94) argues that pre-reflectivity constitutes conscious mental states.

[2]The field of game studies is best characterised as multidisciplinary, encompassing approaches toward games from a diversity of methodological and epistemological premises. As Aarseth (2001) suggests, "[w]e all enter this field from somewhere else, from anthropology, sociology, narratology, semiotics, film studies, etc" and whatever we had learnt before attending to computer games shapes the ways we think they are best understood. Considering game studies as *field*, it would make little sense to speak of its methodological paradigm(s). However, following Mäyrä (2005), we can also consider the *discipline* of game studies as a context in which talk about a methodological paradigm is relevant. Acknowledging the diversity of approaches within the field, Mäyrä calls for "a discipline at the heart of a recognised academic field, with an identity of its own", a discipline which would contribute "concepts and theoretical models that properly address" the fundamentals of games. While I would go perhaps further than Mäyrä by claiming that *computer games*, due to their technological materiality, require approaches that are different from those with which we can assess games in general, I intend my methodological critique in section 3.2 and the proposed approach in chapter 4 as contributing to the development envisioned by Mäyrä.

'partial' access, and is very often 'misguided' about the affordances and intentions hard-coded in the game artifact.

The task of this chapter is to prepare ground for articulating a phenomenological position toward the player's experience. Sustaining an intimacy with the paradigm of game studies, it is assumed that defining the object of study as extending toward the subjective involves inspecting and perhaps revising the connotations vested in the notions of "computer game" and "computer game play". However, in practical terms, there should not be much of a problem in coupling the phenomenological perspective on emotions with game studies, as in both paradigms it is acceptable that the researcher doubles as the researched subject. For example, whereas a phenomenologist may reflect on her own experience of perception, the game scholar may draw an example from how she herself survived the streets of Liberty City. But a significant difference emerges as soon as one thinks beyond the practical level, for example about the role of 'subjective' impressions in research: while the game scholar has to keep his/her subjectivity at bay to retain clear picture of the object under scrutiny, the phenomenologist takes the subjective experience as the premise and begins with what is given in the experience.

Perhaps the coupling of phenomenological theory of emotions (and the experiential perspective it implies) with the paradigm of game studies could be eased with careful articulation of the object of study. This articulation would acknowledge and make visible how the phenomenological perspective differs from the perspective paradigmatic in game studies. This entails exploring and pointing out the extent to which the phenomenologist and the game studies scholar share a common object of study, the extent to which they share the meanings vested in the terms 'game' and 'play'.

Outline of this chapter

I will begin this chapter by acknowledging the fundamental necessity of the player's involvement in the object of study for game studies. This necessity stems already from the notion of 'game' and it can be observed both in conceptual or "philosophical" dimensions and in the empirical reality. It carries onto any attempts of making sense of games, as all these attempts have to negotiate the extent in which they are prepared to account for playing (or for games 'being played').

Once one has acknowledged the interdependency of games and playing – that one cannot study a game without it being played, and playing a game necessarily implies taking the player's perspective – one might conclude the that notions like "player's perspective" and a "game-as-played" would be tautologies as what they signify is already part and parcel of accepted practice of game studies. However, that would be too quick a conclusion, as there is a difference between *studying the game by playing it* and *studying the game as played*, I argue.

In section 3.1, to recognize and articulate the difference between studying a game by playing it and studying a game as played, I will look at the relation between the notions of *game* and *play*. I will identify their simultaneous conceptual interdependency and epistemological incommensurability. I will identify two distinctive ideas of play underlying the single notion, and point out certain limitations to what can be achieved by calling something a game.

Building on the curious relationship between play and games, I will postulate two somewhat troubled tendencies to be avoided, which emphasize one, game or play, on the expense of the other. For both tendencies there are certain 'excuses'; designers have their pragmatic reasons not to problematise the relation between the game artefact and the activity of play, whereas those conducting for example large-scale survey studies, can be, by way of their methodology, unable to account for details in individual game artefacts influencing the humans they study. However, for the purposes of understanding games as they are involved in their players' emotions, it

is necessarily to look into the very relationship between games and playing instead of bracketing it aside.

To provide further rationale for the distinction between *studying the game by playing it* and *studying the game as played* I will, in section 3.2, elaborate on the ways, in both epistemological and methodological senses, in which we can learn about (the playings of) computer games. Whereas the first section of this chapter could be considered a conceptual analysis, the second section concentrates on the practices of studying games, and the implications of the differences in these practices. By contextualising my position in relation to a contemporary debate about a distinction between "studying games" and "studying players" (*e.g.* Aarseth 2006, 1-2, Calleja 2007, 12, Smith 2007b, 242, Aarseth 2007b, 131, Frasca 2007, 41, Bogost 2008, 26) I intend to show that the 'technical' necessity for games to be played in order to exist as games proper does not mean we could take the player's perspective for granted.

While there is a significant difference between the positions of "studying games" and "studying players", namely in their methodologies and objects of study, I point out that the positions are epistemologically similar inasmuch as they proceed from a third-person perspective and carefully negotiate their ways *around* rather than *into* the *subjectivity* of the researcher-player and the *particularity* of his/her playings.

Describing how games become involved in their players' emotions is not possible if the player's subjectivity is shunned aside, as this kind of descriptions necessarily build on the *experienced significance of game content*; for example, *how*, and on which grounds is a barnacle in *Half-Life 2* constituted as an object of fear (*i.e.* as 'that frightening barnacle'). Drawing on Sartre's phenomenological critique of psychology as a science, I argue that from the third-person orientation manifest in both perspectives identified as 'studying games' and 'studying players' we can only *speculate* about the experienced significance of game content.

I also suggest that regarding player's experience, there is an "explanatory gap" for game studies proceeding from the third-person perspective. Thus, I conclude this

chapter by suggesting, in subsection 3.2.3, that for the purposes of understanding the player's emotions by way of experienced significance of game content, a shift of perspective to that of the player is necessary, and discuss what this perspective means for the definition of the object of study and the ways in which we can learn about these objects.

3.1   Unpacking gameplay: a conceptual analysis

> Play the game the game gets played
> – Uffie: Pop the Glock

Recently, game studies has been criticised for taking for granted the affinity, whether conceptual or empirical, between computer games and playing (*e.g.* Kirkpatrick 2007, Malaby 2007). Certainly the relationship between the two sustains a scrutiny, which I will undertake in this chapter, taking the existing critiques into account.

To begin this section, I acknowledge the importance of the player's involvement in a game. I proceed to problematise the relationship between the notions of game and play in the context of game studies: they are simultaneously mutually dependent and fundamentally incommensurable.

I will then look into these notions in more detail. I will identify two distinct aspects of play; an attitude and an activity, and discuss potential problems originating in the ways in which the label "games" is being used. Based on these observations, I articulate, to avoid similar hardships myself, two misguided tendencies, determinism and solipsism, both emphasing one – game or play – at the cost of the other. However, as I point out, there are 'excuses' legitimising these positions for certain purposes.

3.1.1   On the necessity of there being a player

Within game studies it is acknowledged that the player is fundamentally involved in the object of study. This is perhaps best illustrated by drawing a comparison to

non-playable media. For example, Aarseth (1997, 4) observes that the reader of a traditional text is in a position comparable to that of a spectator at a soccer game:

> He cannot have the player's pleasure of influence: "Let's see what happens when I do *this*."

As long as we are concerning ourselves with *games*, the player's involvement is a necessity already on a conceptual level: to conceive something as a game necessarily implies filling the position(s) of the player(s) with something, that is, conceiving something as the player(s) of the game.

That with which the position is filled does not necessarily have to be human, but can be anything ranging from rays of light (*cf.* Gadamer 2001 [1960], 105) and kittens (*cf.* Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 303) to the minimal and abstract *Bob* and *Alice* summoned to illustrate economic game theory (*cf.* Smith 2007b, 86-95). To put it simply, for games to exist as games proper, they necessitate being played. Subsequently, for something to be played requires the to be a player. These conditions are somewhere between ontology and natural language.

The necessity of there being a player in a game carries from the ontological and conceptual onto the empirical; also the phenomena we call "games" in the empirical reality require their players to become fulfilled. Calling a chess board and pieces a "game" without a reference, through the activity of play, to those who make the decisions to move the pieces on the board would be an arbitrary reference to an assumed purpose of the artefacts.

As the player's involvement is fundamental to the phenomenon under scrutiny across different levels of abstraction, it seems to come naturally that striving for a full and faithful description of such a phenomenon requires accommodating this involvement in one's analyses and arguments. The necessity of the player's involvement gives pragmatic rise to a methodological requirement too, that those who wish to understand a game often have to step into the shoes of the player. While secondary sources may supply valuable additional material, to study a game not as a 'black box' one needs to play it (Aarseth 2003, 3).

However, as the next sections will demonstrate, there is a difference between *studying the game by playing it* and *studying the game as played*. This difference is not so much in the methods used to study the object, as it about the object of study itself and the epistemological premises from which it can be approached.

3.1.2   Deconstructing a curious coupling

Game and play are concepts which often make best sense when used together. Humans, especially children, often play without there being any pronounced game involved, but attempting to find out whether a previously unseen object unearthed at an archaeological excavation is a game or not requires one to find out whether it can be played.

Reading contemporary game studies may lead one to think that play and game are not only interrelated but also interchangeable. This affinity implies that we can use the qualities of one to explain the other, as for example Juul (2003, 31-32) has done in the literature review leading to his "Classical Game Model": in a table summarizing earlier definitions of a game, Huizinga's (1998 [1938]) notions about *play* sit commensurately next to Crawford's (1982) opinion of what *a game* is.

There are indeed cases in which it may be lucid and productive to assume game and play as almost synonymous. Those interested in games as formal systems or as artefacts to be designed may dismiss the difference between play and game as trivial, and take the focus on the overlap of the two as a given. Game designers communicate with players primarily through the game artefacts they produce. As Dovey and Kennedy (2006, 116) suggest, the computer games seem to demand a "preferred performance" from their players. Hard-coding rules, as regulations for behaviour, into the game artefacts is the game designers' most powerful method for shaping the player's performance. For example, if the 'system' of the game favours player two, player two will most likely be favoured when the game is played. For a multitude of purposes this "most likely" may be the highest necessary resolution

and the sufficient level of detail. However, while the rules of a game may appear imbalanced to an 'objective' analysis, almost anything can happen when the rules actualise as the game gets played.

Players who, apart from playing the game, are able to do other things with and to it, may cheat or spike each other's drinks. The allegedly advantageous position of player two may be embodied by an infant who can barely tell X from O on a PlayStation controller. Flaws, like overheating GPUs and network congestions may occur in the infrastructure facilitating play. A swarm of grasshoppers may appear, distracting the players. But even if we bracket this kind of "empirical" distractions, play and game are not even conceptually interchangeable. Walther (2003) suggests that

> Play is an open-ended territory in which make-believe and world-building are crucial factors. Games are confined areas that challenge the interpretation and optimizing of rules and tactics – not to mention time and space.

Games need to be played, and when that happens the open-endedness is introduced into the rigid confined area of the game. In other words: the playing of a game often transcends its rules and materiality. Quite an illustrating example is the observation made by Frasca (2007, 174), that in the (non-computer) game *Twister. The Game that Ties You Up in Knots.* (1966),

> sexual performance is not required by rules. However, due to the gameplay, it is likely that a player will end up being 'too close' to another players body.

Were we to understand *Twister* solely based on what we can learn from looking at the game's rules and/or material existence, we would miss one of the key attractions of the game. However, the game, as it exists in the world, cannot be ignored either: if a particular *Twister* mat is slippery, the game of *Twister* as played (including the exchanges between and experiences of the players it involves) is rather different from a game of *Twister* played with a mat with more traction.

Thus it seems that there is a curious relationship between game and play, characterised simultaneously by a mutual dependence and a foundational incommensurability. In the next two subsections I will, by engaging in conceptual analysis, describe

in more detail what lies behind the notions of play and game and by doing so shed light on the origins of the relationship between the two.

3.1.3 Play as an *activity* and an *attitude*

We may encounter two individuals handling pieces of laminated cardboard. By observing that activity for a while, we can recognize that the subjects are actually playing. Perhaps we know the rules of *Uno* (1971) and see that the individuals are behaving according to the rules of that particular game. Or perhaps we haven't heard of *Uno*, not to mention seeing it being played, but our attention is caught by patterns we are familiar with from the context of play, like moving a whole stack of pieces of laminated cardboard aside when a certain kind of piece was placed on top, or asking "Is is it my turn or yours?". Based on paying attention to what the two individuals are doing, observing the events in sufficient detail, we can conclude that what they are doing is play. For this conclusion, it is not necessary to concern ourselves with what the players are thinking and feeling.

For Gadamer (2001 [1960], 105), who emphasized the "primacy of play over the consciousness of the players", play itself was important, not what goes on in the minds of those engaged in it. For him, the essence of play was to be found from the play itself, which he characterised as a *to-and-fro movement*. For this view, "it makes no difference who or what performs this movement" (Gadamer 2001 [1960], 105) and thus the players can be kittens, rays of light, or individuals capable of cogitations. Even though Gadamer acknowledges that play needs its players through whom play can achieve its presentation, in order to understand play we do not necessarily have to understand the players, and vice versa, by understanding play we do not necessarily understand the players. Vikhagen (2004, 5) suggests that for Gadamer's notion of *Spiel*,

> the player's role is secondary, or more like a catalyst, a way to instigate play's own purpose.

For Gadamer, the meaning of play stands detached from the (conscious) behaviour and attitude of the players. Like Rodriguez (2006) puts it, instead of saying "X and Y are playing", Gadamer would say that "there is playing going on."

If we know the structure of the game being played, (as in a general structure found in all games, or the structure of the particular game), we can postulate a more specific notion of play, accounting for how the events will actualise in relation to the structure of the game. Instead of referring to the activity as mere "playing" one can be more specific by referring to, for example, "the playing of *Uno*". As we pause to reflect what kind of phenomena we are informing ourselves about, we observe that it is play as an *activity* (or perhaps as a *process*).

Also Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 303-305), when, in *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, attempting to define what play is, pick up the idea of play as an activity. They differentiate between "Game Play", "Ludic Activities" and "Being Playful". "Game Play" is the narrowest of their categories, the "formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play." "Ludic Activities", then, are play activities, which include not only games, "but all of the non-game behaviours we also think of as 'playing'," such as "a kitten batting a ball of yarn[…]" or high school kids throwing a frisbee. The third category of Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 303-305), "Being Playful" refers "also to the idea of being in a playful state of mind, where a spirit of play is injected into some other action."

When looking at playing taking place, we can easily establish its status as "Game Play" by means of external observation. Given we have a sample large enough, patterns will arise which are enough to conclude the interaction is formal. This is not unlike the previous example about recognising that individuals are playing *Uno* rather than playing around with pieces of laminated cardboard. Regarding the second category of Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 304), "Ludic Activities", again by observing we can see if the participants, for example the high school kids with the

frisbee, are "testing the limits and boundaries" of the structures within which the activity unfolds and "finding ways of moving around and inside them." For example, we can observe that they apply a sophisticated curve in their throws in order not to hit a tree standing in between themselves, not to mention the throws they make with eyes closed, from behind their backs, and so on. Recognising something that fits into either of the two categories, "Game Play" and "Ludic Activities", is perfectly possible based solely on observations from an external viewpoint.

The first two categories, into which phenomena can be classified based on external observation, can encompass playing carried out by all kinds of actors, including non-humans. The 'play' that is portrayed by the first two categories, appears epistemologically commensurate with Gadamer's *Spiel*, meaning that the definition does not rest on the properties of thinking and feeling (human) subjects. However, the third category, "Being Playful" warrants a shift of perspective as it requires us to take the subject's mindset into account.

Salen and Zimmerman (2003) seem to confuse two aspects of play that call for different approaches – the *activity* and the *attitude* – as one. The separateness of these two has been already established since Caillois (2001 [1958], 43), who distinguished between the "purely formal qualities" and the "various psychological attitudes that govern play".

Thus it seems that the model presented by Salen and Zimmerman (2003) attempts to posit formality, a property of game activity, and playfulness, a property of human subject, on one single spectrum. While one end calls for external observation, the other end requires us to the subjectivity into account.[3] Perhaps, instead of being forced onto a single spectrum, the relationship between games as systems and

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[3]This is not to suggest that there could ever be a model portraying any phenomena without distortion and/or reduction. However, it would only exemplify best scholarly practices to point out when this kind of simplifications are being made. But, we should point out that the subtitle of the book of Salen and Zimmerman (2003) is not "Game theory fundamentals" but "Game Design Fundamentals": perhaps for the purposes of game design it is not necessary to problematise the relation between game and play to the extent demonstrated here. I will discuss the relation between game research and game design in more detail in subsection 3.1.5

playfulness as a trait of experience would be best illustrated with model with more than two dimensions.

While the empirical world can provide us with examples of overlapping activities and attitudes, also regarding games and playing, we should not take their unity for granted or as an essential feature. Being playful is an attitude that a subject can adopt, supposedly regardless of the qualities of the activity the subject is engaged in at the moment. As Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 303) put it: the "spirit of play" can be "injected into some other action". This is also observed by Apter (1991), whose example (which we discussed in section 2.3) is about playing golf in a 'non-playful mode', and working in a 'playful mode'.

Caillois (2001 [1958], 6) refers to the *experience* of play as he emphasizes the nature of play as an attitude. He insists that "play must be defined as a free and voluntary activity, a source of joy and amusement". Many of his concepts related to play and game build on or are derived from the playing subject's specific mental state, a mode of experiencing, or a mode of being aware of the world. According to Caillois (2001 [1958], 33), the notions of "agôn", "alea", "mimicry" and "ilinx", each referring to a particular kind of play, connote a precise "psychological attitude". Also Fink (1968) rooted his understanding of play on its subjective characteristics, which led him to understand play as an "oasis of happiness".

Malaby (2007, 96), too, is aware of a distinction between play as "a form of activity" and "a mode of experience". He problematises the assigning of 'experiential' or 'subjective' qualities of *play* on *games*. He provides a lucid synthesis of what we have become to know as 'play', as he writes that it

> commonly signifies a form of activity with three intrinsic features. It is *separable* from everyday life (especially against "work"; it exists within a "magic circle"), *safe* ("consequence free" or nonproductive) and *pleasurable* or "fun" (normatively positive).

He moves on to suggest that none of the features he describes in *play* "holds as an intrinsic, universal feature of games when they are examined empirically". Furthermore, by drawing on Stevens (1980), Malaby (2007, 100) argues that with

one's notion of play, one cannot sit on two chairs simultaneously: if we are using the notion of play

> to signal a state or *mode of human experience* [...] we cannot simultaneously use it reliably as a label for a *kind* or *form* of distinct human activity. (Something that allows us to differentiate between activities that "are play" and those that "are not").

At this stage it does not seem necessary to form an opinion about *which* (if *any*) particular qualities are definitive to what we refer to as play: for example, if the feelings of 'amusement' and 'happiness' are essential to play. While I will return to this topic in subsections 4.2.5 and 4.2.6, these observations about the notion of play can be concluded by pointing out that in the concept of play, as it has been established, there are two distinct ideas, that Malaby (2007) suggests are potentially incompatible. One concerns with play as an *activity* and the other as an *attitude*. While the distinction between the two is primarily conceptual (meaning that in the experience of play the two dimensions are quite often inexctricably intertwined), it still has an important methodological ramification: play as an attitude is not something we could observe like we can observe play as an activity.

In the remainder of this subsection I will demonstrate, in the respective order, that establishing something as play as an activity and as an attitude call for different perspectives.

Regarding play as activity, the events which we can observe and grasp, like "a kitten batting a ball of yarn" (Salen and Zimmerman 2003), or asking "Is it my turn or yours?", or shuffling and dealing cards, *together (eventually) make up what the definition refers to*: the activity of playing (a specific game).

For example, the *activity* of playing *Monopoly* (1935) consists of taking turns, throwing dice, moving tokens across the boards, exchanging play money for property, and so on. If we assumed *a priori* the activity's ontological status as playing, and attempted to arrive at a description of that activity, we could observe the activity for a while. We could then provide an account of the playing of Monopoly that would consist of descriptions, abstractions and conclusions based on what we directly

observed: a game where the players move between properties, occasionally pick up cards, and so on, according to a particular logic.

If we had more general aims, by observing for example a number of board games being played, we could perhaps arrive a definition of board game play, which assumedly would mention turn-taking, tokens, et cetera. However, we should acknowledge that any general definition of *play as an activity* would be arbitrary and exist by an agreement. It would not be an unraveling of an 'essence' of play as an activity. Like Walther (2003) suggests, paraphrasing Bateson (1972):

> play is not the name of some empirical behaviour, but rather the name of a certain framing of actions.

Perhaps tomorrow there will be a new kind of game that leads to previously unseen patterns of activity. For example, adding *Kimble* (1967) to one's sample of board games would require one to exclude dice-*throwing* from the definition, as the game employs a dice trapped inside a hemispherical plastic container at the centre of the board. The dice is used to generate a random number by a push of the container, triggering a spring mechanism underneath the container, thus rolling the dice. The previously unseen patterns of activity would prompt us to question the framing of actions we had become accustomed to call play.

Perhaps we should not even be striving to arrive at an *essence* of play as an activity. This is suggested by Levinas (1969), a philosopher in the French phenomenological tradition, perhaps best known for his treatment of ethics, who recognises that one "can transform the curse of labor into sport". Levinas (1969, 133) concludes that:

> An activity does not derive its meaning and its value from an ultimate and unique goal, as though the world formed one system of use-references whose term touches our very existence.

However, giving up the quest for an essential definition of play as an *activity* does not erode the descriptive power of the distinction between play and non-play as referring to subjective experience, or *attitude*, as long as we are not assuming anything about what it means for someone to play.

If we were concerning ourselves with play as an *attitude* instead of as an activity, the relation between our direct observation the phenomenon under scrutiny would be somewhat different. That which we could grasp by means of external observations – like the gleeful smile on the face of someone who managed to avoid a loss that seemed to have been determined already – would be just *symptoms of the attitude, not anything making up what the definition refers to:* play as an attitude (*e.g.* feelings of amusement, happiness, a particular relation to the one's spatiotemporal existence, etc).

Thus, if we acknowledge that play refers to both an activity and an attitude, and that in order to learn about the latter instead of only about its symptoms we need to adopt the player's perspective, we may conclude that no attempt that looks at computer game play from a perspective "external" to the playing subject can ever achieve a full and faithful description of computer game play. This is not to say that *any* attempt would necessarily ever achieve this goal, but that the aforementioned inability is an *a priori* deficiency of the external, or scientific third-person, perspective.

However, had we access to the experiential knowledge from a first-person perspective, seeing beyond the symptoms would not be problematic: what has been approximated as "amusingness", for example, is supposedly a sum of qualities given in the immediate experience about an activity. If I happen to pause and self-reflect, I am able to provide an infallible subjective judgement about if something is amusing or not, even if that requires me to negotiate a number of conflicting beliefs.

3.1.4   On calling something a 'game'

Jablonski (2001, 124), writing about the emergence of the field of library science, notes that there used to be a time when a chemist "had to state to which definition of matter she was going to adhere" in the beginning of every lab report. This anecdote is not too far from the reality of contemporary computer game studies, as deciding

on what the notion of "game" is applicable to is a recurring theme in debates within computer game studies. (*cf.* Malaby 2007, Aarseth 2007b, Frasca 2007, Juul 2005a)

Juul (2003, 35), when introducing his "Classical Game Model," postulates a definition which, due to it being conceived by means of synthesis of existing definitions, captures the common features in many contemporary definitions suggests that

> [a] game is a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable.

Proposing the definition as a criterion to which things could be compared, Juul suggests the term "borderline case" as referring to a thing resembling a game while lacking some of its defining characteristics. With the Classical Game Model, one is able to differentiate between things one can choose to call games, non-games and borderline cases. Not unlike the applications of the concepts "perverted play" (Fink 1968, 21) and "corrupted games" (Caillois 2001 [1958], 43-55), when speaking of the formal characteristics of games, the notion of borderline case is useful in detailing the ways in which games can differ from each other. From this kind of viewpoint it is possible to exclude a thing from the category of things called "games" in case the thing does not have the required characteristics (*e.g.* it cannot be won, etc).

Gadamer (2001 [1960], 110)[4], who was perhaps the first ludologist in that he was more interested in 'games themselves' than in the players, suggests that the playing of a game is a way for "an activity to become a work" and thus gain independence from the subjects engaged in it. Gadamer refers to this as "transformation into structure." Roughly, this means that the idea of 'a game' allows us to ask "Do you remember when we played hop-scotch?" instead of asking "Do you remember when played so that we drew the figure on the asphalt and [...]?" It is the "structure" of the game that allows us to play the 'same game' over and over again.

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[4]We must acknowledge a certain ambiguity when interpreting Gadamer, as the original text in German does not differentiate between play and game but encompasses them both under the notion *Spiel*.

Gadamer's 'ludology' is ontologically on a safe ground, as for him play/game remains an abstract and he uses the notion of *Spiel* mainly to account for experiences with artworks in the wider context of hermeneutics. The idea of a "game" as an independent free-standing notion faces more trouble when it is extended to account for phenomena which by definition have actually existing correlates, like 'computer game play' does. Grondin (2001), a philosopher who has studied Gadamer's hermeneutics, suggests that "the concept of play marks [...] the boundary of the objectifiable", elaborating on the insistence of Gadamer (2001 [1960], 108), that

> the mode of being of play does not permit the player to relate to the play[/game] as to an object.

It seems that the 'game' we would be dealing with if we applied Juul's definition is some sort of ontological mongrel Gadamer was perhaps consciously avoiding; simultaneously an object (as something on which observable properties like 'rule-basedness' can be attributed), a process (implied by the temporal dimension allowing for 'outcome' and 'consequences'), and an experience (implied by the property of being 'challenging'). Juul (2005a, 43) acknowledges a certain ontological vagueness of his definition, as he points out a duality in what "game" refers to: "A static object or artifact or an activity or event that players perform". He breaks those notions down, so that "the game *as an object* is", according to Juul (2005a, 44), "a list of rules with the property that a computer or a group of players can implement unambiguously", whereas the game "as an *activity* [...] is a system that changes state according to a set of rules that are implemented by humans, computers, or natural laws."

Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 303) have articulated the relationship between game and play in a way reminiscent of the hen-and-egg problem by discussing which one of the two is more fundamental. They outline two distinctive stances regarding the relationship between game and play: on one hand, games can be taken as a "subset of play", constituting the "formalized part of everything we might consider to be play." On the other hand, "play is an element of games", their "essential

component". It should be, however, pointed out that as Salen and Zimmerman (2003) outline play as being "an element of games", they refer to a "game" that is their own specific ontological construct, consisting of "rules", "play" and "culture"[5].

What makes discussing Salen and Zimmerman's take on the relation between play and game relevant in a section dedicated to calling something a game is the observation of Frasca (2007, 40), that while the first stance, "games as subset of play", implies that "the term game is understood as an activity", as something "within which players participate", the second stance, play being an element of games, implies understanding game "as an object." Once one has objectified[6] it, nothing prevents one from assigning properties onto it. Frasca (2007, 40) suggests that

> when we view games as objects, we frame them as a system with different elements (rules, objects such as tokens, a particular space such as the play field and the play time).

Interestingly, Frasca and Juul are in a partial contrast regarding games as activities: Juul associates the notion of "activity" with a "system", whereas according to Frasca "activity" implies player-centric perspective and only when games are recognised as "objects" can we grasp their systemic properties. Quarrelling over the relevance of games' various properties and required characteristics is a meaningful ontological (in the sense of computer science, not in the sense of metaphysics) project, not unlike the question from where these properties should be sought (*e.g.* from the abstract 'game system' of game or the tangible 'game artefact'.)

Tavinor (2009, 17-18), concerned with defining computer games, articulates a project of searching for an essentialist definition of computer games as a search for "necessary and sufficient conditions [. . .] to explicate the *essence* of the defined term [. . . .]" Tavinor sees the essential definitions, as used in philosophy, as parallel to "empirical" or "real definitions", which within sciences are used to correct false

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[5]Perhaps this exemplifies what Boellstorff (2006), quoted in Lammes (2007, 26), means when stating that "most authors in game studies employ a rather narrow definition of culture."

[6]It should be evident, but perhaps it should still be pointed out that the notion of "object" here, including analyses of Gadamer, Juul and Frasca, is to be distinguished from "an artefact."

nominal connotations of vernacular terms. Thus, there is affinity between the projects of essentialism and (scientific) realism.

In the previous subsection we observed the difficulty of delineating the essence of "play as an activity", originating partly in the potentiality of a new kind of game surfacing to question the prevailing conceptions about the nature of the activity of play. Thus, we concluded, that any definition of play as an activity is arbitrary and exists by agreement. Tavinor (2009, 18) makes a similar remark concerning specifically games and not play, and affirms our observation that the notion of game might be a signifying shorthand rather than a natural class of things, as he suggests that the essentialist

> ambition for realism needs to be tempered by the likelihood that games lack a substantive essence and that a nominal aspect to this definition is unavoidable: videogames may sit together in a category *in name only*.

The option Tavinor (2009, 25-32) chooses is to give up the essentialist quest, and instead to arrive at a disjunctive definition, which refers to the way of defining a term by listing a number of conditions, which are not all individually necessary but together, when combined in a particular manner sufficient for something to be counted as that to which the term refers. If the disjunctive definition runs into problems with a new kind of object, it can be extended with a new condition that describes the previously unknown object.

Despite Tavinor's critique of essentialism, the idea of a "game's essence" seems potentially less problematic with the more specific and thus significantly narrower definitions of particular games. The idea of a game's "essence" makes sense especially in the context of intellectual property rights. For example, consider a commercially produced game with transmedial[7] potential, such as *Monopoly*. We might say that what the US Patent 2026082: "Board Game Apparatus" (Darrow 1935) was intended as covering in fact the very "essence" of *Monopoly*. A similar protective attempt is observed by Jordan (2009, 6), who mentions that *The Tetris Company*, created after

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[7]This terms refers to the possibility of the "same game" being implemented on a variety of platforms. I discuss this topic in more detail in subsection 4.1.3.

the fall of Soviet Union to manage the intellectual property rights associated with *Tetris* (1985), stipulated a *Tetris Guideline*, a "mandatory standardization of game mechanics comprising the new official Tetris platform" to which all licence holders, that is companies producing Tetris games, are required to adhere.[8]

It seems that defining a computer game, even by disjunctive means, is a somewhat troubled pursuit. An attempt for a faithful description that takes all aspects into account (like the definitions discussed here) leads to objectifying a game into an ontological mongrel that has properties which are incommensurate with each other, ranging from material properties and the player's experience to the designers' intentions. Consider for example the disjunctive definition of a videogame by Tavinor (2009, 26):

> X is a videogame if it is an artifact in a visual digital medium, is intended as an object of entertainment, and is intended to provide such entertainment through the employment of one or both of the following modes of engagement: rule and objective gameplay or interactive fiction.

A potential problem with the definition is that it places quite a lot of weight on the intentions of whoever was responsible for the artefact's emergence into the world. While I will discuss the authorial intentions in relation to the notion of "ideal game" in section 4.1.3, at this point we can arrive at a preliminary conclusion about the quest of defining a "game". If we subscribe to the suggestion of Gadamer (2001 [1960], 108), that from the player's perspective it is "to relate to play/game as to an object", taking a "game" as something onto which "qualities" can be attributed, or, as something of whose existence and qualities we can have *a priori* knowledge, would, imply that whoever making the statement is not considering the game from the player's perspective.

It is worth pointing out that neither the terms used, nor the way of arriving at the terms are important here. The critique of objectification applies equally

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[8]However, the case of *Tetris Guideline* is somewhat different from the *Monopoly patent*, as it is used, according to Jordan (2009), as a means to promote new design concepts rather than just protecting a finished or stabile version. I will return to this topic when discussing the notion of "transmedial Tetris" in subsection 4.1.3

to the attempts of calling games for example "processes" or "systems", from an essentialist or a disjunctive perspective. Even though they differ in what comes first, the qualities or an object/process/system's status as a game, they all suppose a connection between certain qualities and the things we call a game.

However, perhaps the notion of a game could be used without any ontological commitment as a signifying shorthand, an approximation for a group of things in the world, ranging from abstract to tangible and from atemporal to temporal, all suggestive of the properties one chooses to hold characteristic to games. Every time one wants to speak about a particular kind of a thing, instead of having to unpack full list of properties whose mentioning would make the receipient understand that one is referring to games, one can resort to the easier option of referring to the thing as a "game." This is a benevolent reading of how the notion is used for example in contemporary game design literature.

But we must note that claiming that the qualities that are deemed based on an agreement as definitive for the *signifying shorthand* had something to do with that which the players encounter in the world, would amount to coming out from the closet as an essentialist. This would be to claim there is some kind of 'core gameness' exemplified by a definition of a 'game'. This 'core gameness', would then be, to a varying degree, manifested in games as encountered by their players.

The conveniences and drawbacks of the notion of game as a somewhat loose signifying shorthand observed already by Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §66), who suggested that a search for that which is in common between all the games we know, ranging from board-games and card-games to children's games and olympic games, will never arrive at a core gameness but has to content itself on the level of "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities". Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §67) calls this *family resemblance.*

Thus, Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §66) suggests that to give someone an account of what a game is, we could

> describe *games* to him, and we might add to the description: "This *and similar things* are called 'games'."

Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §71) generalises this conduct of definition as follows:

> One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way.

This amounts to an *ostensive* definition. Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §69-71) suggests that defined this way, the "concept of a game is a concept with blurred edges" – we do not know its boundaries because "none have been drawn". However, the boundaries are not necessary to facilitate meaningful use of the concept. To demonstrate this, Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §71) compares his definition to asking someone to stay put around a particular location by pointing at a particular location and saying "Stay roughly here". Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §71) observes that, when doing so, he does not "bother drawing any boundary" but merely makes a pointing gesture: "as if I were indicating a particular spot. And this is just how one might explain what a game is."

Gupta (2008) suggests that ostensive definitions work "because a complex linguistic and conceptual capacity is operative in the background." However, he points out that it "is not easy to provide an account of this capacity." Of the use of ostensive definitions, Gupta observes that:

> The philosophical quest for definition can sometimes fruitfully be characterized as a search for an explanation of meaning. But the sense of explanation of meaning here is very different from the sense in which a dictionary or an ostensive definition explains the meaning of a word.

As for the purposes of this dissertation it does not seem necessary to seek to articulate the meaning of the notion of "game" beyond it referring to a particular kind of family resemblance, it seems that we can be comfortable with the notion's ambiguity. Put explicitly, it is not necessary for the purposes of this dissertation to assume that there is either a natural class of objects called "games" or an essence of "gameness".

However, it can be assumed that at some point in this dissertation arises a need to distinguish between two kinds of things – those with which my argument is concerned

and those which it is not. For example, without this ability, I could not be able to defend my argument against a counter-example of an object I consider to be outside my scope. But as soon as I put forward a statement beginning with "a game is", I risk not only objectifying game into the ontological mongrel Gadamer (2001 [1960]) warned us about, but also open doors for unnecessary presuppositions.

To get around this issue, we can postulate another viewpoint that provides an interesting contrast to the attempt of making games appear as objects with known properties: *any object which can be played can be referred to as a game.* Here, 'playability' can be safely assumed as the definitive feature of things we call games, so as long as we are talking about games, we can assume that they afford being played.

Even though inclusive, the view is not all-inclusive by default: the descriptive abilities of the concept of "game" in this view are directly inherited from the concept of "play" and thus anything applied to "play" is also reflected in the notion of "game." I will discuss this option in more detail in section 4.2.2. This option, however, implies the assumption that we can take play's status as play as given. This should not be a problem, especially considering the first-person perspective to be postulated in chapter 4. "Play", regardless if it is understood as an activity or an attitude, is something of whose aspects we can learn based on our immediate experience. Thus, subordinating the notion of game to the notion of play seems to bring in the least possible amount of ontological presupposition.

A similar way of referring to a game can be described in Taylor (2006, 68), who, compares her own style of playing *EverQuest* (1999) to that of her two informants:

> What they focused on and highlighted generally were not the things I paid careful attention to. While I was not an unknowledgeable player – I certainly knew which was my best weapon and set of spells, knew where to hunt, even had my eye on a new outfit to upgrade my abilities – their intent and focus had a different quality.

Based on observing the different nuances and qualities of the two kinds of play activities, Taylor (2006, 68) suggests, implying that the notion of game is to be inherited from the activity of play, that "Mitch and Josh played a different *EverQuest*

than I did."

3.1.5 Articulating determinism and solipsism

While the play and game as both abstract concepts and labels given on phenomena in the empirical world are certainly inseparable in number of ways, and the difference between them may in some context be deemed trivial – so trivial that in certain languages like German they are encompassed in the same word – the grounds on which we can describe details of the two from a scholarly point of view are decisively different. The grounds that may justify a statement about a game (*e.g.* the rules favour player two) are not enough to justify a similar statement about a playing of that game (*e.g.* player two gets favoured). However, assuming, based solely on an 'objective' analysis of the rules[9] of the game, that player two would be in fact favoured, would not be epistemologically sustainable, but a form of strange idealistic prophecy I shall call *ludic determinism*. Ludic determinism can be defined as the ignorance of the foundational difference between game and play.

Ludic determinism can be seen as manifested in the statements about the player's experience which build on the assumption that "play" would actualise based on the game artefact as the "ideal player", defined by Sicart (2008) "as the abstraction of a user that will use the object designed as predicted by the design team", would have it actualised.[10] Game designers, in order to be able to do their jobs meaningfully, that is, believing that their efforts make sense, have to think pragmatically and practice a fair degree of ludic determinism.

Calling this kind of attitude "pragmatic" seems fair given the "usual question" for pragmatism, outlined by James (1943, 133) as follows:

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[9]Rules are targeted here for simplicity's sake – the argument can be extended to address any predictions on how a game will play out made based on the properties of the involved artefact.

[10]Sicart's notion of an ideal player as 'that which is predicted by the design team' differs from the 'usual' connotation, originating in Iser 1980, prominent in approaches drawing on literature studies where the 'ideal reader' is necessitated by, or as Aarseth (2006, 131) puts it, "a function of the text". I use Sicart's notion here to avoid having to open, at this point, the discussion about games 'necessitating' their players.

> Grant an idea or belief to be true, [. . .] what concrete difference will its being true make in any one's actual life? [. . .] What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?

Regarding more specifically epistemology, Heylighen (1993), who sees pragmatism as a stage in the development of epistemology over the course of history, suggests that

> according to pragmatic epistemology, knowledge consists of models that attempt to represent the environment in such a way as to maximally simplify problem-solving.

A linkage between James (1943) and Heylighen (1993) can be drawn, so that James' 'cash-value' is the maximal simplification of problem-solving to which Heylighen (1993) refers.

Examples of the pragmatic epistemology within game studies are numerous, but perhaps one that best illustrates the position is the model of "Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics" presented in Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek (2004), as an attempt to "bridge the gap between game design and development, game criticism, and technical game research." (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004, 1) The model deals with the relationships between the game's properties, it's run-time behaviour and the player's experience and supposedly helps game designers to understand "how formal decisions about gameplay impact the end user experience" (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004, 5). A premise for the model is "the idea that games are more like artifacts than media", with which the authors "mean that the content of a game is its behavior – not the media that streams out of it towards the player." (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek 2004, 2)

I assume that it would not be impossible to dispute the model of "Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics" by showing faults in the claims and assumptions on which the model builds, in for example the claim that "the content of a game is its behaviour". However, we can assume that game designers can find meaningful uses for the model, which has perhaps already proven its "cash-value" (*cf.* James 1943, 133) by saving us from encountering instances of unthought or bad game design. This serves to illustrate that for the purposes of applied research or design research

it might make sense to subordinate the question of epistemological plausibility to practical feasibility and by so doing downplay epistemological weaknesses. However, game studies, unlike game design research, cannot always excuse itself on pragmatic grounds from taking a stand toward what Frasca (2007, 40) calls "play's confusing duality."

We can also postulate another, equally vulnerable standpoint toward play, a 'counter-force' to ludic determinism, by polarizing the ludic determinist assumption that play inherits all of its qualities from the game. The resulting claim would be that the game has no effects whatsoever on the qualities of play, which depend ultimately on whatever goes on in the player's mind. This viewpoint I shall call *ludic solipsism*.

In a paper concerned with qualitative content analysis of video games, Malliet (2007) suggests that "in most theories on the psychological or social effects of video games, only minimal attention is paid to the role of video game content as a moderating variable". As their focus is on psychological effects, the reseachers in the effects tradition, according to Malliet (2007), often introduce game content into their equations by indirect means such as surveys, which reduce games even to a single property of being either "violent" or "non-violent". While this position is not totally solipsistic, as it makes an attempt, however feeble, to account for the game as an ingredient of the experience, it exemplifies a solipsistic tendency to ignore the potentiality of gaining insights by analysing the materiality of the involved computer game.

A position on the other side of the determinism-solipsism divide, implying a similarly reductionist perspective, is in Juul (2003, 38), where it is hypothesized that winning a game leads to happiness, whereas losing triggers unhappiness. Not only all winners are not happy, but emotions arising from gameplay are seldom so simple as to be classified into being either as "happiness" or "sadness".

While the distinction between determinism and solipsism has so far been presented from a conceptual 'top-down' perspective, it echoes in the ways how different practices

of doing game studies negotiate the relationship and the differences between game and play.

3.2 Accessing gameplay: methodological considerations

In this section, I will look at a contemporary debate concerning a distinction between two ways of approaching the phenomenon of computer games. I will argue that the two positions, the 'player-centric' and the 'game-centric', which are often seen as separated as consequence of differences regarding methodology, purpose, and the object of study, are in fact quite similar in that they both employ a 'third-person perspective' and are equally distanced from gameplay as the player experiences it. By drawing on Sartre's critique of psychological science, I will identify this distance as an "explanatory gap". I suggest that in order to understand how games become involved in players' emotions, we have to look at the experienced significance of game content, which in turn implies taking the player's perspective.

3.2.1 Studying games vs. studying players

Recently many computer game scholars (*e.g.* Aarseth 2006, 1-2, Calleja 2007, 12, Smith 2007b, 242, Aarseth 2007b, 131) have pointed out, sometimes half-jokingly, a potential division between those who study players (*e.g.* empirical and social scientists) and those who study games (*e.g.* humanities-inclined and critical scholars). This kind of debate assumedly drives forward the development of good practices for multidisciplinary exchanges, as it encourages scholars to be specific in delineating what they are and are not trying to do. This is also one of my intentions behind the following brief plunging into the debate. However, my main purpose for bringing up the difference between the two perspectives in this and the following subsections, is, by demonstrating their (unexpected) similarities, to prepare ground for an experiential

perspective that embraces the ontological hybridity of the phenomenon of computer game play and thus makes a break from both of the positions discussed here. Aarseth (2006, 1) suggests that the dichotomy "between 'textual' and 'player-centric' traditions", referring to "the idea that studying 'games-as-texts' vs. focusing on the player are somehow opposing, incompatible or competing for dominance of the field", is "false [...] or at least a miscast one". Aarseth suggests that the significant difference between the two fronts of this dichotomy can be traced to their methodologies, which guide scholars to study certain aspects of games. This seems plausible given the multidisciplinary field of computer games research into which a scholar brings the methodological kit she is most experienced with. Aarseth (2006, 2) asserts also that the methodology chosen has a say in not only which aspects of games are being studied, but also "governs the choice of games", connecting this with for example the popularity of MMOGs as objects of study for sociologists.

Whereas Aarseth (2006) makes the connection between methodology and the object of study, Bogost (2008, 26) sees the origins of the dichotomy in how purpose of research in a particular discipline affects the choice of objects of study, as he suggests that

> critical approaches, no matter their method, tend to focus on games, seeking to understand and document their meaning along with the cultural relevance of that meaning. Social scientific approaches, again no matter their method, focus on players, seeking to understand and document what they do with games and how they do it.

Bogost (ibid.) goes on to suggest that "this is a conlict inherent in these approaches, one palpable in todays game studies milieu". Also Frasca (2007, 41) sees the connection between object, purpose, and methodology. For example, taking the object of study, game, as an activity, emphasizes players ("games are something players do") and invites methodologies that are renowned for being able to assess things that humans do.

Aarseth (2007b, 131) outlines a "tension" between two kinds of game researchers, a tension he sees as stemming partly from "the lack of realization that the object

they study is not the same." Aarseth distinguishes between the "critical player-theorist" and the "ethnographic player-observer". For the "critical player-theorist", the "empirical target" are games as aesthetic objects comparable to films, music and visual art but "with the added challenge of gameplay". The "ethnographic player-observer", focuses on the players with their own "habits, actions, values and relationships." For the critical player-theorist, the player is "a function of the game, a slot in a game machine that can be filled by any rational, critical, informed person", whereas the for "sociologist or ethnographer, the player is an actual, historical person" or a group of entities of this kind.

It seems we can fairly state that what we can conceptualise as the 'distinction' between "those who study players" and "those who study games" is in fact is a composite of several variables: methodology, object of study, and purpose of the research. Calleja (2007, 12) has approached the distinction by framing it as questions of "what kind of activities can be classified as games, and what disciplines and methods are appropriate for their study." In relation to these questions, purpose of the research, pointed out by Bogost (2008, 26), an equally important variable contributing to the 'distinction', is what motivates the researcher to answer to the questions in the specific way.

It seems that these three factors, object of study, methodology, and purpose, constantly inform each other, perhaps to the extent that one is "created" by the others. Finding out about for example the ideology behind design choices in a particular game calls for an object of study roughly corresponding to "game-as-text', which in turn calls for a method allowing to extract meaning from an artefact. If, from these premises, one was trying to generalise one's findings to the level of *play*, for example that the player's experience would have something to do with the ideology read into the game, the danger of uncritically assuming an affinity between the properties of the game-as-text and the experience of play and thus falling into what we called ludic determinism would become real.

To find out for example if and why stay-home parents prefer casual games to *World of Warcraft* one could adopt a social sciences-informed survey apparatus, which already implies an epistemological position toward a game as something about which we can learn by way of answers given by informants. The challenge at this front would be to retain (or attain) some kind of linkage between the games-as-seen-through-the-survey and the actual games and to subject the linkage to critical analysis, otherwise the experience of play risks to become independent from the game involved, thus prompting the use of the label ludic solipsism.

3.2.2 Articulating the third-person perspective

Frasca (2001b) reappropriated the word ludology "to refer to the yet non-existent 'discipline that studies game and play activities." Ludological basic research, in the broader context of arts and humanities, in contrast to applied research or design research, can be framed as the study of game and play activities solely for the sake of advancing the knowledge of such phenomena without any hidden agendas, like game design, education or storytelling. Striking a balance between determinism and solipsism is a precondition for epistemologically plausible ludological basic research. This requires careful negotiation eventually leading to the definition of the object of study.

As suggested in the previous subsection, this negotiation takes place in relation to both the method and the purpose of research, which are often dictated as if 'from outside' by for example the tradition in a particular discipline. Given the linkage of game and play, the negotiation of the object of study involves accounting for not only dead matter and abstract ideas, but also the living, thinking, and feeling subject. Some may choose to embrace the human subjectivity, whereas others may deal with it by bracketing it aside. To arrive at the object of study for ludological basic research seems like an ongoing quest, in which I join forces with for example Vikhagen (2004, 6), who, when elaborating on Gadamer's notion of *Spiel* in relation

to contemporary game studies, writes that:

> [w]hen we try to understand play, game, or even more specifically a computer game, it is always a matter of where to look in order to find the answer to our questions. It is evident that the outcome would be significantly different if we discuss the subjective experience in games and use either a subject-based or objectified view of the playing subject.

At first glance it seems that the positions dictated by paradigms concerning both method and object of study in empirical and humanities-inclined game studies are rather distanced. The procedures of making plausible claims from the two perspectives do not seem to have much in common. Acknowledging that the object of study is an aesthetic object for some and a social practice for others seems to separate the perspectives even further. However, I argue that the perspectives are in fact rather similar, inasmuch as they share the 'objective' scientific third-person orientation toward their objects of study. This seems to roughly correspond to what Vikhagen (2004, 6) refers to as an "objectified view of the playing subject."

While the 'objective' orientation is self-evidently embedded in methods of empirical games research, we can describe it in game studies, too. At this point it should be made clear that I acknowledge the ambiguity in the notion of 'objectivity'. My aim is not to discount the pursuit of objectivity "in the sense of avoiding prejudice or bias" (*cf.* Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 28), but cast a critical look at the practice implied by the *de facto* methodological paradigm of humanities-inclined game studies (*e.g.* Konzack 2002, Aarseth 2003, Consalvo and Dutton 2006), according to which the computer game researcher distances him/herself as the playing subject from the object under study.

When presenting his game analysis methodology, Konzack (2002, 91-98) postulates seven "layers": hardware, code, functionality, gameplay, meaning (semiotics), referentiality, socio-culture. Using Konzack's method one is able to give a pretty detailed description of any computer game, as his own analysis of *Soulcalibur* (1999) exemplifies. Strikingly, however, Konzack does not see *experience* as worthy of a layer of its own, and the issue of researcher's own subjectivity is not discussed in the

paper. Instead, Konzack (2002, 94) deals with "play's confusing duality" (*cf.* Frasca 2007, 40) by taking a strong determinist position by assuming that a specific kind of playing and the subsequent experience would automatically follow from certain properties in the game artefact, as he writes for example that "the challenge of the game comes from obstacles."

In a paper detailing their "methodological toolkit for the qualitative study of games", Consalvo and Dutton (2006) do not discuss researcher-player's subjectivity, but as an extenuating circumstance it has to be pointed out that they do not attempt to speak about the player's experience either. However, remembering that one has to account for play when describing a game and that a faithful description of play needs to pay attention not only to play as an *activity* but also as an *attitude*, inevitably leads to questioning the value of the toolkit as a means to gain insights on games as played.

Perhaps the value of methodologies like those postulated by Konzack (2002) and Consalvo and Dutton (2006) is in their ability to provide us with 'background information' about a particular game, based on which we can make informed assumptions, or dare I say hypotheses, prior to the empirical analyses of the games as played.

When postulating the two types of game scholars, the "critical player-theorist" and the "ethnographic player-observer" Aarseth (2007b, 131) makes it explicit that in both orientations the researcher's *own* subjectivity tends to be shunned. For the ethnographic player-observer

> [s]elf-play is [...] potentially suspect, since it is subjective and quite likely unrepresentative. While her own experience of the game might be used as background information to better understand the observed players, the data samples are a presumably representative and hopefully diverse group of real, historical players.

On the other side of the divide the practice of dealing with the researcher's own subjectivity is somewhat different:

> The fact that [the critical player-theorist] is studying an object that at the time of study is a process partly instigated by her, and not necessarily shared by any other player, is seldom a topic for discussion, but bracketed by experience of play. (Aarseth 2007b, 131)

Aarseth (2007b, 132) points out that the "bracketing" of the particular and sub-jective is not an attempt to "disregard of social reality" but "a means to govern interpretation", manifested in an "ideal reader" who is a "function of the text". By implementing the ideal reader, "the humanist is trying to exclude himself from the interpretation, while acknowledging that this is impossible." (Aarseth 2007b, 131) However, as a consequence of careful manoeuvering, for both the "ethnographic player-observer" the "critical game theorist" the lived gameplay carried out by the researcher is not material in itself, but one means among others by which to gather material to support claims about 'the game', that is something beyond the researcher's particular playing.

The critical player-theorist has to play because that's the only way to see what the game is like. The ethnographic player-observer needs to play in order to understand what the other players are talking about. We can augment the array of caricatures with an empirical scientist, who needs to play in order to be able tune his empirical instruments to correspond to in-game events. For them all, the 'particularity' in their playings is an unnecessary, perhaps unwanted, property of a 'tool' or of a method originating in the fact that it is hard to study games without playing them, perhaps a providing anecdotal illustrations, but not in any case a quality of the material based on which claims are being made.

Due to this 'objective' orientation, humanities-inclined games scholarship and empirical games research both run into trouble in equal amounts and often have to resort to speculation when trying to account for "what is it like"[11] to play. Consider

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[11]I borrow this expression from the discussion, prominent in anglo-american analytical philosophy of mind, originating in the article "What is it like to be a bat?" by Nagel (1974), concerning what later became known as "qualia." Dennett (1988) understands "qualia" as referring to "the *ways things seem to us*", *e.g.* the whiteness of milk in a glass, its taste and that which we hear when swallowing it. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines it as the qualities that are accessible to one "introspectively and that together make up the phenomenal character of the experience", where "phenomenal character" refers to that which is different in experiences of seeing a patch of turquoise colour and seeing a patch of red color (Tye 2007). However, despite that the expression "what is it like to play" rather well illustrates my area of interest, I am not subscribing to the discourses and methodologies, like "heterophenomenology" (Dennett 1991, Radner 1994) implemented in the debates around the notion of "qualia".

the following examples from both sides of the empirical sciences / humanities divide.

Discussing why players enjoy playing *The Sims* (2000) even though there is no goal, Juul (2007) suggests that "*there is much indication that*[12] many players find great enjoyment in creating (and showing off) families and houses in *The Sims*, and exploring and perfecting their clever manoeuvres in the *Grand Theft Auto* series." We should note well that Juul does not write anything about his *own* enjoyment in either of the games.

An equally speculative account on the side of empirical sciences can be found in Ravaja (2005, 9-10) who, when studying the bodily states of players of *Super Monkey Ball 2* (2002), "unexpectedly" found out that players react to a failure in in ways that reverberate on the scientific instruments as suggestive of emotions of joy and happiness. They end up acknowledging that "characteristics such as visual impressiveness and excitingness *may be*[13] more potent determinants of the emotional response of the player compared to the meaning of the event in terms of failure or success." (my emphasis) We observe that Ravaja et al. do not say anything about how *they* felt about the visual characteristics of the game.

Earlier we made the distinction between play as an activity and an attitude, the former being something whose make-up we can observe from an external viewpoint and the latter something of which only *symptoms* are observable from outside. In relation to this distinction, from the third-person perspective the player-researcher can back up her claims by referring to her own play as an *activity*, but not as an *attitude*. From the third-person perspective, emotions in play would be treated through what we in subsection 2.2.3 established as *causal explanations*, which cannot address the experienced significance of events, but refer to facts about states of affairs in the world. Like the examples discussed suggest, this leads to speculation when it comes to player's experience. This can be presented as an 'explanatory gap' in the third-person perspective.

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[12](my emphasis)
[13](my emphasis)

3.2.3   Explanatory gap in the third-person perspective

Assuming that the experience of computer game play is to some extent affected by the computer game artefact, a natural precondition for successfully understanding the player's experience is that one is informed to the best of one's abilities about the properties of the game artefact (or *e.g.* a game 'text' or system – that which we can dissect with methods like those suggested by Konzack and Consalvo and Dutton) involved. However, that does not conclude the project, as the artefact is not yet the big picture.

To proceed from the 'perfect knowledge' about the game artefact towards knowing about the player's experience, empirical psychological methods might seem, for some, the most obvious way to go. Well-designed empirical metrics can give us clues about which emotion the player is experiencing and when. However, concerning *how* the player ended up experiencing what she did experience, their perspective alone would not make us any wiser than that of qualitative game analysis. Their ambiguity is not unlike the ambiguity in an analysis of emotions that understands them by their names only, which we discussed in subsection 2.1.2.

For example, being able to assert based on a combination of empirical psychophysiological methods, like galvanic skin response and brain imaging, that the player was afraid at a given time (which would already be an achievement given that there is no psychophysiological measurement that could differentiate between emotions based on their intentionalities) is only a starting point for understanding why and how she became afraid. To understand what happens 'in between' the areas targeted by these two modes of inquiry, how does game content (understood by qualitative game analysis) become objects of emotions (measured by empirical sciences), we need to look at the significance of in-game events, objects, and encounters from the player's perspective.

For both empirical games research and humanities-oriented game studies, even if the best practices of both are used in conjunction, the 'what is it like to play' is out

of bounds, and thus between them remains what amounts to an *explanatory gap*[14].

In connection with his argument on the experienced significance within emotions, Sartre (1962 [1939], 1-14) elaborates a phenomenological critique of psychological science. I suggest that some of his ideas could be used to illustrate the explanatory gap in the third-person perspective for computer games scholarship. There are two similarities between the study of emotions and the study of computer game play, justifying drawing a parallel between Sartre's criticism of psychology and my criticism of game studies. First, both emotional experience and the experience of play are similarly subjective experiences about actual things in the world. Second, the positions of Sartre's "psychologist", who "strictly is forbidden to consider the men around him as men *like himself*" (Sartre 1962 [1939], 3) and Aarseth's "critical player-theorist" and "ethnographic player-observer" are similar in that they take precautionary measures to avoid resting any claims in the domain of what is "particular" or "subjective" to themselves.

Allow us to consider empirical psychophysiological measurements as an extreme of "studying players", and a qualitative content analysis as an extreme of "studying games". By transposing the two distinctive modes of inquiry, in an attempt of interdisciplinary methodological triangulation, we would be able to know the player's physiological state at the given time and assert facts about properties and states of affairs regarding the game (text/artefact/process/system, depending on the perspective chosen). However, we would still have to resort to speculation, perhaps assisted by a method such as interview, when faced with a need to connect the dots, to explain *how* game content contributed to the emergence of the emotion.

Sartre (1962 [1939], 4) suggests that "psychology, in so far as it claims to be a science, can furnish no more than a sum of heteroclite facts, the majority of which have no link between them." This transposition of facts is what we have seen in

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[14]I borrow the term "explanatory gap" from Levine (1983), who coined it to illustrate an argument concerning the inability of theories of mind to exhaustively explain mental phenomena. It is used here for a different, however slightly similar purpose.

examples from both Juul (2007) and Ravaja (2005): between the bare facts laid on the table remains a gap to which referring amounts to speculation. (*cf.* "Might be...", "There is indication that...") Sartre (1962 [1939], 3) illustrates this by stating that from the perspective of the psychologist, "emotion is primarily and in principle an *accident*", and the "psychologists do not notice, indeed, that it is just as impossible to attain the essence by heaping up the accidents as it is to arrive at unity by the indefinite addition of figures to the right of 0.99".

Sartre's psychologist is forbidden to ask himself what is it like to be a human, and has to (vainly) wait for science to collect enough (accidental) facts to arrive at a complete synthesis of anthropology. Sartre (1962 [1939], 5) recognises that for the psychologist who is satisfied with knowing based on the evidence accumulated that emotions exist, the phenomenologist's project of understanding emotions in terms of their significance seems "needless and absurd."

Similarly, for the kind of arguments Juul (2007) and Ravaja (2005) are making, the experienced significance of gameplay details would not even be relevant. The lack of accounting for the subjective side of gameplay is not, from the third-person perspective, really a lack at all. If Ravaja (2005) had shared what he felt about visual effects in *Super Monkey Ball 2*, or if Juul (2007) had added that he personally enjoys creating and showing off families and houses in *The Sims*, we would perhaps be somewhat amused to know these details about persons behind the papers, but the anecdotes would not add to the credibility of their statements concerning the relationship between computer games and players' experiences. This goes to exemplify the difference between third-person and first-person perspectives.

We may conclude that in order to understand how games become involved in players' emotions, we have to understand the experienced significance of game content. The parallel between "psychological science" and the perspective of *de facto* methodological paradigm of computer game studies suggests that if one wants to shed light on the experienced significance of in-game events and objects, and by

doing so bridge the explanatory gap, the third-person perspective has to be replaced with that of the first person, the player.

Chapter 4

Gameplay from the player's perspective

So far it has been suggested that understanding games as they are involved in players' emotions, understanding how they contribute to the constitution of the objects of their players' emotions, requires us to understand the experienced significance of game content. This implies that the object of study encompasses experiential or subjective qualities.

Looking at games from the player's perspective can be facilitated by, or perhaps even already implies, a phenomenological orientation toward games, inasmuch as phenomenology can be understood as an endeavour to describe phenomena, such as emotions and computer game play, as they are experienced by the subject as meaningful.[1] (Smith 1979, 435). In this introduction to the chapter at hand, I briefly outline some of the classical phenomenological principles on which my perspective builds, and discuss their contemporary applicability and plausibility. In the sections of this chapter, I postulate a phenomenological perspective on computer game play,

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[1] I acknowledge that I am vesting a particular kind of meaning to the notion of phenomenology, which is no surprise given the breadth of the term. My approach, emphasizing human experience, is significantly different from for example Bogost (2008), who writes about "phenomenology of videogames" with an undertone of "speculative realism", for which also non-human entities, like microprosessors, qualify as 'experiencing' entities.

from which it should be possible to to embrace the ontological hybridity in the object of study, understanding it simultaneously as a technological artefact, an activity, and an experience, while operating based on what is given in the experience of play and thus respecting the principle of least possible presupposition.

Moran (2000, 5) observes that for Sartre phenomenology implied an approach that allowed one

> to delineate carefully one's own affective, emotional, and imaginative life, not in a set of static objective studies such as one finds in psychology, but understood in the manner in which it is meaningfully lived.

Elucidating how Sartre, too, arrived at a phenomenological perspective, Moran (2000, 2) characterises phenomenology as an attempt

> to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer.

Husserl, the founder of classical phenomenology, intended phenomenology to counter the positivistic world-view of sciences by going 'to things themselves.' The problem with sciences according to Husserl, quoted in Moran (2000, 141-2), is that they "*take for granted* the possibility of cognition".

> Constantly busy producing results, advancing from discovery to discovery in newer and newer branches of science, natural thinking finds no occasion to raise the question of the possibility of cognition as such. Cognition is a fact in nature. It is the experience of cognising organic being. It is a psychological fact.

Husserl suggested that sciences, in general, proceed with what he called the *natural attitude*. With this term, Husserl refers to our ordinary way of being in the world, implying an uncritical assumption about the ways in which we can learn about things in the world. He writes (in Moran 2000, 141-2), that the natural attitude

> is our way of belonging to the surrounding world in an everyday sense where there is always a general commitment to the existence of that world.

In order to reach "things themselves", Husserl (in Moran 2000, 141-2) suggests that the natural attitude must be set aside:

> Genuine philosophy wants to uncover the source of the meanings we encounter in the world, and to do this it must adopt a new attitude, one which abandons, disables, or neutralises our normal, 'natural attitude'.

However, abandoning the natural attitude and being able to concentrate on that which is given in the experience is not as simple as it may sound. Moran (2000, 142) suggests that

> it requires special trained vigilance not to let the natural attitude creep back in at some stage in our enquiries.

This vigilance supposedly refers to the phenomenological method Husserl developed. While I will not attempt to adapt Husserl's method into the analysis of computer game play, outlining its premises briefly elucidates the nature of the project undertaken in this dissertation. Its first step is "bracketing", which in Husserl's case, begins from setting aside the assumptions concerning the existence of the world and the things it contains. Smith (2007a, 241) describes how the phenomenological analysis (of consciousness) then proceeds:

> Then as I look around me, I attend not to the presumably existing things of which I am conscious, but to my consciousness of them. I shift my attention from the *objects* of my consciousness to my *consciousness* of those objects.

After this shift, with the achieved "modified attitude toward the world", Husserl's method, as described by Smith (2007a, 243), proceeds to

> give phenomenological descriptions of various types of experience just as I experience them, where these descriptions characterize the contents or meanings of of such experiences, presenting objects as experienced, regardless of whether the objects represented by these meanings exist.

Thus, Husserl's method can be suggested to concentrate more on the "experience and its content or meaning" rather than "the object represented by the meaning" (Smith 2007a, 243). While the methodological ideas in classical phenomenology certainly *inform* the perspective to be postulated here, I will not follow Husserl's method explicitly. For this project, the take-away from classical phenomenology its is epistemological orientation toward the world, rather than its methodological

apparati[2]. Allow me to unpack this suggestion: in previous chapter, what was articulated as a difference between a third-person and the player's perspectives, is in fact the distinction which Husserl makes between scientific and phenomenological ways of seeing the world, the distinction between the *natural attitude* and the *phenomenological attitude*. Characteristic to phenomenological inquiry is its attempt to approach its object as it is "given in the experience" without resting any claims or assumptions on knowledge originating outside the phenomenon (Moran 2000, 9-10). Whereas from the third-person perspective we can concern ourselves with what games "are", from the player's perspective we can focus on how they *appear as played*. This is the phenomenological, *pre-suppositionless attitude*, adapted to the context of the study of computer games.

Behind the decision to import phenomenological epistemology but not the whole of Husserl's method is the assertion that while this project seeks to uncover how meaningful emotion comes about in computer game play, the phenomenological project in this dissertation is not a phenomenology of player's experience, at least if that term is understood to refer to an inquiry that focuses its efforts on the consciousness of the player. Computer game play can be conceptualised as a relationship between (at least) humans and technologies, as a relationship in which it is not always clear who has the last word on its form and content. Rather than framing the attempt to uncover the intricacies of this relationship as a phenomenology of player's experience, it is perhaps better described as addressing the *phenomenology of computer game play*.

Thus, the framing 'phenomenology of computer game play' implies a shift of the focus from player's experience to the relation between the player and her game. This is not to dismiss experience, but suggest a somewhat indirect access: the experience of play will be an experience *about* this player-game relationship. To articulate this shift, I turn to Verbeek (2005), who argues that the attempt to go into "things

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[2]This is not unlike Moran (2000, 359) describes Sartre as rejecting most of Husserls methodological dogmas while persisting to identify himself as a Husserlian.

themselves" could be today considered somewhat naïve. Verbeek (2005, 104) suggests that classical phenomenology's

> suppositions seem to mesh poorly with the contemporary emphasis on locality and context-dependence, according to which human access to reality is never direct but always mediated. In light of post-modernism and the linguistic turn, phenomenology seems to be obsolete, a romantic throwback.

Verbeek (2005, 104-119) suggests that the role of phenomenology needs to be transformed in order to maintain its relevance to contemporary scientific and philosophical discourse. Verbeek (2005, 108) sees the origins of this transformation already in the writings of Merleau-Ponty, of whose approach he remarks that:

> The "things themselves" that [Merleau-Ponty] addresses appear to be not the things of the world but rather the *relations between human beings and the world*.[3]

Verbeek (2005, 111) suggests that by acknowledging that the focus is on the relations between humans and their worlds, the relations in which technologies are often situated, phenomenology can be practiced as meaningfully responding to the requirements and features of contemporary world. This perspective, which Verbeek (2005, 113), drawing on Ihde (1995), characterises as *postphenomenology*, is the framework of phenomenology informing the approach toward gameplay postulated in this dissertation.

Even though in the shift from classical phenomenology to postphenomenology, the focus has been shifted from 'things' in the world to relations between humans and 'things', the principle of *pre-suppositionless attitude*, standing in contrast to the natural attitude, seems to survive the transformation. Thus, the attempt to postulate a "player's perspective" for the purposes of this dissertation is an attempt to focus on the relation between the game and its player by approaching games like any player would, and, by arguing based on what is given in the experience of play to be able to address the origins of meaningful emotion that are not tainted by the scientific knowledge or my idiosyncratic mental baggage and preferences.

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[3]In subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, we already acknowledged the concept of *intentionality* as referring to such relations.

However, while adopting the player's perspective leads to an access to "givenness" of computer game play and opens up access to the 'experiential realm', the other side of the coin is that it cordons off the ontological questions from the scope of the argument. In other words, from the phenomenological first-person perspective the metaphysical or ontological claims about 'what a game is' beyond it being played are out of bounds, as they imply the natural attitude and must be bracketed in the attempt to study games with pre-suppositionless attitude. My own personal assumptions about games, their inner workings, genres and origins that are included in the biographical baggage I have accumulated, are presuppositions that too must be bracketed not unlike the scientific knowledge about games.

An analysis of emotions in computer game play from the player's perspective, conducted according to the best practices of being reflective and acknowledging the ways in which the analysis is situated in a particular socio-cultural context (*cf.* Lammes 2007), faces two significant threats. On one hand, it risks turning inwards into its own private realm because of the subjective nature of its empirical target. On the other hand, I may accidentally elevate my own experience and way of experiencing, or, experiences and ways of experiencing of those who resemble me in some respects, to a more important and representative status than they can plausibly described as having.

I intend to guard against these threats by focusing my description on the materiality of the computer game artefact as it appears in the experience of play. In the first section of this chapter, I describe concrete materiality as something based on which claims about the player's experience can be made, and discuss how it can be approached with minimal presuppositions. I discuss two specific threads of argument ascribing *a priori* properties to games, potentially overriding their materialities: games' alleged processuality (*cf.* Malaby 2007) and transmediality (*cf.* Juul 2003). However, it is crucial to observe, as I will discuss in more detail in subsection 4.1.1, that the insights that can be meaningfully and plausibly gained from the proposed

perspective are not about any particular idiosyncratic experience, but about the *conditions* for idiosyncratic experience.

In the second section of this chapter, I suggest that we can describe certain conditions for the player's experience in the game's materiality. Drawing on Ihde (1990, 68-70), I begin by acknowledging the materiality's ambiguity: computer games can be used for a multitude of purposes. This ambiguity persists despite, and is perhaps even heightened by, approaching it at face value with minimal presupposition. I assume that when looking at the diversity of these purposes, we can make at least the rough distinction between *playing* and *playing with.* By discussing the player's position in terms of freedom, responsibility, and risk, I articulate how this distinction is manifested in the requirements the game artefact sets to the player. I identify these requirements as *the gameplay condition.* Based on the gameplay condition, I differentiate between playing, playing with a game, and playing a game, gameplay for short.

I argue that the gameplay condition is an "invariant structure" (*cf.* Gallagher and Zahavi 2008) in players' experiences. It is not a property of an idiosyncratic experience, but a condition delineating the unfolding of idiosyncratic experiences of single-player computer game play. To make this claim, I discuss the notion of gameplay condition in relation to the paradigmatic solution of referring to *goals* and their relation to *challenge* and *skill* as definitive to the player's experience.

In this discussion, I identify certain drawbacks of the paradigmatic solution. First, those games we colloquially know as "sand-box games" defy the utilitarian mode of explanation employed by the paradigmatic solution. Second, often the goals of gameplay, whether it involves a "sand-box game" or a more conventional one, cannot be derived from the materiality of the game. To complement the paradigmatic solution of goals, challenge, and skill, I suggest that gameplay, and more specifically our ability to derive enjoyment from it, could be understood, by following Levinas (1969) as characterised by *nourishment*, as an activity which sustains itself, where

enjoyment is derived from "pure expenditure."

I observe that incorporating the player, as *anyone who desires to play*, into the object of study, transforming the object of study from a *game* to a *game as played*, we can plausibly speak of "success" and "failure" regardless of the fact that we cannot derive goals for the activity of play from the game artefact's materiality. This allows me to arrive at an experiential definition of gameplay, whose importance was flagged at the end of the second chapter.

In the third section of this chapter, after observing that imposing the gameplay condition is not an exclusive feature of *computer* games as mechanical games can be played equally well, I proceed to define, by drawing on the notion of technological artefact in Ihde (1990) and Verbeek (2008), what was previously known as "single-player computer game" as a *single-player game artefact*.

This results in observing that by means of the gameplay condition, game artefacts enforce a particular context of use, thus voiding some of our concerns of the materiality's ambiguity. Furthermore, by entering into a *hybrid intentionality* relationship with the player, the game artefact delineates the spectrum of its player's intentionality. However, the formulation of hybrid intentionality brings us back to the intuitive assumption we made in the end of second chapter about a "game world", which will be unpacked in relation to the gameplay condition in the next chapter.

4.1 Seaching for an invariant stucture: materiality and its contenders

Implicit assumptions about how games are being played and what kind of experiences their players have with them are already employed within the various practices involving computer games. For example, designers have an idea about which in-game encounters are supposed to contribute to the player's emotion of fear, and a psychophysiologist can make an informed decision to measure the player's physiological

properties at the time of particular in-game events. However, there is no reason for these assumptions to remain implicit or at the level of tacit knowledge. Only if the principles by which this kind of assumptions can be made are articulated and made explicit, can they be subjected to criticism from a multiple directions and thus developed. This "intersubjective corroboration" (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 28) is important especially as any project aiming for a first-person perspective faces a real danger of turning inwards and assuming implicitly that there would be as many completely unique player's experiences as there are players.

To avoid the accusations of technological determinism, I begin this section by making explicit the distinction between *properties* and *possibilities* and focus on the latter. To steer clear from solipsistic tendencies, which might easily get into an analysis from the first person perspective, I emphasize the materiality of the single-player computer game artefact as something shared by all players and playings of a particular game. Doing so is necessary not only as contributing to the inter-subjective plausibility of claims to be made, but also for avoiding idealising or objectifying the game into something never encountered by a player. I will unpack these claims in this subsection, through discussing ideas about games as *processual* and *transmedial*.

4.1.1 Towards describing possibilities, not properties

As observed in the previous chapter, the distinction between 'those who study players' and 'those who study games' (*cf.* Aarseth 2006, 1-2, Calleja 2007, 12, Smith 2007b, 242, Aarseth 2007b, 131) is a composite of differences in methodology, object of study, and the purpose of the research, which all inform and feed each other. Conceptualised in relation to these variables, the shift from the third-person perspective to the player's perspective, in the context of humanities-inclined games scholarship (*cf.* "the critical player-theorist"), involves a transformation of the object of study from a "transmedial game" (or "ideal game") to the game as it appears in the experience, the *game as played*. However, as epistemological and ontological concerns

are "inextricably bound up with each other" (MacQuarrie 1973, 93), we might say that the adaptation involves an epistemological shift, too: not only the contents inside the brackets "that which we call a game" change, but also the possibilities of knowing about the object change.

My reader, benevolently thinking of best practices of proceeding with the project of game studies, might now consider occupying the perspectives one at the time – shifting between third-person and first-person perspectives when the need becomes evident.[4] Studying the game-as-something here, and game-as-played there. While I am certainly positive in regard to such attempts, it should be made explicit that what one is then considering is methodological triangulation that transgresses epistemologies; anyone having experience with interdisciplinary research projects, involving natural scientists and humanities scholars, can recognize the hardships that potentially underpin these attempts. The objects of study are different from the first-person and third-person perspectives. Like Aarseth (2006) suggests, it is not the 'same game' one is studying from the two perspectives.

MacQuarrie (1973, 55), who suggests that the unfinishedness and uniqueness attributed to humans by the existentialist-phenomenological tradition does not render it impossible to describe human phenomena, but directs the description "to possibilities rather than properties". MacQuarrie continues that

> the fact that each individual is unique does not mean we are confronted with a formless and indescribable multiplicity, for there are limits within which these unique existents fall, and there are structures that can be discerned in all of them.

From the third-person perspective, we can plausibly study the properties of games as "dead matter" or "processes" out of which the researcher's involvement beyond the minimum is bracketed. From the first-person perspective we can only observe properties of our own experience, based on which we can, however arrive at possibilities for anyone else's experience to have particular properties. While it would amount to ludic determinism to assume that materiality dictated what the player

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[4]This would be like reversal theory (Apter 1991) reversed: theory reversal

did (and experienced), we can fairly state that the material game artefact dictates what it is *possible* for the player to do (and experience). Making claims about how the possibilities originating in the materiality of a particular game artefact are *likely* to actualise would be a matter of achieving *saturation* in one's material by means of extensive empirical analysis of the game as played.

4.1.2 Processuality

In an intellectual climate in which scholars studying single-player games share an assumedly common field with social scientists and anthropologists whose object of study is characterised by social aspects, it makes sense to advocate the importance of the materiality of the computer game artefact for the study of single-player computer games. This position can be contextualised in relation to Malaby (2007, 102), who insists on a processual nature of computer games:

> Every game is an ongoing process. As it is played, it always contains the potential for generating new practices and new meanings, possibly refiguring the game itself.

Malaby's examples include players negotiating what happens to parking fees in Monopoly and the introduction of new rules and tactics in sports, based on which he suggests that games are "grounded in human practice" and "therefore always in the process of becoming". While understanding games as "processual" makes perfect sense in the context of multiplayer games, its viability for the study of single-player computer games remains to be explored. This exploration is the task of this subsection.

According to Laughlin (1993), an anthropologist studying rituals, suggests that "games are an amalgamation of play and ritual". This exemplifies a definition of a game that places no weight whatsoever on aspects of the materiality involved. I assume that in a ritual a number of objects are utilised, but Laughlin (1993) does not see their involvement as defining what the notion of game corresponds to. Despite all the talk about the 'hybrid' object of study for game studies, it seems worth pointing

out that regarding the ontological 'stability' of our objects of study, as computer game scholars we are much better off than for example the anthropologist attempting to make sense of folk games by drawing a linkage to ritual.

Consider for example a game of *Qualat* (trad.), belonging to the *Mancala* (trad.) family, in which a fundamental mechanic is the picking-up a handful of little stones from one pit and 'sowing' them into subsequent pits on the board. These games were, and perhaps still are, played by herdsmen using goat droppings as stones (called *til* when used as playware for *Qualat*) and hand-dug holes in the dry ground as pits (Pankhurst 1971). In his chapter in the *The Study of Games*, Culin (1971, 94) offers an account of *Mancala*, and suggests of its material dimension that it uses a "board with cup-shaped depressions and a handful or so of pebbles or shells." Culin (1971, 95) also recollects hearing that

> Children frequently play the game in holes made in the ground when they have no board, a device also resorted to by travelers who meet by the way.

Compared to what the anthropologist would gain from studying goat droppings and earth, a computer game scholar can gain much more meaningful insights on her object of study by looking at the 'dead matter', the non-subjective and asocial qualities, in one word the materiality of the game artefact involved.

With the "materiality of the game artefact" and the "material game artefact" I refer, for the time being, to the amalgamation and dynamic real-time interplay of hardware and software across layers of abstraction: that without which play could not take place and that which is to a computer game like goat droppings are to *Mancala*. I will provide a more elaborate definition of materiality in section 4.3.

The emphasis on materiality is not intended as excluding from analysis that to which "emergence" (*e.g.* Aarseth 1997, 29, Juul 2002) refers: new, sometimes unexpected game features and events which arise from a small number of rules working together. While I return to this topic in more detail in subsection 5.2.2, at this point it suffices to assert that as the "emergent properties" owe their existence to the materiality of the game artefact and thus have the potential to be shared by

all players and playings of the particular game. Thus, not unlike 'bugs', 'easter eggs', or that which can be achieved by 'cheating', they should be neither excluded nor elevated to any special status.

The important difference between goat droppings of *Mancala* and the material game artefact of, say, *Tetris*, is that the latter not only has the ability to transform as a consequence of its player's choices, but is also expected to do so. If a dry goat dropping gets crushed in the hands of a herdsman playing *Mancala*, it is an unfortunate accident comparable to a power failure when playing *Tetris* in that in both cases the materiality prevents the game from continuing. However, the goat dropping does not have the ability to prevent the game of *Mancala* from continuing as a consequence of the player's particular choices, even though these choices owe their meaningful manifestations to the very same materiality.

The material game artefact of *Tetris*, on the other hand, will prevent the game from continuing if the blocks touch the top of the container. This is always the case, it is hard-coded in the binary executable file whose run-time behavior corresponds to what we know about how the game of *Tetris* plays out, and it is not possible for the players to change this by way of inventing "new practices".

An advocate of the "processual" perspective might perhaps now point at the practice of 'rocket-jumping' invented by the players of first-person shooter (FPS) games. Rocket-jumping refers to using the blast wave of a rocket intentionally launched at the avatar's feet to propel the avatar into jumps otherwise impossible. It seems lucid to admit that we can describe the playings of *Quake* (1996) as transformed substantially as a consequence of the invention of rocket-jumping, not unlike a new interpretation of "Tuck rule" mentioned by Malaby (2007, 103) changed the ways in which American football was played. However, while playings of first-person shooters changed, the conditions by which those playings took place did not: the players merely became aware of new ways around the restrictions imposed by the game artefacts. Furthermore, the comparison to American football would perhaps

be a bit misplaced, as in American football there is no materiality within which the conditions by which gameplay can unfold would be hard-coded.

Malaby (2007, 103) suggests that

> any given singular moment in any given game may generate new practices or new meanings, which may in turn transform the way the game is played, either formally or practically (through a change in rules or conventions.)

This transformation seems quite straight-forward in the context of most multiplayer games, where the upholding of the correct procedure is (partially) in the hands of human players and conventions about acceptable practices exist as agreements between humans. One could perhaps claim that all activities whose structure (referring to that which defines how an individual event influences the possibilities for future events) rests upon inter-human agreements are 'processual', like Malaby suggests play to be.

What would correspond to the invention and institutionalisation of a new rule in the context of single-player games would be the ways in which game designers, in update patches made after a game is released, fix bugs and adjust the balancing of the game to account for the practices (known as *exploits*) the players have come up with. For example, when questioned in an interview regarding how the designers intended players of *Doom* (1993) to get into a particular secret area, John Romero, one of the game's designers, recollects how a bug related to ways of accessing the secret area was fixed in a subsequent update as players found out about it (Killough).

To illustrate the argument from an alternative angle I turn to Nakamura and Wirman (2005), who have picked up the distinction between "strategy" and "tactic" originating in Certeau (1988 [1980]), and adapted it for the purpose of discussing "girlish counter-playing tactics" in computer games. In accordance with the somewhat offbeat connotations of the term in Certeau (1988 [1980]), by "strategy", Nakamura and Wirman (2005) "mean the gameworld, all objects and items in it, and rules of the game. The strategy aims to control the player by isolating the space in which the player moves", whereas they understand "tactic" as referring to "the ways in which

the player moves within the place defined by an outside power". Bracketing the spatial undertone of their argument, we can suggest that rocket-jumping is indeed a *tactic*, invented to counter the *strategy*, or the 'institution' of the game, the rules, environment, and other properties which control what is possible and what is not. So while the tactics might change, the strategy remains constant, with the exception of bug patches being released.

While we certainly can describe "processual" qualities in playings of single-player games and the material game artefacts of single-player games are sometimes adjusted to meet new practices of play, it would not seem sensible to assume that the materiality of single-player games was as malleable as that of games which, by definition, consist of social exchanges between their players. Doing so would discount and undermine a body of knowledge to be gained by studying the material game artefact as it exists. From an extreme processual position it would be challenging to describe why players looking for fresh experiences, instead of saving money by generating new meanings and transforming the ways in which their existing games are played, shell out their monies to access new kinds of materialitities, that is, buy not only new games but also expansion packs with new content for their existing games.

Kirkpatrick (2007, 75), who is concerned with computer games as aesthetic objects, questions the alleged affinity between games and computer games. While the critique I have levelled at processuality rests upon the difference between single-player and multi-player games, Kirkpatrick demonstrates that the claim of disparity between games and computer games can be made without distinguishing between games based on their different amounts of players. Kirkpatrick suggests that an analysis of a computer game must take play as its starting point, but points out that it would be wrong

> to pursue the prioritization properly afforded to play exclusively in the direction
> of an analogy with traditional games.

Further emphasizing the disparity between computer games and all games, he suggests

that

> what is distinctive to the computer game form can only be partially understood
> by examining its game character.

On the same note, writing about what some might consider an addiction to *Breakout!*, Sudnow (1983, 8), referring to videogames, suggests that

> perhaps [Atari] called them video 'games' only to avoid troubles with the Food
> and Drug Administration."

While I am sympathetic to Kirkpatrick's insistence to study computer games without the baggage of the association with 'traditional games', in all fairness we must note that the position Kirkpatrick (2007) advocates can be criticized of essentialist undertones as it postulates the existence of a "computer game form". However, on the other hand, there is no reason to assume that such a form could not exist. If it does, perhaps its definitive characteristics are to be found in the relation between the materiality of the game artefact and the activity of gameplay.

The materiality of the game artefact has more weight in studies of single-player computer games than it has in game studies in general. How much more weight one can place on the materiality, I presume, is directly proportional to the distance of how far away one is willing to locate single-player computer games from multi-player computer games and from all games in general. Woods (2007, 11) suggests that

> in typical single player games [...] the computer not only maintains and
> represents the playing field, but provides automated intellectual and skill-
> based dynamic challenges [...] it would be a mistake to treat the interactions
> with such a world as constituting contestual play.

Instead of corresponding to "contestual play", Woods (2007, 11-12) sees single-player computer game play as resembling the

> configurative practice that occurs when physically manipulating a puzzle or
> altering the relationship between cards in a game of solitaire.

If the notion of game one has adopted claims that games are inherently processual, and thus cannot accommodate the importance of the material, perhaps a way out would be to admit that these things we call single-player games are something other

than games. In other words, if 'games' are to be processual due to being social phenomena by definition, perhaps these 'single-player computer games' could be better understood in relation some other continuum, perhaps to that which we refer to when explaining sudoku and crossword puzzles or, like Woods (2009) suggests in a later paper, mountain climbing. Certainly giving up the term "game" and replacing it with a new one would do less violence to the object of study than it does to force it into an ill fit with an alien mode of description.

4.1.3 Transmediality

Juul's "Classical Game Model" provides an example of the project of understanding the essential traits contributing to the 'gameness' of games. Based on literature review and game analyses, Juul proceeds to construct a theoretical abstraction intended for "explaining what relates computer games to other games and what happens on the borders of the field of games" (Juul 2003, 30). Implied in Juul's model is what we might call the *transmediality argument*, according to which for example *Chess* is the same *Chess* regardless if it is played on a wooden board with ivory pieces (possibly resembling *Star Wars* characters), on a computer or on a mobile phone with a tiny screen.

In line with the transmediality argument, one could say that while the 'implementations' of a game may vary, the *idea* of *Chess* persists across the implementations. That is why we are 'allowed' to refer to them with the name *Chess*. When we speak of *Chess*, we tend to refer to the transmedial *Chess* and not to any of its particular implementations. That is also why the transmediality argument can be criticised for being idealistic.

The transmediality argument seems quite sensible in the context of games like *Chess* or *Qualat* that consist of general rules which can be exhaustively described.[5]

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[5]The difference between the kind of games here is certainly suggestive of the differences between emergence and progression games (*cf.* Juul 2002) and between games with infinite and finite teleologies (*cf.* Elverdam and Aarseth 2007). However, whether there is an essential connection

It is possible for us to know how *Chess* should be implemented and to point out when computer makes a mistake in the implementation. If taken into game analysis practice, the transmediality argument implies that the particular game being studied is an implementation of the transmedial game. Thus, to study the transmedial *Tetris* by studying for example *TETRIS: The Soviet Mind Game* (1988), amounts to taking the object of study as an 'ideal' *Tetris* manifested, perhaps fallibly, in *TETRIS: The Soviet Mind Game.*

However, like Tavinor (2009, 21) observes, there are games, which "do not seem possible except in this digital medium"[6] and thus are not perhaps best described as "transmedial". Furthermore, the transmediality argument's self-evident sensibility diminishes when we try to apply it on games whose functionality we would have hard time describing exhaustively, as it brings in the notions of 'bug' or 'glitch'. These notions refer to features in the underlying technology or implementation which are perceived as erroneous compared to an assumed "ideal" implementation.

Bugs and glitches are real issues for the applicability of the transmediality argument in game studies that must strive for an undisturbed and non-biased access to its object of study. It is due to bugs and glitches that it is problematic to assume a "transmedial" game as the object of study for computer game studies. I will unpack this claim in this subsection, and suggest how the transmediality argument can coexist with arguments emphasizing the particular materialities of computer games.

Bugs and glitches are problematic because it is ambiguous on which grounds we can read certain features as flaws. While the revision history of a particular game, a document detailing all the corrections made to software after its initial release, is quite powerful an authority concerning what is a flaw and what isn't, the origin of the 'ideal game' to which the implementation is compared is easily left unannounced.

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remains to be interrogated.

[6]As examples of such games, Tavinor (2009, 21) mentions *Rise of Nations* (2003), *Civilization* (1991) and *Age of Empires* (1997). In all fairness we must note that Tavinor (2009, 21) seems to be assuming that there is a constant digital medium of computer games, which seems like an unexamined claim.

4.1. Seaching for an invariant stucture: materiality and its contenders

Perhaps the game developers are not publishing a revision history, perhaps the game is not supported by its developers any more, perhaps bugs remain unnoticed by developers or most crucially perhaps we misjudge features as bugs and vice versa.

Consider the following example. The policemen in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2009) (later *GTA:SA*) cannot swim, unlike the protagonist, CJ, controlled by the player. In the early PC versions of the game, if CJ is chased by the policemen on foot, and the player makes him jump from a cliff to water, the policemen follow CJ and drown. Analysing the particular version of *GTA:SA*, we can conclude that the policemen are immensely stupid. Given the somewhat positive light under which *GTA:SA*, represents criminal activities – consider for example the scenes where the player is rewarded after a mission that included working for gangsters – the stupidity of the policemen would make perfect sense in *GTA:SA,*, not unlike it does in movies that tell stories about crimes from criminals' perspective. However, the policemen's stupidity apparently was not a desired feature but a bug, as it was fixed in an update, presumably by tweaking the path-finding algorithms that control the policemen so that they avoid jumping into water. (Champanard)

Consider also *The Sims 3* (2009), which, since the version 1.3, has been a game in which babies will not be born to single parents. (Electronic Arts: The Sims v.1.3 patch notes). It is crucial that we acknowledge the difference between the two game artefacts: *The Sims 3* pre and post the v.1.3 update, especially if we are to analyse what kind of ideas about parenting are implied in the game.

As players, we may have accumulated a wealth of knowledge regarding play practices and intricacies of computer games. We may know the conventions of particular genres and platforms and the tactics they require, and recognize for example that whereas a dialogue between game characters that seems never-ending might be considered a flaw if found in a action-adventure game of US origin, it is perfectly typical in action-adventure games intended for the Japanese market. We also know that usually, if action-adventure games have levels, there exists particular

location through which or a particular item using which we can proceed to the next level.

Based on this knowledge, we have certain expectations of how a particular game should work and recognize when it does not do so. This is not unlike an informed movie-goer would recognize if a film's reels are projected in a wrong order (*cf.* Aarseth 1994, 56-7). If a tactic working anywhere else does not work in a particular level, it would be tempting to conclude that we have found a bug. Thus if a glitch comes in between the seemingly apparent 'ideal game' and one's particular playing, for example a key with which to proceed to next level cannot be found anywhere, one could try to hold one's ground by claiming that the bugs and glitches are *not* part of the 'ideal game' the game artefact is supposed to make manifest.

It is also perfectly possible that we are wrong in our conclusions based on our genre expectations. Thus, studying an 'ideal game' without deriving evidence for one's claims from the materiality leaves the origin of this 'ideality' unannounced and brings in unnecessary weaknesses. These weaknesses can be identified as *intentional bias*, *functional bias*, and *ideological bias* which I will discuss in the respective order.

It is possible that the designers have intended a game that plays with what we know of intricacies of genres. If we, by default, assume that is *not* the case, we invite the discussion on authorial intent or "intentional fallacy" one may be familiar with from literary studies (*cf.* Wimsatt and Beardsley 2005, Barthes 1967). Further complexity is added by the fact that the author is known as a problematic figure in the context of computer games, which are products of teams consisting of sometimes hundreds of members. Perhaps what we call a 'bug' is just an evidence of that we are encountering a game artefact that stands out from its genre as exceptionally challenging and we are just not good enough players to solve the problem in front of us.

Even though the corporate author of the game in question perhaps intended only to make money with its product, it is possible that the level designer who was in charge

of the area in which we found the alleged 'bug' wanted the game to challenge what we know about computer games and managed to leave his transgressive thumbprint, in the form of a well-hidden key to next level, into the final product despite the corporate author's quality assurance process.

The questions of intentionality behind an artefact are not exclusive to the study of literature. Ihde (1990, 69), following an example of a party game where the guests' task is to decide on the purpose of a stone that resembles an ancient axe, concludes on the ambiguity of objects and technology in general, that:

> [t]he designer's intentions play only a small part of the subsequent history of the artifact. [...] Design, in the history of technology, usually falls into the background of a multiplicity of *uses*, few of which were intended at the outset.

We would be committing an *intentional bias* if we claimed that a detail is a bug based on our knowledge of genre conventions, because this claim would necessarily build on expectations about the designers' intentions by excluding the possibility that the game was in fact intended to transgress genre conventions.

Another threat posed by assuming an 'ideal' game is what we might call *functional bias*. This is a threat especially to game analysis proceeding from the first-person perspective, that is, without creating a distance between the projects of researching and playing. Due to the functionality embedded in a game as an aesthetic object, it is (too) easy to couple the dichotomy of aesthetic judgements "good" and "bad" with the dichotomy of pragmatic judgements of "useful" (relevant) and "harmful". Frasca (2003) points out that such pragmatic judgements can be viewed also as moral judgements, when he writes, elaborating on the difference between *paidea* and *ludus* games, that in the latter

> you must do X in order to reach Y and therefore become a winner. This implies that Y is a desired objective and therefore it is morally charged. [...] By stating a rule that defines a winning scenario, the [author of the simulation] is claiming that these goals are preferable to their opposite.

Thus, anything contributing to the success toward Y, such as a powerful weapon in a first-person shooter would be "good", whereas anything hampering the pursuit of

Y, such as a bug preventing one from advancing from one level to another would be "bad".

On one hand, following the line of argument known as 'normative aesthetics' (*cf.* Eggerman 1975, Crowther 2007), one could claim that being able to proceed from one level to another is a part of the 'canon' of computer game aesthetics and thus there is nothing wrong in attributing the quality of "bad" on all things which unnecessarily prevent moving from one level to another, such as exceptionally well hidden keys.

On the other hand, there is the perspective of cultural evolution, from which mutations are necessary as they have the potentiality to move forward the development. This is exemplified by Spiegelman (2005), who has studied the phenomenon of graffiti in relation to authority and aesthetics, and sees graffiti as a "catalyst for change, both symbolic and social" and as "the chaotic glitch in the aesthetic template of the status quo". While debating the cultural and aesthetic dimension of these features might not serve the purpose here, it can be pointed out that the aesthetic status of bugs and glitches is best described as ambivalent, as its description depends upon the purposes of both playing and designing the game in question. If we study an ideal game instead of an actual game, the ambivalence of these features' desirability leads to great ambiguities that extend from the aesthetical toward the ideological. *Functional bias* amounts to taking the game's functionality as a strategy to treat the ideological, moral, and aesthetic ambiguities of the game.

As genre expectations are part of our biographies as persons, they are most likely consistent with the world-views we employ and might not be shared uniformly by the general playing public. This is evident in the examples that are functionally ambiguous enough to be interpreted in a number of ways, for example the stupid policemen of *GTA:SA* and the adoption ban for single parents in *The Sims 3*. The status of these examples as bugs or glitches depends on the values of the particular player. Rebellious teenagers who think that police abuses them by enforcing strict

antisocial behaviour laws might find it natural that the police in *GTA:SA* is stupid, and feel comfortable playing a game that manifests a world-view similar to theirs. An advocate of 'traditional family values' might find it disturbing if babies could in fact be born to single parents. For some these things are glitches, whereas for others they are exactly the right state of things. Assuming an ambiguous feature as a bug based on one's personal values would be to commit oneself to an *ideological bias.*

While at first sight the transmedial argument, and the biases it can bring in, seems to be in contrast with an emphasis on the computer game's materiality, the two perspectives can be reconciled. Allegedly *Tetris*, too, comes in different guises. Wikipedia lists over 50 "variants of *Tetris*" for a different platforms. Some of them are faithful to the Russian aesthetic, whereas some contain for example sexual imagery of varying crudeness and relevance to gameplay (*cf.* Leino 2007b). Consider that we are to study *Tetris* from the transmedial perspective. Should we assume Alexey Pajitnov's original for Elektronika 60 as the *urtyp* that gives us the best access to the 'ideal *Tetris*' and focus our empirical efforts on it?

Jordan (2009, 6) observes how *The Tetris Company*, by stipulating *The Tetris Guideline* to which the new game designs of *Tetris* licensees are required to adhere, attempts "to standardize not only straightforward design choices (such as block colors, keyboard controls, and playfield dimensions)" but also "to leverage the adoption of new gameplay elements across its various platform licensees". These elements include new ways of rotating the blocks, an ability to 'hold' a single block for later strategic usage, and so on, and their addition to new games published under the *Tetris* license is mandatory. Does the inclusion in the official guideline make these features part of the "ideal" or "transmedial Tetris"? Given that we could somehow get hold of *The Tetris Guideline*, could we even stop paying attention to its manifestations, which due to their actual existence are most likely fallible and incomplete compared to the essential clarity of the "ideal Tetris" conveyed by the guidelines? Perhaps, instead of analysing the manifestations of "ideal tetris", we could analyse a mental construct

developed based on studying the guideline carefully.

While this might indeed be a good idea for a specific project, such as one focusing solely on *Tetris*, perhaps it would not make sense as a general rule for games scholarship to suggest a preference of essential over existing. We should bear in mind that the transmediality argument is not an *antimediality* argument. Juul (2005a, 48) asserts that "there is no set of equipment or material support common to all games." It is hard to disagree about the lack of a common material support across all games – at least describing a medium shared by both *Puzzle Bobble* (1994) and *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards* (1987) would require watering down the significance in the notion of "medium" or speaking about a *meta*medium instead.[7] Acknowledging that there is not necessarily any common "material support" or "medium" to all games, does not amount to renouncing the involvement of "material support" or "medium" in the cases of *particular* games. Even though *Chess* can be implemented on a variety of platforms, the platforms can and most likely do have an influence on how a given instance of a particular implementation of the game will play out.

Our earlier observation that the notion of a 'game' is a signifying shorthand whose reference is arbitrary and exists by an agreement is echoed also in the discussion about 'ideal' and 'transmedial' games. We observe that the applicability of the transmediality argument as an ontological claim with which to define the object of study for game studies is contested by the three biases identified. However, after acknowledging that the transmediality argument is not an antimediality argument, that the particular materiality of the game artefact can have a crucial influence on the game being played, the transmedial idea of a game, such as that assumedly

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[7]This position is characterised by Kay (1984), who suggests that "[t]he protean nature of the computer is such that it can act like a machine or like a language to be shaped and exploited". Youngblood (1989) moves on to articulate the ramifications of such device to artistic practices, as he suggests that the (computer) "code is a metamedium: through it, high-level aesthetic constructs from previous media become the primitives of the new medium." Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin (2000) discuss the larger aesthetic and cultural implications of media's ability to mimic, simulate, and draw upon other media.

shared to a varying degree by all the numerous "*Tetris* variants", makes sense as a device of comparative game analysis and criticism.

We can articulate meaningful differences between games unfolding based on their particular (however 'fluid' and 'patchable') materialities by pointing out how they differ from the 'transmedial game' we decide them to manifest. *XTET* (1996), for example, differs from the 'ideal Tetris' not only as the blocks represent humans, but also as the conditions by which blocks are cleared are slightly different from the usual.

However, that project has a weakness – it remains arbitrary to which 'transmedial game' we should be comparing the individual manifestations. For example, one applying the idea of 'transmedial game' as a device of comparative methodology could perfectly well ask if all FPS games are different implementations of the same game. This is exemplified by Steve "Slug" Russell's statement about his invention, the game *Spacewar* (1962), quoted in Huhtamo (2005): "My gosh – it is a pinball machine!"

The transmedial *Tetris* is not to be found in any of the variants (including the original) but from somewhere *in between* them – as for example in the official guideline. This amounts to saying that the transmedial *Tetris* game *does not exist.*[8] The transmedial *Tetris* is not accessible from the first-person perspective, because the player's experience always involves a particular *Tetris* game with its distinctive materiality. Here we can find an explanation for the difference between *studying a game by playing it* and *studying a game as played.* The former project assumes the empirical target of the scrutiny as most likely partial, perhaps also somewhat fallible, manifestation of its object of study, the "ideal" or "transmedial game". The latter project takes the empirical target, gameplay upon the materiality of the game artefact, as the object of study at face value. For the latter project, safer than to assume 'ideal game' as *a priori* manifested (partially) in the particular material

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[8] If one believes that "ideas" exist, perhaps one could say that an "idea of *Tetris*" exists.

game artefact, is to observe that by conducting empirical game analysis by engaging in the activity of play upon the material game artefact, we can, perhaps (if we're good enough), arrive at an 'ideal playing' *a posteriori*.[9]

This discussion can be concluded by observing that the transmedial game is not something that can be ever encountered in direct experience by playing and must thus, from the first-person perspective, be bracketed as a presupposition.

4.2 Gameplay upon materiality

Like discussed in section 3.1, we can acknowledge, without going into the details, that the notion of "play" is applied to describe quite a number of different phenomena; ranging from the plays of Shakespeare via playing an accordion to playing poker and playing with one's life. Thus, attempting to understand the "player's experience" without further clarification would imply an impossibly broad endeavour.

Perhaps it would be possible to take the materiality of the computer game artefact, and building on its constancy across different playings, postulate the object of study for game studies from the player's perspective in a plausible manner as a manageable and less broad category of phenomena, while maintaining the presuppositionless attitude. In this section, I explore this possibility, and arrive at a definition of computer game play that rests on the materiality of the game artefact and the player's desire to play. The definition can be postulated without building on assumptions about either the qualitative texture of play or any essence or idea of games. From this definition, we can inherit also the notions of success and failure.

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[9]However, what, then, would make the playing "ideal"? From the first-person perspective we could perhaps call a playing that could have continued as long as the player wished it to continue an 'ideal playing'. I will unpack this claim in subsection 4.2.5

4.2.1 The ambiguity of computer game materiality

Seemingly the simplest possible way to arrive at a notion of computer game play that takes into account the materiality would be to assume the involvement of an object we decide is a game as a definitive feature in the play activity we then decide to call computer game play, or 'gameplay' for short. We could take a definition of a game, such as that of Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 80), Tavinor (2009, 26), or Juul (2003) and by comparing *Heroes over Europe* (2009) and *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* (2006) to the definition, find out for example that *Heroes over Europe* is a game whereas *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* is a borderline case. The activity that take places upon or involves the artefacts we take as computer games, like *Heroes over Europe*, could be referred to as computer game play. That, which takes place upon *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* we might refer to as a borderline activity. Or we might say, following further the theory of Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 302-9), that *Heroes over Europe* affords "Game Play" whereas *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* affords 'only' "Ludic Activities". However, for the scope and purpose of this project, this approach is problematic not only due to its *ambiguity* but also due to its self-contained solution to the ambiguity, its *reliance on an ontological presupposition*. I will discuss these problems respectively in the following.

We can describe the approach suffering from ambiguity based on an observation that all objects can be used for a multitude of purposes. For example, bottles can be opened with mobile phones, computer games can be used as vehicles for self-expression in the form of *machinima*, and so on. If the involvement of a particular kind of object was our only criterion, we would be grouping together phenomenologically un-related activities. The definition landing all the responsibility on the involvement of a (certain kind of) artefact would fail to capture any nuances in the kinds of activities it attempts to refer to. Among these nuances is a distinction that seems crucial, the distinction between playing the game and playing *with* the game. The other way around the ambiguity arising in this approach would be to assume that by

default, particular context of use would stand out from among all possible contexts of use. This would be to build on an unexamined claim.

This ambiguity can be approached from the point of view of Ihde's *technological artefacts*. Ihde (1990, 68), a post-phenomenologist and a philosopher of technology, observes, leading to his notion of a technological artefact, that animals make occasional use of objects they find in nature, such as thorns and sticks. Even though humans do the same, for humans these objects do not remain as thorns and sticks, but turn into spears and tools. In this process, Ihde sees them being shaped and manufactured "into technological artifacts". Ihde (1990, 68) defines a technological artefact as something which "becomes what it 'is' through its uses". For example, the only use envisioned for the *Honeywell 316* marketed as a "kitchen computer" was the storage of recipes, which was somewhat challenging as the user interface comprised of switches and lights only. Only through decades of evolutionary iteration and developments in both contexts of use and the technical properties utilisable by designers, has a "kitchen computer" become an entertainment device embedded into the refridgerator door and capable of streaming music videos to spice up the event of cooking manifested as for example the *Electrolux Screenfridge*.[10] Thus a mere ontological description of what an object is is not enough to describe a technological artefact or a "technofact", whose description necessitates also accounting for the object's context of use.

This ambiguity might pose a significant problem for someone trying to answer questions of ontology – such as "what are computer games?" However, let us be reminded of the lack of ontological concerns in this project, and their incompatibility with or irrelevance to the first-person perspective. In section 3.2.3 we observed that to access the experienced significance of emotions in play we must adopt a first-person perspective, whose plausibility in turn depends on the presuppositionless attitude. An implication of this attitude is that ontological concerns need to be

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[10]This development is documented in Spicer, 2000

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bracketed, that is, "put out of court" (Moran 2000, 10) – not necessarily negated or denied but left unused. Ihde (1990, 70), discussing the problem of defining and describing technological artefacts, continues that:

> If the ambiguity of the object is one side of the problem, then the other side is that virtually any object may become a technology – at least, if it can be brought into the range of human praxis.

We accused our first attempt to define computer game play by assuming the influence of an object we choose to call a game not only of ambiguity, but also of reliance on an ontological presupposition. We have no reason to assume that things not matching whatever definition of a computer game we have chosen could not be played equally well, that is, be brought into the range of *playful* praxis. While we might be happy about the resource-efficiency of the empirical demarcation implied by the definition, that excludes a number of potential activities, namely those that do not involve a thing identifiable as a computer game, the definition's reliance on an *a priori* assumption is problematic for the presuppositionless perspective. In case we had followed Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 303-305), the definition would rest on assumptions about an ontological class of "computer games" and their usages, assuming not only that games have "systems" and that "rules" exist, but also that the players would "follow the rules" and "experience its system". Had we relied on Juul (2003) instead, the assumptions would be somewhat different (concerning for example the player's attachment to the outcome of the game) but similarly problematic.

Kirkpatrick (2007, 75) suggests that we should not assume that the 'core gameness' would be all there was to games, or, that a computer game could be exhaustively described by its 'gameness'. This is not unlike Aarseth (2010), who suggests, using the example of *Max Payne* (2001), that many contemporary computer games are "crossmedia packages" that afford a wider variety of activities than merely being played. In the context of '*Tetris* variants' discussed in subsection 4.1.3, the 'Tetrisness' shared among them would supposedly not be enough to describe the individual variants.

After all, admitting that there is more to games than "core gameness" is only sensible, as acknowledging the existence of "*Tetris* variants" implies that it is possible for a number of artifacts to share a 'core gameness' but differ in respect to some other qualities to the extent that we can talk about "variants" rather than "instances". Thus, while the "*Tetris* variants" may share for example the kind of "formalized interaction" (*cf.* Salen and Zimmerman 2003, 303-305) – arranging of blocks, we can assume that their players experience much more than the "system" according to which the blocks are arranged. Otherwise, there would be no market for *XTET* (an erotic *Tetris* variant) and the like.

In his critique of a 'ludological' understanding of games, Kirkpatrick (2007, 75) points out that the things we often call computer games, are often more than games, or "only part game", as they stand

> somewhere between the traditional 'game' which structures play, and the aesthetic object or 'artwork' which works by stimulating the play of imaginative and cognitive faculties in the subject of aesthetic experience.

For this reason, according to Kirkpatrick (2007, 75),

> the kind of play we engage in with [a computer game] is best understood as an embodiment of the subjective experience of play associated with art objects and reflected in the philosophical discourse of aesthetics.

Even though we might, somewhat mischievously, read Kirkpatrick as calling the aestheticians to arms to study games, it makes more sense to take the statement as reminding us from the dangers of taking it for granted that we can assume one possible kind of context of use (*cf.* Ihde 1990) of computer games standing out as somehow primary or fundamental. However, regarding how a context of use emerges from the technology or how a technology invites a certain context of use, it would be foolish to claim that there was no difference between for example *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* and *Heroes over Europe*.[11] The difference between the flight simulator

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[11]This remark can be made not only based on first-hand experience, but also based on the observed differences in cultures surrounding the two computer programs that involve simulating the position of an airplane pilot. However, without engaging in ethnography or demographical studies we can only *anecdotally* observe that *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* seems to appeal to older

and the airplane dogfight game seems to be that the former can be played *with* while the latter can be also played.

In subsection 3.1.4 we observed that defining a game as *that which is being played* brings in the least possible amount of ontological presupposition, and that with the definition the descriptive abilities of the concept of *game* are directly inherited from the concept of *play* and thus anything applied on *play* is also reflected to the notion of *game.* Perhaps, with a suitable notion of *play*, this definition could be tweaked to account for the difference between materialities of *Microsoft Flight Simulator X* and *Heroes over Europe* that seems to amount to the difference between affording *playing with* (a game) and *playing a game.*

This definition of a game as played would then correspond to a definition of a computer game as a "technological artefact" from the first-person perspective: accounting not only for the game's materiality to the extent that its features are experienced as significant, but also for its implications to a particular context of use, *gameplay.* With this definition, we would be able to account for the crucial nuance in all possible contexts of use, the difference between playing and playing *with.* I will discuss single-player games as technological artefacts in the next section, but before going there it is necessary first to find out what the materiality of a computer game does differently when it is being played, compared to, say, a digital toy.

In an earlier chapter it was pointed out that the purpose of the research, its object of study, and methodology are intertwined and inform each other. Given that the purpose of this project is to understand the player's emotions in the context of the play experience as a relationship between a computer game and its player, it seems fair to hold on to the necessity of the involvement of the artefact we may choose to, in vernacular terms, call a single-player computer game until we find a better definition.

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audience who prefer slow-paced action and are interested in the technology that facilitates flight. *Heroes over Europe*, on the other hand, is preferred by younger players who like competition and close encounters.

In other words, the sensibility of assuming the involvement of a "computer game" applies within the context of this project, even though the ontological idea of 'what a game is' needs to be bracketed until it makes an appearance in the experiential perspective. Perhaps, by means of comparative analysis, we could arrive at a description of the significant features in those artefacts that afford being played that make them stand out from among artefacts that afford 'only' being played *with*.

4.2.2   Playing with vs. playing: the *gameplay condition*

Gadamer (2001 [1960], 106) refers to play/games (*Spiel*) as "risks" for the player: the player "enjoys a freedom of decision which at the same time is endangered and irrevocably limited." He continues that

> even in the case of games in which one tries to perform tasks that one has set oneself, there is a risk that they will not 'work', 'succeed', or 'succeed again', which is the attraction of the game.

Aarseth (1997, 179) defined an *ergodic artwork* as one

> that in a material sense includes the rules for its own use, a work that has certain requirements built in that automatically distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful users.

Given the possibility of ending up as an "unsuccessful user", we can assume that interacting with an ergodic artwork would correspond to Gadamer's notion of play as a risk for the player. However, the notions of "success" and "failure" are somewhat ambiguous. What does it mean for a task to "succeed" or to "fail" in the context of a computer game? Would it be possible to describe, based on what is given in the experience, the ways in which the materiality of the ergodic work shapes its use?

Allow me to try to describe these structures from a player's perspective. Some of my actions as a player of a game will allow me to do other (perhaps new) kinds of things in the game. As a consequence, whether direct or indirect, of some other actions of mine, however, continuing playing the game might be rendered as an impossibility.

We observe that while playing takes place, the game evaluates, in relation to a pre-defined criteria, the choices the player has made and decides on opening-up or delimiting the player's possibilities to choose. Depending on the design of the particular game, some choices choices may allow the player to do previously impossible things, while other choices may lead to an abrupt ending of the situation, cause the player to become a non-player even if she was not aware of the existence of the criteria against which his actions were evaluated.[12]

In *SimCity 4* (2003) I *may* choose to replicate the social-realist esplanade Karl-Marx-Allee of East Berlin by constructing a road of two driveways with parks in the middle, lined up with high-density residential buildings, but, I *must* keep my spending lower than my earnings in the long run, otherwise I will be relieved from my mayoral duties. Most likely if I succeed, the project leaves me with a positive cashflow to be invested in future projects. However, I can *fail* in two ways. First, the neighbourhood might not look like its Berlinese counterpart in the real world. Second, in the process of building the neighbourhood, I may run out of cash. The first kind of failure has no consequences whatsoever for the game's materiality. Perhaps, from the point of view of materiality, we should not call it a failure. However, the second kind of failure may lead me to be expelled from being the mayor of *SimCity 4*, especially if I have already used all the last resorts offered by the game. But if I manage, with careful budgeting and planning, to build the Karl-Marx-Allee replica into a thriving neighbourhood with plenty of taxpayers, I open up possibilities that were previously outside my reach, building for example a small municipal airport, which attracts businesses to my city and gives me various other sorts of benefits, among which is the possibility to build a convention centre.

When I make choices as a player of a single-player computer game like *SimCity 4*, I subject them to evaluation by the game, which can in turn, decide on the consequences my choices will have. This exemplifies the idea of "endangered freedom"

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[12]In all fairness we must note that in some cases this kind of abrupt ending can also be the winning of the game, as also winning can cause the player to become a non-player.

(Gadamer 2001 [1960], 106). In a game like *SimCity 4* we have a certain freedom of choice, and some choices can lead to possibilities for new choices being opened up for us. Furthermore, in *SimCity 4* (but not in for example the Train Table Mode of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* (2006), an example to which I will return in a while), certain other choices can lead to the freedom of choice being taken away from us altogether. In effect this makes us *responsible for our freedom* as players. The "endangered freedom" of which we are responsible is not exclusive to computer games – it is also the condition by which we exist in the actual world. Like Sartre (2003 [1943], 505) points out, a human is "condemned to be free" and as such "responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being".

Thus we can also talk about "endangered freedom" and responsibility for this freedom in the context of anything describable as a game, which naturally encompasses also non-computer games.[13] If I am playing the game of throwing a ball against the wall so that it bounces via the floor in between my hand and the wall, in each throw I subject my actions to be evaluated against the "structure" (Gadamer 2001 [1960], 210) of the game. I may have agreed that if I fail to behave according to the rules, for example if I catch the ball before it has bounced via the floor, I lose and can't continue playing. Thus in such a case I would be responsible for my being as a player of the particular ball-throwing game. This is, though, pretty ambiguous, as that against which my actions are evaluated is not enforced anywhere else than in my mind, which means I can alter the "structure" of the game at will.

I mentioned "anything describable as a game" as a context within which we can speak of endangered freedom. This warrants a more detailed treatment. Let us

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[13]In subsection 3.1.4 I suggested that the notion of 'game' is a signifying shorthand, and the target of its reference is arbitrary. In the same vein, following that we observed that our freedom also in the actual world is endangered, it seems to follow that being in the world is a game, or, "life is a game". If we want to be more specific, we can refer to some of the more particular "endangered freedoms" we may enjoy, and state that "traffic is a game" and "writing a PhD is a game". However, these statements seem to veer towards metaphorical ambiguity. But in the case of computer games, this ambiguity can be avoided, which I attempt to do by establishing the notion of gameplay condition, and describing how the materiality of the involved game artefact imposes it concretely on the human player.

be reminded that in subsection 3.1.1 we observed that to conceive something as a game, we need to fill the position(s) of the players with something. Furthermore, in subsection 3.1.4 we suggested that we can take a "game" as a signifying shorthand, and engage in the debates on what kind of phenomena should be covered by the shorthand. We also observed a second option regarding the use of the term game, that it could be used to refer to anything that can be played, without yet making the distinction between *playing* and *playing with.*

Following Gadamer (2001 [1960], 210), we might think of my postponing to buy flight tickets as a kind of a game, as I am, at least metaphorically, playing with the possibilities when I am comparing the fares on different websites, not buying the tickets yet while knowing the risk that tomorrow they might be even more expensive as the departure date is closing in. I stand in the position of the player, but where would the shorthand refer to in this case – to the possibilities? Perhaps, given a suitable definition of the shorthand, we could call the possibilities a "game", but ultimately the debate about whether the shorthand should be extended to cover such thing as "possibilities" would be a debate about personal preferences, and as such not of our interest here. However, the second option seems more fruitful, to see if "the possibilities" can in fact "be played".

In the context of ball-bouncing game, that against which my actions are evaluated was not enforced by anything else except my own mind. Regarding "playing with possibilities" of buying a plane ticket with different routings, travel times, companies, et cetera, that against which my actions are evaluated seems certainly more tangible, involving my bank account, the travel websites, other passengers, *et cetera.*

However, like we observed in subsections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3, when defending materiality against processuality and transmediality, in the context of computer games this evaluation and enforcement is done by the game artefact which has the ability to change its material properties as a consequence of my actions, possibly rendering it impossible for me to continue playing. In contrast, the ball I could be bouncing

could not make itself non-bouncable as a consequence of landing into my hand without touching the floor first. If a *Qualat* board, for example one dug into the ground, breaks or gets severly tampered as a consequence of an in-game action, the players are facing an unfortunate accident, not a normal turn of events. The possibilities of buying different kinds of plane tickets, however, could in fact make themselves non-playable and will evidently do so at the latest on the day of my preferred departure if I have not bought the ticket yet. But on that day, I am free to change the departure date, to decide that I would rather leave, for example, in two weeks time.

Regarding the plane tickets, I can only play *with* the possibilities; the possibilities and their tangible manifestations and representations in the form of websites, passengers, my bank account and so on, even though able to render me a non-player, are not suggesting any particular kind of context of use in relation to which my actions could be evaluated. While they provide material support for my playing, they could equally well be used for any other kind of playing than buying a particular kind of ticket. In other words, I can play *with* them, but in them is no particular game which I could *play*.

What makes single-player computer games stand out among these examples is not yet the materiality's ability to change itself as a consequence of my actions as a player, but an implication of this feature: the game artifact's ability to, by changing its material properties, *enforce* a particular context of use onto those who desire to play. This is, perhaps, an account from the first-person perspective of how an ergodic work "includes the rules for its own use" (Aarseth 1997, 179).

This influence of the materiality of the computer game artefact to the activity of play can be articulated through Sartre's notion of "resistance". For this to be possible, it is necessary to trace Sartre's argument a while, regarding how the notion of *resistance* is meaningful in relation to how humans[14] are responsible for the

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[14]In the passages I am referring to, to signify that which is free and responsible, Sartre does not use the word "human", but "being-for-itself". "Being-for-itself" in Sartre's philosophy is

freedom they have. Sartre (2003 [1943], 505) takes responsibility

> in its ordinary sense as 'consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of
> an event or object'.

However, the Sartrean freedom goes a bit against the common sense, as it, according

to Moran (2000, 358)

> resides in a decision of the intellect, in autonomous thinking, rather than
> arising in action. One can be free and yet unable to act. Freedom is a stance
> of consciousness.

Sartre (2003 [1943], 505) addresses the difference between decision and action as

follows: "*to be free* does not mean *to obtain what one has wished* but rather *by

oneself to determine oneself to wish*", which equals to choosing. Thus, actualisation

is not ultimately important, because already 'choosing to act' implies freedom:

"determination to action is itself action" (Sartre 2003 [1943], 498). As humans in the

world, we are always already bound to choosing, and even escaping this necessity

by means of suicide would itself be a choice, albeit our last one. This is where the

'condemnation to freedom' originates in. However, a choice is distinguished from

a dream or a wish, as it "supposes a commencement of realization" (Sartre 2003

[1943], 505). What makes this commencement significant is that not all wishes can

be realised: the world within which the human has to choose is no silly putty in his

hands. Like Sartre suggests,

> there can be a free for-itself [*i.e.* human] only as engaged in a resisting world.
> (Sartre 2003 [1943], 505)

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not unlike Dasein is in Heidegger's work, in the sense that they are both 'technical terms' or
'placeholders' whose target of reference could be roughly approximated as a 'human. In Sartre's
work, "being-for-itself" is in contrast to "being-in-itself", which refers to "non-conscious being", or
the "Being of the phenomenon", which transcends our knowledge of it. (Sartre 2003 [1943], 652)
For simplicity's sake, I am following the example of Moran (2000) and others (*e.g.* Grelland, Jones),
and using "human", referring first and foremost to a human consciousness, as an approximation of
"being-for-itself", which more specifically would refer to the "nihilation of the Being-in-itself", where
nihilation is the postulation of "nothingness" in between consciousness and its object. (Sartre 2003
[1943], 652) The relation between in-itself and for-itself forms Sartre's ontological proof, as outlined
by Jones (1980, 234): "The fact that consciousness is always consciousness of something shows that
consciousness is supported by a transphenomenal being (being-in-itself) which is not itself." It is
worth noting that there are parts of Being and Nothingness, where Sartre writes explicitly about
humans, too, but differentiating between human consciousness and being-for-itself does not seem
necessary at this stage.

Thus the Sartrean notion of resistance could be approximated as that which makes manifest and tangible the distinction between *wishing to do* and *choosing to do* things. In the materiality of *SimCity 4* the extent of my freedom is defined before I set out to play: some kinds of actions and their combinations are possible whereas others are not. For example, I can zone land for industrial, commercial, and residential use, each with three different grades of density. I can assign different zonings to adjacent plots, but no plots of land with mixed zoning are possible. Furthermore, that as a consequence of certain choices I can *fail* and be prohibited from continuing playing *SimCity 4*, exemplifies that the game resists my actions, which in turn means that the notion of choice is meaningful in the specific context of *SimCity 4*. Within the temporality of a particular playing, a *game over* is the last demonstration of this resistance.

What we have articulated here with the Sartrean notion of *resistance*, can be approached also from the point of view of agency. Giddings and Kennedy (2008, 30) postulate the notion of "control aesthetics", referring to computer games quality of exercising non-human agency on their players. In their view, the idea of mastery as the highest pleasure in computer game play appears a fallacy; games can master their players inasmuch players master the games. Thus, mastery is one pleasure among the "pleasures of lack of agency, of being controlled, of being *acted upon*." We may hypothetically consider a situation where there were no limitations for what I could do in *SimCity 4*. Its control aesthetics would be characterised by a total lack of control: there would not be a significant difference between *wishing* and *choosing*. Thus, in the materiality of this kind of 'game artefact', there would be nothing to shape the activity upon the artefact into what we know as *SimCity 4* play.

In both the ball-throwing game and "playing with the possibilities", materiality does not resist my project of playing in any way that would stand out among all the possible ways. Buying a ticket from Copenhagen to Helsinki is most likely equally

challenging as is buying a ticket from Copenhagen to Barcelona.

Regarding computer games, the game *Sid Meier's Railroads!* has a "train table mode", behind which the idea supposedly is to provide a digital alternative for the real-life practice of occupying a garage with miniature train sets. However, there are no requirements for my performance – the materiality does not distinguish between *failure* and *success* any more than the possibilities I could play with would do. Engaging in the playful activity upon the materiality set in the "train table mode" perhaps exemplifies the idea of playing *with* the materiality of the game.

The possibility for the player's choices to become meaningful (via the threat of failure and expulsion from the game by means of *game over*) in relation to her responsibility for her freedom as a player, is what could be used to distinguish between playing and playing *with* a game. To make this distinction more practical, perhaps we could, on similar grounds, distinguish between play and gameplay and thus call 'playing with' the game *play* and playing the game *gameplay*. When engaged in 'mere' (solitary) play, it is in my powers to decide how long the activity should continue. When playing a (single-player) game, *i.e.* engaged in gameplay, the continuation of the activity depends on my choices as evaluated by the game. Thus the difference between play and gameplay is that in gameplay, the continuation of the activity is what is at stake. This resembles how Gadamer (2001 [1960]) describes the risk involved in gameplay (Spiel) by observing that "the one who tries is in fact who is tried." Furthermore, that regardless of how trivial the activities constituting gameplay might seem in light of one's real-life concerns, we can speak of *risk*, *success* and *failure*, suggests that a game indeed "contains its own seriousness" (*cf.* Gadamer 2001 [1960], 102).

To account for the player's role in the situation of gameplay, I turn to Suits (2005, 54), who defines "lusory attitude" as "the acceptance of constitutive rules just so the activity made possible by such acceptance can occur". Given that I desire to play, and am willing to demonstrate the lusory attitude, the materiality of the game

artefact imposes on me a freedom of choice of which I am responsible in my choices. This is what we could refer to as the *gameplay condition*. We can assume that by virtue of being a player of a particular game, I, not unlike anyone else, experience game content as significant in relation to the gameplay condition imposed by the game. An account of how the gameplay condition is implemented in a particular game would be an account of the actual details of the control aesthetics (Giddings and Kennedy 2008, 30) in a particular game; a list of the principles according to which the non-human agency operates in a particular game as regulating what is it possible for the player to do, and also, more importantly, defining what the player needs to do in order to retain the possibility of choosing to anything in the game.

Consider, for example, someone being able to clear several lines consisting of single-coloured blocks in *Tetris*. Anyone aware of the condition imposed by *Tetris* recognises such ability as remarkable. Among game content are what we have come to know as the "goals" of games, which are often thought of as definitive for the player's experience. Interestingly enough, when considered against the goal of *Tetris*, assumed as "to get as high a score as possible", succeeding in the achievement of clearing lines of one colour would be a mere triviality. This suggests that the concept of gameplay condition could be clarified by relating it to the notion of a goal.

4.2.3   The gameplay condition and goals

We can turn almost any activity into competitive, or *agôn*-like (*cf.* Caillois 2001 [1958], 12) gameplay by agreeing on a goal to strive for, for example "to collect as many bottle-caps as possible in ten minutes" and as a consequence we begin to see the world in a different light: our desire is targeted at certain objects in the world, the bottle-caps which have transformed from pieces of litter into tokens in the game.

How strong the desire – that depends directly on how much we wish to win. Perhaps a key attraction of the so-called "pervasive games" or "augmented reality games" (ARG) that take place in the real-world amongst individuals who are not

aware that there is a game being played, is that they offer new ways of seeing the world according to which a kind of behaviour that would otherwise be inappropriate seems legitimate.[15]

In the terminology of Sartre (2003 [1943], 510), we take on the specific *project* of playing the game of collect-bottle-caps-as-fast-as-you-can and in light of the project chosen the previously relatively trivial objects not standing out from the mass of brute existents, the discarded bottle-caps camouflaging themselves between cobblestones among trampled chewing gum and cigarette butts, appear as *coefficients of utility*, as it is through them that we can succeed in our project. Had we agreed to collect caps of Tuborg Grøn bottles only, we would have to spend precious time distinguishing the desirable caps from mere litter; from the other caps appearing as *coefficients of adversity*.

To understand computer games, we need to add a layer of complexity to this argument: they do not merely suggest the possibility of taking on certain projects through which the world could be seen (*e.g.* in collecting bottle caps, bouncing the ball, "playing with the possibilities" of buying a plane ticket), but like we observed earlier, *enforce*, by means of the gameplay condition, particular projects onto their players. Furthermore, like we observed, single-player games often simultaneously facilitate and resist of a particular (kind of) project, which makes the particular (kind of) project stand out among all possible (kinds of) projects.

One could perhaps go as far as to claim that using the alterations of material affordances as means to enforce certain projects onto the players and to resist their fruition is fundamental to the what we might call the single-player computer game form. However, the notion of "computer" in "single-player computer game form" as that which is characterised by materiality that enforces and resists certain projects,

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[15]Nieuwdorp (2009, 206), when discussing pervasive games, suggests that their playings involve rejection of "the practices and conventions within the semiotic domain of everyday life in order to enter a more playful realm", which is a "temporary and reversible attention shift, in which the conventions of the semiotic domain of play prevail over those in real life." The same description seems to apply for a game like *Spin the bottle*, that gives the players an excuse for getting intimate with each other.

would seem an unnecessary extra, because the imposing of gameplay condition is something we can observe not only in what we know as "single-player computer games", but also for example in pinball machines, such as *Williams Pinball Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991) (later *WPTII*) too: some choices can for example give extra balls, ensuring that the activity can continue, whereas other choices can lead the player to becoming a non-player. To explore the viability of this claim, we need to account for how the argument promoting the gameplay condition relates to goals, given for example that Lee (2003) has suggested that goals are "the ultimate fulfilling factor[s] in what we know of computer games so far."

The goal in, for example, *WPTII*, not unlike *Guitar Hero* (2005) is ambiguous. Is it to get a high score? Is it to be able to keep playing, or to impress the bystanders? We may observe that it is perfectly possible to play *WPTII* without being aware of the score – so it is without there being any bystanders watching the playing take place. Would playing, in those cases, be without its fulfilment? Even if we would choose to solve this dilemma by resorting to (quasi)ontological categories by saying that *WPTII* is not a *computer* game[16], this issue would not stop haunting us, as the same argument concerning the ambiguity of the goal could be made about *Tetris*, too.

Juul (2007) emphasizes the importance of goals when he postulates a "Complete Theory of Videogames" as follows:

> Games have goals. Goals provide challenge to players. It is the mental challenge of a game that provides the fun. If the challenge is right, the player is in a state of flow[17]. (If the challenge is too easy, the player is bored, if the challenge is too hard, the player is frustrated.)

When discussing "open and expressive games", Juul (2007) observes that

> [a] goal can be to achieve as high a score as possible. This is the standard type of goal in the arcade game, for example in the arcade game *Scramble*.

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[16]Which would be not feasible, in general, given that the game employs a LCD screen whose content changes according to the player's actions, and, in the context of this project because such claim would rely on the ontological presuppositions about what is a computer game.

[17]This term refers to a pleasant mental state, and was postulated by Csikszentmihalyi (1990)

While it is perfectly possible to play *Scramble* (1981), like it is to play *WPTII* and *Tetris*, without knowing of the existence of the scoring mechanic, or, for example with something covering the portion of the screen where the score is displayed, like Juul (2007) notes,

> the player has no option but to 'invade the scramble system' – otherwise the game will end

where 'invading' refers to attacking fuel tanks on the ground. We can observe at least two kinds of goals in this example. On one hand, we have what we might call the "undeniable" goal of having to "invade the Scramble system" (or bouncing the ball with the paddles as to prevent it from falling in between the paddles in *Williams Pinball Terminator II: Judgement Day* and making sure the blocks do not touch the top of the container in *Tetris*), while on the other hand we have what we might call the "deniable" goal of (having to try) to achieve "as high a score as possible." Also Juul (2003) observes the two kinds of goals in *Scramble*, as he suggests that "there are dual goals between progressing in the game and getting a high score."

I agree with what Juul (2007) sees as the meaning of stating that a game as has a goal: it refers to "an activity which contains an imperative". However, as Juul continues, that "in a game, some of the possible outcomes are assigned positive values, and players should work towards these positive outcomes", our shared understanding staggers. As demonstrated with the example of *SimCity 4*, I not only *should* keep my budget at least in balance, but it is *ultimately necessary* for me *as a player* to keep the budget in balance. A similar necessity is implemented in *Scramble*, too, and was observed by Juul (2007) as follows: "the game strongly punishes the player that tries not to reach the goal, ending the game."

That it is ultimately necessary to keep the budget in balance when playing *SimCity 4*, and to invade the Scramble system when playing *Scramble*, are not unlike that I should eat if I wish to remain as a human being in the 'meatspace'. However, it would seem somewhat misleading to suggest that eating was a goal of life. I will

return to this in the next subsection, but let us first explore the argument concerning the two kinds of goals to its logical end.

We do not have to cut too many corners short to read Juul as suggesting that the player's experience is somehow defined or delineated by goals. However, this line of explanation which we could perhaps call, based on the affinity it postulates between pleasure and outcomes, the *utilitarian* theory of videogames, runs into trouble when confronted with games that have no goals, or, whose goals we would have to describe as "personal" or as set by the players for themselves. Like we discussed earlier, games like *The Sims 2* (2004) and *SimCity 4* are sometimes referred to as "border-line cases" (Juul 2003, 39-40) among the phenomena of games, as they do not contain goals for the players' actions in the ways in which many other games do.[18] If there are no goals at all, where would the pleasure of playing come from? One might, as a solution, suggest that the player can decide upon a goal herself. It seems, however, somewhat problematic, if the player can at will decide to alter the goal, how the goal would contribute to the experienced challenge. This is not unlike "playing with possibilities" of buying a plane ticket and deciding to postpone the preferred departure date.

Following the line of argument that holds that the "fun" is derived from challenges which originate in goals, when confronted with goals that are set by the player herself, would perhaps lead to describing the player as engaging in some form of self-deception that would ensure that the player seriously believes that she is unable to alter the goal she has set for herself. However, this would not only lead to speculation, but also introduce the necessity to account for "make-believe" in emotions, an option we discussed and dismissed in section 2.3.1's subsection devoted to what we called the *fictional safety fallacy.*

Juul (2007), too, seems to recognise the evident drawbacks of the approach, as he

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[18]This also exemplifies our earlier observation in subsection 3.1.4, that the meaning of the notion of "game" as a signifying shorthand is arbitrary and exists by agreement. That, however, is not the point here.

does not pursue the line of argument holding that the goal-challenge-fun structure would work in case of player-defined goals. He asks: "why would anybody want to play a game without a goal?", and as an answer suggests that the solution is "to consider games as vehicles of expression", which he does by acknowledging that "[t]here is much indication that many players find great enjoyment in creating (and showing off) families and houses in Sims [...]". He proceeds to consider games "without goals" "as languages" and concludes by acknowledging that compared to games with "obligatory goals", the "games without goals, or with optional goals can work in a different way, allowing players to play according to personal, aesthetic, and social considerations."

Smith (2007b, 67) suggests that a "goal is that which the player strives for"[19]. Smith (2007b, 237) asserts, based on the results of his empirical experiments, that "players in the study adapted their in-game behaviour to meet the objective game goals." This is not a surprise, given that in many games the gameplay condition and what Juul (2007) identified as "obligatory goals" overlap. Thus, for the players in the study of Smith (2007b, 237), not unlike for any players, it is often ultimately necessary to adhere with the game's requirements for behaviour.

Costikyan (2002, 11-14) makes the distinction between *explicit* and *implicit* goals. He suggests that the former are what we find in most games: the "victory conditions" toward which the players should strive. *SimCity* (1989) according to Costikyan, contains no explicit goals, but is "susceptible to so many goal-directed behaviors" and "supports a wide variety of possible goals". Costikyan (2002, 13) suggests that *Sim City* "works because it allows players to choose their own goals". How, and on which terms, does it exactly do that? Like we have observed earlier, my project of striving for my own goal in the game, for example replicating a real-life neighbourhood, can fail in two ways; not only by not resembling its actual counterpart but also by causing me to run out of money during the construction. The former failure might make

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[19]Smith (2007b, 67) distinguishes between "ultimate goals" as "end conditions" and "proximate goals" as "steps toward that end."

me disillusioned and disappointed about my capabilities as a city planner, but the latter failure has consequences also upon the game artefact facilitating play. As a consequence of the latter failure I am relieved from my duties as a mayor and the particular playing of the game is over. I can strive for the goal, whether "personal" or "pre-defined", only as long as the gameplay condition remains fulfilled. It seems that a notion of a "goal" that attempts to encompass both the goals *a priori* in the game's materiality (obligatory and optional) and the goals set by the player herself extends too broadly and becomes too vague to facilitate plausible arguments concerning the playings of games. Perhaps we could be more specific about the notion of goal, and its relation to the activity of playing the game.

In many cases, the gameplay condition corresponds to what can be described as a goal of a game. However, that is *not* always the case, and when it is not, goals are subordinate to the gameplay condition: meaning that they can be striven for only until the gameplay condition is fulfilled. Consider our observation that being able to clear lines of uniformly coloured blocks in *Tetris* would be considered as an achievement by everyone who is aware of the condition imposed by *Tetris* on its player. Now consider achieving a goal in *GTA:SA*, such as a completing an exceptionally tough mission for a particular boss. To recognize the completion as an achievement not unlike that of the *Tetris* player and to understand what made it as such, requires us to understand it in relation to the gameplay condition, by asking for example the following questions: What did the player get out of it? What does that which she got out of it mean in terms of her being a player?

Thus, we can not take goals as the invariant or the most fundamental structure that defines the player's experience. Neither does it follow that ergodic artworks would have goals from the acknowledgement that they contain "certain requirements" with which they distinguish "between successful and unsuccessful users" (*cf.* Aarseth 1997, 179), nor that the risk, which games are to their players (*cf.* Gadamer 2001 [1960], 106), was about or defined by the goals contained in the game. This observation

may have implications to the paradigmatic utilitarian solution of understanding the player's experience as delineated by goals within the tripartite of "goal, challenge, and skill", as represented by Juul's theory.

This disparity between the two ways of understanding what a goal of a computer game is, whether it is a necessary or an optional agenda, can be articulated with Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements. According to Kant, the statement "all bodies are extended" is an analytic judgement, because,

> [f]or I need not go beyond the conception of body in order to find extension connected with it, but merely analyse the conception, that is, become conscious of the manifold properties which I think in that conception, in order to discover this predicate in it[...] (Kant 2003 [1781], IV 1.par).

"All bodies are heavy", would, in turn, be a synthetic definition, because "the predicate", heaviness, "is something totally different from that which I think in the mere conception of a body". Essentially, the distinction is about "predicate B" belonging "to the subject A, as somewhat *(sic)* which is contained (though covertly) in the conception A; or the predicate B" lying "completely out of the conception A, although" standing "in connection with it." (Kant 2003 [1781], IV 1.par).

Whatever a game would require its player to do in order to fulfill the imperative "to play", like "to invade the Scramble system", or "to keep the budget balanced" would correspond to the definition of a goal in the particular game in the sense of an analytic judgement. A goal like "getting a high score", on the other hand, might well be a goal in the analytic sense in some game, but in the cases of *Scramble* and *Tetris* it corresponds to a definition of a goal in a synthetic sense, as it is not a manifestation of the "imperative to play". A goal of a game, in the analytic sense of the term, as "an imperative contained in an activity" (*cf.* Juul 2007) corresponds to an answer to the question *What do you need to do in [order to keep playing] that game?*. However, in games in which the player would get an extra life from achieving the high score, getting a high score would be goal also understood in the analytic sense.

In the case of games without the '1-up from highscore' feature, finding out about a goal like "getting a high score" requires benevolent empirical interrogation of the world (*e.g.* "I want to know what the goal is"), and one might find out, for example, that the goal is in fact not to get a high score but impress the bystanders. Like we will observe in the next section, it is ambiguous how far the scope of this interrogation should extend; should it stay within the limits of the materiality of the game, or extend even beyond the social norms constraining the playing situation to the evolutionary goals and purposes behind playing. This ambiguity is a problem for the goal in the synthetic sense. Being uncovered by benevolent, or perhaps even *voluntary*, interrogation is not exclusive to goals: someone wanting to know what is the fastest kind of car in *GTA:SA* has to take on the tedious project of test-driving all available cars.

Understood in the synthetic sense, as something necessitating curiosity and interrogation in order to be uncovered from within the materiality, the goals are one feature among other features within the game's content, of which the players make sense in relation to the gameplay condition – not universal structures in players' experiences. We can only guess what kind of question we should ask in order to find out about the goal of a game in the synthetic sense, because the "predicate is lying completely out of the conception" (*cf.* Kant 2003 [1781], IV 1.par). My own informed guess would be *Why do I play that game?*. From a position where our argument rests on how the materiality appears in the experience of the game as played, we cannot make sustainable claims of the 'synthetic goals' of a game, as that category perfectly well encompasses aspects that are idiosyncratic and accidental to our particular biographies and experiences and do not originate in the game artefact in question.

4.2.4 'Transcendent' goals, enjoyment and resistance

However, as my reader might have worked out, we already observed that what corresponds to the definition of a goal in the analytic sense, *i.e.* the answer to the question *'What do you need to do in [order to keep playing] that game?'*, can be described also as the manifestation of the gameplay condition in the particular game. Should we, as a result of the observation, reframe the notion and refer to a *goal* instead of to a *condition*? Of course, given that computer games exist and take place in the real world instead of being abstract ideas, and that we should not assume to be able to exhaust in our descriptions, it comes as no surprise that their features can be described from a multiplicity of directions.

However, our comparison between the "ultimate necessities" in a game and in the real world led us to question the sensibility of taking eating as a goal in life. Similarly, it does not seem feasible to take the "ultimate necessities" required by a computer game as goals either. I will unpack this claim in this subsection.

Levinas (1969, 110), who in his work in the field of ethics emphasized the 'joy of life', asserts we life from "good soup", among other things. With "good soup" he refers to food which not only satiates us, but is something from whose eating we can derive enjoyment. However, he points out that the "good soup" is not a "means of life", like a word processor is a means of writing a letter. Neither is "good soup" a "goal of life", like communication is the goal of writing the letter.

In this light it is evident that we should not try to explain the gameplay condition, for example in the case of *Tetris* the need to keep the blocks from touching the top part of the container, as either "means" or "goal" of the activity of play. Levinas (1969, 110), accounting for how we enjoy life by describing what he calls *nourishment*, continues that

> even if the content of life ensures my life, the means is immediately sought as an end, and the pursuit of this end becomes an end in its turn.

It is possible to to take games as "tools for fun" (*e.g.* Parkin 2008, Adamo-Villani and Wright 2007), and by doing so force them into a mode of description we are

familiar with from inquiries into more "serious" activities with technologies: with a little help from a technology one can achieve a completion of a task and derive benefit from it. The variations of this argument are the ideas of games as tools for relaxation, learning, *et cetera*. We can also consider the players as "employed by the game" (Aarseth 2004, 51), or games as for example "second jobs" (*e.g.* Aupers 2007) for their players, and subsequently be puzzled about how enjoyment can be derived from the tedious grind.

While these lines of argument can lead to explanations that make intuitive sense – for example Aarseth (2004, 51) describes the "feeling of limbo" at the end of a game, when one is "no longer employed by the game" – we should not assume that games, or more precisely enjoyable gameplay as a whole, would neatly fall into a utilitarian description. Neither does it make sense to first force gameplay into the utilitarian description and then spend resources trying figure a way to account for the enjoyment. This is exemplified by the difficulty of describing the enjoyment derived from playing "sand-box games" or "games without goals" with utilitarian terminology and subsequently forcing them into a borderline category due to the ill fit with the preferred mode of description. Levinas (1969, 110) points out that the way in which we enjoy working is two-fold:

> [w]e live from our labor which ensures our subsistence; but we also live from our labor because it fills (delights or saddens) life. The first meaning of "to live from one's labor" reverts to the second – if the things are in place.

The utilitarian description employing the goal-challenge-fun triad seems to be able to account only for the former of the two ways of deriving enjoyment Levinas mentions. This is perhaps due to a somewhat narrow notion of "enjoyment" it employs, *i.e.* enjoyment as something which could be exhaustively descried by describing its material target and which originates as a response (fun) to a stimulus (right challenge). As Levinas (1969, 110) observes, we cannot completely describe that which we live from by assuming it as somehow facilitating the achieving of tasks:

> The things we live from are not tools, nor even implements, in the Heideg-
> gerian sense of the term. Their existence is not exhausted by the utilitarian
> schematism that delinates them as having the existence of hammers, needles,
> or machines.

The option of *analytic definition* of goals, according to which the goal of *Tetris* would be to keep the blocks from touching the top part of the screen, does not seem to grasp at all the reasons why one plays *Tetris*. Describing the game's goal as it is seen through the *synthetic definition*, as *e.g.* to get as high a score as possible, would be to engage in speculation. We observe that neither of the options gives us any hints about the actual goal of playing *Tetris*. In this light, it does not seem sensible to try to force the utilitarian description onto the enjoyable experience of playing *Tetris*. However, there is no reason we should assume it being necessary either.

Based on arguing that in games "property is exchanged, but no goods are produced", Caillois (2001 [1958], 5-6) suggests that

> Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and
> often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay
> for the establishments.

This line of description seems compatible with Levinas (1969, 133), who writes that it is "pure human" that we

> enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything
> else, in pure expenditure [...]

Levinas (1969, 111) suggests that the enjoyment of "living from..." is characterised by

> a relation with an object and at the same time a relation with this relation
> which also nourishes and fills life.

In *Tetris* we nominally "live from" keeping the blocks from touching the top part of the screen, thus have a relation with the particular feature in the game artefact. However, enjoyment could not be described exhaustively by describing this relation, as, like Levinas (1969, 111) suggests that there is a "relation with this relation." Enjoyment, he suggests,

is precisely this way the act nourishes itself with its own activity.

Following Levinas (1969, 111), it makes sense to take the playing of *Tetris* as an "act" that "nourishes itself with its own activity", whose momentary existence or unfolding does nothing but facilitates its existence and unfolding in the next moment. This means taking the "goal" of *Tetris* as played as *being able to continue playing.*

Salen and Zimmerman (2003, 322) borrow the concept of "autotelic activity" from Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 67), as describing

> a self-contained activity, one that is done not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward

While Salen and Zimmerman (2003) connect the concept of "autotelic activity" with their theory, which seeks to explain play by employing a metaphor of a "magic circle" as demarcating play from non-play and game from non-game, it seems that the concept of "autotelic activity" can be invoked also without any demarcation, based on the assumption that *Tetris* can be played just to be able to continue playing *Tetris*.

The "autotelicness" of play demonstrates that the ability of the notion of goal (and of the utilitarian mode of description it represents) to assist us in the project of understanding the player's experience by looking at the game's materiality has its limits: we cannot find a plausible "goal" by looking at the materiality of *Tetris*. Furthermore, from observing that the material game artefact of *The Sims 2* is "without a goal" (Juul 2007) it does not follow that the gameplay of *The Sims 2*, or more accurately *The Sims 2* as played, would be without a goal.

This demonstrates that the goal of a game as played *transcends* the game artefact and its materiality. As game scholars we should consider ourselves lucky if we were able to find about the goal of the game as played by looking at the game's materiality. We suggested in section 3.1.2 that the playing of the game often transcends its rules and materiality, and as an example borrowed the suggestion of Frasca (2007, 174), that the "sexual performance is not required by rules" of *Twister*. We observed that

it is hard to pinpoint the "goal" of *Tetris*, while it is not hard to grasp that it sure is possible to derive enjoyment from playing *Tetris*. With the example of the the "goal" of *Tetris* as played, we can be more specific regarding how features of gameplay can transcend the game artefact.

Playing *Tetris* to 'be able to keep playing *Tetris*' is a kind of goal we can not find out about by analysing the computer game artefact, but on the other hand we cannot give an account of its intricacies without recourse to the properties of the artefact, namely to the resistance it provides to the player's projects.

However, our inability to find out about the goal by analysing the computer game artefact alone is not a problem, as it is only lucid to assume the player as someone who desires to remain a player, as someone onto whom the gameplay condition is imposed. Otherwise we would be better of speaking about all humans in general instead of players as potentially, but not necessarily, a subset of the former. While the goal of remaining a player may seem tautological, looked at from a suitable epistemological perspective it is in fact rather meaningful and equips us for gaining meaningful insights on the experience of playing Tetris.

If we assume the object of study as *Tetris as played* and by doing so include among the qualities of the object of study certain properties of the player, for example her desire to remain a player of *Tetris*, we are able to describe the intricacies of the goal which at first seemed pointless and tautological. This amounts to answering the question of why is it a meaningful goal to "be able to continue playing" as follows: because of the materiality of *Tetris* resists the player's project by making the blocks fall faster she keeps playing. My condition, and also your condition, as a player of *Tetris* is characterised by having to cope with constantly increasing speed of falling blocks.

The inability to trace the goal of the activity within the materiality of the object is perhaps the reason why some games are grouped together in the vernacular category of "sand-box games", perhaps in attempt to somehow signify that they did not resist

any particular kind of project. Even though *The Sims 2* may not contain "goals" in the sense Juul (2007) describes them, it still resists the player's projects, also the one of remaining a player.

We observed that within the temporality of a particular playing, the *game over* is the last, thus strongest, possible form of resistance. There is not exactly a screen or a message directly identifiable as representing "game over" in *The Sims 2*. The strongest form resistance against the player's projects in *The Sims 2* is "The Finale" message, which appears when the player has, whether deliberately or by accident, killed all the characters in the family:

> If the point of playing The Sims2 was to kill off all your Sims, then you would be the world champion! But, unfortunately, the way things stand now, The Sims 2 is still a LIFE simulator. You could actually exit the lot without saving and maybe try this household again. Or, if you were trying to kill your Sims, and we arent saying that you were, then feel free to move another family into this lot.

Nothing of course prevents the player from loading a saved game and continuing from where I was before my sims died. Saving and loading are not exceptions to any otherwise teleological explanation but a natural turns of events in the temporality of one possible playing of *The Sims 2* – not unlike the role Klastrup (2008, 150) ascribes to death in an experience of playing *World of Warcraft*:

> by briefly placing characters outside the game itself with no possibility for powerful action within the world, players are reminded that the world might close itself to them.

The possibility of saving and loading goes to show that even the severest of the consequences the game artefact can land its player with is not in fact too severe, which is no surprise given that playing transcends the game artefact. But nothing prevents the player either from quitting any time she wants – the possibilities to load a game and and to quit altogether are both something in the realm of possibilities delineated by the gameplay condition not unlike the option of suicide that is always available in the actual world.

Assuming a player as someone who desires to play is not to assume she was unaware of the possibilities of saving, failing, and loading and quitting. Lee (2003) suggests

that "to lose denotes a temporary setback rather than an ultimate consequence of gaming". The possibilities to save, load, and quit at will do not erode the description that players are responsible for the freedom they enjoy, but suggest that the conditions by which they are able to exercise the freedom allow for certain 'exceptions' compared to the conditions in the real world. There is no reason to assume that the freedoms afforded by single-player games would be identical to the freedom afforded by the real world. (In which we can, for example, commit suicide only once.)

Given that the option to quit without saving is in fact suggested *The Sims 2* at the time of the 'game over', we might of course say that the resistance *The Sims 2* provides is *trivial*, especially if compared to the more 'brutal' means by which certain other games can resist players' projects, for example by means of "permadeath", which in the case of MMO games refers to the players' avatars inability to come back to life after being killed. Frasca (2001b) provides an example of the other end of the spectrum concerning the brutality or strength of resistance, when he outlines the notion of an "ephemeral game."

As a manifestation of an ephemeral game, Frasca (2001b) postulates the notion of "One-Session-Game-of-Narration (OSGON)", which refers to an irreversible game, which can be played only at once and and gives no second chances: dying would end the game immediately. The 'brutality' of the resistance provided by an *ephemeral game* would be directly proportionate to the player's expectations about the game. Perhaps, with suitable incentives, such as a price tag with several digits on the ephemeral game, or a guaranteed social recognition to its winner, the brutality of the resistance could be ensured.

However, regardless of where we posit the other end of the spectrum of resistance, stating that *The Sims 2* does not resist 'enough' because it suggests that the player quits without saving, would make sense only as an *aesthetic evaluation*; "The Sims 2 is a game that only trivially resists its players' projects", and as such belongs to the discourse of game criticism, rather than being anything that would disprove the

mode of description suggested here.

We may conclude the treatment on goals by stating that the goals for the activity of gameplay, or the goals of games as played, cannot necessarily be found within the material computer game artefact. Any attempt that insists on finding the goal from within the game artefact will evidently lead to speculation and/or reduction. However, what we *can* find out based on analysing the materiality is the resistance it provides for the player's projects, a manifestation of the gameplay condition in the particular game.

We can observe that some projects more than others are relevant in the light of the gameplay condition: the resistance makes some projects stand out from among all possible projects. The difference between, for example, the kinds of resistance I encounter when writing XYZ and ZYX with the railroad track in *Sid Meier's Railroads!* is less significant than the difference in the kinds of resistance I encounter between writing XYZ with the railroad track and actually connecting two cities with the track.

And given that we are able to know at least *something* about the player *qua* her being a player instead of for example any human, at the intersection of the resistance as a manifestation of the gameplay condition in the particular game, and the player's desire to try to confront the gameplay condition in her attempt to remain a player, there is, within the range of epistemological plausibility, room for us to operate with concepts like *failure* and *success* when analysing a *game as played*. The notions of failure and success inherit their significance on one hand from the gameplay condition and from the player's desire to play on the other.

When the scope encompasses the player who desires to play, the certain ambiguity that puzzled us in the notions of *success* and *failure* in observations of both Gadamer (2001 [1960], 106) and Aarseth (1997, 179) vanishes. The notion of failure refers to a choice with consequences that delimit the player's degree of freedom in the game and thus most likely decrease the long-term chances of the player remaining a player of

the game. Given her desire, the player would deem her inability to remain a player a failure. Correspondingly, success refers to a choice which, while not necessarily opening up any new possibilities to choose, does not contribute to delimiting the degree of freedom either. Thus, a successful choice is what ensures that the player remains as a player at least until a new choice is to be evaluated, in other words a choice that makes it possible that the activity continues to sustain itself. With these notions we are equipped to account for successes and failures also in games that contain neither "obligatory" nor "optional" goals (*cf.* Juul 2007).

A successful player is someone who is able to decide whether she should continue playing. An unsuccessful player is someone who is unable to retain the freedom for this decision, and finds out that such a decision was made on her behalf by the materiality of the game artefact. In other words, surviving the resistance put forward by the game is already an accomplishment. Following Levinas, this amounts to enjoyment.

4.2.5 An experiential definition of gameplay

In this subsection, we will arrive at an experiential definition of gameplay as a *subset of play* which rests on what is given in the first-person experience, which retains intersubjective plausibility (*i.e.* can account for my playing as well as yours), which forces only the least possible amount of presupposition (in fact only that which is already embedded in the semantic structure of language[20]), and which is not tied to any particular theoretical position concerned with the qualitative texture of play or an "essence" of a game. It is important to observe that the goal behind defining gameplay in this dissertation is not to explicate the ontological nature of gameplay, but to articulate the empirical scope of the argument concerning emotions. Being about aspects that are relevant to gameplay, as it will be defined in this subsection, is what unites the emotions that can be plausibly addressed from the perspective

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[20]Given that we are calling someone a player we can assume that she desires to play. Otherwise we could, if saw a need to do so, categorise the person by some other property.

postulated in this dissertation.

I will use the notion of gameplay condition to articulate what is meant with gameplay in this dissertation. Thus, I will begin by making the description of the gameplay condition more concise by revising it as follows: given that I desire to play, the game artefact endows me with a freedom of choice of which I am responsible in my choices. I experience the condition becoming manifest in the form of *resistance* put forth by the game artefact toward my projects. Due to this resistance I understand a significant difference between wishing and choosing to realise a project upon the game artefact.

Before proceeding any further it is necessary to acknowledge once again that for the purposes of this project, play's status as play is taken as a given. With this I do not mean to postulate a category of activities with certain kinds of qualities (like those discussed in subsection 3.1.3), but to acknowledge, with a nod towards Wittgenstein (1973 [1953], §66-71) that there are things in the world which we can address with the notion of "play". This allows us to establish a footing for further argument about a *specific kind of play.*

In subsection 4.2.1, we observed that the simplest possible way to attempt to define computer game play was to assume that a play activity involving a computer game should be considered computer game play. However, with the help of Ihde (1990), we pointed out that games, not unlike any other kinds of objects, are ambiguous. They can be used in a multiplicity of contexts and somewhere within this multiplicity lies the distinction between playing the game and playing with the game. With the gameplay condition, we can, if not surpass, at least be better equipped to avoid unpleasant consequences when confronted with the ambiguity of the computer materiality that we observed in subsection 4.2.1.

In subsection 3.1.4 we postulated a definition of game as "that which is being played" and in subsection 4.2.1 hypothesised that given a suitable notion of play, the definition could be adjusted so that it could account for how the materiality of the

game shapes the activity upon itself into either *playing* or *playing with*. Now, we may begin to see the sensibility and significance beneath the tautological surface of the definition. Considering only solitary play, the involvement of a game artefact and the imposing of the gameplay condition allows us to distinguish between mere *playing* (as in a child's freeform play), *playing with* a single-player computer game (as in freeform play involving a single-player computer game), and *playing a single-player computer game*.

The first activity is not delineated by a gameplay condition. The second may be, but this condition is not, however, enforced anywhere else but in the player's mind. In the first and second cases, playing is a project like any other project one might take on, and can be thus reshaped and restructured at will. The last of the activities is delineated by the gameplay condition and the condition is enforced by the materiality of the game artefact. The former two activities can continue as long as the player desires – it is within the player's powers to decide whether the activity should continue or not. In the last activity, playing a game, due to the gameplay condition imposed by the material artefact on the player, she might find herself in a situation in which she is expelled from the game and thus is no longer a player, even against her own will. The last activity is something I would not hesitate calling computer game play, for lack of a better word.

This argument can be given a more rigid structure by following the example of the Aristotelian "method of division", which Cohen (2008) describes as follows:

> one begins with the broadest genus containing the species to be defined, and divides the genus into two sub-genera by means of some differentia. One then locates the definiendum in one of the sub-genera, and proceeds to divide this by another differentia, and so on, until one arrives at the definiendum species.

We assumed that play's status as play can be taken as given. Thus, *play* is the "broadest genus", but what could be the differentia? We observed that by assuming only the involvement of a particular kind of artefact, we cannot account for the nuances between playing and playing with. Given that we strive to focus on what we colloquially know as single-player computer game play, holding on to the involvement

of the artefact makes sense. However, necessitating special properties, such as "containing goals", from the artefact is obsolete, as their existence alone does very little to banish the ambiguity of what can be done with the artefact. But if we drop the necessity of the artefact being of any special type, its involvement could be used as the first differentia. Thus, at this stage, any artefact will do.

By assuming the *involvement of an artefact* as the first differentia, we can divide play into two sub-genera: play that involves an artefact, and play which does not involve an artefact. We focus on the former, which encompasses a variety of activities, ranging from a game of *Chess* played with a board and pieces to a game of *Half-Life 2*. Now, what could be the second differentia? Cohen (2008) notes, following Aristotle, that the division should be by the differentia of the differentia:

> For example, if one uses the differentia footed to divide the genus animal, one then uses a differentia such as cloven-footed for the next division.

We already know that some artefacts impose gameplay condition and some do not. The second differentia can be derived from the activity's relation to the artefact it involves. Thus, the second differentia is the characteristic of the activity of play as being *delineated by the involved artefact.*

With being delinated, I refer to two kinds of delineation. First, that the freedom to decide on the continuation of the activity is not entirely in the player's hands, as the player's choices might, despite his contrasting desires, lead to the artefact ending the activity by rendering it materially impossible for the player to continue. Second, the delineation can be framed also in terms of the 'content' of the game as played: even though the player can wish or desire to do an unlimited number of things, the artefact delimits the repertoire of choices that are possible to the player to take. Given that I desire to remain a player, I am not free to reshape and restructure the project of playing at will, *i.e.* act in a manner which could be considered transgressing the gameplay condition. In other words, as a consequence my attempts to reshape the project of playing or transgress the gameplay condition

I will encounter resistance from the game artefact, and this resistance may take the form ending the activity.

The second division is between play that is delineated by the involved artefact, and play that is not delineated by the artefact. We already established the gameplay condition as signifying the limitations which define my position as a player. Thus, it seems appropriate to call the delineated play involving an artefact *gameplay*. The non-delineated play involving an artefact can be referred to as *playing with*.

These observations allow us to articulate the empirical scope of the argument of this dissertation by on one hand relying on the gameplay condition and on the other hand assuming the player as desiring to play, as follows: *single-player computer games as played*, where playing is different from playing *with*, and what distinguishes between the two is that the former takes place as delineated by the gameplay condition.

It seems worth observing that thanks to the level of abstraction, the definitions introduced so far do not bind us to any of the specific definitions of play we have discussed. We can operate on the two-fold understanding of play as both an activity and an attitude. Neither do the definitions introduced so far require us to rely on a concept of a "game" defined *as* anything beyond that which is being played, which I take as the least minimum presupposition. Now, when we describe a (computer) game as *that which is being played*, 'play' refers to the activity and attitude delineated by the condition enforced by the materiality of a game artefact – not to freeform play nor play delineated by a condition that is not enforced extra-mentally.[21]

Thus, my playing of a single-player computer game like *Tetris* qualifies to be labelled as gameplay, so do my playings of *The Sims 2*, *SimCity* and *Williams Pinball Terminator II: Judgement Day*, even though these artefacts might not contain elements or features that have been previously thought as essential to games, such as "goals". While we have set up a conceptual structure that allows distinguishing

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[21]I will return to the ways in which the game artefact delineates gameplay in terms of both activity and attitude in subsection 4.3.3.

between different activities, namely playing and playing with a game, thus capturing perhaps something essential about the nature of the activity of gameplay, we can still adhere to the phenomenological principle of minimal presupposition.

It is important to point out that even though we are postulating a notion of gameplay that is comparable to what Taylor (2006, 90) criticises as models that postulate the existence of "pure play", we are only minimally ascribing thoughts and attitudes to the heads of the players. The notion of gameplay suggested here can comfortably coexist with a diverse range of subjective attitudes involved in play, such as those mentioned in Taylor (2006, 90) as ranging from instrumental orientation and "extreme dedication" to "occasional boredom", as all such attitudes, by definition, include the desire to continue playing.

However, also another consequence of the abstractness of the definition needs to be pointed out. There is no "gameplay" in general, as something that could be thought of without taking into account the game artefact making it possible by delineating the activity. This is not unlike the observation that "players cannot exist without a game they are players *of*" (Aarseth 2007b, 130). The notion of gameplay is always dependent on the materiality of the particular game artefact. There is not necessarily anything in common between the playings of *Tetris* and *World in Conflict* (2007), apart from being delinated by the respective artefacts. This renders the definition unsuitable for the purpose of analysis carried out 'in the armchair', as the details of the activity of gameplay are ultimately decided by the qualities of the material game artefact. Thus the definition of gameplay suggested here is perhaps best described as non-essentialist.

In the case of single-player computer games, the gameplay condition is dictated by the computer game artefact – the game's materiality. While multi-player games and non-digital games are outside my scope, I can assume that the gameplay condition could perhaps be described also in other kinds of single-player games, as for example in the game of bouncing a ball against a wall so that it touches the floor before

landing in the player's hand, but its imposing would rest on the player's willingness to enforce the condition. The materiality of the ball, for example, could not do anything to delineate the activity to the extent that the we could describe the gameplay condition being imposed in the player. The ball's materiality would not facilitate and resist any particular project or context of use.

In the case of multi-player computer games the social conventions upheld by the players, known to be "processual" (*cf.* Malaby 2007), augment the gameplay condition, and perhaps become more fundamental structures than the gameplay condition. Taylor (2006, 157) suggests that

> [d]espite the common notion that computer games lock down modes of play via the system, rules and norms can be, especially in the case of MMOGs, incredibly contextual, socially negotiated, heterogenous, ambiguous, and quite often contradictory between players.

This is demonstrated by Myers (2008, 295), who, based on experiments of breaching social norms in *City of Heroes/Villains* (2004), concludes that

> if game rules pose some threat to social order, the game rules are simply ignored. And further, if some player [...] decides to explore those rules fully, then that player is shunned, silenced, and, if at all possible, expelled.

However, we must remember, like we observed in subsection 4.1.2 concerning the "processuality" of games, that even in the cases where the players collectively choose to reappropriate the "game system" and the meanings it implies, the materiality continues to impose on the players requirements with which they have to deal. In multi-player games, the difference between the result of reappropriation and that which is imposed may be less trivial than in the context of single-player games. Still, a direct implication of the observations of Taylor (2006, 157) and Myers (2008, 295) is that for the purpose of describing the experiences of playing multi-player games the notions of "success" and "failure" can not be derived from the overlap of the desire to play and the gameplay condition, as opposed to single-player games.

At this stage it is necessary to clarify the relationship between the gameplay condition and winning or losing a game. Smith (2007b, 242), concerned with whether

or not players play to win, a question directly related to the ones asked by Myers, asserts based on his experiments that

> it seems that players do seek to win but that this attempt is subjugated by social norms defining appropriate play. Outside the gamespace itself, the players mitigate and modify their "rational" behaviour to satisfy other priorities.

On a similar note, Woods (2008, 5) observes that

> the understanding that players pursue [the winning condition] exclusively is primarily based upon the postulated existence of an ideal rational player, a stance which has proven particularly problematic in other fields which seek to address the nuances of human activity.

We might think that the "subjugation by social norms" would hamper the plausibility of the argument put forward here, as even single-player games are often played in a variety of social settings within which social norms exist. However, it is extremely important to be reminded of the difference between a "desire to play" and a "desire for victory". Consequently, we cannot assume that rationalizing and behaving accordingly when driven by the desire to play would lead to games as played that are identical to games as played which result from rational behaviour driven by the "desire for victory".

Whereas in order to answer the question "do players play to win?" it is necessary to plunge into the limitless contingency of the real world (which Smith 2007b manages with accuracy) or negotiating play's essential aspects in relation to its empirical manifestations (which is a project advocated in Malaby 2007), the answer to the question "do players play to play?" is already contained in the question itself. Furthermore, whereas the consequences of the desire to win may be subjugated by social norms, thus affecting how the activity of play unfolds (*e.g.* the leading player waiting for others in a racing game as documented by Smith 2007b) a subjugation of the *desire to play* by social norms would amount to giving up being a player due to a social pressure. While this situation might be interesting from the point of view of human behaviour, elevating it to the status of a paradigmatic example would not

make sense as the concern here is with emotions as they are involved in computer game play.

Computer games are (assumedly) called games because they are built so that they can be won and lost, sometimes in a variety of beautiful ways; thus the tension between success and failure is a fundamental feature, starting at which we can begin to uncover the ways in which contents of computer games appear meaningful to their actual and historical players, even to those who are not aware of, let alone trying to achieve, the winning condition.

So far the notion of game artefact has been used in a vernacular sense, and in order to defend the argument, it is necessary to be more precise with what is meant with the notion. I will take on this task in section 4.3, where I, by drawing on Ihde (1990) and Verbeek (2008) among others, define the notion of *single-player game artefact*. However, before going there it is necessary to provide more backup for the assumption that the player *desires* to play, which is the task of the next subsection.

4.2.6   On the desire to play

Aarseth (2007b, 130) suggests that a "generic player is an unthinkable, not merely ahistorical, figure". It is important to point out that while the kind of player the previously postulated definition of gameplay concerns with is neither any particular existing person or a historical "figure", it is neither an *imagined player* (*cf.* Taylor 2006, 69).

Instead, the player is someone and anyone who will do what it takes to play the game, not unlike the human of Sartre's human condition in *Existentialism Is Humanism*, who "may be born a slave in a pagan society or may be a feudal baron, or a proletarian", but has to cope with the universal limitations and necessities which define his situation and being in the world. Not speaking about any particular game, we can make only the minimal assumption about a player that she is willing to keep

playing. What we encounter is a subset of human phenomena[22] – a somewhat limited slice of what does it mean to be a player, perhaps a 'minimal player', but certainly not anything "unthinkable" or "imagined".

We are not in a position to dwell on the intricacies of why people play, and thus cannot build our descriptions on whatever motivations the players have or the kinds of commitments they are willing to enter into. However, we are safely grounded in the fact that as long as they play, they subject their willingness to play to be countered by the requirements of the game artefact. This may not, of course, be their *only* disposition at the time. No matter if I play for research, for entertainment, or to show my nephew how to pass a level, I exhibit the willingness to play. This applies even if we consider an initially reluctant player held at gunpoint – that we talk of her as a player implies that she has done the necessary judgements and chosen to exhibit the willingness to play. We observe that the postulation of a desire or a willingness is a necessary manoeuvre that brackets whatever higher-order motivations players might have.

Thus it seems sensible to assume the player as someone who is *willing to play* or *desires to play*. This assumption is not intended as a normative claim ascribing values onto the player, as in for example that all players *ought to* desire to play, but a positive description of something we can observe about being a player. Not unlike a concept of game implies there being players as we discussed in subsection 3.1.1, the concept of player implies there being a willingness or even a desire to play.

However, postulating a *desire* to play (rather than a willingness to do so) as a precondition seems at first to imply veering toward unnecessary presuppositions about the motivations the players bring in to the game. Claiming that there is willingness seems at first safer than to ascribe strong emotions on players by claiming that there always was a desire. Also, considering the example of playing for research – I might not *desire* to play *Far Cry* (2004) when I undergo the same level for the 20th

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[22]I will discuss the idea of gameplay as a subset of human phenomena in more detail in subsection 6.1.1

time in order to experience the effects of flashbang grenades, but I am *willing* to do so for the purpose of proceeding with my research. Perhaps sticking to "willingness" would signify that as little weight as possible is placed on the subjective motivation. However, that is not the case. I argue that once we acknowledge that the subject is *free*, the difference between willingness and desire is superficial, they are two names for the very same attitude and it is *not* an essentialist presupposition to assume players as having the *desire* to play. I will unpack this claim in this subsection.

If I was the reluctant player held at a gunpoint, and excluded the possibility of choosing not to play, and begun playing just because 'I had no other option', I would be engaging in what Sartre (2003 [1943], 70-94) calls *bad faith*. Sartre (2003 [1943], 78-9) gives an example of a conduct of bad faith in the form of a woman who has gone on a date first time with a particular man:

> She knows very well the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her. She knows also that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision. But she does not want to realize the urgency; she concerns herself only with what is respectful and discreet in the attitude of her companion. [...] Now suppose he takes her hand. This act of her companion risks changing the situation by calling for an immediate decision. To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt, to engage herself. To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm. The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible. We know what happens next; the young woman leaves her hand there, but she *does not notice* that she is leaving it. [...] We shall say that this woman is in bad faith. [...] She realizes herself as *not being* her own body, and she contemplates it as though from above as a passive object to which events can *happen* but which can neither provoke them nor avoid them because all its possibilities are outside of it.

Without going into details of the mechanics of bad faith, we can roughly approximate it as a denial of the freedom to choose between the options that are presented. The motivation behind the conduct of bad faith would deserve a more detailed analysis, but we can, following Sartre (2003 [1943], 89) observe that

> The goal of bad faith [...] is to put oneself out of reach; it is an escape.

It is important to observe that the terminology chosen by Sartre, the 'badness' of bad faith, implies an ethical judgement only in a very limited sense. If held at gunpoint

most of us would probably resort to any available escape. However, closing one's eyes when faced with a problem would not be good if we, following the assertion of Sartre (2003 [1943], 82), understood that it is "necessary that we *make ourselves what we are*" and accepted *authenticity* as a challenge common to humans. Moran (2000, 362) asserts that according to Sartre,

> "there [is] no blueprint for human existence [...] Rather, we must face up to the dizzying formlessness and groundlessness of our existence [...] The only possible meaning a life has is that given by living it, and therefore the challenge to live authentically is the highest human challenge."

Thus, we might approximate that from the perspective of Sartre's existentialism, there hardly is such thing as an involuntary activity, as something which would stand in contrast to how Caillois (2001 [1958], 6) postulated play as characteristically "free and voluntary activity". Thus, while postulating "willingness" instead of "desire" might perhaps satisfy some of my potential critics, actually they are two names for the same attitude that arises after the choice to play has been made and one is no more essentialist than the other. I will from now on use them interchangeably.[23]

The conclusion that there are no 'un-free' human activities has consequences to how we can interpret Caillois (2001 [1958], 5-6). In a benevolent 'existentialist' reading that assumes as its premise a subject who is always free in a situation[24], what Caillois (2001 [1958], 5-6) appears to mean with with the freedom and voluntariness of play is that the activity is free of the accidental connections to aspects of society which normally reduce the spectrum of volition and make activities somehow less constrained. Productivity is one such aspect. Caillois (2001 [1958], 5) concluded that play was free only after observing that in play,

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[23]Considering the desire to play in relation to bad faith has another side that warrants to be mentioned at this point, even if just in passing. Play, not unlike any other activity, can be ended at will. However, we can, and often do play in bad faith – that is, as if we had no option to stop. "I have gotten this far, I cannot stop now" or "I have to help my guild members, I cannot stop now" can both imply an attitude of bad faith.

[24]*i.e.* not bound by anything else apart from its facticity. Facticity can be understood as the concrete limitations "against" which we are free. Sartre (2003 [1943], 509) defines situation as "an ambiguous phenomenon in which it is impossible for the [human] to distinguish the contribution of freedom from that of the brute existent." I will return to the topic of facticity in section 5.2

> Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued.

In our 'existentialist' reading, resorting to the lack of accidental connections is necessary, as play could not be elevated to a special category based on it being somehow essentially *more voluntary* than other activities, as all human activities are always already free and voluntary. Like Moran (2000, 358) points out concerning Sartre's notion of freedom, that "[f]reedom is absolute, not a matter of degree."

The idea of a subject vested with absolute freedom on which our benevolent reading rests, does not seem to be compatible with Caillois (2001 [1958], 7), who suggests, that a defining characteristic of play is, that "one plays only if and when one wishes to." Thus, at least from the existentialist perspective it makes sense to agree with Malaby (2007), that Caillois' account of play is "exceptionalist", as it attempts to elevate play into a special category on unjustifiable grounds. While from the suggested perspective we agree with Caillois (2001 [1958], 7) about the voluntariness of the play activity, it is not enough to elevate it into a special category from among all other human activities.

4.3 Single-player games as technological artefacts

In this section, I will discuss the definition of a single-player game artefact, and by doing so specify the notions of artefact and materiality, which have so far been used in almost vernacular sense.

Like we have observed before, the "computer" in the description of the empirical scope of the argument of this dissertation seems accidental and obsolete: neither an artefact's ability to perform calculations at high speed nor the vibrating chips of silicon monocrystals it contains are relevant to what we are interested in. We observed that a pinball machine like *WPTII* imposes a gameplay condition to its player. We can assume it would do so even if it was not the first pinball machine to incorporate a digitally controlled LCD screen and thus perhaps be easier to qualify

as a *computer* game. Even though we managed to articulate a difference between objects that can be played and played with, that the word "computer" nags us as being accidental in our definition demonstrates that a certain ambiguity still remains in the formulation of the scope of the argument.

Thus, necessitating the game to be a computer game does not make any sense given that also a mechanical game like *WPTII*, by imposing a gameplay condition on its player, can posit itself towards the player in a relation that is unique compared to many other mechanical objects. Among all the qualities in the computer game there is a quality that makes it possible for the computer game to impose a gameplay condition on its player. However, we have a good reason to assume that the quality of being a *computer* game is not the quality which allows this to happen.

It seems that the existential-phenomenological views which we applied to arrive at the notion of gameplay condition can not get us any further in articulating the difference, as, when described for example in terms of intentionality, freedom and responsibility, the materialities of *WPTII* and *Tetris* appear, if not identical, strikingly similar. We have no reason to assume they *would not* be similar as we, after all, know them both colloquially as single-player games.

Perhaps the ground currently covered by necessitating the game to be computerized could be covered with a more suitable formulation and perhaps this formulation could be derived from a more detailed analysis of the relationships between the player and the materiality of the game artefact.

So far the notion of an artefact has been used ambiguously, referring to that which has the property of having materiality. This has been the case with a "game artefact", for example. However, like observed in section 4.1.2 that concerned with processuality, artefacts, even in the vernacular sense of the word, involved in *Qualat* and *Half-Life 2* as played seem decisively different, the most significant differences being perhaps that while the former can consist of plant material processed by a goat's digestive system, the latter is a combination of hardware and software, and,

that the latter imposes a gameplay condition on its player whereas the former does not. Furthermore, *Qualat*, not unlike many other games with transmedial potential, can be, like Culin (1971, 95) points out, played with found objects, whereas *Half-Life 2* can not.

In our discussion of the cognitive-rational perspective toward emotions in chapter two, we observed that a basic tenet of pheomenological understanding of human experience is that all human experience is intentional, that is, *about something* or *directed at the world*. We observed that the fundamentality of intentionality extends to emotions, too, and discussed its intricacies such as constitution and the principles of conception-dependence and existence-independence. We suggested that emotions, as intentional, can be conceptualised as *judgements* or *interpretations of the world*, which in turn required us to acknowledge, following Solomon (2007), that the object of every emotion is ultimately the world.

The tenet of intentionality is further developed by a tradition often referred to as "post-phenomenology", which, Ihde (2009, 8) introduces as "philosophy, particularly phenomenology" practiced in the contemporary context in which technologies "constitute the texture of our very lifeworld". We might, however in a perhaps somewhat simplifying manner, refer to post-phenomenology, at least as it is applied in this dissertation, as phenomenology of human-technology relations, given that one of its chief interests is understanding how technology shapes the relation between humans and their world and affects, modifies, and extends the ways in which human intentionality can be directed at the world.

In this subsection I inspect if it is possible to adapt Ihde's notion of a technological artefact, which we already discussed briefly in subsection 4.2.1, to fill the conceptual gap that has persisted underneath my shallow use of the notion of "game artefact".

Ihde (1990, 72) describes how technological artefacts, such as glasses, windows, thermometers, vending machines, and computers, situate in the intentionality relations between humans and the world. It seems that by drawing on the post-

phenomenological views, namely the works of Ihde (1990) and Verbeek (2008), it is possible to pay closer attention to the materialities of *WPTII* and *Tetris* and the kinds of relationships they are situated in when experienced.

While computer games, like *Tetris*, and pinball machines like *WPTII*, are technological artefacts by definition, I seek to demonstrate that single-player computer games as played can be described as standing out from the category of all technological artefacts due the peculiar coupling between desire and materiality in the player-game relation. We observed in subsection 4.2.4, by drawing on Levinas (1969), that even though we cannot necessarily describe any "goals" in gameplay and thus the kind of relation between the player and the world is one escaping any "utilitarian schematism" of tools and implements, the necessity of "nourishment" is a fundamental feature of gameplay. Furthemore, we suggested that gameplay can be described as an act of "pure expenditure" characterised by its pursuit, sometimes exclusively, to sustain itself. It seems that by articulating the role of nourishment in gameplay, not only to the temporal continuation of the activity, but also to the qualitative texture of the relationship between the human and the artefact, it is possible to justify speaking of game artefacts instead of technological artefacts in general.

Beyond making this argument, I intend in this section to arrive at a understanding of the alleged similarity of materialities of *Tetris* and *WPTII* and to decide either that together they exemplify a category of artefacts which we might call single-player game artefacts, or, that between them there is in fact a meaningful difference and they should not necessarily be treated as similar. This analysis would allow us to either confirm or dismiss the requirement for the game to run on a computer.

4.3.1   On intentional relations

The special value of the notion of technological artefact for this project is that it comes with an explanatory project Ihde (1990, 72) calls "a phenomenology of technics" that sets out to explain the relationships between humans, technological artefacts

and the world. As the length of this dissertation prevents me from providing a detailed account of the phenomenology of technics, cutting certain corners short is perhaps justified as Ihde's insights on human-technology relations can be used quite effectively to iron out the problem at hand. By drawing on the distinction between three kinds of existential relations between humans and technology, found within the phenomenology of technics, it seems possible to be more specific about the kind of game artefact we are talking about.

Ihde (1990, 72-107) distinguishes between three kinds of human-technology relations: "technics embodied", "hermeneutic technics" and "alterity relations". I will unpack these types of relations in the following.

With "technics embodied", Ihde (1990, 72-80) refers to technologies, such as eyeglasses and telephones, that situate in-between the human and the world, and become transparent in their "*position of mediation*" (Ihde 1990, 73). Technics embodied, as "taken into my own perceptual-bodily self experience" (Ihde 1990, 73), can be described in a framework of intentional relations between a human and the world, as follows:

(Human-technology)→world

As, for example, in:

(I-glasses)→world

Or,

(I-telephone)→you

The second of Ihde's categories of existential human-technology relations is hermeneutic technics, which refers to relations, which, as their name suggests, appeal to the domain of reading and interpretation. Selinger (2006, 7) suggests that hermeneutic relations "arise when we enter into practices with artifacts in order to ascertain knowledge about the world that would not otherwise be available (or, would at least be more difficult to ascertain)."

Ihde's first example of hermeneutic relations is that between a reader and a text. Not unlike in embodied relations, where through the transparent artefact the world becomes present, also in the hermeneutic relations a 'world' is made present. However, the presence of 'worlds' via hermeneutic relations

> is a hermeneutic presence. Not only does it occur *through* reading, but it takes its shape in the interpretative context of my language. [...] And while such phenomena may be strikingly rich, they do not appear as world-like. (Ihde 1990, 84)

Another illustrating example is a thermometer outside a window, which one might look at from within a house. One knows in the "immediacy of [one's] reading" that it is cold outside without actually *feeling* cold. However, this immediacy is constituted (not unlike the objects of emotions are *constituted*) in the interpretation – what has been gathered through perception is

> the dial and the numbers, the thermometer "text". And that text has hermeneutically delivered its "world" reference, the cold. (Ihde 1990, 85)

Thus, formalised as an intentionality relation, hermeneutic technics appear as follows:

Human→(technology-world)

As, for example, in:

I→(thermometer-world)

With the third kind of relations, alterity relations, Ihde (2003, 528) refers to "relations in which the technology becomes quasi-other, or technology 'as' other *to* which I relate." As for rendering a world present, Ihde (2003, 528) observes that in alterity relations there possibly can be a relation "through the technology to the world", but this is not a precondition, but perhaps an indicator of a technology's usefulness. In the case of alterity relations, the world may remain "context and background", whereas the technology may "emerge as the foreground and the focal quasi-other with which I momentarily engage." (Ihde 2003, 528) Alterity relations, too, can be formalised in terms of intentionality:

Human→technology(-world)

As, for example, in:

I→vending machine(-world)

In the first two relations, embodied and hermeneutic, the technology sits in between the human and the world. Thus we may call them "mediated intentionality". In alterity relations, the technology is, like Verbeek (2008, 389) puts it, the terminus of the experience. In addition to the three relations mentioned so far, Ihde also introduces "background relations", which refer to the ways in which technologies which which we are not explicitly in relations, do shape our experience of the world. Air-conditioning is an example of a technology with which we often have a background relation.

Now, as the outlines of Ihde's theory have been introduced, we may proceed to inspect its viability for understanding the materiality of the technologies which impose the gameplay condition on their users.

If we were holding to the popular presupposition that games are somehow 'separate from everyday life' and believed that our in-game choices are free of real-life consequences, it would seem lucid to take the relation between a player and her game as an alterity relation, based on the acknowledgements of Ihde (2003, 528), that alterity relations are not necessarily characterised by any relation from the technology to the world, and that the existence of a relation or lack of any thereof might be an indicator of how useful the technology is. This might serve the purpose of claiming that games are useless, which, however, is not the intention here.

Brey (1999, 101), a Dutch philosopher of technology, suggests that "virtual environments" could be understood as "aspects of computer systems to which alterity relations are established". Along these lines, Brey (1999, 101) continues that:

> a virtual environment is a computer-generated artifact that we experience and interact with, as in an alterity relation. Only, the structure is so rich that within the context of this alterity relation, we can establish more specific alterity relations with substructures of the environment, as well as embodiment, hermeneutical, and background relations with yet other substructures

Describing the first-order game-player relationship as an alterity relation would amount to observing that "I am sitting behind the computer and interact with it; I treat it as an other", like van Schoonhoven (2007, 46), a student of Verbeek and Brey, does when exploring the option of taking the player-game relationship as an alterity relation. That kind of player-game relationship could be formalised as

I→Tetris(-world)

However, as van Schoonhoven (2007, 46) points out, the computer does not get *all* of our attention, and this approach would dismiss everything going on in the periphery. Furthermore, given that we can intuitively recognize that there is something different in the relationship we have with an ATM machine and the relationship we have with a computer game, it is easy to agree with van Schoonhoven (2007, 46) as he suggests that taking the computer game (or today's popular virtual reality as he calls it) "simply as an artefact with which I engage in an alterity relation does not do justice to its complexity."

Brey (1999, 101) suggests an alternative to the alterity relation – the consideration of "virtual environments [...] as straightforward extensions of the physical world that should not be understood as complex artifacts but as *worlds*". "Worlds", he observes, "are not artifacts to which we have relations, but contexts within which such relations are established with specific objects". van Schoonhoven (2007, 47), follows this alternative option and suggests, holding to ontological reality of "today's popular virtual realities", that they are generated in reality and thus exist inside reality. With an account of his experience with *GTA:SA*, van Schoonhoven (2007, 47) describes the relation between a player and her game as a hermeneutic relation:

> I experience a visual interpretation of data stored in the memory of my computer. This data is interpreted and converted to a two-dimensional image using a combination of software and hardware, which we can describe as a generator.

van Schoonhoven (2007, 47) proceeds to formalize this relationship as follows:

I→(Generator-Data)

Framing the relationship as hermeneutic seems to capture the nature of play activity better than framing it as an alterity relation does. Not unlike we read thermometers and based on the reading arrive at facts about what awaits us on the other side of the window, we interpret computer games' output and arrive at the conclusion that we are, for example, under a barnacle attack. But however lucid the argument of van Schoonhoven (2007) in this regard may seem, its feasibility for solving the issues at hand in this dissertation suffers from two interrelated issues, which I will unpack in the following paragraphs.

First, it assumes that there is "data stored in the memory of my computer." An implication of this assumption would be, again, that pinball machines could be excluded on accidental grounds. While in *WPTII* the information to be presented on the LCD screen is stored in computer memory, the functionality responsible for imposing the gameplay condition – the paddles, the relays and the ball – is, to a large extent, of electro-mechanical nature. Furthermore, subscribing to ontological assumptions, regardless of their potential viability, is not possible given the first-person perspective and its reliance on what is given in the experience achieved by bracketing such assumptions. However – allow me to leave the concern of ontological assumptions aside for a while, as taking the argument of the player-game relationship as hermeneutic a bit further seems to lead to interesting insights on intentional relations.

The second issue for the description of the player-game relationship as hermeneutic is that such description leaves the player, and the modalities of her intentionality unchanged. This second point deserves to be elaborated in more detail with an example. Consider "flashbang grenades", whose existence is a common feature in first-person shooter games. With flashbang grenades I refer to grenades which inflict only marginal damage on avatars, and which work in a somewhat more indirect manner. In *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), there are two kinds of flashbang grenades, *stun grenades* and *flash grenades*. When exploding near the player's avatar, they

cause the player's screen to go fully or partially white, and the sounds her computer emits to turn into a high-pitched piercing tone. The effect lasts approximately five seconds. The *smoke grenades* in *Gears of War 2* (2008) have a similar effect. In *Far Cry*, the idea is taken a bit further. The *flashbang grenades* in *Far Cry* work somewhat similarly to those in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, but in *Far Cry*, as a consequence of a flashbang grenade explosing, the image on the screen is replaced with a semi-transparent snapshot from the moment when the grenade exploded. As time goes by, the transparency of the snapshot increases until it has completely faded away. I will take the flashbang grenade explosion in *Far Cry* as a paradigmatic example, and explore it further in the following.

When describing what the flashbang grenades actually do, statements such as "sounds are replaced with high-pitched noise" or "the image on the screen is replaced with a semi-transparent snapshot" are misleading. This is because the effect of flashbang grenades, experienced from the perspective of a player who has been hit by one, amounts to "I can't hear and see properly". This statement is sensible, despite the fact that the audiovisual sensory modalities with which I grasp the events in the periphery, whose existence van Schoonhoven (2007, 47) pointed out, remain unchanged. Thus, it seems that seems that while the approach of van Schoonhoven (2007), by avoiding framing the player-game relationship as an alterity relation, succeeds in taking into account the "peripheral" perceptions – the sounds we hear in the background while we play and so on – it fails to grasp the ways in which intentionality is not only *mediated*, but also *transformed* for the purpose of gameplay.

Thus, it is sensible, for the time being, to dismiss the option to describe the player-game relationship in terms of hermeneutic relations.

Perhaps a way to account for the effects of the flashbang grenades would be to take the player-game relationship as an *embodiment relation*. In this line of argument, not unlike eyeglasses which allow us to see further than we normally do, what we might call an interface would stand in-between "the game" and the player, and as

a consequence of embodying the interface the "semi-transparent snapshot" would become an "inability to see properly". This relationship could be formalised as follows:

(I-interface)→*Far Cry*

As players, we know that a successful interfaces become "transparent" after prolonged periods of play, again not unlike eyeglasses, which at first may make their wearer a bit dizzy, but soon after disappear from the realm of pre-reflective consideration. However, this line of description has a problem. As Verbeek (2008, 391) observes, "in embodiment relations, a distinction can still be made between the human and the technological 'share' in the mediated experience." Unless we subscribe to some particular game-ontological presupposition that delineates where the interface stops and *Far Cry* begins, we cannot describe it being possible for me to "take off" the interface of *Far Cry* like I can take off my eyeglasses. Thus, postulating the notion of "interface" seems to unnecessarily complicate things. As the "interface" seems the only candidate for that-which-is-embodied in the description of game-player relationship as an embodied relationship, it seems that we are better off turning back from this track of description.

Furthermore, my "inability to see" as a consequence of a flashbang grenade explosion is not something I could *see better* via the interface like I can see the landscape as more focused with my glasses, but a *mode of seeing* that cannot be described as existing, let alone as experienced as significant, outside *Far Cry* (2004). Thus the paradigm concerning solely with *mediated* intentionality would fail to see the significance in the effects of flashbang grenades. What we are dealing with is not only mediated intentionality, but also altered and transformed intentionality. How could this be grasped in terms of human-technology relations, we may wonder, as excluding background relations, we have used all the options given in Ihde (1990).

4.3.2 Hybrid intentionality in play

Following Verbeek (2008, 391), we may observe Ihde's range of human-technology relationships as a spectrum on which technologies range, based on their distance from the human, "from being 'embodied' to being 'read,' to being 'interacted with' and even being merely 'background'." However, Verbeek (2008, 391) also suggests, luckily for our project of describing the effects of flashbang grenades in terms of human-technology relations, that

> [y]et, prior to the embodiment relation there are human-technology relations in which the human and the technological actually merge rather than "merely" being embodied.

This is what Verbeek (2008, 391) calls *hybrid intentionality*. He points out it can be characterised as *cyborg intentionality*, based on the observation that relations like this are often associated with cyborgs and other such man-machine hybrids. He suggests in those cases, "there is no embodiment relation anymore - at least, not a relation which could compare to wearing eyeglasses or using a telephone". As Verbeek (2008, 390) acknowledges that the cases of telephone and eyeglasses, too, involve "intentionality that is partly constituted by technology", it is necessary for him to make the point that in the cases of hybrid intentionality,

> there actually is no association of a human and a technology anymore. Rather, a *new* entity comes about. Instead of organizing an interplay between a human and a nonhuman entity, this association physically alters the human.

Thus, like Verbeek (2008, 391) points out, hybrid intentionality is not technologically mediated human intentionality, but intentionality that is "beyond the human":

> just like "being" which experiences reality under the influence of drugs, or which sees things with the help of an implanted microchip, is not entirely human, so is the intentionality involved here.

Hybrid intentionality relations can be formalised as follows:

> (Human/technology)→world

We know that, for example, being implanted with something is not a prerequisite for becoming a player. However, it seems that despite Verbeek's insistence of

"physical alteration", we can meaningfully describe the relationship, however somewhat mundane compared to body modifications, between a player and her game as hybrid intentionality. Like we already observed in subsection 2.2.2, Verbeek (2008, 388) recollects the first principle of intentionality as follows: "Because of the intentional structure of human experience, human beings can never be understood in isolation from the reality in which they live." However what we did not yet explicitly observe is the other side of the coin:

> [I]t does not make much sense to speak of "the world in itself" either. (Verbeek 2008, 388)

We observe that a description of the consequences of the flashbang grenade explosion as "becoming temporarily deaf" does not make any sense outside the context of *Far Cry* (2004), that is, if we take the I as in isolation from *Far Cry* (2004). I retained my hearing abilities perfectly well, and could continue to hear the sounds from the "periphery" which van Schoonhoven (2007, 46) pointed out. If there in fact was an alterity relation in play, it would remain intact despite the explosion. Conversely, if we describe the consequences of the flashbang grenade explosion merely as a change in the sounds the computer emits, we miss the whole point about the event's significance. This situation perfectly well illustrates what we assumed in subsection 2.4.2, that an account of the phenomenon of gameplay is not possible without embracing its ontological hybridity: that it consists of both material and subjective constituents.

Thus, if we approach intentionality from the point of view of experienced significance, as we have so far done, the *I*, who *could not hear anything* after the explosion of the flashbang grenade instead of merely *observing that the sound turned into a high-pitched tone*, is a hybrid entity resulting from a relation between a human and a technology – the relation is *symbiotic* to the extent that we cannot always identify where the border between the two is. The flashbang grenades exemplify the observation of Verbeek (2005, 130), that

> Mediation does not simply take place *between* a subject and an object, but rather *coshapes* subjectivity and objectivity.[25]

Subscribing to how van Schoonhoven (2007, 47) argues for the ontological reality of generated worlds, a preliminary formalisation of the hybrid intentionality in the game-player relationship would be as follows:

(Player/*Far Cry*)→world

The hybrid intentionality seems to capture the kind of intentionality involved in becoming temporarily deaf as a consequence of a flashbang grenade explosion. The way how my mind was directed at the world could not be possible without the involvement of *Far Cry*. The gradually fading afterimage hampering my vision as a result of a flashbang grenade explosion in *Far Cry*, different from the way how my ears ring after failing to steer clear from a flash grenade explosion in *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007), is a result of my intentionality being coshaped (Verbeek 2005, 130) by the game artefact.

Simultaneously, I cannot separate the influences of myself and *Far Cry* in this relationship like I can separate the influences of myself and eyeglasses. But the involvement of *Far Cry* is ultimately necessary not only to the emergence of the particular modalities of intentionality, but also to the constitution of the objects of my emotions. Verbeek (2005, 130) suggests that

> Formulations in terms of the "access to reality" offered by an artifact should be read as relating to the way in which an artifact makes possible the constitution of a world in the very process of perception.

In other words, *Far Cry* has its say in not only *how* my intentionality is directed, but also in where/what my intentionality is directed *at*.

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[25]A similar position is echoed in Lister et al. (2007, 370), who understand the relation between a game and its player as a cybernetic circuit:

> We do not see here two complete and sealed-off entities: the player on the one hand and the game on the other. Rather there is an interchange of information and energy, forming a new circuit.

Thus it is necessary to explore the possibility of being more specific considering that at which my intentionality is directed, of distinguishing between *Far Cry* and the "periphery", which are both perfectly well encompassed by the "world" in the formalization as it stands now. For this purpose, I turn to Brey (1999, 101), who suggests that "virtual environments" could be taken as "worlds". Brey further elaborates that this

> interpretation accepts virtual environments as genuine worlds, and hence the idea that our experience and interactions in virtual environments can be as meaningful and 'real' as those in the physical world.

Assuming the experience as genuine resonates with what we argued in section 2.3.3, that there is no reason not to attempt to describe emotions in play as genuine – not only as "sincerely and honestly felt or experienced", but also as "having the reputed and apparent qualities." Thus, I do not hesitate to follow the intuition, which in section 2.4 led us to postulate a "world" of *Half-Life 2* as that in which the barnacles are frightening. Thus, we can be more specific in the formalisation, and make it as follows:

(Player/*Far Cry*)→the "world" of *Far Cry*

However, due to the approximative nature of the "world" in this formalization, certain things should perhaps be made explicit, even though our reliance on the assertions of Brey (1999) and van Schoonhoven (2007) about the ontological reality of virtual environments should do the trick for us for the time being. The mentioning of the "world" of *Far Cry* is not an ontological claim that "another world" known as the "world" of *Half-Life 2* existed. Neither it is a postulation of an "imaginary world" in which the in-game events take place. Rather, it is an indicator that perhaps it might make sense to understand a "world" of *Half-Life 2* as a signifying shorthand, perhaps even a metaphor, for a *subset* of the actual world. While this issue sustains a more detailed treatment, it suffices for the purposes of this chapter to leave the "world" the way it has been since section 2.4, until it will be unpacked in the next chapter.

4.3.3   The single-player game artefact

Now we are in a position to attempt to cash out on the attempt of describing single-player computer games as standing out among all technological artefacts.

Ishihara (2009) argues that in the contemporary "technologically conditioned world" a distinction must be made between tools and machines, based on the observation that the latter interfere with human autonomy and contribute to the constitution of *technological intentionality*.[26] We already dismissed the option of games as tools for, for example, fun. Reflecting on the discussions in this chapter, perhaps games are, due to their ability to shape human intentionality, closer to machines as Ishihara (2009) sees them, than they are to tools in the traditional Heideggerian sense.

However, interestingly, the game-player relationship seems exceptional among all possible manifestations of not only technologically mediated intentionality in general but also more specifically of hybrid intentionality because of its *volatility*. The hybrid intentionality relationship between a game and a player is *endangered* (*cf.* Gadamer 2001 [1960], 106) and as such has to be *nourished* (*cf.* Levinas 1969, 111) with whatever it takes in the particular game. Allow me to unpack these claims.

Consider for example pacemakers, objects with which their users similarly enter into hybrid intentionality relationships. They are supposedly implanted in humans to enhance humans' quality of life, and they are intended to fulfil a particular task for the human. It is the pacemaker's job to do whatever it takes to keep the human heart beating. In the player/game relationship, however, the player is fulfilling the requirements set by the game. This is what we already identified as *the gameplay*

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[26]Ishihara (2009, 6) postulates three requirements for the notion of technological intentionality. Its character should be distinct from "the intentionality concerning natural things, animals, tools, and Others". Technological intentionality should be analysed form the dimensions of materiality, structure, mechanism and function, and from the perspectives of designer, user, manager, and regulator. While it would certainly be interesting to articulate how the hybrid intentionality in the player-game relationship meets these requirements or if the requirements would need to be revisited, such endeavour would not serve the purposes of this dissertation and thus remains a potential topic for future research.

condition. The player and the materiality of the game are not equal partners when deciding about the nature of the relationship.

This inequality can be further elaborated with the example of games that allow the player to change settings that define properties of the gameplay activity. Sometimes a player may be able to customize a considerably large proportion of the parameters according to which the game's materiality shapes the activity. Often this has consequences for how the experience of play unfolds. *Civilization IV*, for example, has six different "victory conditions" the player can choose to turn on and off at will before the game starts. These conditions refer to particular aspects of a game state, and once that state is reached, the game announces the winner and takes the player through statistics about the particular playing, after which, however, the player, in case her civilization was not destroyed by a winning opponent, is free to continue playing. Apart from victory conditions, the player can choose also for example the size of the globe on which the in-game events take place and its proportions of water and land, climate, and so on. In some games, such as *SimCity 4* and *The Sims 2* the player can adjust the speed on which the game runs during playing.

Even if we consider the possibilities of changing the parameters, and take into account the possibility of doing it on the fly, in other words changing settings such as the speed of the game and its difficulty level on the fly once the game has been started, the plausibility of the argument concerning inequality in the relationship does not erode. We should not take these as examples of any special kind of freedom concerning the gameplay condition, because the possibilities to change settings, their amount, kind, and consequences are *a priori* hard-coded in the materiality. Thus, the possibilities to choose the size of the globe or to change the speed are not different from any other possibilities offered by a game. We have no reason to elevate the possibilities to change settings from among all other possibilities for action afforded by the game artefact.

As we have already observed, the materiality does not only shape the modes of

hybrid intentionality, but also the constitution of its objects. The events, objects, and encounters at which the hybrid intentionality can be targeted exist only as long as the player fulfils the gameplay condition. When playing *PacMan* (1982), I am not allowed to take the ghosts as my lovers. The materiality of *PacMan* excludes certain ways of directedness toward "the game world", namely love toward the ghosts. The player can, of course, break the relationship at will by quitting the game, but it is not in her powers to renegotiate the conditions according to which the hybrid intentionality is shaped.

Verbeek (2002) observes of technologies and artefacts which mediate intentionality, that when

> artifacts are used, they help shape how they are used, and therefore they actively contribute to the constitution of a specific relationship between humans and reality.

This applies well to game artefacts, too. But interestingly enough, what makes games stand out from among all artifacts mediating, enhancing and transforming intentionality, is the means by which they not only shape how they are used, but, like we observed in subsection 4.2.2, also enforce a particular mode of use onto those who desire to be their users.

Based on Ihde's notion of technological artefact as that which is constituted in its contexts of use, and that with which we enter into intentionality relations, we can describe a game artefact as a technological artefact as follows. Single-player game artefacts are technological artefacts with which the users enter into hybrid intentionality relationships. They can be described as differing from other technological artefacts as, based on the gameplay condition, they *enforce particular contexts of use*, which we already know as gameplay, and *regulate the qualitative spectrum of intentionality relations*.

These two characteristic features of single-player game artefacts, *enforcing a context of use* and *regulating the qualitative spectrum of intentionality*, facilitate, respectively, what we in subsection 3.1.3 conceptualised as play as an *activity* and play

as an *attitude*. However, given that we already established the notion of *gameplay*, we can be more specific and state that the context of use enforced is not only play, but *gameplay*. We observe that this definition grasps both *Tetris* and *WPTII*, and does not rely on presuppositions regarding the kind of materiality that fulfils the aforementioned requirements. Thus, both *Tetris* and *WPTII* can be described as *single-player game artefacts*, replacing the term single-player computer game.

4.3.4 Let cyborgs be cyborgs

It is necessary to deal briefly with a criticism that is easily levelled at the attempt to use the notion of hybrid intentionality for the study of game artefacts. I will do so in this subsection.

Applying the notion of hybrid intentionality, one cannot deny that it implies the potentiality of drawing a parallel between players and "cyborgs", despite the fact that the human *body* remains mostly intact in computer game play. If the player is only in a metaphorical sense a cyborg, is the "hybrid intentionality" then not "hybrid" and "intentionality" in an equally metaphorical sense?

The metaphorical way is perhaps the way in which the notion of a cyborg is most often applied in debates around digital media. Hayles (1999, 114), for example, argues that the cyborgs in the *Manifesto for Cyborgs* (Haraway 1991) "are simultaneously entities and metaphors, living beings and narrative constructions." Hayles (1999, 115) sees the "conjunction of technology and discourse" as crucial for the notion's feasibility, because as "manifesting itself as both technological object and discursive formation, it partakes of the power of the imagination as well as the actuality of technology". Hayles (1999, 115) identifies a difference between what she calls "actual cyborgs", that is people with technology implanted in their bodies, and "metaphorical cyborgs", of which her first example is a computer game player.

It should be evident, but perhaps is worth making explicit that the introduction of the notion of "cyborg" to the debate here was a byproduct of discussing intentionality

in the game-player relationship, and thus does not play a significant role in the descriptive project. Playing can be described as involving hybrid intentionality. Verbeek (2008, 391) suggests that being a cyborg could also be described as doing the same. Admittedly, the similarity of "playing" and "being a cyborg" could be interrogated in more detail. Perhaps interesting findings would surface from harnessing the "power of imagination as well as the actuality of technology" (Hayles 1999, 115) by describing the player explicitly as a cyborg.

Giddings (2006), who is interested in unpacking computer games as a "techno-cultural form" characterised by the formation of cybernetic circuits between the playing subjects and the games' materialities, discusses how the subject has been understood within the discourse of new media studies. Talking to Hayles (1999, 115), Giddings (2006, 82) points out that the "the game/player [. . .] is not metaphorically but actually part of a cybernetic feedback loop with the videogame". This suggests that making the player explicitly a cyborg would actually require less imagination as one might think at first. If hybrid intentionality was understood as a necessary and sufficient condition for being a cyborg, one could could claim that computer game players are what Hayles would call "actual cyborgs". However, engaging in this debate does not seem necessary for the purposes of this project, especially if we take into account the observation of Giddings (2006, 83);

> [The cyborg] implies, and is often taken to mean, a discrete, bounded entity (a cybernetic organism); a monster no doubt, but one generally more or less human in origin and form. The cyborg and its literature [. . .] cannot fully account for the entities in (and at) play in the videogame event. [. . .] [W]hilst the use of the term cyborg here makes links with salient concepts, debates and disciplines, it may ultimately prove misleading.

Thus, it seems more feasible to stick to the notion of "hybrid intentionality" also known as "cyborg intentionality" without explicitly employing the notion of "cyborg", and instead proceed to describe hybrid intentionality as subordinate to gameplay according to the gameplay condition. We can observe that the only approximation necessary to describe the game-player relationship as a hybrid intentionality relationship, as

in the example concerning the effects of flashbang grenades, is our old friend from subsection 2.4.1, the "world" of the game. However, as we also observed, holding on to the ontological reality of video game "worlds", the argument could as well be made *without* the approxmation, but using it adds to the argument's specificity. Friedman (1995) suggests that it is difficult to describe

> what it feels like when you're 'lost' inside a computer game, precisely because at that moment your sense of self has been fundamentally transformed. [...] The computer comes to feel like an organic extension of your consciousness.

Not knowing what it feels like for Friedman (1995), I can of course only speculate, but it seems that with the notion of hybrid intentionality we can articulate in more detail that which has been often addressed with cyborg metaphors, such as Friedman's.

To be able to complete the argument, it is necessary to go into the approximation of "world", and see if it can be unpacked and defended based on what is given in the experience. This is the task for the next chapter, where I proceed to discuss the implications of the gameplay condition to the player's freedom. I describe how the gameplay condition contributes to the experienced significance of game content and ties events and objects meaningfully together, possibly to the extent that we might consider the cohesion as experienced "worldness".

Chapter 5

Game world as a metaphor

In a world full of nothing
Though it's not love
It means something
It's easy to slip away
And believe it all
- Depeche Mode: World Full of Nothing

In the second chapter, we arrived, by drawing on Solomon (2006, 301), at an understanding of emotion as intentional and as such "an experience of the object of emotion, from the peculiar perspective of that emotion" (Solomon 2006, 301). We observed also that every emotion's 'object' is ultimately the world. In other words, a description of a mere object-in-itself would not suffice in a description of an emotion. Instead, a description of an emotion involves accounting for the object as the subject experiences it as part of the world for herself. Thus, it follows that describing an emotion as meaningful must include or draw upon a description of the world in which the object is constituted and experienced as significant.

For many purposes one might, instead of introducing the notion of "world" into the discussion, be better off with for example 'play arenas' or 'game environments' (*cf.* Järvinen 2008a, 66), not having to carry all the conceptual baggage that comes along with "world". But as emotions are established as "interpretations of the world," the notion of a world becomes central to the argument, and thus cannot be escaped in the pursuit of the intricacies of emotions.

At the end of second chapter, namely in subsection 2.4.1, we observed that it made intuitive sense to describe a barnacle as frightening "in the world of *Half-Life 2*". However, when considering to unpack the intuitive statement, we are faced with the fact that the term "world" transgresses all disciplinary and paradigmatic borders. It carries a diverse range of connotations ranging from a planet with a molten core surrounded by an atmosphere to a system of beliefs regarding the creation of life. The use of the term can be fairly disputed from the points of view of all these connotations. Thus a certain conceptual specificity is needed in order focus the notion of a "world" properly to be used in the context of computer game scholarship.

When seeking for specificity it is important to remember that the idea of "emotions as interpretations of the world" is an approximation that underlines the intentionality of emotions, to which we arrived only after discussing the relation between a subject, emotions, and the world, with more detailed concepts. More important than establishing a notion of "computer game world" is to establish a conceptual interface through which computer game play can be addressed with the notions we used to frame emotions as "interpretations of the world."

Perhaps we could describe single-player games as "worlds for their players" in an experiential sense, even if they are not "worlds" in the sense of objective ontology. If being in the world is delineated by the human condition, perhaps there is something *for* players that is delineated by the gameplay condition, and, perhaps this something would be that of which emotions in play are interpretations – an experiential manifestation of the vague concept of a "game world" as something which the player grasps through the hybrid intentionality relationship. Furthermore, not unlike unlike gameplay is a subset of not only play but of all human phenomena, perhaps that which is approximated in the notion of "game world" could be articulated, following Verbeek (2002) and van Schoonhoven (2007) as a subset of the actual world.

Outline of this chapter

In the first section of this chapter, to enhance the likelihood of making my argument about game worlds with conceptual clarity, I will briefly subject the paradigmatic notion of "game world" to criticism from the point of view of intentionality, and argue that many contemporary usages of the notion ignore the intentional unity between the subject and the game artefact. As an outcome of the analysis I suggest that for the purposes of this dissertation the notion of "game world" is to be detached from any (objective) ontological concerns, such as *spatiality*. I argue, building on the notion of metaphor in Black (1955), Peres (1998) and Lakoff and Johnson (2003), that the *metaphorical* nature of the concept of "game world" is to be made explicit.

However, as a metaphor can get us only so far as to point at a particular direction, I suggest, in the second section of this chapter, that the "comprehensive but inexplicit connection" as the essence of the metaphor (Peres 1998) between the experiences of being in the world and playing a computer game, can be opened up by following how Sartre (2003 [1943]) articulates the relation between freedom, responsibility, and *facticity*, the latter referring to all the concrete details against which human freedom exists and is limited.

Unpacking the metaphor results, in the second section of this chapter, in observing and articulating an implication of the gameplay condition: a game extends its player's facticity by introducing new concrete details against which the player can exercise her project of freedom. The hybrid intentionality originating in the symbiosis of the game artefact and the player is directed at the extended facticity. A barnacle, the object of anger, has relevance within the extension of the player's facticity. Remembering how the notion of gameplay condition was derived from the duality of freedom and responsibility, it is no surprise that the player is responsible for the extension of her facticity, and must *nourish* it.

The approach of taking a game world as a metaphor for an extended facticity provides certain significant benefits compared to its precedents, many of which

attempt to establish, in one way or another[1], "game world" as a category of *other than the real* world or as an *alternative* to the real world, and attempt to defend its existence plausibly from the position of objective ontology, independent from the player's experience. The viability of this kind of projects can be questioned based on the principle of intentionality.

Thus, while arguing, in the second section of this chapter, that the extension of facticity is real, I don't argue that the "game world" was anything else but a conceptual metaphor for the extension the player's facticity. This allows us to avoid resorting to "imagination" or "make-believe" (*cf.* Walton) as means to explain how "computer game worlds" can be experienced as coherently significant. It also keeps us from having to articulate a "virtual body" that would do the "existing in" a "virtual space" (*cf.* Tomas 1995, Klevjer 2006). This position will be articulated in the last three subsections of this chapter.

5.1 Objective ontology and the "spatiality" of game worlds

The notion of "game world" is used widely within computer game studies but it is by no means established. Seeing how it is used, it seems as if the meaning of the notion could be taken for granted, as if there was no need for definition. The notion of "game world", in the lack of a proper definition, often becomes articulated as an undefined other, for example, as "that which is not the rules" or "that which is not the interface", or as inheriting most of its descriptive powers from another concept, as in for example "that in which the actions take place".

My critique of how the notion of "game world" is used in the contemporary paradigm is twofold. On one hand, I argue that "game world" as a category defined

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[1]as "fictional" or a "possible" (*cf.* Juul 2007, Ryan 1991, Murray 1997, 38), "spatial" (*cf.* Günzel 2008), or "virtual" (*cf.* Klastrup 2003)

by spatial features is problematic. This is because the introduction of spatiality into the discussion invites in also the notion of spatial existence. Given the current state of technology, which does not allow us to really *exist in* computer games like we exist in space with our bodies, this approach thus requires postulating some sort of vicarious entity between the "game world" and the human body. On the other hand, given that it follows from intentionality that "human beings can never be understood in isolation from the reality in which they live" and "it does not make much sense to speak of 'the world in itself' either" (Verbeek 2008, 388), discussing "game worlds" as independent of particular players and their particular playings is problematic.

In fact, these aspects intertwine in the discussion of *spatiality* of computer games. It is often understood as a feature which we can discern in games by means of objective analysis and by understanding which we can learn about the "worlds" of computer games. However, it seems unclear to which extent objective spatial properties are among the qualities that contribute to the 'worldness' of computer game 'worlds'. Should we assume that a game environment which is not entitled to the label "world" based on its objective properties such as spatiality, could not provide sufficient coherency for emotional experiences, thus excluding them from being "interpretations of the game world"?

This option is not viable for two reasons. Given the intentional unity of humans and their worlds, it would be challenging to plausibly address "worlds" without addressing the experiences of those being in the worlds. From the first-person perspective, on the other hand, it is necessary to bracket ontological assumptions, of which a prime example is the presupposition that a computer game "world" exists beyond the player's experience.

It seems worth exploring if we could describe the experienced worldness as independent from the properties of the play arena that can be discerned by means of analysis from the third-person perspective. I begin unpacking my criticism of the use of the notion of "game world" with the question of spatiality, taking "spatial

game worlds" as a prototypical example of addressing "game worlds" based on the properties they appear as having from the third-person perspective. I argue that for the purposes and in the context of this dissertation, understanding "game worlds", not unlike understanding gameplay, requires us to introduce subjective qualities into the empirical scope of the argument. This task begins at inspecting the the role space and spatiality have in gameplay.

5.1.1 Spatial representation and the experience of playing *Railroads!*

I begin the discussion of the "worldness" experienced upon game artefacts at the notion of spatiality, because it is often taken as one of the somehow definitive features of computer game "worldness". Spatiality is sometimes understood as one of the key paradigms with which new media, including computer games, could be explained (*cf.* Manovich 2002). Emphasizing spatiality when discussing computer games can be framed as a way of reconciling the two distinct perspectives emphasizing playability and narration. (*cf.* Günzel 2008)

In his discussion of the idea of "immersion" in computer games, Calleja (2007, 46) sees "digital games" as "subspecies of virtual environments" and "MMOGs" as "subspecies of virtual worlds". Calleja (2007, 44) defines virtual environments as "computer generated domains which create a perception of traversable space and permit modification through the exertion of agency." He distinguishes between "virtual environments" and "virtual worlds" not only based on the involvement of other users, but also on the objective spatial properties of "virtual worlds". "Virtual worlds" are, according to Calleja (2007, 46) "composites of persistent, multi-user virtual environments extending over a vast geographic expanse."

While I will return to the "virtuality" of computer game worlds in subsection 5.2.4, at this point it suffices to suggest, based on Calleja's definitions, that spatiality is a direction from which computer games can be meaningfully discussed. This

suggestion can be easily backed up with empirical observations. Consider for example the game *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, in which the player views the game's landscape from a freely movable and zoomable perspective and lays railroad tracks through the landscape, taking into consideration the steepness of hills and turns and the costs of bridge-building and tunneling, in order to assign freight to be hauled from one city to another in a pursuit of maximal profit. The activity of playing *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, including its details like challenge, success and difficulty, can be meaningfully described by drawing on spatial terminology.

For example: greater *distance* between a coal mine and a city equals greater cost of track-laying, greater *elevation* of hills and *steepness of curves* equal slower trains. Cost and delay in turn equal a potential drop in profits which subsequently equals increased difficulty to be coped with. Based on these observations we may conclude that *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, like many if not most computer games, is fundamentally *about space.* Next evident question is whether this gives us any hints about the experience of play.

According to Merleau-Ponty (2005 [1945], 94-5), my "body is the pivot of the world" and "the unperceived term in the centre of the world towards which all objects turn their face". In this world, my spatial experience is characterised by perceiving my surroundings in terms of dimensions and distances between my body and my environment – which objects are within my reach and reaching which objects would require me to stand up, and so on.

Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 141-4) unpack Merleau-Ponty's claim by outlining three "spatial frames of reference". The "proprioceptive frame", refers to my awareness of my own body. It is 'according to' such frame that I know the location of my arms and legs without any conscious reflection. The proprioceptive frame is an embodied *sine qua non* for the "egocentric frame", in which my body is the "experiential zero-point" and the "indexical 'here' in relation to which every appearing object is oriented". (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 142). The third, "alleocentric"

frame, refers to the purely objective conception of space 'according to' which "it doesn't matter where you happen to be standing, in Copenhagen, Rome, or New York; Copenhagen is always north of Rome." (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 141).

A similar observation about the role of first-hand experience in spatiality is made by Sartre (2003 [1943], 512), who suggests that:

> [t]he only concrete placing which can be revealed to me is absolute extension – *i.e.*, that which is defined by my place considered as the center for which distances are accounted for absolutely, with me as object and without reciprocity. The only absolute extension is that which unfolds starting from a location which I am absolutely.

With reciprocity Sartre (2003 [1943], 512) refers to the interrelations of figures in space, constituting what he calls "geometric" space, which seems to correspond to how Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 141) describe alleocentric space.

Based on the insights of Merleau-Ponty (2005 [1945], 94-5), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 141-4), and Sartre (2003 [1943], 512), we may conclude that concerning ourselves with space not as a representation necessitating make-believe but as a space encountered as real in lived experience, we must take take into account the position of the body. Any "spatial worldness" depends on the body as point of view upon the world.

Thus we must move on to discuss the topic of a point of view upon the world in which games are being played. In *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, I can move the god-like omni-present perspective and zoom in and out at will to see the "Bucharest Bullet" express train belching black smoke as it climbs the Carpathian mountains. Apart from merely observing, I can upgrade a railroad depot in Varna at this moment and in the very next moment be laying new track on the other side of Europe. All this happens while most of my body is, if not totally at rest, at least immobile in front of the computer. Considering the physical strain or motion involved, or more accurately the lack of any thereof, a relevant comparison to *Sid Meier's Railroads!* is driving a car. van Jennep (1987, 226), discussing the "world of the driver", remarks that "proportionately it makes no difference to my bodily effort (namely the push

on the pedal) whether I drive 15 miles per hour or 65 miles per hour." Apart from observing the lack of physical strain or relative passivity of the body, it is important to observe that in *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, there is nothing corresponding to a body 'in the game' either.

A proper analysis of a game as a "spatial world" as something in which we can exist (in contrast to the alleocentric notion), involves, if not taking the embodied position ourselves, at least describing how our chosen point of view relates to the proprioceptive and egocentric perspectives to the space: *i.e.* where is the indexical 'here' in the description and what is its experiential basis if not proprioception (*cf.* Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 141).

Because at this point in time we do not have bodies as proprioceptive points of view inside computer game "worlds" in the manner we have them in the real world, the necessity of accounting for 'here' when describing space as something in which we can exist threatens to make an argument concerning "game worlds" convoluted and vague. Pursuing the spatial line of argument would require us to introduce a workaround for the lack of body "in" the game.[2]

To account for my experience of the 'game world', we could seek to demonstrate that I, in fact, had objective presence *in* the game, or, advocate that my experience of 'existing in' the world of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* can be described without accounting for "objective presence" (consider, for example, a pragmatic perspective that I would 'exist in the consequences of my actions'). I will discuss these options in the following.

While in the case of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* the former option, demonstrating objective presence, would be somewhat problematic given the god-like perspective implemented in the game and the lack of any 'puppet' whatsoever controlled by the player, Klevjer (2006) has applied the perspective of objective presence on avatar-

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[2]The intention with which I say that we cannot "be in" computer game "worlds" is not to discount any of the evident cyborgian undercurrent, it is merely to point out that the modes of description beginning with "spatial existence" are not necessarily the most feasible for describing the players' experiences with computer games.

based computer games. In his analyses, the avatar[3] takes the role of a 'vicarious body' through which the player perceives the game world. For Klevjer (2006) the avatar is 'the pivot of the *game* world' in a Merleau-Pontian sense.

However, in order to speak about my existence "in" *Sid Meier's Railroads!* in a similar fashion, we would have to stretch the notion of existing in space so far that it would lose much of its descriptive power, as we would end up addressing something like "disembodied omnipresent existence". This is why it does not seem feasible to apply Klevjer's model onto games without avatars.

This observation suggests that in order to unpack the experienced worldness in gameplay and by doing so understand the "world of *Half-Life 2*" in which the barnacle is frightening, we should not attempt to treat "computer game space" as parallel to actual space. In search for an alternative line of description, I will move on to consider if it would be possible, despite the observation that computer games' spatiality is distinctively different from actual spatiality, to retain the analytical value of spatial descriptions of computer games.

Friedman (1995) suggests that 'objective presence' is not a necessity, using *SimCity* as an example:

> When a player "zones" a land area, she or he is identifying less with a role than with a process. [...] "Losing yourself" in a computer game means, in a sense, identifying with the simulation itself.

However, as my physical existence is not altered when I play *SimCity*, it is evident that taking Friedman's description as a description of "existence" would refer to something on a much higher level than the existence characterised by the experience of proprioception, that is, existence in the space that surrounds oneself, the kind of spatial existence with which Merleau-Ponty (2005 [1945], 94-5), Sartre (2003 [1943], 512) and Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 141-2) are concerned with.

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[3]Using the simple notion of "avatar" in reference to Klevjer (2006) does not really do justice to his analyses, in which the tasks and roles of the avatar are re-articulated with more detailed concepts. However, the brief mentioning goes to show the kind of the measures which would be necessary if we held to the notion of a spatial game world in which we could exist.

Friedman (1999), suggests that "gameplay in *Civilization II* revolves around the continual transformation of place into space". Friedman refers to a distinction between place and space originating in Certeau (1988 [1980]), where the former refers to an objective conception of space, as in maps, whereas the latter refers to the dynamic, experienced space, as in walking through, or making a tour of, an area depicted by the map. Certeau (1988 [1980], 118-22) suggests that

> Maps are abstracted accounts of spatial relations ('the girl's room is next to the kitchen'), whereas tours are told from the point of view of the traveler/narrator ('You turn right and come into the living room')[4]

Thus, "place" and "map" as understood by Certeau (1988 [1980]), could perhaps be roughly approximated as corresponding to the "alleocentric" notion of space in Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 141-2).

However, once we have acknowledged the problems of "existing in" computer games, it seems that the notions of "space" and "place" Friedman (1995) refers to have to be vested with special meanings in order to facilitate plausible argumentation. This is exemplified by Friedman (1999), when he argues that when playing *Civilization II*, we experience the space without taking a perspective *within* the space: "the map is not merely the environment for the story; it's the hero of the story." However, it seems that the idea of experiencing space in the argument of Friedman (1999) refers to experiencing space in a doubly metaphorical sense. If a body within the space is a precondition for experiencing space, the map being the hero of the story must refer to a metaphorical "experience of space". This causes us to fall back on describing the actual human body as the body within the actual space, for whom the space in the screen is a metaphor or a representation.

Sartre (2003 [1943], 512) suggests space becomes what it is by *spatialization*, which is a subjective process occurring over temporality:

> it depends on temporality and appears in temporality since it can come into the world only through a being whose mode of being is temporalization. [...]

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[4]For more detailed discussions about the concepts of place, space, map, and tour within the context of computer games, see *e.g.* Jenkins (2004) and Lammes (2009)

> In this sense it would be useless to conceive of space as a form imposed on phenomena by the *a priori* structure of our sensibility. Space can not be a form, for it is *nothing*.

If we acknowledge that the process of spatialization occurring over time is a precondition for experiencing space in the real world, the importance Aarseth (2000, 162) places on "hallucination" in the experience of computer game space seems sensible. Aarseth (2000, 162) observes that computer games

> are constituted of signs and are therefore already dependent on our bodily experience in, and of, real space to be "hallucinated" as space.

Being able to acknowledge computer game space as a result of a subjective process, perhaps comparable to "spatialization" (*cf.* Sartre 2003 [1943], 512), is an achievement which prompts us to downplay the ontological assumptions in Aarseth's argument. In other words, regardless of what we understand by "signs", we can buy the idea of computer game space as resulting from a subjective contribution.

Rather than giving us access to actual space, computer games provide us with space represented, supposedly by means of simulation. This seems like a rigid way to treat the notion of computer game space after the acknowledgement that we cannot really *exist in* computer game space. However, it is necessary to point out that even though we can describe affinities in the processes leading to the experiences of actual space and simulated space – *i.e.* the roles of spatialization and "hallucination" – we have no reason to assume that the relation between the player and the *spatialized game content*, in other words the 'simulated space' of the 'game world', would be like the relation we have with actual spatiality.

It seems we have encountered a limit to the plausibility of stretching the 'spatiality paradigm' of new media (*cf.* Manovich 2002, 213-243) for the description of computer game play, especially if it is understood as a somewhat uncritical extension of spatial metaphors to account not only for the new media work "in itself" but also for the experience. While we can speak of "aesthetics of navigation", and suggest that a key characteristic shared by *Myst* and *Doom* is that they both are "spatial journeys", like

Manovich (2002, 213) does, we cannot automatically assume these descriptions to account for the player's experience. Computer games can *represent* space by means of *simulation*. The descriptive devices we can use for explaining existing in actual space apply to computer games to the extent that we can for example describe *some* games as *representing* or *simulating* "spatial journeys" and "navigation".

However, considering computer games within the 'spatiality paradigm', we must constantly remind ourselves of two reality checks. First, simulating "spatial journeys" and "navigation" is not an important trope in *all* computer games. Second, we cannot assume the experience about a representation of something as sharing all its qualities with the experience of that something as not represented, *i.e.* as in its original form. For example, as humans we use different practices and draw upon different conventions for dealing with the pictorial representations of our relatives in an instant messaging program than we use for dealing with the actual persons. We have no reason to assume that there would not be a similar difference in the ways we treat "space represented (by means of simulation)" and "actual space".

Even though there is a peculiar relation between "world" and "space" in human reality, we should not perhaps assume this affinity in computer games. Simulating space does not lead to simulating being in space let alone simulating a world. We cannot discuss the worldness in *Sid Meier's Railroads!* as played as a property of *that in which one exists* by a body that persists over temporality. In other words, there is a disconnection between the "world" and the "space" of *Sid Meier's Railroads!*.

However, that does not prevent us from discussing the spatial representation in *Sid Meier's Railroads!* in a way that resembles how space is conceived according to the alleocentric frame (*cf.* Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 141). For example, without having to account for neither the indexical 'here', nor the process of spatialization and its origins, we can compare distances between cities and conclude that laying the track from Venice to Berlin over the Alps is more cost-effective than making a detour via a pass in the mountains. This is what a successful player might do. If we,

in this kind of reflections, use the word "world", we do so for reasons of convenience.

This is the sense which we can read in Aarseth (2008), where an argument about the worldness of *World of Warcraft* builds upon measurements of spatial and geographical dimensions, in other words on the alleocentric space in *World of Warcraft*. However, if we acknowledge the disconnection between "worlds" and "spaces" of computer games, the arguments concerned with space in the alleocentric sense do not get us far in unpacking the experienced "worldness" within gameplay, *i.e.* kind of "world" in which barnacles are frightening. In *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, alleocentric space is one among the many faculties of the functionality of the artefact facilitating gameplay, and in that sense comparable to the model of economics the game employs, or, to the sounds of the locomotives.

Based on the acknowledgement that *Sid Meier's Railroads!* is fundamentally *about* space we can make only similarly abstract claims about the experience: the experience of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* as played will be *about* space. This is not unlike an experience of playing *Spore* (2008) would be about evolution, and an experience of playing *Flower* (2009) would be about flowers.

In this light it makes pragmatic sense to conclude, along the lines of Aarseth (2000, 162), that the spatial worlds of computer games can be described as a 'hallucinations' based on the representation of space in the game.[5] However, allow us to reminisce the example of anger and fear in *Half-Life 2*, which began with me observing that my agency has been altered, proceeded via perceiving the auditory cues of slimy grunts to the conclusion that I am being taken by surprise by a barnacle, and finished off with a couple of shotgun blasts that killed the monster. There seems to be more to game worlds than spatiality, as it makes hardly any sense to refer to the material correlates contributing to the constitution of the object of my emotion as experienced, the alteration of my agency and the subsequent events, as features of

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[5]It seems unclear if this process is different from assuming the "world of economics" of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* as similarly hallucinated, given that for the player it is necessary to conceive both economics and space as principles regulating gameplay. While this unclarity is worth flagging, interrogating it further would not serve the purpose of this project.

mere "representation". Neither did I 'hallucinate' the grounds based on which my shotgun blasts aimed at the barnacle constituted a vengeance.

Luckily, it does not seem necessary to describe the experienced worldness, let alone the experience of playing *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, by way of "being in".[6] While one should admit that *Sid Meier's Railroads!* is, fundamentally and essentially, *about space*, that acknowledgment is not enough to justify a conclusion that playing *Sid Meier's Railroads!* would have something to do with *being in that space* which the game is about. My abilities in *Sid Meier's Railroads!* are primarily delineated by the principles of gameplay, not by considerations related to existing in space. If I am unable to build a bridge in *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, it is most likely because I do not have enough in-game money, not because of for example my inability to reach far enough to place the furthest tiles of the bridgehead.

Pursuing a mode of description that postulates the avatar/vehicle/puppet as an *a priori* category in the experiential ontology of computer game play does not necessarily survive Occam's razor, as, for the description of experiences of not only avatar-based games, there are simpler and more fundamental invariant structures of experience available.

Perhaps the 'worldness' structuring the experience of a game like *Sid Meier's Railroads!* as played can be described independently of the properties of the space represented by the game. Perhaps the project of "existing in space" does not characterise the experience of computer game play beyond the extent, or, in any different way than, it characterises *any* human experience. While spatiality is an important trope in many computer games, its role in the constitution of experienced worldness seems to be subordinated to the principles of gameplay. I will unpack this

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[6]It should perhaps be made clear that the perspective toward experienced worldness I am advocating is not one discarding the notion of embodiment: the player addressed by the suggested mode of analysis is a human player as an embodied being, most likely sitting in front of a screen and using the computer's interface with her hands. The critical point to be made here, which follows from subscribing to the reality of "virtual worlds" in subsection 4.3.2, is to question the viability of a project of pursuing a description of the experience of a game like *Sid Meier's Railroads!* as played as "virtual embodiment" inside some kind of another "spatial world".

claim in the next subsection.

5.1.2   Playability over spatiality

In this subsection, I continue tracing the experienced worldness of computer games by discussing represented spatiality as subordinate to the principles of gameplay.

The discussion concerning the relationship between spatiality and playability begins with looking at the role of spatiality in *Sid Meier's Railroads!* with the help of Wark (2007). In his book *G4M3R TH3ORY*, a metaphorical treatment of potential affinities between computer games and features of contemporary society, Wark (2007, §069), when discussing how spatiality of computer games is experienced, observes that "the algorithm [referring to what could be roughly approximated as game mechanics] consumes the topographic and turns it into the topological." Appropriated onto an experience with *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, the consummation of the topographic and its transformation into the topological means that in order to succeed as a player, we do not have to grasp the landscape in terms of its topographic features (*e.g.* "that is a city, there is a mountain").

Instead, a successful player will understand the landscape in terms of a multitude of different potential kinds of *relations* between the possible nodes it contains. For example: Frankfurt produces coal which should be hauled to Trieste'. However, there are numerous potential routings between the locations, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. The player can choose between different kinds of relations between Trieste and Frankfurt, for example how she prefers to deal with the mountain range between the two cities. All potential relations between Frankfurt and Trieste would have somewhat different impacts for the player's possibilities for future choices about relations between these two and other cities.

Before any track between the two cities gets built, the player has to decide whether to build single-track or dual-track. Quite simply, the dual track is twice as expensive as single track, but gives the player much more flexibility for planning trains running

not between the two cities but also for using the track capacity for trains on other routes extending beyond Frankfurt and Trieste. Shorter routes are always the more cost-effective, but having to build a tunnel to cut through a mountain can be very costly. The track-laying function in the game follows a somewhat fuzzy logic, as the game decides, perhaps in an attempt to enhance the interface's usability, when to build a viaduct, a bridge, a tunnel, or normal open-air track, supposedly based on the properties of the location and the direction to and from which the track is being built.

However, it is possible to make the track climb up the mountainside and thus save the cost of building a tunnel, but this requires careful planning, involving laying the track in very short chunks instead of just dragging the route from point A to point B and letting the game figure out the details. As trains achieve highest speeds on flat surfaces, forcing them to pull their load to the top of a mountain will most likely slow the trains down significantly. If the mine in Frankfurt could produce more coal than could be hauled to Trieste via the slower route over the mountains in a given period of time, the slower route can mean lower profit margins. Routing the track through a natural pass in the mountains would usually be the best option, but if the AI opponent has already built its tracks in the pass, the pass might not be usable by the player.

If the Frankfurt-Trieste connection was among the first tracks to be built in a particular playing, implying that there was neither positive cashflow nor any significant sum of saved for the project, the main concern would most likely to be to get the track built given the limited budget in the first place and not for example to optimize the journey time with the yield of the coal mine. Thus, the player might decide to, for example connect Frankfurt and Trieste by dodging the steepest parts of Alps, allowing the tracks to be laid uphill and downhill. However, what is crucial here is that the "steepness" with which the player who is trying to save money is concerned, would not refer to the "topographical" quality of being steep, but to the

property of a particular in-game location that states that if the player decides to build track at this location from that direction, the game will suggest an expensive tunnel instead of more affordable but slower open air track.

The transformation of the topographic into topological can be further illustrated by drawing a comparison to a technological artefact which, on the surface, looks strikingly similar to those which impose a gameplay condition on their users and which we would thus not hesitate calling games. *Tropical Paradise* is a technology demo application on the website of Unity Technologies, a company producing the Unity3D game engine. Running in a browser, *Tropical Paradise* allows its user to move around a point of view into the landscape of a tropical island.

Moving the camera around in *Tropical Paradise* is rather similar to moving the camera around in the game *Far Cry*, which represents a similarly lush and leafy tropical landscape. However, unlike in *Far Cry*, where details of the environment can be manipulated, there is no interactive functionality beyond 'navigating' the spatial representation in *Tropical Paradise* except for an ostrich-like bird running away if confronted by the camera. We can read an attempt to create a "topographic world" in *Tropical Paradise*, in how the terrain is formed and how the textures look, but following Wark (2007, §069), we can observe that the environment represented by *Tropical Island* remains "topographical", as there is no "algorithm" according to which it would get converted into "topological."

The difference between the two is that whereas *Tropical Paradise* attempts to represent a tropical island in as rich detail as possible (to showcase the capabilities of the game engine), in *Far Cry* the representation is there to facilitate gameplay. Aarseth (2000, 163) suggests that the constitution of the spatial representation in games is "a reductive operation leading to a representation of space that is not in itself spatial, but symbolic and rule-based", where "the reductions" are used "as a means to achieve the object of gameplay." Were we to bridge this with Wark (2007, §069), we might suggest that the experience of gameplay made possible by a spatial

representation involves a reduction of the topographic into topological.

Of course, nothing prevents one from using *Tropical Paradise* to play whichever self-invented games and thus maintain the reduction of "topographical" into "topological" mentally. A with a stopwatch can play the game of 100m dash, but the software does not distinguish between the user's actions apart from confronting the bird, and thus does not encourage any particular kind of reduction from topographic into topological over another. A landscape feature, say, a tree, remains a representation of a tree, and does not become a node standing in relation to other nodes. This is not unlike our example of playing the game of ball-bouncing, in which the gameplay condition is not maintained extra-mentally. Using the terminology we have established, we might refer to the use of *Tropical Paradise* as a platform for self-invented games as the activity of *playing with* the *Tropical Paradise* application.

Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå (2003, 48) postulate a distinction between "games *in* virtual environments – that is, games that take place *in* some kind of simulated world"[7] and "purely abstract games like poker or blackjack". Aarseth (2003, 2) suggests that such label "fits games from *Tetris* via *Drug Wars* to *EverQuest*" while it excludes "computerized toys like *Furby* and dice and card games like *Blackjack*". Interestingly enough, the notion encompasses also "non-computerized simulation games like *Monopoly* or *Dungeons and Dragons*".

Both *Far Cry* and the 100m dash 'in' *Tropical Island* seem to qualify as "games in virtual environments". The former we wouldn't hesitate calling a game artefact, whereas the latter's status as game artefact is ambiguous at best. What distinguishes between the two is that the materiality of *Far Cry* imposes a gameplay condition whereas the materiality of *Tropical Island* does not. The same difference applies between a computerised version of *Monopoly* and the original board game. Grouping them all together in the mixed bag "games in virtual environments" introduces the risk of recognising the objects of study in the mixed bag by their least common de-

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[7](my emphases)

nominators and thus discarding a wealth of detail to be articulated in the relationship between the activity of play and the materiality of the technology facilitating play. This can potentially leading us astray when trying to trace the "worldness" that structures the experienced significance of in-game events, objects, and encounters into a coherent whole.[8]

Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 153) assert that the "spatiality of the lifeworld – of the world we live in – is a spatiality captured not by geometrical measures, but structured by contexts of use." We already observed that game artefacts enforce a particular context of use: gameplay. Spatial representation, not unlike everything else in single-player computer games, is most often ultimately subordinate to gameplay, thus represented spatiality appears as one feature among others (in the case of *Sid Meier's Railroads!* for example the economics model, the sounds of the locomotives, the pre-defined tasks whose completion is rewarded with a bonus payment, etc) against which the activity of playing takes place. Perhaps, instead of the three-fold Merleau-Pontian model of "proprioceptive", "egocentric" and "alleocentric" frames according to which we conceive the real world as a spatial phenomenon, (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 141-4), space that is simulated to facilitate gameplay is grasped as having undergone a transformation from the "topographical" to the "topological" (Wark 2007, §069) and as reduced from a spatial representation to a "symbolic and rule-based" representation (*cf.* Aarseth 2000, 163).

If *Tropical Paradise* is an attempt to represent a world in rich topographic detail, *Sid Meier's Railroads!*, not unlike many other computer games, is an attempt to provide the player with a "playable world", in which the topographic is transformed into topological for the purposes of gameplay. Perhaps we should thus look at the conditions by which playing can take place, or in other words *the gameplay condition*,

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[8]If there is such thing as a "single-player technological game form", and its essential feature is the imposing of the gameplay condition by material means onto those who desire to play, we can state that the notion of "games in virtual environments", by asserting similarity between analog *Monopoly* and computerized *Monopoly*, fails to grasp what is essential in the ways how single-player game artefacts are used.

as that which dictates the worldness of computer games.

Now, what kind of "world" is that *in* which one does not exist in a spatiotemporal sense by one's body, and whose spatiality is subordinated to principles of gameplay, but which still serves as structuring the subjective experience to the extent that we can observe things making sense in the "world" of *Half-Life 2*? Perhaps it is a "world" in a *metaphorical* sense. I will explore this option in the following subsection.

5.1.3 On the potentiality of metaphor

In this subsection, I discuss the viability of considering "computer game worlds" as worlds in a metaphorical sense.

In Poetics, Aristotle defined metaphor as the "the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or by analogy, that is, proportion." Dodging the necessity to discuss Aristotle's ontological classes in detail, his conception of metaphor could be roughly summarised as the use of one thing's name to refer to another. At least three individual purposes for metaphorical references in philosophical writing can be identified. These purposes are metaphor as decoration, metaphor as substitution and metaphor as interaction. These correspond roughly to how Paivio and Walsh (1993, 309), following Ortony (1975), postulate three hypotheses of a metaphor's function, which I will discuss alongside the previous distinction.

According to Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, we can, on one hand, understand metaphors as tropes, figures or decorations of speech, lending to its "color, vividness, emotional impact, etc". This kind of usage might have been the intention of those who have chosen the title *World of Warcraft*, as "Playground of Warcraft", for example, would perhaps not set the kind of expectations preferred by the game's creators. The decorative usage corresponds to the "third hypothesis" of Paivio and Walsh (1993, 34), that "through imagery metaphor provides a vivid and therefore memorable and emotion-arousing representation of perceived experience."

We can frame metaphors also as *substitutions*; the example in Oxford Companion to Philosophy (Honderich, 1995, 555) is that "the metaphor of *Achilles is a lion* can be teased out to give *Achilles is like a lion in respect to the following features...*". It is to this kind of function to which Paivio and Walsh (1993, 309) refer when they point out, following Ortony (1975), as their "first hypothesis", a metaphor's ability to "allow 'chunks' of information to be converted or transferred from the vehicle to the topic."

We could read Aarseth's critique of the "world" of *World of Warcraft* as if it was targeted at the world-metaphor as a "substitution". In this kind of reading, the metaphor is inaccurate because while the environment of *World of Warcraft* is like a world in respect to some of its features, the features in respect to which it is *not* like a world outnumbers the affirmative ones. However, if we hold to a materialistic ontological viewpoint according to which something can be "actually a world" (*cf.* Aarseth, 2008, 10) (assumedly meaning that the world exists independently of its observers and can be empirically scrutinized in objective fashion), the question of the threshold for sufficient similarity ultimately appears to be a matter of personal preference. An airplane enthusiast might find the "world" of *Microsoft Flight Simulator X*, with its detailed physics and cockpit models, sufficiently similar, whereas a more architecturally inclined might find the models of airport buildings not convincing and thus claim insufficient similarity.

What follows is that any argument applying the substitutive world-metaphor on game environments could be contested on the basis of alleged insufficient similarity. For example, one might decide that if, on top of the features included in the "world" of *World of Warcraft*, there was a simulation of weather and four changing seasons, the similarity would be sufficient to justify the metaphor.

Yet, in addition to the decorative and substitutive roles, a third function of metaphors can be postulated. They can have, according to Peres (1998), an "independent function in philosophy" only when they cannot be "grasped intrinsically in

their individual use, that is, when it is not possible to translate them completely". This is the rationale behind *the interaction theory* of metaphors, suggested by Black (1955). In this understanding, "metaphors [...] are not cognitively dispensable decorations" but "contribute to the cognitive meaning of our discourse" (Honderich, 1995, 562). According to the interaction theory, the "substitution" within a metaphorical reference does not necessarily imply "total replacement" but is suggestive of "isomorphy as the relation of similarity between the metaphorical expression and the implication complex of another realm, so that the *interaction* comes about, that is, so that the metaphor actually functions as metaphor." (Peres, 1998).

Metaphor as it appears according to the interaction theory roughly corresponds with the "inexpressibility hypothesis" in Paivio and Walsh (1993, 309), following Ortony (1975), "which states that a metaphor enables us to talk about experiences which cannot be literally described." I will, in the following, explore the feasibility of considering a "computer game world" as an interactive metaphor.

Instead of unpacking the way how metaphor refers from one term to another within language, the interaction theory of metaphors emphasizes the mental work that metaphors invite in their users, through which new meanings emerge. Similar notions are put forward by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), who have expanded the notion of metaphor from the realms of rhetorics and linguistics toward more cognitive interests, and who speak of "conceptual metaphors". They argue that we use metaphors not only for expressive purposes (*i.e.* metaphorical expression), but that our cognitive systems, too, operate in terms of metaphors (*i.e.* conceptual metaphor). Thus, we not only speak using metaphors, but also think using them, or even "live by them", as the title of their book on the subject suggests.

Lakoff (1992) introduces the idea of a metaphor as a "cross-domain mapping", when he observes that

> The word metaphor has come to mean a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. The term metaphorical expression refers to a linguistic expression (a word, phrase, or sentence) that is the surface realization of such a crossdo-

main mapping (this is what the word metaphor referred to in the old theory).[9]

Thus, the project of discussing "computer game world" as a metaphor can be framed not only as a project of discussing the language computer game scholars use in their books and papers. The metaphor of "computer game worlds" and "worldness" can be also understood as a conceptual metaphor, which is employed by computer game players and scholars alike, referring to the structure and coherence within the experience of computer game play.

Consider for example the intuitive assumption in the analysis of fear in *Half-Life 2* in subsections 2.3.2 and 2.4.1, that the barnacle was frightening *in the "world of Half-Life 2"*. To approach the metaphorical nature "computer game worlds", we might try to reveal the ways in which I, when giving statement stretched, twisted, pressed and expanded (Black 1955, 35) the concept of world. However, perhaps there would not be any lucid logic according to which the concept was bent and our attempts to uncover any such thing would be in vain. Saying that there is, within a metaphor, room for interaction and interpretation is a way of saying that metaphors are ambiguous. As Peres (1998) suggests, in the ambiguity and vagueness lies the strength of interactive metaphors:

> because they represent, so to speak, comprehensive but inexplicit connections "from outside", they are well suited for a regulative reference to an orienting frame of special theoretical analyses

and

> might be taken as legitimizing proof of reference to something that is not yet explicit.

However, as interactive metaphors, whether conceptual metaphors or expressions, are ambiguous, they have "no value for explanation and reasoning" but instead "a high value for implication and innovation", which implies that they may be used to

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[9]What Lakoff (1992) understands as the "old theory" perhaps corresponds to substitutive and decorative metaphors, but discussing what we might call interactive metaphor (as in a metaphor understood according to the interaction theory of metaphors) together with Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphors seems justified, as Neisser (2001, 166) suggests that idea of conceptual metaphors "owes much to that of Max Black"

point at, or hold a place for something which will be uncovered at a later stage by means of a proper analytical or descriptive treatment. (Peres, 1998) Thus, instead of focusing on the grounds and rationale of (linguistic) reference between "world" and *Half-Life 2*, we can content ourselves with the "comprehensive but inexplicit connection", which there intuitively seems to be between the experienced significance within the emotional experience of encountering a barnacle *Half-Life 2* and the experienced significance in an emotional experience in the real world.

I am not the first one to discuss the idea of game world as a metaphor. As a part of his theory of "game elements", Järvinen (2008a, 61-62) observes that

> the metaphor 'game is a system' can be logically extended to the form 'system is a world', which logically produces the metaphorical concept 'game is a world'. Games are worlds inhabited by players and other game elements under the law of the rule set and the metaphor of the theme.

Järvinen (2008a, 62) proceeds to unpack the metaphor in relation to his theory of "game elements" as follows:

> in games as worlds, there are: events: game mechanics, game system procedures according to rule set (*e.g.*, goal resolutions) agents: players, game system agency via rule set objects: components, environment, information, goals as stated by the rule set.

While I am sympathetic to how Järvinen (2008a) uses the metaphor of "world" to convey detailed insights in a compact package, I think it is possible to exploit the idea of game world as a metaphor even further. By understanding "game world" as an *interactive rather than substitutive metaphor*, we can use it not only to pack existing knowledge together, but also to gain new insights by unpacking it not in relation to an *a priori* theory, but to what is given in the experience of play. Furthermore, what the idea of *conceptual* metaphors can bring into the argument is the assumption that the metaphor operates not only on the level of expression, as in statements of both researchers and players, but also in the experience of play. Thus, a metaphor is not merely a way to articulate insights on "game worlds" but also a way to *experience* "game worlds". Subsequently, by unpacking the conceptual interactive metaphor of

"game world" we learn not only about properties of dead matter, but also of the experience of "being in the game world".

Understanding the "world" of a game as a metaphor, more specifically as an interactive conceptual metaphor, allows framing the worldness of games without attaching it into the results of any objective considerations that would break the intentional unity between the player and the game world. This is necessary to be able to understand game worlds from the player's perspective.

Klevjer (2006, 161) suggests that an important way in which "simulated environments of computer games are 'worlds' " is that "they are world-like in terms of our mode of interacting with them". Regardless that games might not represent geographies justifying the substitutive metaphor 'world', they can provide experiences in which the experienced significance of events, objects and encounters is coherent enough to be experienced as a "world".

However, as the interactive metaphor is more a pointer than a description, it is crucial to unpacking it before attempting to apply it in description. In other words, understanding the "worldness" as a conceptual metaphor merely gives a legitimate frame for what we intuitively assumed already when analysing the enigmatic example of enjoyable fear and anger in *Half-Life 2*. What contributes to "worldness" is yet to be made explicit. The direction for inquiry has been pointed out, but nothing has been argued for or described self-evidently. The next task is to find out whether we can find something that would explain the "comprehensive but inexplicit connection" between world and the experience of a computer game as played.

Like we suggested after discussing the spatiality of computer games in the previous subsection, it seems feasible to search for the origins of "worldness" in the principles of playability, which is the task in the next section.

5.2   *Facticity* in gameplay

In this section, I unpack the game world metaphor by discussing gameplay in terms of *freedom* and *responsibility*, drawing on the notion of *facticity* as postulated by Sartre (2003 [1943]).

When discussing emotions in chapter 2, we understood the human condition as an approximation of the inter-subjectively common features of existing in the world as a human. It was observed that the human condition is the ultimate baseline for the humans' emotional judgements, a baseline upon which emotions work in order to maximise "personal dignity and self-esteem" (Solomon 1993, 160). We observed that in relation to the human condition, a barnacle in *Half-Life 2* can be described as (contributing to the constitution of) an object of the emotion fear only in a somewhat trivial sense, as it can not, under normal circumstances, pose a significant threat to human. A description that would not content itself on the level of the trivial would have to go a long way explaining how playing or gameplay is relevant to human condition. However, we observed also that it makes intuitive sense to describe a barnacle in *Half-Life 2* as frightening "in the world of *Half-Life 2*." Based on describing how the materiality of the single-player game artefact regulates and delimits the activity of gameplay, we articulated the gameplay condition as applying on and as imposed onto those who wish to remain players of the particular game.

We observed that justifying the game world metaphor based on objective ontology is problematic, and can be contested based on insufficient similarity. Even though spatiality plays a significant role in many computer games, we observed that explaining game worlds as delineated by their spatialities runs into problems when faced to account for the body "in" the game world that does the existing. While the argument postulated existence "in" can be defended, by allowing certain concessions, concerning avatar-based games, it might not survive Occam's razor when applied on games whose simulation of space does not simulate proprioception or offer an ego-centric perspective. We suggested that the "worldness" of games was approached

from the point of view of gameplay.

Pursuing to bridge the gameplay condition with the intuitive notion of "world of *Half-Life 2*" as referring to that in which the barnacle is frightening, we suggested that "world" was described as an *interactive conceptual metaphor*, illustrating a "comprehensive but inexplicit connection" (Peres 1998) between experienced significance within the experiences of being in the world and playing a game. However, we also acknowledged that the metaphor does nothing else but provide a legitimate frame for our original intuition. Thus, we can begin to unpack the "game world" metaphor, and by doing so make explicit the implications of the gameplay condition to the human players on whom it is imposed.

5.2.1 Facticity and world

While we decided to hold on to the intuition regarding the "world of *Half-Life 2*", in subsection 4.3.2 we observed that we have no reason to assume that in-game events would take place in some sort of "alternate world" or "virtual reality". Like the analysis of *Second Life* (2003) in Dreyfus (2009)[10] exemplifies, considering in-game actions as alternatives for corresponding real-life actions presents them as feeble and incomplete.

In this subsection, I explore if the "game world" metaphor could be unpacked as referring to something *within* the actual world in which the subject exists, thus incorporating the game artefact, with which the player has a hybrid intentionality relation, into the subject's realm of possibilities and restrictions.

Sartre (2003 [1943]) uses the notion of "facticity" as an umbrella term for the concrete aspects which delineate human freedom. Moran (2000, 362) observes of the role of facticity in Sartre's constellation of concepts that

> although humans are always limited by their facticity, and always uniquely 'situated' in space and time, they nevertheless make themselves through their

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[10]I will discuss this analysis in more detail in subsection 5.2.4

'projects'. Freedom always operates in relation to this facticity and situated-ness.[11]

Thus, to understand facticity, we have to discuss it in relation to the notions of project and situation. We observed earlier that according to Sartre (1945) we continously *make ourselves* as there is no blueprint for human existence like there are blueprints according to which objects like paper-knives are manufactured. Sartre (2003 [1943], 107) asserts that "we can be nothing without playing at being it". However, the project of freedom, due to which we must make ourselves by "playing at being" something, takes place against certain conditions whose transforming is beyond our powers.

> while I must *play at being* a cafe waiter in order to be one, still it would be in vain for me to play at being a diplomat or a sailor, for I would not be one.

This is what Sartre (2003 [1943], 107) calls the "inapprehensible *fact* of my condition", due to which we apprehend ourselves "totally responsible" for our being. In other words, facticity does not dictate what we are. Sartre (2003 [1943], 107) asserts that

> I could determine myself to "be born a worker" or to "be born a bourgeois." But on the other hand facticity can not constitute me as *being* a bourgeois or *being* a worker.

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[11]The Sartrean view of the subject I adopt here could be criticised of centering too much on the conscious or thinking individual. This issue is actually twofold – a phenomenologist following Levinas might dislike the cognitivist undertone, consider for example Critchley (1999, 65), who reads Levinas as suggesting that "the subjectivity of the subject is a passivity that cannot be grasped or comprehended, that is beyond essence, otherwise than Being." An "anti-correlationist" might perhaps say that it is ill-conjured to center around the human subject, which in fact is "overflowed or dependent upon prior structures (linguistic, ontological, socio-economic, unconscious, or whatever) outside its conscious control." (Critchley (1999, 67)) This, in practice, would suggest a metaphysical shift, which Critchley (1999, 67) postulates as Levinas' (*cf.* Levinas 1991, 54) response to the anti-humanist critique, as follows: "The subject is no longer the self-positing origin of the world; it is a hostage to the other. Humanism should not begin from the datum of the human being as an end-in-itself and the foundation for all knowledge, certainty and value; rather, the humanity of the human is defined by its service to the other." However, my reaction to the critique about being overtly centred on the individual conscious subject and not taking into account either the pre-reflective experience or the experience of the other is not of the defensive kind. My response rests on pragmatic grounds: understanding the subject as primarily as being a *conscious individual* subject is conceptually compatible with the theory of emotions postulated in the first chapter. Acknowledging the limits of this dissertation, I will stick to the (perhaps old-fashioned) conscious individual subject for the time being. Certainly, expanding upon the pre-reflective experience of computer game play, or exploring the analytical potential of speculating about the perspectives the non-human agents have into the process of gameplay would be both be interesting directions for future research.

The project of freedom takes place "against" facticity, and we make ourselves 'out' of our facticities.

Concerning our attempt to situate "game worlds" within the actual world, it is crucial to understand that that *facticity* and *world* are not synonymous. World, for Sartre, is pure contingency, an infinite array of "brute existents" or a pool of "non-conscious being" (Sartre 2003 [1943], 652) and only through the actions of a motivated and conscious individual it can appear as meaningful. Sartre emphasizes the role of the individual subject, bound to her facticity, in the constitution of the world (for him/herself) out of pure contingency. *The world is what we make of it* would be a glib but strangely fitting tagline. Verbeek (2005, 108) shares a similar conception of world, as he understands it as

> "reality disclosed by human beings"; the world-for humans that arises when they act and experience it.

This kind of definitions for the notion of world can hardly surprise us, given that we acknowledged the unity of the subject and her world through the principle of intentionality.

In the discussion leading to the gameplay condition in subsection 4.2.2, we already articulated the notion of *resistance*, as that which allows us to distinguish between *wishing* and *choosing*. We can understand Sartre's notion of world in relation to resistance. The world does not resist, but

> is neutral, that is, it waits to be illuminated by an end in order to manifest itself as adverse or helpful (Sartre 2003 [1943], 504)

Instead of facing an already illuminated world, a human "illuminates the existents in their mutual relations by means of the end which [he/she] posits". (Sartre 2003 [1943], 505) In other words, like Jones (1980, 234) puts it, a human in the world organises the

> otherwise undifferentiated being-in-itself, into "instrumental complexes" or means-ends relationships which are an expression of its overall goal or "project".

Like we observed when discussing the gameplay condition and goals in subsection 4.2.3 with the example of collecting bottle caps as fast as possible, it is in relation to the idea of a "project" that we can articulate the "resistance" provided by the world. A project undertaken, ultimately the project of freedom (*i.e.* a project of being free) if not anything more specific, "causes there to be things, that is, precisely, realities provided with a coefficient of adversity and utilizable instrumentality." (Sartre 2003 [1943], 505)

Illuminated within instrumental complexes in the light of the project chosen by the human, the "brute existents" appear as coefficients of either adversity or utility. For example in practice, that the "adversity of things and their potentialities in general are illuminated by the end chosen" (Sartre 2003 [1943], 530), means that a batch of rocks on the mountainside may appear as coefficient of utility to those who have chosen to take on the project of enjoying the landscape, while for those about to climb the same rocks represent adversities and thus resist the individual's project. While "brute existents" can limit our freedom, Sartre (2003 [1943], 504) suggests that they come under consideration only because our "freedom itself which must first constitute the framework, the technique, and the ends in relation to which they will manifest themselves as limits." In other words, if a particular batch of rocks is revealed to us as "too difficult to climb" and we must turn back, it is "revealed as such only because it was originally grasped as 'climbable' [. . . .]"

However, to some extent the brute existents guide and delineate what can be done with them, as within them are properties and aspects that are not dependent of whatever project we have chosen: a particular batch of rocks will be more favorable for climbing than others, some objects work as hammers better than others, and so on. This is what Sartre (2003 [1943], 504) calls *residue*. Remembering how game artefacts enforce certain contexts of use, we could say that they exploit this very *residue*.[12] However, when saying so we must not forget that we described the player's

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[12]We could also say that the "control aesthetics", which Giddings and Kennedy (2008) postulated as aesthetics of how non-human agency of the game artefact delineates the gameplay activity,

desire to play as voluntary, thus it is her project of freedom which postulated the end of "playing." Thus, it is due to the player's freedom that the possibility for game artefacts to exploit the *residue* can arise in the first place.

5.2.2 The project of freedom in *GTA IV*

In this subsection, I will look at how freedom operates in relation to and "against" the player's facticity with an example of *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008) (later *GTA IV*).

When playing *GTA IV*, I can choose to engage in different sorts of activities, put more properly, to take on different projects that illuminate the brute existents into instrumental complexes. To watch television in *GTA IV* I need to move the protagonist-avatar Niko Bellic close to the television and turn it on, occasionaly flicking the channels. To drive around Liberty City, the environment in which the game's events take place, I need to situate the protagonist on the side of a road, wait until a car of my liking appears, enter into it by possibly giving a punch or two to the driver, steer clear from obstacles, and so on. It is not enough to wish for things to happen in *Grand Theft Auto IV* – I have to perform the required actions in order to realise a project I have chosen to undertake.

While I am free to undertake different projects, the materiality of the game artefact delinates my freedom by resisting my projects and I face risks when undertaking projects. Consider for example *unique stunt jumps*, which are long and somewhat difficult jumps which the game recognises as achievements. The environment in *GTA IV* has certain locations which allow the player to attempt *unique stunt jumps*. These are for example slanted roofs, onto which the player can drive at high speed in order to jump long distances. If, as a consequence of for example bad judgement (*e.g.* aiming poorly) or inadequate planning (*e.g.* failing to remove exploding items from the landing area), I cause the avatar to die one time too many when attempting an

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addresses the properties of this residue in computer games.

unique stunt jump, and run out of lives, I am faced with a *game over*, and cannot any more go watch television or drive a sportscar. By *game over* I am in effect expelled from the framework within which I was free to choose; my wish to drive a sportscar, which could have been a valid choice one life ago, would now remain as a wish or a dream instead of being realized as a choice. The possibility to commence a realization of the wish to drive a sportscar has been rendered a material impossibility. When faced with the "game over", I have encountered a tangible limit for my playing of *GTA IV*.

It is this new-found limitation for my possibilities that makes things interesting; we have seen that what I do in *GTA IV* actually matters – to the very playing of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, that is. How could we describe this, that something particular I did (*e.g.* failing to get out from a burning vehicle several times in a row) affected my possibilities to do anything in general (*e.g.* drive a sportscar, accept a mission, shoot an NPC, etc) in the future?

What happened with the *game over*, is that I demonstrated that as a player of *GTA IV* "I am responsible for the world and for [my]self as a way of being" (Sartre 2003 [1943], 574) – after the game over I am not a player of *GTA IV* any more, and, if world was taken as something within which we are free to choose, it too has ceased to exist, as my wishes cannot take off as choices any more. The *game over* is the severest of the consequences I, the *GTA IV* player, can get from the game.

Like we observed when discussing the gameplay condition in subsection 4.2.2 via the example of replicating a real-life neighbourhood in *SimCity 4*, not all the choices afforded by the game are equal. Some of them will have consequences that are beneficial for my playing, can for example lead to unlocking previously unseen parts of the level for me to explore, whereas others will have more severe consequences, of which I as a player will be responsible (to myself, in the case of single-player games). If we agree with Sartre (2003 [1943], 523), as he asserts one of the characteristics of freedom as "to be free is to *have one's freedom perpetually on trial*", we observe that

the *game over* exemplifies that I *had* a degree of freedom as a player of *GTA IV*.

Furthermore, It is worth noting that what I can realise as a choice and what is deemed to remain as a wish is not in my hands. No matter how much I wish to do so, I cannot become a gardener, nor sell Niko Bellic's kidney in order to get extra cash. As *GTA IV* affords certain things while not affording others, there is a finite repertoire of things which I can choose to do. What is often referred to as *emergence*, both the "situations or player behaviours that were not predicted by the game designers" (Smith 2001) or the "game variations", which emerge from small number of rules specifying the game (Juul 2002), belong to this finitude: the artefact ultimately dictates what is possible and what is not, even if it cannot be predicted in advance.

We used a similar argument emphasising the 'pre-definedness' of the possibilities to justify the gameplay condition in subsection 4.2.2, but what I would like to add in this subsection is that the gameplay condition is manifested in *concrete* aspects of the experience. The *GTA IV* artefact resists my actions: the car of my liking many not appear immediately and some obstacles are harder to dodge than others, especially with the high speed I wish to maintain. Televisions are not exactly all over Liberty City either, but in particular places where I need to move the avatar before I can watch television. There is a fixed number of locations at which unique stunt jumps can be performed. I did not imagine these constraints, neither do I have to pause and conceive them as abstractions – I can end up finding out about them and experiencing them by trial and error, too: I find out that the button on the controller, which is supposed to turn on the television, does not do so until I position the avatar close enough to a television. Jumps – no matter how high – do not give me the unique stunt jump bonus unless performed at a particular location. These constraints for my freedom as a player, and their implications such as having to wait ten minutes for a particular kind of car to appear, are concrete.

Thus, perhaps, as I explore in the next subsection, we could describe *GTA IV*

and other similar game artefacts as extending their players' *facticities*, and by doing so unpack the game world metaphor.

5.2.3 Game artefacts as extensions of facticity

In this subsection, I unpack the game world metaphor as referring to game artefacts as extensions of their players' facticities. This allows articulating computer game worlds as *real*, but makes it necessary to discuss the role of fiction in emotions in play. I argue that if we understand game artefacts as extensions of their players' facticities experienced through the hybrid intentionality relationship, we can postulate both computer game worlds and the players emotions about the aspects within them as *real*. Following the line of description proposed in this dissertation, we do to refer to game characters as Others or resort to the second-order structure of empathy when describing emotions in play.

Verbeek (2005, 38), guiding the inquiry in the context of philosophy of technology toward the new possibilities of human existence to which technology gives rise, suggests that if we approach technology not in terms of its theoretical conditions of existence, but "in terms of the concrete roles it plays in human existence", our attention is directed toward the existential possibilities technologies open up for us. Thus, he suggests that

> [a]n existential philosophy of technology needs to explore how technology opens up these new possibilities through which human beings can realize their existence and to examine how this happens.

This is a project on which we can embark by establishing game artefacts as extensions of the player's facticity.

Game artefacts have concrete and actual existence in the world, like van Schoonhoven (2007) underlines. Following Sartre, we may add that they do so among all the other forms of contingency, and do not, by default, stand out in any particular way. However, as soon as a player, that is someone who desires to play, encounters the game artefact, it imposes the gameplay condition on the player. In other words,

it enforces the particular intricacies of the project of playing hard-coded into its materiality on the subject who desires to play. As soon as the player gets her bearings concerning the usability details of the game artefact, the hybrid intentionality relationship is established. As a result, what was among the overall contingency of the pool of un-conscious being, becomes coefficients of utility and adversity within the hybrid intentionality relationship. The player gains new kinds of freedoms, which come with corresponding responsibilities. Thus, she has to constantly nourish her relationship with the game, deal with objects and encounters in a way that satisfies the gameplay condition. Depending on the design of the particular game artefact, *successful* actions open up possibilities for new actions, whereas *unsuccessful actions* diminish her possibilities to act. If she is *unsuccessful* for an extended period of time, again depending on the design of the game artefact, she will soon be no player at all.

Not unlike the human condition, the gameplay condition has both *objective* and *subjective* aspects, in other words that its objective aspects need to be *lived.* Game artefacts, as imposing the gameplay condition, do not constitute the player (as they do constitute an "implied player", for example), but allow the player to *make herself* (*cf.* Sartre 2003 [1943], 107) or *realise her existence* (*cf.* Verbeek 2005, 38) against the game artefact. Thus, we can unpack the "game world" metaphor by framing game artefacts as providing their players with *extended facticities*, because upon them the player can exercise the project of freedom in ways that could not be possible without the game artefact.

Extended facticity refers to the *concrete* details in which the gameplay condition is manifested in the particular game. Thus, what we can say about general implications of the gameplay condition is that a game artefact *extends the player's facticity according to the gameplay condition*, that is, introduces new concrete details against which the player's freedom exists and is limited, while making the player responsible for the existence of these details by requiring her to *nourish* their existence. Whereas we can discuss the gameplay condition as an *abstract* concept and use examples of

individual games to illustrate our arguments, discussing the extension of a player's facticity necessitates talking about a particular playing of a particular game artefact because it refers to the *concrete*.

Considering for example the game *Half-Life 2*, we observe that the extended range of possibilities to exercise the project of freedom owes its existence to the *Half-Life 2* artefact existing in the real world. Thus, extended facticity is real-world facticity. We are not postulating games as alternatives for reality. A player's experience is an experience of reality and her emotions are real. There does not seem to be an evident need to mess up the striking ontological clarity of this observation. I will unpack this claim in the remainder of this subsection.

It cannot be overemphasized that even if, from the scientific third-person perspective of game studies, which we articulated in subsection 3.2.2, it would be possible to outline an ontology distinguishing between "fictional" and "non-fictional" (or "fictional" and "virtual", as in Aarseth 2007a) features of game content, we cannot take for granted that these categories would be echoed in any way in the player's experience. Doing so would amount to what Merleau-Ponty (2005 [1945], 5) calls *the experience error*, which means that

> what we know to be in things themselves we immediately take as being in our consciousness of them. We make perception out of things perceived.

Thus, we cannot automatically assume that our knowledge of the properties of things would be transferred onto the experience about such things. Allow us to consider the ramifications of this observation with an example of a contemporary model addressing emotions and computer games.

Frome (2007) postulates a model to explain the ways in which games "generate emotion", by distinguishing between four "types of emotion" and two "audience roles". Combining these variables, Frome (2007, 833) arrives at a table delineating eight categories of "inputs to emotion", which we might, using the terminology established here, roughly approximate as that out of which the objects of the player's emotions are constituted. Among these categories are, for example, "narrative situations",

which are input to "narrative emotions" experienced from the perspective of an "observer-participant." Conversely, the input necessary for "narrative emotions" from the perspective of an "actor-participant" is "roleplay".

Frome (2007, 833) seems to be aware of the caveat of experience error, as he suggests that there are alternative ways in which his model could be looked at. While it could be seen as detailing "the different emotion-creating aspects of a videogame", Frome (2007, 833) admits a less deterministic reading, according to which the game features can be experienced *as* different things.

> We might see the same image *as* part of our environment, *as* a game event, *as* a narrative event, or *as* an element of style.

When dodging the experience error by giving up the claim that a categorisation is the only valid categorisation, the other side of the coin is that there does not seem to be any inherent limit for the spectrum of that *as which* things such as in-game events could be seen: like was suggested in subsection 1.2.2, the monster of *Doom* can be seen as someone you know. Thus, instead of taking categorisations or ontologies which look at gameplay from the third-person perspective and attempting the necessary manouvres to safeguard against the diversity brought in by subjective experience, perhaps it would make more sense to approach the question of ontological categories from the player's perspective and see what kind of categories can be postulated based on that which is given in the experience of play. I will undertake such project in section 6.2.

The benefit of retaining the notion of "game world" as a metaphor, and accounting for the concrete dimension of gameplay by means of facticity is that we are not ontologically postulating a "world", with which would come along a range of issues that would need to be detailed, but we still have the extended facticity which fulfils the task unpacking the metaphor of "world" inasmuch as it provides the framework and baseline for the player's experience and delineates the material constituents of the play experience, distinguishing for example barnacles from the table on which the computer sits.

We can address the embodied human being in the actual world while being able to describe the experience of play with a conceptual framework that is specific to the particular game. We smoothly dodge the question asked by Tomas (1995): "how can we exist in a world that consists of pure information?" because we are not, in the first place, claiming that that which existed materially was a *world*. We do not have to postulate a "vicarious body" (*cf.* Klevjer 2006) which would take care of the "existing in" any special kind of world (*i.e.* a "fictional world"), and thus we are not bound to describing "vicarious experiences" (*cf.* Marsh 2006) characterised by empathy either.

From the proposed perspective, new light is cast on the association of empathy with emotions in play, which prevails in contemporary discussion. The prevalence of the idea of empathy in discussions concerning emotions in play originates in the observation that considering emotions felt for fictional characters, empathy and sympathy are often the descriptive devices of choice. For example, Perron (2005) and Frome (2006) draw on how Tan (1995), a film scholar drawing on Frijda (1986), postulates "fiction emotions" as those felt sympathetically for the characters in the film in their explanations of emotions in play.

While some games may require their players to 'believe in the fiction' and act accordingly by for example demonstrating empathy toward game characters in order to remain players, we cannot assume beliefs about fictional states of affairs to always be preconditions for gameplay, as not all games have "characters", and even if they do, taking a game character seriously as an Other is seldom necessary.[13] At this point we can conclude that while games can elicit emotions which can be described as "fiction emotions" characterised by empathy, if we take the materiality of the game artefact as the premise for our argument and consider ourselves with single-player game artefacts in general, we cannot describe empathy as an invariant structure behind emotions in play. However, it is important to observe that if we were to

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[13]I will return to the question of taking stories in games seriously when discussing the experiential ontology in section 6.2

concern ourselves with a more restricted category of games, one characterised by a fundamental involvement of a narrative, such as adventure games, our conclusion would supposedly be rather different. In the remainder of this subsection, I will explore how this perspective should deal with game characters, if not as targets of empathy.

Aarseth (2004, 46) touches upon the ambiguity of the relationship between the player and a "game character", when describing his relation with Lara Croft's body:

> The dimensions of Lara Croft's body, already analyzed to death by film theorists, are irrelevant to me as a player, because a different-looking body would not make play differently. When I play, I don't even see her body, but see through it and past it.

This exemplifies that taking Lara Croft seriously as an Other, *e.g.* as anthropomorphic to the extent that "it" would have a "body", is not necessary in order to play *Tomb Raider*. Instead of holding on to descriptive devices that require us to postulate a pseudo-other somewhere "within" the game content or the technological materiality in general, perhaps we could pursue other lines of description. We could, for example, use the notion of "emotional contagion" (*cf.* Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson 1994), which Zahavi (2008) defines in relation to sympathy as follows:

> [. . .]you can be infected by the jolly or angry mood of others without even being aware of them as distinct individuals. [. . .] This is precisely what makes emotional contagion different from both empathy and sympathy. In empathy and sympathy, the experience you empathically understand or sympathetically care for remains that of the other. In both of the latter cases, the focus is on the other, the distance between self and other is preserved and upheld.

Referring to the conduct of emotional contagion, we could describe the player catching emotions from the game without having to describe emotions in play as having the second-order structure of sympathy or empathy and without having to describe there being an Other – the object of sympathy or empathy – in the game. Most importantly, the benefit of a description like emotional contagion over sympathy is that it does not force a rigid explanation on the ambiguities of the relation between the game, the game's protagonist, and the player. This is crucial, because the latter

two parties, the protagonist and the player, often intertwine into a unitary and hybrid whole: the "I", who perceive the game world via the hybrid intentionality relationship and thus for example cannot hear or see anything as a consequence of a flashbang grenade in *Far Cry*.

In this line of description, the game's protagonist, or the avatar, appears as resembling a *tool* that has utility value within the game world, and which mediates the hybrid intentionality *within* the game world, not unlike eyeglasses and telephones mediate human intentionality in the real world, and, which is not necessarily distinct from minimaps, toolbars, weapons, and other such particular constellations describable within game content which fulfil the same tasks.[14]

Like we observed in previous subsection, the *Nico Bellic* in *Grand Theft Auto IV* allows me to drive a car, watch TV, and so on, and is thus not unlike the minimap in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* which allows me to see the location of my cities around the globe at one glance, and the HEV Mark V suit in *Half-Life 2*, which, as documented by Wikia Gaming (2009), gives me as a player access to features such as

> a visual zooming capability, limited enhanced running (sprint) capability, an injector to administer antidote for neurotoxins such as Poison Headcrab venom, an optional ammo and health counter on the crosshair (enabled by the player in the game's "Mouse" options), and the capability to use Combine power nodes to charge the suit.

Merleau-Ponty (2005 [1945], 213) describes a *sense* as "thought subordinated to certain field", providing the example of *vision*, subordinated to *visual field*, which is an "opening upon" a system of visible beings, whose grasping requires no effort on the subject's behalf and which is accessible only by reason of the subject's position in the world. Features of the HEV Suit in *Half-Life 2*, such as the ammunition counter, exemplify such opening upon sensible beings, and the yet unnamed sense afforded by the hybrid intentionality is one informing the player about the amount of ammunition she has left. When playing *Tetris*, I can "see" which kind of block

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[14]The ideas that follow in this subsection are developed based on a paper co-authored with Hanna Wirman (see Wirman and Leino 2008), in which we discuss the idea of the avatar as constituting a part of the game's interface that extends the sensory capabilities of (trans)human body.

will be appearing next, where "seeing" refers to using a yet unnamed modality of hybrid intentionality.

Whereas in *Tetris* the "field" of this sense extends one block ahead, in *Puzzle Bobble* a similar "sense" is employed as perceiving the colours of two upcoming blocks. This argument of game features providing openings upon systems of sensible beings can be extended also outside the context of matching tile games. For example, also the spy unit in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* can be described as providing a new modality of the hybrid intentionality. After completing the Scotland Yard wonder, the player can build a spy unit, which, when stationed in an enemy city, allows the player to view the details of an enemy city, such as what is being built at that city, how is its population composed, and so on, as if it was her own city.

Some games, such as *Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie* (2005), implement a "transparent interface", which refers to the design convention which attempts to present all information relevant to gameplay in a diegetically consistent fashion, that is, using features which remind the player as little as possible about the fact that she is actually not physically in a jungle hunting a giant monkey, but playing a computer game and interacting with a designed artefact. For example, what traditionally could be best represented with a health bar, is often in games with transparent interface conveyed by the outlook of the avatar. If the avatar gasps as it walks and bleeds visibly, the player is able to understand the necessity of focusing her efforts on attaining a health pack. This does not, however, suggest that the proposed perspective needs revision. It would make only marginal sense to fall back to the description involving the pseudo-other and describe the player's emotions motivating her to find the health pack as "sympathetic sadness" for the dying avatar. Instead, we can take the outlook of the avatar in *Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie* as 'an opening upon a system of sensible beings' not unlike the minimap, the 'next block' feature, and the spy unit.

This kind of features, such as minimaps, avatars, and toolbars, which could

perhaps from another perspective be described as *interface elements*, are means
with which the game artefact regulates and controls the modalities of the hybrid
intentionality relationship, perhaps even *opens up new sensory modalities* that grasp
the extension of the player's facticity through the hybrid relationship.

Thus, in the case of game artefacts, the hybrid intentionality not only goes *through*
the technological artefact, but *into* the extension of the player's facticity afforded by
the game artefact. We can formalise it, using the example of *Far Cry*, and the game
world metaphor established, as follows:

(I/*Far Cry*)→my facticity as extended by *Far Cry*

In this formulation the game world of *Far Cry* is not an alternative world, but the
concrete extension of the player's facticity. Avatars, minimaps, and toolbars situate
inside the first brackets, as it is those aspects with which the playing subjectivity
intertwines to form the unitary whole of the playing "I", who has access to neurotoxin
antidotes, sees the world from a satellite's perspective, is able to steal a sportscar at
will, and so on. Thus, it is no wonder that the consequences of the flashbang grenade
explosion, which we discussed as a paradigmatic example of hybrid intentionality
in computer game play in subsection 4.3.2, often seem severe from the player's
perspective is no wonder, because the flashbang grenade explosion is comparable
to an accident or a corporeal punishment as it damages actual human sensory
capabilities.

These modalities and abilities are neither *imagined* nor virtual, but owe their
existence to the *concrete* limitations for the player's freedom afforded by the game.
This issue, their *actuality*, warrants a more detailed argument, which I provide in
the remainder of this chapter, in relation to the notions of virtual worlds, relativity
and imagination.

5.2.4 Facticity and virtual realities

In this subsection I discuss, by drawing a comparison between game artefacts and *Second Life*, the nature of responsibility imposed on the players. Taking into account how Dreyfus (2009, 102) discusses *Second Life* as comparable to "synthetic Mardi Gras", I argue against the triviality of the responsibility imposed by game artefacts on their players.

According to Klastrup (2003, 103), computer games constitute a subcategory within the broader category of "virtual worlds". She defines a virtual world as

> a persistent online representation, which contains the possibility of synchronous interaction between users and between user and world within the framework of a space designed as a navigable universe.

However, given the focus on single-player games, the emphasis the notion of "virtual world" places on the social aspects makes entering this discourse problematic; the idea of a single-player virtual world might even be an oxymoron to some. However, it seems that the emphasis of the social in the definition is somewhat accidental, originating perhaps in the particular uses for the applications marketed with the colloquial use of the term virtual world. In contrast to the weight Klastrup (2003) places on the social aspects, allow us to briefly review another recent application of the term 'virtual' onto computer games and adjoining phenomena.

van Schoonhoven (2007, 8) introduces the term "today's popular virtual reality", referring to a broad category of phenomena, encompassing virtual worlds *á la* Klastrup (2003) as well as computer games. van Schoonhoven (2007, 11) points out that this term does not signify "a pure, abstract concept of virtual reality, which is fully seperated [sic] from actual (physical) reality, yet completely convincing for all the senses". Instead, van Schoonhoven (2007, 11) intends the term as referring to situations where

> a user is experiencing a three-dimensional computer-generated environment through a two-dimensional video display and some sort of audio system, which can be speakers or a headphone. To interact with the virtual environment he uses a keyboard, mouse or joystick, or a combination of the three. Sometimes the user can also interact using his voice by means of a microphone.

As examples of phenomena to which the term refers, he suggests *GTA:SA*, *DEFCON* (2006), *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* (2003).

Dreyfus (2009, 89), an American philosopher, observes of *Second Life*, that its "residents visit art galleries, shop for virtual goods, go to concerts, have cybersex", and so on. He points out that while we can enjoy *Second Life* as a role-playing game, *Second Life* itself is not a game, because it lacks the "structure and narrative that define the actions necessary for advancement". Instead, he postulates an affinity between the real world and *Second Life*, because in the latter, not unlike in the former, "there is no overall goal and so there is no way of ranking the success of those involved."

Dreyfus (2009, 89-120) is critical of the capabilities of what he has grouped under the label 'virtual worlds', as he argues, from several angles, using *The official guide* (Rymaszewski et al. 2006) of *Second Life* as his material, that the experience of 'being in' *Second Life* does not live up to the standards we have come to expect from an experience of being in a world based on our experiences of being in the real world. Many of the issues he raises, boil to the lack of risk in *Second Life*, and I agree with Dreyfus (2009) that "risk-free experimentation with the ways of life [...] does not give one serious satisfaction". Like our brief discussion about the angels in the movie *Wings of Desire* in the introduction to this dissertation suggested, there is no courage without risk.

Dreyfus (2009, 102) argues that combination of anonymity, detachedness and minimized vulnerability which "makes role-playing easy and risk-free", also rules out possibilities for "openness to surprising and dangerous new situations that could lead to real discovery." He continues that

> Nietzsche would claim that, while the safe experimentation of *Second Life* is easy and can give you superficial satisfactions as in a synthetic Mardi Gras, only a bold experiment with the real possibility of having to deal with the consequences of failure could help you discover what is really possible and worthwhile for you.

Considering *Second Life*, I wholeheartedly agree with Dreyfus (2009) about the

consequences of the lack of risk. However, I am not sure if Dreyfus (2009) would agree with me, that the case with computer games, even the single-player ones, is rather different. To understand the nature of Dreyfus' criticisms, it is necessary to follow him to Castronova (2005, 276), who suggests that:

> Perhaps synthetic worlds have begun to offer a new mythology. Perhaps this mythology will be eventually successful, credible, even sublime, so that we will find ourselves in an Age of Wonder. And perhaps right now we are really living in an age of boredom. If all those possibilities are true, not just a few people, or many, but *everyone* will eventually want to spend their time in synthetic worlds.

In response to Castronova (2005), Dreyfus (2009, 93) argues that a virtual world like *Second Life* cannot give rise to "a sense of wonder and the sacred", because they cannot give us the experience of

> being in the grip of mysterious powers that have authority over you. That sort of power is expressed in the traditional myths but is necessarily lacking in the programmed gods and goblins we wilfully invent and can completely command and understand.

The problem of Dreyfus' argument, which he acknowledges as centred around the "Cartesian model of a concealed computer user deliberately controlling his public avatar" (Dreyfus 2009, 120), as I see it, is its inability to distinguish between the different contexts in which the "programmed gods and goblins" appear. From the point of view of their own designers, the "programmed gods and goblins" might perhaps suffer from "essential poverty" (Sartre 2002 [1940], 7-8), meaning that the designers cannot find in them anything they had not put there themselves. However, given the capabilities for procedural and emergent expression in contemporary game development tools, I doubt even that would always be exactly the case. But it is important to understand that even though their programmers might do so, we, as players, completely understand very few of them, and even lesser amount of them is in our complete command.

Dreyfus' argument, as long as we restrict it to an environment like *Second Life* is sensible and consistent, but breaks apart as soon as it is extended to a game like

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World of Warcraft. It seems that Dreyfus (2009), by dismissing games as things which "provide a structure and narrative that define the actions necessary for advancement", fails to grasp what the addition of 'playability' could do to a "virtual world" like *Second Life*.

Dreyfus (2009, 101) acknowledges that "if you become involved in what you are doing, even in the virtual world you are no longer in total control. Failure in your virtual emotional, professional, or practical life is still always possible". Consider for example attempting to join the *Second Life Anti-Griefing Guild*, a volunteer organisation seeking to root out abusive behaviour from *Second Life*, whose website states the following membership requirements: one has to be "regularly available in SL", be "at least two months old", have "never participated in griefing" nor have any affiliation "with any griefing group", has to have "at least two personal references from avatars who are also at least two months old", be "a good dancer" and so on. Failing to be a good dancer, you might not be accepted as a member. It is not hard to imagine a *World of Warcraft* guild having similar requirements, but they have the means to complement the requirements with for example the minimum level, necessary skills, and so on. While an "emotional failure" (*cf.* Dreyfus 2009, 101) is a possibility faced by both the users of *Second Life* and the players of *World of Warcraft*, the latter, more than the former, can find concrete support for their emotion in the materiality of the game artefact. Accused of being a dancer not good enough, the user of *Second Life* can blame only the other users and their arbitrary agreement on what constitutes "good dancing".

Sometimes *Second Life* (2003) gets grouped together with game artefacts based on family resemblance of certain traits, one of which is the constitution of a "world". The materiality of *Second Life* suggests its users to take on certain projects (*e.g.* building a house), but it does not establish any means with which to evaluate its users' behaviour. As my choices are not evaluated by *Second Life*, the software cannot resist my actions and I cannot be punished as a result of such evaluation;

thus *Second Life* does not make me responsible for the freedom I enjoy. From an existentialist perspective we have to question the nature of the 'freedom' in *Second Life* as freedom in the first place, as

> there can be a free for-itself[15] only as engaged in a resisting world. Outside of this engagement the notions of freedom, of determinism, of necessity lose all meaning. (Sartre 2003 [1943], 505).

Thus, if we are to describe the freedom and facticity in the experience with *Second Life*, *i.e.* to consider *Second Life* as resisting, we must resort to the first life as the origin of this resistance. With first life, I refer to the human condition and the social, psychological, and biological norms and conventions which govern the activities involving *Second Life*. Certainly in activities involving *Second Life* there is evaluation going on, but it is not evaluation carried out by the game artefact potentially leading to a game over, but evaluation based on the standards of the real world.

In subsection 4.2.2 we identified two ways in which my project of replicating my real-life neighbourhood can fail in *SimCity 4* – by not looking like its counterpart or by causing me to run out of money in the process. *Second Life* bears a resemblance to replicating one's family with *The Sims 2*, or one's neighbourhood with *SimCity 4*, as due to the lack of the gameplay condition which would lend meaning to "failure" and "success", the descriptive powers for these concepts have to be derived from the standards of real world.

Second Life can be used for playing self-invented games, not unlike the technology demo *Tropical Paradise* we discussed in subsection 5.1.2. A game of 100m dash in *Second Life* (2003) perhaps even qualifies as a 'game in a virtual environment' (*cf.* Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå 2003, 48). However, the technological artefact of *Second Life*, while affording a number of actions, does not enforce any particular project on its players, who are free to constitute the contents of *Second Life* as coefficients of adversity or utility in any way they can imagine. Sartre (2003 [1943],

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[15]Elsewhere we have approximated the "for-itself" as human consciousness

505) observes that

> without facticity consciousness could choose its attachments to the world in the same way as the souls in Plato's *Republic* choose their condition.

If there are constraints preventing me from realizing a particular project in *Second Life*, where I can fly about freely and am never have to worry about levels, scores, and game overs, they originate either in the social norms or are concerns which affect my existence as a human in general. My ability to build a house depends on my abilities to think in terms of three dimensions, to use the required 3D modeling software, perhaps also on my ability to shell out real-life cash to buy a "plot of land" in *Second Life*.

As the technological artefact of *Second Life* lacks anything even vaguely corresponding to a "game over", it neither resists nor enforces a gameplay condition on its users. If we consider *Second Life* as enhancing the repertoire of limitations against which the player's projects of freedom can proceed, we would have to drop either the requirement of these limitations being *concrete* or the player's projects being *real*. Thus, the extension of facticity provided by *Second Life* would be *imagined*. However, in all fairness it has to be pointed out that given the cohesion of communities in *Second Life*, we can safely assume that norms are being actively enforced among the users of *Second Life*. Within those circles, notions like "success" and "failure" are perhaps not only imagined, but supported by the shared conventions of acceptable behaviour. But equally important is to point out that the constraining and shaping of the player's experience that takes place in such circles is distinctively different from the ways in which materiality of single-player computer games shapes its player's experience.

However, due to the lack of gameplay condition hard-coded in the technological artefact, there is not *necessarily* any shared coherency in the experiences of the users of *Second Life*, as something that I could experience by entering *Second Life* as a complete newbie, that could justify the metaphor 'the world of *Second Life*' like it does justify 'the world of *Half-Life 2*'. If *Second Life* constitutes 'brackets' within

which free experimentation with capitalism, sexuality, and such things is possible, which is the hypothesis of Dreyfus (2009), the existence of these brackets is, to borrow an expression from Malaby (2007), a "cultural achievement", that depends on being enforced by the individual users.

Unlike the users of *Second Life* who are free to decide what *Second Life* means to them (as suggested in Second Life: The Official Guide), the players of computer games, given that they have even some desire for authenticity, are not free to construct and experience meaning arbitrarily defined by their own preferences. A player of *PacMan* (1982) is not free to imagine that the ghosts are her lovers: any attempts to fulfil the desires associated with being a lover and to and play out the lover's role would be severely hampered by the hard-coded limitations in the game artefact. Thus, we observe that in a computer game's materiality, there are structures which make the activity upon themselves less ambiguous and meaning less arbitrary than in the case of *Second Life*.

Even though computer games can not sufficiently emulate the experience of living one's life, we can describe in them structures which guarantee that the experience of playing a game has certain similarities to the experience of "being in the world". The existence of these very structures in games is what differentiates them from what we may, either colloquially or using a definition like that of Klastrup (2003), refer to as "virtual worlds". To understand these structures, it does not seem necessary to postulate the virtual as any kind of 'alternative' life, which is the angle from which Dreyfus (2009, 89-120) levels his criticism at *Second Life*.

I am sympathetic to the suggestion of Verbeek (2002), that

> the role of information technology [...] does not consist in offering a substitute
> for reality, but in mediating our involvement with reality and with each other.

Thus, even though some aspects of the definition of "today's popular virtual realities" in van Schoonhoven (2007, 12), such as the three-dimensionality of the representation and the involvement of specific input devices, seem somewhat accidental, it is lucid to

subscribe to how van Schoonhoven (2007, 12) underlines the ontological reality-status of "today's popular virtual realities":

> virtual reality technologies exists inside reality, and in this sense, virtual realities are ontologically also part of reality as a whole. The computer generated virtual worlds are not something paranormal, they physically exist as electrical currents and magnetic fields inside computer circuits.

The implications of these electrical currents and magnetic fields we have already unpacked, and we know that to the player, they appear as the concrete limitations which allow her to exercise her freedom within the project of gameplay, thus extending her facticity.

5.2.5 On the non-relativity of the extension

In this subsection I argue that despite humans' inability to concentrate equally well on a number of things and the fact that playing involves an altered way of seeing the world, the 'extendedness' of the player's facticity is neither relative nor a matter of perspective, but a fact of her condition as a player.

Playing does not change nor replace the facts that we need constant nutritional refills, weigh X kilos, can get hurt, know the location of our arms and legs in real time, hear sounds, sit on a chair near where the moats of old Copenhagen used to be, and so on. Rather, playing a game adds to this collection of facts in its own peculiar way. At this point may be worth reminding that with the notion of facticity, as "that which is altered when playing", I do not refer to a mental state (*e.g.* an attitude), a 'frame', a 'focusing of attention', nor a 'self', but to the concrete details delimiting human freedom.

However, I am not assuming that the one who starts out to play would remain unchanged. van Jennep (1987, 225), who takes a phenomenological-psychological perspective on driving a car, suggests that "in many cases a certain change does indeed take place in a man who sits behind the wheel. He is not exactly the same man he is at home in front of the fireplace." Supposedly, what is essential in the

change is the particular way of seeing the world the driver adopts; an attractive pedestrian is a distraction rather than a target of attention. Driving a car is a project, and we already know that projects enlighten the world in their own ways and make different things appear as coefficients of adversity and utility.

I acknowledge that a contemporary computer game leaves many of the sensomotoric modalities of the human body somewhat unused. Scents, for example, are rarely used as a means of communication by games, and buttock muscles may become numb while remaining unused for non-trivial work during a lengthy gaming session. We might even be tempted to consider the player as somewhat 'passive', as her body is at relative ease and there is not necessarily any correlation between levels of physical effort and in-game action. van Jennep (1987, 226), who observed that a driver's bodily effort does not depend on the speed at which she travels, suggests that between driving slow or driving fast

> [t]here is at most a mental difference. [...] The landscape I cross at a speed of
> 60 miles per hour is changed, is less real, or at least of an unusual "reality".

However, the temporary involvement of an unusual reality does not mean the sensory modalities or physical abilities according to which we act in the usual reality would be turned off, regardless of if we consider ourselves with a driver or with a computer game player. Huizinga (1998 [1938], 21) notes that

> The play-mood is *labile* in its very nature. At any moment 'ordinary life' may
> reassert its rights either by an impact from without, which interrupts the game,
> or by an offence against the rules, or else from within, by a collapse of the
> play spirit, a sobering, a disenchantment.

In an incident alleged to have happened in South Korea a player of *World of Warcraft* died of malnutrition and dehydration after playing several days in a row without eating. In the news item outlining the incident, Demick (2005) quotes a psychiatrist at hospital where the player died:

> "He was so concentrated on his game that he forgot to eat and sleep. He died
> of heart failure brought on by exhaustion and dehydration"

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This example illustrates the issue of basic human needs contrasting with the 'require-ment' of constant participation in the activity of play, a contrast which some might use to draw a line between two distinct realms – one in which malnutrition is not an issue and the other in which it has severe consequences.

It is important to point out that while we may *choose* to suppress some of our needs and functions while playing, a similar choice can be made in relation to any other activity, such as driving, as in the example of van Jennep (1987, 226). There does not seem to be anything particular, essential or structural in playing compared to any other human activity in which an individual chooses to engage intensively that would encourage such suppression. The 'requirement' of constant participation that clashes with the requirement of alimentation applies only to those who have already *chosen* to play a game. A similar requirement could be postulated regarding any human activity, and in that case it would become a requirement proper only after a human had chosen to engage in the activity. The voluntary player is, at any given moment, free to subject the choice to play to renegotiation, to engage in an introspection about whether or not the activity of playing is worth continuing, and as the result of such pondering stop playing as if "in disenchantment" (*cf.* Huizinga 1998 [1938], 21).

We might consider that since a human is able to focus his attention on a limited number of things, it would ultimately a matter of perspective whether we see the facticity as extended or *reduced* while we play – extended on *that* side of screen and reduced on *this* side while playing, and the other way around while not playing. However, if we followed this line of argument we would be confusing the first principles of human reality with its "secondary empirical properties" (*cf.* Smith 1979). By engaging with the game artefact, it is a *fact of the gameplay condition* that the number of concrete limitations against which the player can exercise her project of freedom and thus the number of potential ways for her to *make herself* increase. The player's position as someone whose facticity is extended by a game artefact is

neither *relative*, nor a *matter of perspective*. What is somewhat more relative and as such a matter of perspective is the *meaning* the individual may choose to give to her position; how much shall she care about events and objects that make up her position. In the next subsection, I approach this relativity from the perspective of imagination.

5.2.6 Imagination and extended facticity

In this subsection I discuss the notion of extended facticity in relation to imagination, taking into account the notion of game worlds as 'imagined' realms. I illustrate the extended facticity of a computer game's player *vis-à-vis* her imagination by drawing a comparison to playing with *Lego* blocks.

If we wanted to describe *Lego* play as taking place in some other realm than the actual world, we must turn to an 'imagined world', even if it has to be 'collectively imagined' and socially enforced. I argue that a box of *Lego* blocks does not offer an extended facticity and we cannot describe the metaphor of a 'game world' being fulfilled in *Lego* play. Whereas in the case of *Second Life*, we can perhaps describe the conventions according to which the world is imagined as highly institutionalised (*cf.* role-playing guilds in *Second Life*), *Lego* play seems to offer an example of less strict and less regulated form of shared imagination.

A relevant example with which my reader perhaps is familiar is a story retold by Huizinga (1998 [1938], 8), about a father who

> found his four-year-old son sitting at the front of a row of chairs, playing "trains." As he hugged him, the boy said: "Don't kiss the engine, Daddy, or the carriages won't think it's real".

Huizinga intends the story as an example of how play essentially involves a characteristic of make-believe – here it illustrates the arbitrary nature of imagined play-worlds. Even though those playing with Legos (or chairs as in Huizinga's example) may *agree* to constitute or imagine certain events or objects as something particular, the existence of those particulars is not affected by the turns of events in play. That a

"carriage" breaks down does not imply any changes in the material existence of the chair, because the material existence of the chair is largely irrelevant to the chair as a carriage. That the chair breaks down does not make it any easier or harder for me to choose to do things with the carriage, because all my choices involving the chair already build on my imagination.

Not unlike in the chair example, there is hardly anything, apart from the social context, that would distinguish between wishing and choosing when playing with *Legos*.

While the nubs and holes due to which the pieces click together delineate the activity to the extent that the blocks can be combined only in a particular manner, their effect does not extend to prohibiting me from continuing my freeform *Lego* play by material means. They do not have the ability to render themselves as non-combinable. If they do so, were are talking about an unfortunate accident. Thus, I suggest the nubs and holes of *Lego* blocks are better described manifesting the *residue* (Sartre 2003 [1943], 504) we discussed in subsection 5.2.1: delineating their potentiality of uses in a somewhat general manner instead of providing *resistance* for any *particular* project.

In case an individual plays out his transgressive desires in a "world" of Lego play, most likely the social reality will intervene and return the individual to his/her place. Such intervention might take place within gameplay, too, but it is important to distinguish between an attempt to persuade someone to behave in a certain way and the enforcement by way of conditioning a certain kind of behaviour impossible.[16]

Making Niko Bellic a gardener in *GTA IV* would not merely be 'inappropriate in the fictional world of *GTA IV*', but is simply not possible. The extension of my facticity as a player of *Grand Theft Auto IV* renders it impossible to engage in gardening, not unlike my facticity in the actual world prevents me from becoming a genuine samurai. On the other hand, within the extended facticity provided by

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[16]This difference, in fact, allowed Myers (2008) to breach the social norms in *City of Heroes/Villains* (2004)

Grand Theft Auto IV it is perfectly possible to become a tourist or a taxi driver.

In the imagined world of Lego play, in which the anthropomorphic plastic figures have jobs and families, nearly everything is possible as only limits are those imposed by the players' imagination. But the other side of the coin is that such worlds, as imaginations, suffer from "essential poverty" (Sartre 2002 [1940], 7-8); by exploring them I cannot find anything that I had not put there myself.

Sartre (2002 [1940], 11) suggests that

"the world of images[17] is a world in which nothing *happens*"

While a horse may run or a plant may grow, these events and objects never precede the intention in the imagining mind. Thus for a lucid individual it would be impossible to be surprised by anything in such a world. However it is important to remember that here we are speaking strictly about one's private imagination; what could be vaguely approximated as "collective imagination" (as in when constituting for example a world in Lego play with other individuals) should not in fact be approached as imagination but as behaviour regulated by (unwritten) social rules.

The freedom which I enjoy when I play with Legos cannot be taken away from me because it resides in my imagination and has no manifestation outside my mind in the first place. This certainly limits the extent to which we can meaningfully speak of being responsible for the freedom in Lego play, and from it follows that the responsibility for such freedom is largely imaginary. Any 'resistance' encountered is, again, leaking in from the first life or in fact not resistance at all but residue of the material's properties: some blocks combine whereas others do not, according to the laws of physics, thermodynamics and so on. On these grounds we may conclude that a box of Legos does not constitute an extended facticity. But by no means is this an attempt to discount imagination, or the "only pretending"-quality as described by Huizinga (1998 [1938], 11), as a feature of the player's experience; nothing suggests that it was not involved in our encounters with extended facticities – it is just that

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[17]referring to an imaginary world using the terminology he has established

it does not seem sustainable to build one's notion of "world" on subjective and imagined grounds especially when, as in the case of game artefacts, there is no scarcity of actually existing grounds. These actually existing grounds provide the basis for considering emotions as interpretations of game worlds in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Emotions in play as interpretations of game worlds

So far we have established emotions as "interpretations of the world". In more detail, this observation implies that emotions are *intentional* – they are directed at the world and are thus best conceptualised as relationships between the subject and her world. In order to describe the experience of an emotion, we must describe the emotion's object and the reasons the subject has for relating to the object in the particular way. However, as an object of emotion is only its primary focus and ultimately the object of every emotion is the world in which the subject exists (Solomon 2003, 72), understanding and describing emotions implies understanding the subject's contexts and ways of being in the world. *The human condition* can be understood as an approximation of these contexts and ways, utilisable in the descriptions of emotions.

However, we observed that emotions in play do not necessarily make sense in relation to the human condition, and proceeded to find out if the human condition could be replaced with a more suitable baseline for the purpose of describing emotions in play. In order to understand emotions in play *as experienced*, from the first-person perspective, it is necessary to strive for a similar perspective onto computer game play. We began developing this perspective by discussing how the notions of *play* and

games are used in contemporary game studies discourse. We identified the *de facto* methodological paradigm of computer game studies, understood as encompassing perspectives focusing on both games and players, as representing a scientific third-person perspective, that is, a non-subjective perspective, and proceeded to postulate an approach toward gameplay from the player's perspective.

In this analysis, the materiality of the computer game artefact appeared as contributing to an invariant structure in the player's experiences. By observing how computer games, by way of their materialities, *resist* their player's actions and make their players responsible for the freedom they enjoy, we postulated *gameplay condition* as imposed by computer games on their voluntary players. With the gameplay condition as the baseline, we observed that it is possible to analyse *games as played* while retaining inter-subjective plausibility. We observed that the property of being *computerized* is not necessary for the imposing of the gameplay condition, as mechanical games like pinball machines do impose a gameplay condition on their players as well. Drawing on the post-phenomenological philosophy of technology as represented by Ihde (1990) and Verbeek (2002), we replaced the accidental notion of a single-player computer game with single-player game artefact.

Characteristic of game artefacts is that they situate themselves into hybrid intentionality relationships with their players, and allow the human experience to assume modalities which would not otherwise be possible. In contrast to certain other technological artefacts which situate themselves in hybrid intentionality relationships, such as pacemakers which are best conceptualised as existing to serve the human, the qualitative texture of the relationship between the game and its player is negotiated primarily on terms dictated by the game artefact. The player, unlike the human carrying a pacemaker, is there to serve the artefact: she can play or not play, but what play implies is often dictated univocally by the game artefact.

The player must *nourish* the relationship by engaging in the behaviours requested by the game artefact in order for the hybrid intentionality relationship to persist.

This amounts to observing that the hybrid intentionality relationship between player and the game is *volatile*, due to the gameplay condition imposed by the latter on the former. Thus, the game artefacts have the ability to delineate and shape the hybrid intentionality relationship.

However, when discussing that toward which the hybrid intentionality is directed and attempting to be specific in the argument, we ended up returning to the approximative notion of "world" we postulated when discussing the enjoyable anger in *Half-Life 2*. Thus, it became necessary to unpack the notion of "game world". When doing so, we observed a disparity between the player's experience and concepts building on objective ontology, such as "spatiality", used to assess games and their properties and features. While games can be *about* space, the experience of playing a game that is about space cannot always be described as an experience about *being in* that space, unless one is willing to let go of the conception that spatial experience starts at proprioception. In other words, we cannot take for granted that a spatial experience would follow from space as a feature or a theme we can describe in game content.

We established spatiality as one feature of games among many, subordinate to the principles of gameplay. After reviewing the potentiality of metaphorical reference, we established "game world" as a metaphor, but observed that this formulation does not do anything else but provide a legitimate frame for the original intuitive assumption. Thus, we proceeded to unpack the metaphor with the notion of facticity, and conceptualised game world as an *extension of the players' facticity* whose extent at a given time is defined by the game artefact according to the gameplay condition.

In this chapter, I will look at dynamics of emotions of play using the perspective established so far. I begin by acknowledging a certain limitation of my perspective: the empirical scope of this argument is gameplay as a *subset* of human phenomena – or, those aspects of games as played that, by way of originating in the materiality of the game artefact, are shared by all players and playings of the particular game.

For example, while we can comfortably speak about the experience of losing a battle in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*, my attachment to a particular civilization which I always choose to lead when playing *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* is somewhat out of bounds for the argument.

I proceed to identify the *principle of relative intensity* as a method to account for the diverse ways in which the player can engage with the game world, which affect the intensity of the player's emotions. Based on the principle of relative intensity, I describe the conduct of *emotional investment*, which refers to how the player elevates certain parts of the game's content out from the overall contingency of the game and paves the way for those parts of game content to be experienced as objects of emotions.

Looking at the ways in which game artefacts transform our desire to play into beliefs concerning features of game content – objects, events, and states of affairs – which can later emerge as emotions, I draft an experiential ontology of game content, or an ontology that can be used to categorise contents of games as played.

I will discuss the practice of *transgressive play*, which refers to play that attempts to break out from the position implied for the player by the game. While transgressive play, as rebeling against the game's whatever attempt to shape the player's experience, seems at first to pose a challenge for the perspective presented, situating it into the framework that emphasizes the materiality of the game, diffuses most of the worries and reinforces the conception of Aarseth (2007b) that transgressive play is primarily a *symbolic gesture*. However, it seems possible to postulate an alternate definition of transgressive play, as play with consequences that alter the gameplay condition itself. This kind of behaviour is exemplified by becoming a wizard in a multi-user dungeon, for example.

Finally, by postulating an experiential ontology which can be used to assess the relevance of game content to the player's emotions within the finitude of a game as played, I outline the limits to which we can assume games to affect their players'

emotional experiences.

6.1 Describing emotions in play

With the framework we have set up so far, we can describe gameplay as a subset of human phenomena. We can grasp how in-game events and objects are experienced as significant through emotions, and how the experience of play as a whole is constituted as coherent, meaning that we can understand the relation between the parts and their relation to the whole. Taking the gameplay condition as a baseline, we can articulate emotions in play as interpretations of the "world" of *Half-Life 2*, where "world" refers to the sum of concrete possibilities and limitations opening up in front of me as a reward of my desire to play, in other words, to the *extension of my facticity.* I will illustrate this with an example of *Half-Life 2*.

Consider that I find a shotgun and a pack of ammunition in a barnacle-infested area in *Half-Life 2*, where I know a monster most likely lurks behind the next corner. Again, if we take the gameplay condition, instead of the human condition, as a baseline for my judgements surfacing potentially as emotions, it makes perfect sense to be delighted of the find. The shotgun and the accompanying ammunition can perfectly well be described as *coefficients of utility* in relation to the project of playing enforced by the game artefact by means of gameplay condition. Had I not found them, I might not be able to defend myself and would be expelled from the game as a consequence of a barnacle attack. Perhaps the shotgun and its ammunition were not in plain sight, and I could find them only after a thorough search that involved smashing boxes, in other words dealing with several *coefficients of adversity.* I would not be out of my mind to be not only delighted but also proud about finding such things. However, assumedly, these are not the only possible emotions the players can have with *Half-Life 2*, but constitute a *subset* of all possible emotions about the game.

6.1.1 Gameplay as a *subset* of human phenomena

Sartre observes of human condition in *Existentialism Is Humanism* (1945) that

> although it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence
> that can be called human nature, there is nevertheless a human universality of
> condition.

By this condition, he refers to "all the *limitations* which *a priori* define mans
fundamental situation in the universe". While historical situations may vary, "the
necessities of being in the world, of having to labor and to die there" remain constant.
Furthermore, he suggests that "these limitations are neither subjective nor objective,
or rather there is both a subjective and an objective aspect of them." With the
objective aspect, he refers to the pervasiveness of the limitations; "we meet them
everywhere and they are everywhere recognisable". The subjective aspect, according
to Sartre, is that the limitations need to be 'lived', meaning that a man has to "freely
determine himself and his existence in relation to them."

We must note that there is no reason to believe the barnacle in *Half-Life 2 could
not* be described as a threat also in relation to the human condition. However,
following this line of description seems unnecessarily complicated. This is because a
particular in-game encounter would give rise to different emotions in players with
different motivations, because for them all different in-game encounters would *mean
different things.*

The line of description leading to an account of the barnacle as frightening in
relation to the human condition would necessarily expand quite far. The account
would have to be able to posit the activity of playing somehow onto the spectrum of
all possible human activities based on their relation to the human condition, so that
insights that are general enough to cover playing regardless of the individual players'
motivations and situations could be gained. Furthermore, assumedly that pursuit
would be in vain, as there is more than one way, supposedly an infinite amount of
ways, in which the activity of playing can relate to the player's being in the world.

Thus, realistically speaking, a description of the barnacle as frightening in relation

to the human condition would necessarily have to build on unexamined, hypothetical and reductionist assumptions about "why" people play. An observation by Levinas, already quoted in subsection 3.1.3, becomes relevant again in relation to the observation that we cannot describe play as meaningful in relation just one particular end. Levinas (1969, 133) observes, that

> An activity does not derive its meaning and its value from an ultimate and unique goal, as though the world formed one system of use-references whose term touches our very existence.

However, from assuming that there are properties in the materiality of the game artefact which define the conditions upon which the activity of play can unfold regardless of its situational qualities, it follows that we can give plausible accounts of a *subset* of all possible human experience with the game artefact. We cannot find out how a particular player, based on her biography and psychosocial baggage, relates to a barnacle - perhaps it reminds her of her schoolmate. However, we can safely assume that the intensity of the anger and fear she feels toward the barnacle is proportionate to her desire to play.

It is debatable whether the word "only" should be in front of the word "subset", when we state that we can learn about a *subset* of human phenomena via the notion of gameplay condition: being able to assert this much about the player is already an achievement compared to not being able to discern *anything* about the experience of play based on the qualities of the game artefact. However, we should acknowledge the limitations of the suggested scope regarding its abilities to account for the diversity brought into the experience by biographically different humans, compared for example to the attempts to assess gameplay as a primarily *social* phenomenon. The debatability of this issue comes from the observation that the account taking its premise in the social, too, has its *a priori* deficiencies, namely the potential ignorance toward the influence of the materiality, originating in the emphasis on play as 'in becoming' or as 'processual', which we already discussed in subsection 4.1.2.

It is also important to observe that acknowledging that games are played in

different ways and for different purposes by different people does not devalue the attempt to understand that, which is shared by all players and playings. Verbeek (2005, 113) observes that

> The facts that technological artefacts can be conceived as constructions, always exist in a context, and are interpreted by human beings in terms of their specific frameworks of reference, do not erase the fact that systematic reflection can be undertaken of the role that these contextual and interpreted constructions play concretely in the experience and behavior of human beings. That "the things themselves" are accessible only in mediated ways does not interfere with our ability to say something about the roles that they play, thanks to their mediated identities, in their environment.

We may assume the gameplay condition as one characteristic shared by the "identities" of all the phenomena we would not hesitate referring to as computer games as played, as constant across players and playings. In other words, the gameplay condition can be described as a *universality* in the very particular domain of single-player gameplay. By means of game analysis we can observe and recognise how it is manifested in one game or another. If we are to understand emotions arising in single-player games as phenomenologically similar to emotions arising in real-world situations, the gameplay condition is a replacement candidate for the human condition.

The notion of gameplay condition can be used to flesh out the approximation of an emotion like the fear of the barnacle in *Half-Life 2*, postulated in subsection 2.4.1 as an "interpretation of the game world"; the barnacle is frightening not only because of the shock value of the surprise of its attack, but also because it makes manifest the threat for the player to be expelled from the 'world' of *Half-Life 2*. Were there no such threat, the surprise would be a mere empty novelty, like a dog that barks but never bites. In other words, the barnacle poses a threat *in relation to the gameplay condition*, while not necessarily in relation to the human condition.

But what we are addressing when we, by game analysis, articulate the gameplay condition, is its *objective aspect*. The experience of play comes forth when the condition is *lived*, and knowing that as humans we are free to believe, imagine, and do whatever we like in the situations we find ourselves in, there is no way to

predict with absolute certainty how exactly the condition will be lived. However, we have no reason to despair of the uncertainty that is once again facing us, as we are not interested in experiences of *all* possible humans, who bring in their subjective concerns. We are interested in *players*, (only) inasmuch as their experience is *about the game artefact* (including everything that can be described about it in a more detailed fashion) and the events and activities unfolding upon it according to the constraints and affordances it contains.

Thus it needs to be acknowledged that using this approach, we are assumedly not able to account, in an inter-subjectively plausible fashion, for those differences in the constitution of the experienced significance in the emotions objects that originate in the biographical histories of the players. If motivation – for example if the player plays to win or just to explore the game – affects how the barnacle becomes constituted as the barnacle-the-player-is-afraid-of, those aspects of constitution would be outside the scope of this argument.

However, given how the gameplay condition delineates intentionality within the player's experience, we can assume that as *players' experiences*, they all overlap to a certain degree. This overlap is the subset of human experience, and the empirical extent to which the argument of this dissertation can be plausibly applied. The methodological implication of this observation is, that as researcher-players, we desire to play as much as any player would, and will thus have no trouble in positioning ourselves 'into' that overlap.

Thus, apart from observing the objective aspects of the gameplay condition, the limitations against which the players' freedom takes place, I can live the gameplay condition and let it shape my experience like anyone else. By making my desire to play manifest, I "freely determine" myself and my existence as a player in relation to the objective aspects of the gameplay condition. By doing so, I observe also the subjective aspects of gameplay condition. However, the qualitative nature of those aspects in a particular experience, *i.e.* the 'contents' of the experience about the

gameplay condition, interest us only for the methodological integrity's sake, as our focus is not on the properties of any *idiosyncratic experience* but on the *possibilities for idiosyncratic experience.* This resembles how Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, 26) illustrate the focus of phenomenology:

> Phenomenology is not interested in understanding the world according to Gallagher, or the world according to Zahavi, or the world according to you; it's interested in understanding how it is possible for anyone to experience a world.

It can be made explicit that the gameplay condition delineates the potentiality for a *subset* of human phenomena that is gameplay. Of all the idiosyncratic experiences upon a given game artefact, with the gameplay condition we can describe a subset, namely those experiences that are about playing the game.

Smith (1979, 433-4), discussing the differences in the methods Sartre used to analyse consciousness and reality, describes a "progressive method" as aiming "to describe the first principles of consciousness or human reality". This method, according to Smith, progresses from the first principles toward the secondary, more determinate and less general, principles of human reality, by bracketing the "being of man and the world". "Regressive method", on the other hand takes the secondary principles as its starting point and regresses toward the first principles.

In a manner similar to the progressive method, we have established the gameplay condition as a "first principle" of single-player computer game play by not taking any particular game as our starting point, thus bracketing any considerations on the level of particularities. The gameplay condition as a first principle could be "tested" by seeing how close one can arrive by means of *regressing* from the level of particular games.

However, like Sartre (1962 [1939], 117) points out, referring to "regressive phenomenologists" manifested in the form of psychologists, "the term of their regression is *for them* a pure ideal", supposedly meaning that they cannot arrive at an unified synthesis even by accounting for an infinite amount of properties if the reasons behind such properties remain accidental. (Perhaps, using contemporary vocabulary,

Sartre would not be content with any level of saturation, and would instead oppose the whole idea when applied to human phenomena.)

6.1.2 The principle of relative intensity

As we observed in section 2.4, a barnacle in *Half-Life 2* constitutes a trivial threat in relation to the human condition. Replacing the human condition with the gameplay condition, we can describe the threat the barnacle poses in our example case as directly proportionate to my desire to play. For this argument, it is crucial to remember that the gameplay condition is imposed on those who voluntarily desire to play. Thus, the threat of the barnacle is as real as I am convinced about my desire to continue with the project of playing. Thus, we might say that I must "believe" in the barnacle, and I inherit this belief from the overall project of playing which is imposed on me by the game artefact if I desire to play. Sartre (2003 [1943], 92) writes of believing that *Pierre* is his friend:

> I *believe it*; that is, I allow myself to give in to all impulses to trust it; I decide to believe in it, and to maintain myself in this decision; I conduct myself, finally, as if I were certain of it – and all this in the synthetic unity of one and the same attitude.

We can as well paraphrase Nintendo's advertising tagline used in the product launch of *Nintendo Wii*: "playing is believing". However, my reader may wonder how can we have genuine emotions about in-game events and objects which we know are real threats in relation to the human condition. This consideration reminds us of the paradox of "genuine rational fictional emotions" (Gendler and Kovakovich 2006), which we discussed subsection 2.3.4. It is due to the gameplay condition that we are not opening up towards the paradox of genuine rational fictional emotions. While the barnacle is a real threat in light of the human condition only trivially and/or through a very convoluted description, it is a *real threat when evaluated based on the gameplay condition*. Without resorting to fiction or make-believe, we can say that the barnacle has the ability to expel me from the game – not unlike we can say that *Ctrl+S*

triggers a sequence of events that has the ability to save the document I am writing, or that a hammer is a hammer that has the ability to assist me in forcing nails into the wall. Thus, it is rational for me, subjected to the gameplay condition, to believe wholeheartedly that the barnacle is a threat. Taking the gameplay condition into account, we can describe the my fear and anger about the barnacle as both rational and genuine – genuine not only as in having the reputed qualities but also as in sincerely and honestly felt.

However, as a player, I am free to quit any time I want. It is not an *inapprehensible fact of my condition* (Sartre 2003 [1943], 107) that as a human that I *must* play. "Having to play" is not included in my condition which I have not chosen but thrown into (Sartre 2003 [1943], 103). I am free to decide whether I want to play or not, to decide the extent to which I care about the project of playing. This extent of caring is then reflected on my emotions. The intensity of an emotion about an in-game event or object that is relevant to the project of play is relative to the intensity of the desire to carry on with the project of playing, that is, the intensity of my desire to play. This is what we might call the *principle of relative intensity*, which could be thought of as a reductive approximation of the inexhaustible spectrum of ways in which the player can care about aspects of the game world.

In the following sections, I will discuss how the game artefacts, by mediating human intentionality according to the gameplay condition, facilitate the transformation of the desire to play into beliefs about states of affairs within games; how game artefacts can turn my desire to play into a variety of beliefs about events, objects, and states of affairs within the game. These beliefs contribute to the constitution of the objects of my emotions in play as interpretations of the game worlds. And, when 'boosted' by my desires, preferences, wishes, intentions, and memories, *i.e.* by my *idiosyncratic psychosocial biography*, they emerge as (some kind of) emotions.

Furthermore, some features of game content seem to appear, as if by default, as more relevant to the player's emotions than others. I will demonstrate that from the

premise of the gameplay condition, it is possible to arrive at an ontology of game content from the player's perspective, distinguishing different kinds of game content as experienced within the finitude of the game as played.

6.1.3   Emotional investment in Civilization IV

Based on the principle of relative intensity, and taking into account the gameplay condition according to which the player's facticity is extended, we can describe the conduct of *emotional investment*.[1] Consider for example the game *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* (2005), in which the player leads a civilization from pre-historic to modern times. The player's achievements can persist through the temporality of one playing: a city constructed in year 500 BCE may be the metropolis of the player's civilization in the year 2000 CE.

Once the player has built her first city, she can decide on what kind of people should live in the city – ordinary citizens or specialists of some kind – and what should they be be working on. Options on how the city's efforts could be invested include a city wall, barracks, military units, and so on. Often the environment around the city calls for specific kinds of units and/or improvements: a city near a mountain containing gems can benefit from having workers around to build a mine, whereas a coastal city near a good fishing spot gets access to healthy food by constructing a work boat and sending it out to the sea to fish. Careful micro-management of cities, paying attention to production and citizen composition, can be critical to the player's success.

However, given that the amount of cities tends to increase as the game progresses, it is tempting to refrain from micro-managing all cities with an equal attention to detail, as the game can decide automatically on the player's behalf how the efforts of individual cities should be directed. Given that the cities often persist

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[1]Yee (2006) uses the notion of emotional investment without explicit definition alongside the notion of "temporal investment", as referring to something which the MMOG "environments derive from users". My usage of the notion is to be understood separately from Yee's.

throughout a particular playing, and micro-managing them is pleasant to a certain degree, especially if there are no urgent war-time decisions to be made, as a player I may choose one of the cities as my "pet city", to which I pay a closer attention than I do to other cities.

When I exercise my freedom against the extension of my facticity afforded by *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* by positing the project of "having a favorite city" which implies micro-managing it carefully, I choose the ends according to which the brute existents of the game are illuminated. If my "pet city" was suddenly attacked by my enemies whose troops outnumber my defenses, it is understandable that I would more upset than if it was one of the cities to which I had paid lesser attention. According to the principle of relative intensity, the more I desire to micro-manage my favourite city, the stronger my fear of losing that city.

Allow us to assume that the AI enemy conquered my city, but did not raze it to the ground, instead installed a governor of their own kind and thus forced the city to join their empire. Seeing my pet city in the colours of the enemy amounts, metaphorically speaking, to a knife being turned in the wound. However, luckily the citizens chose to revolt against their new master and re-join my empire. This was probably assisted by the outposts of my culture, such as radio towers and theaters and so on, near the pet city. Again, according to the principle of relative intensity, both how deep the knife actually was in the wound and how overwhelming my joy was when the city's citizens revolted and came back to my empire, were proportionate to my desire to have a pet city.

What is there to say about the relationship between the 'objective' qualities of my pet city, such as the improvements it contains and the history it has persisted through, and the intensity of my emotions about the city? Sartre (2003 [1943], 473) points out that

> Causes and motives[2] have only the weight which my project – *i.e.*, the free

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[2]Here "motive" refers to a subjective motivation and "cause" to an objective state of things in the world, not unlike in our discussion on objects and causes in subsection 2.2.3.

production of the end and of the known act to be realized – confers upon them.

Even though it is "easier" to care about a large city that has the pyramids and is situated next to a diamond mine, the intensity of my fear depends neither on the city's size nor on the diamonds. If the city's qualities, such as its size, the improvements it contains, or the resources it allows me to access, have an effect on the intensity of my fear, this effect is indirect. This is because, like we observed by drawing on McIntyre and Smith (1989, 148-51) in subsection 2.2.2, emotions are intentional, and as intentional they depend on the *conception* the individual has of the emotion's object, not on the properties of the object as *existing*. However, *if*, for example due to those qualities which are not merely *residual* (*cf.* Sartre 2003 [1943], 504) but to some extent are results of my more or less informed choices (such as the one to construct the pyramids), I happen to *care about* the city more, my emotions about the city, whatever happens to it, are more intense.

It is important to observe that what was at stake in my fear when I saw the enemy troops progressing toward my city was not just the city as a feature in game content or owning the city as a state of the state machine underlying the game, but my possibility to continue devoting my time to the "pet city" and seeing it flourish. In other words, at stake was a tangible part of the extension of my facticity as a player, against which I can exercise my project of freedom and the diversity of more specific projects it implies.

Sartre (2003 [1943], 467) offers support to the idea of emotional investment by describing how the relation between emotion and freedom persists across situations:

> My fear is free and manifests my freedom; I have put all my freedom into my fear, and I have chosen myself as fearful in this or that circumstance. Under other circumstances I shall exist as deliberate and courageous, and I shall have put all my freedom into my courage.

Losing the stake of my emotional investment as a consequence of poor defences in the city did not mean loss only in terms of my possibilities to act upon the game artefact in the ways that are explicitly recognized as contributing to "failure" and

"success", but also *loss in purely emotional terms* as the object and the factual cause of the emotion of sadness; not being able to spend time with my "pet city" any more.

We can describe the conduct of *emotional investment* as a primordial concern, subordinate to the project of freedom that is already delinated by the gameplay condition, that identifies a particular block within the relatively contingent[3] mass of features and aspects of the game artefact and confers upon it a weight which causes them to stand out from the contingency. If something happens to this block of contingency which I identified as a *pet city*, the weight of the emotion directed at it, whether it is for example fear or courage, rejoice or sadness, is the weight I have conferred upon the block.

The reason why I say "subordinate to the project of freedom that is already delinated by the gameplay condition" is that whereas I am free to 'emotionally invest' in any kind of game content, the conduct of emotional investment often becomes more articulated if I invest in game content that is recognized by the game artefact as relevant in terms of contributing to either "failure" or "success". Cutscenes, that is, sequences during which the player cannot influence the course of in-game events but observe, or other ways for the game artefact to present narratives to the player, can also be described as guiding players' emotional investment. Thus, not unlike background information provided by materials supplied with the game artefact, or hearsay of other players, that which we might call "fiction" may highlight some aspects of the game world by for example representing them as desirable, repulsive or worth the player's attention and emotion in some other way.[4] However, if a

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[3]I say "relatively contingent", because for example the cities in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* are actually not as contingent as any brute existents would be, given that I myself have created them, given them names, and decided what they are to build, but still more contingent than my pet city, to which a particular spot is reserved in my playing mind.

[4]Allow us to diverge from *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* for a while and consider the game *Need For Speed: Undercover* (2008) (later *NFSU*), whose player is presented with cutscenes featuring flashy cars painted in shiny colours and decorated with elaborate stickers. We can assume that many players of *NFSU*, who have gone to the lengths of buying a game that is about road racing in urban environment, prefer decorated cars to non-decorated cars for reasons whose identification is beyond the interests here, but which can be assumed to originate in popular culture imagery. Thus, it is not surprising that the player of *NFSU* is endowed with the ability to decorate her own vehicle with stickers, and some players may find using this feature highly enjoyable. I will elaborate

representation of the particular aspect as somehow special is not supported by the gameplay condition, *i.e.* the aspect is not relevant in the light of the gameplay condition, the emotional investment into the particular aspect is voluntary, and its description would be a description of the player's idiosyncratic biography and thus off-limits for the argument looking at emotions from the suggested perspective that emphasizes the game artefact's materiality.

As a player of *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*, I could perfectly well choose also a 'pet spot on the map' instead of a city, say, a barren icy fjord in the northern hemisphere. However, my possibilities to make my desire 'to hold a pet spot' manifest in the game would be somewhat limited. If I did not want to build a city in the location, but keep it as a mere spot on the map, unbuilt natural formation, I could for example place a unit in the location. However, if the enemy built a city next to my "pet spot", which would most likely happen as soon as the territorial sprawl of civilizations had exhausted the more desirable locations, my unit would be automatically removed from the enemy's territory. To replace the unit in the location, I would then have to declare war on the enemy, and destroy the city to make the border retreat away from the location and return it into its natural state.

The conduct of emotional investment and the ways in which *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* artefact facilitates it can be considered also with the examples of military units. I might savour a special relationship to a particular military unit which I have upgraded from being a puny warrior of prehistoric ages into a modern-day mechanized infantry unit. The possibility to upgrade units, and thus maintain the particular unit's relevance across ages, facilitates emotional investment. If the warrior could not be upgraded, it would not make sense in relation to the project of freedom delineated by gameplay condition to keep supporting the particular unit, and we would consider the choice to maintain it a *quirk* in relation to the gameplay condition. Furthermore, if *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* did not have the feature of endowing military units

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further on the stickers in *NFSU* in relation to voluntariness of taking some game content seriously in section 6.2.

with experience points after each battle they win, my emotional investment, the special relationship to the particular unit, would not be supported by the extension of my facticity.

Some might contest these formulations by claiming that the examples of emotional investment do not stand out among objects of *pride*. Am I not simply proud of my pet city and my military unit that have persisted through the history?

Schopenhauer (2004 [1851], IV/2, 1.par) describes as pride "an established conviction of one's paramount worth in some respect." Pride serves as a peculiar example how "emotional subject and the object of the emotion are united in an indissoluble synthesis" (Sartre 1962 [1939], 35), and that the object of every emotion is ultimately the world and the self existing in the world (Solomon 2003, 72). The object of my pride about my pet city incorporates myself as filling the requirements of the game artefact by a being player as much as it incorporates the history throughout which the city has persisted.

However, like Solomon (1993, 286) points out, while the primary object of pride is "oneself as an agent", the perception of self employed in pride "always stop[s] short of complete subjectivity". That pride does not embrace complete subjectivity can be explained in reference to Sartre (2003 [1943], 314), who suggests that

> pride is at first resignation: in order to be proud of *being that*, I must of necessity first resign myself to *being only that*.

As conforming to the gameplay condition implies a degree of resignation by default like we discussed in subsection 5.2.5 with the example of an unfortunate accident involving excessive playing of *World of Warcraft*, we might not necessarily have any problem with being proud of our achievements as "only" players. Thus, my response to a question about an overlap between emotional investment and pride would be that perhaps emotional investment involves experiential structures that we can describe in also pride, or perhaps pride is even a necessary stage in the sequences of emotions in play, or an often passed through node in the "network of intertwined

and mutually entailing judgements" (*cf.* Solomon 1977) which constitute emotions in play.

However, it seems unclear if we can consider the initial stage of emotional investment as having established one's worth *yet* in any respect. Most likely pride emerges from emotional investment if the player is on her way to success (whether self-proclaimed or recognised by the game artefact), but then we are not considering the *proto-emotion* of emotional investment, but its outcome when the investment has paid off already. We can describe emotional investment as the constitution of contingency into an object as experienced, or perhaps more accurately *object to be experienced*, in relation to the particular end I have chosen, but not yet encountering the circumstances upon which the "conviction of [my] worth" could be established, thus lacking the *emotional judgement* (*cf.* Solomon 1977). We have no reason to assume that the intentionality of human experience would not be at work, constituting objects-as-experienced out of the contingency of the world, even before the emergence of a situation prompting as a response a meaningful and personally relevant emotion.

Some might, on the same grounds on which I have built my argument on emotions, accuse me of *atomism*; of postulating an assemblage consisting of a 'proto-emotion', that is the identifying of a block of contingency as somehow important, and an 'emotional judgement', the pay-off when the circumstances change. My answer to those would be that of atomism I am guilty as charged but that which I am breaking apart is the temporal process of play, not the intentional unity of the resulting emotion. The assemblage in question is the human phenomenon of *gameplay*, not *emotion.*

While by imposing the gameplay condition on their players game artefacts *require* the player to invest effort in the game, they also *facilitate emotional investment*. Describing emotional investment requires us to consider the game as played as an ontological hybrid in which subjective qualities exist alongside tangible ones: if we were observing the game as a system and consequently the player as an input

to the system, the conduct of emotional investment could not be described as a pattern of gameplay behaviour, because the system does not recognize emotional input. However, what we are pointing at is a drawback of the objective third-person perspectives, rather than a limitation in game artefacts. Because games as played transcend their corresponding game artefacts, the fact that the artefacts do not recognize emotional input does not mean such input and its consequences could not be integral part of gameplay.

6.2 An experiential ontology: the deniable and the undeniable

In between the gameplay condition and the emotion there is, in both quantitative and temporal sense, plenty of events, objects and interactions. The sheer quantity of game content through which the player sifts during one playing might seem troublesome at first; how could a method be prepared to account for all the movements of individual units, scientific breakthroughs and negotiations with AI civilizations in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*, for example, as they become constituted as objects of the player's emotions?

Acknowledging the weight placed on the *activity* of gameplay, in which the player is an important participant, perhaps we could distinguish between those aspects of the game artefact that contribute to the functionality as facilitating gameplay, and those which could be understood as not having anything to do with such functionality. One such distinction is made by Frasca (2003), between *simulation* and *representation*. Frasca (2003) does not define what he means with "representation", but provides photography as an example of representational media. This ostensive way of defining representation makes sense especially when contrasted with his definition of simulation. According to Frasca (2003), to simulate, is to

> model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system

Frasca (2003) suggests that while from a photograph of an airplane we can learn about the airplane's properties such as shape and colour, "it will not fly or crash when manipulated". A flight simulator, in contrast,

> allows the player to perform actions that will modify the behavior of the system in a way that is similar to the behavior of the actual plane

Thus, the distinction between simulation and representation, as put forth by Frasca (2003) places a lot of weight on the user's capability to affect the course of events, an ability not unlike that of the reader of a cybertext outlined by Aarseth (1997). However, what seems somewhat problematic in the distinction between simulation and representation is that it requires us to describe a reference relationship between the simulation and that which is simulated. Assumedly to dodge the problems that potentially arise from the need to demonstrate there being a reference relationship, Frasca (2003) suggests, with the phrasing *to somebody*, that the proof for arguing that there is a reference relationship is not necessarily to be sought in the simulation *itself*, but from the experience of using the simulation. While for someone *Tetris* might "maintain some of the behaviours" of taking care of a suburban household, for someone else it might maintain some of the behaviors of building an ever-heightening wall out of odd-shaped tiles. Furthermore, it also perfectly possible that for someone, *Tetris* would *not* maintain any behaviour of any known system.

This exemplifies again a particular drawback of definitions postulated from the third-person perspective as accounting for the subjective experience, something we observed already when discussing in subsection 5.2.3 the "six inputs to emotion" as put forward by Frome (2007). In this case, concerning with simulation, the drawback is manifested in the observation that anything is a simulation of something *for someone*. Once one gives in to subjectivity by way of leaving room for interpretation, there is no way to confine the extent to which subjectivity can rearrange one's formulations, no matter how careful they initially seem. Thus, rather than 'patching' a categorisation that looks at the world from an "objective" perspective to account for subjective aspects, perhaps a categorisation could start from the subjective.

Another distinction that covers the difference between the game's functionality and other kinds of game content is put forward by Aarseth (2003), who distinguishes between "gameplay", "game-structure" and "game-world". With "gameplay", Aarseth (2003, 3) refers to "the player's actions, strategies and motives", with "game-structure" to "the rules of the game, including the simulation rules", and with "game-world" to the "fictional content, topology/level design, textures etc."

As our concern here is to differentiate between kinds of game content, we can safely focus our argument to the latter two categories, "game-structure" and "game-world", whose difference seems to come down to a difference between "rules" and "fiction". However, we cannot take for granted that such a distinction could be sustained from the player's perspective; perhaps the player never becomes aware of any *rules* regulating how the activity of gameplay unfolds. While I will elaborate on this issue in more detail in subsection 6.2.2, at this point it suffices to say that perhaps a distinction of game content, or an ontology, could be postulated based on what is given in the experience of play, that is, from the first-person perspective.

We can intuitively recognize there being a difference in the experience of emotional investment into a particular spot on the map and emotional investment into a particular city or a military unit – regardless of what is the emotional outcome of such investments. We can elaborate on this issue through a negation. If I *did not* emotionally invest in any of the cities within my borders – that is, neglected them or *did not care about them at all* – my ability to retain the power to decide whether the activity of gameplay should continue would be greatly diminished. For example: if I had set auto-manage on and accidentally left my cities to build monuments and wonders of the world on their own, instead of building defensive military units, the cities would be taken over by the enemy easily and as soon as all my cities were taken over, I would be expelled from the game and the extension of my facticity would close itself.

Huizinga (1998 [1938], 8) notes that "when the rules of the game are transgressed,

the play-world collapses." However, contemporary game artefacts do not consist merely of rules whose transgressing would have the severe consequences Huizinga describes; their game worlds can take a fair share of denial and disbelief before collapsing. Underneath the notions of denial and disbelief lie a diverse range of attitudes and activities. We already know that if the goals of the game and the gameplay condition are not identical, goals can be striven for as long as the gameplay condition remains fulfilled. Thus, denial and disbelief on one hand amounts to playing without the intention to win at the game's conditions (*i.e.* not striving for the goal or winning condition) and on the other hand to a more 'benevolent' imaginary re-appropriation of game content.

It seems that the gameplay condition dictates a degree of minimal participation, or minimal caring. On the level of game content, this translates to the observation that not all game content is equally relevant from the point of view of the upkeeping of the extension of the player's facticity. Thus, we can think of games as *selectively* transforming our desire to play into beliefs concerning individual features in the game content, and it is the task for our imagination to fill in the gaps between these beliefs if we wish to do so. I have to acknowledge the dangerousness of barnacles in early stages of *Half-Life 2*, but I do not have to take seriously whatever I am told about their biological origins, for example. The latter details I can reimagine at will. Taking the gameplay condition as a baseline, we can distinguish between two kinds of game content within games as played.

Within single-player game artefacts, there are meanings which the player can deny without decreasing his possibilities to act in the game. There are also some, which cannot be denied without such consequences. The shape of Bismarck's moustache in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* is among the deniable meanings, whereas the attack strength of military units in the same game is not. Everything related to the blond female co-driver in the racing game *Turbo Outrun* (1989) is deniable. In the *heart attack mode* of the game's sequel, *OutRun 2* (2003), the co-driver has to be impressed

with fast driving and tricks, which makes her undeniable. This simple ontology of game content as experienced, or, an experiential ontology of game content, can be outlined as follows:

- A *deniable* meaning can be denied without affecting the possibilities to choose and act

  - *e.g.* the shape of Bismarck's moustache in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*

- An *undeniable meaning* cannot be denied without affecting the possibilities to choose and act

  - *e.g.* the importance of making it to the next checkpoint in time in *Turbo Outrun*

The notion of 'meaning' might seem troublesome at first, but this kind of 'umbrella term' is necessary for two reasons. On one hand, it allows us to retain simplicity while simultaneously grasping all there is to grasp about gameplay in terms of *experienced significance*. On the other hand, given the principle of minimum presupposition, being more specific and speaking about for example "rules" or "mechanics" would require demonstrating if and how that to which such notions refer appear in the experience. In other words, we can be sure that the player's experience is about *meaning*, but not that it would be about "rules" or "mechanics".

There are overlaps between the proposed experiential ontology of game content and existing attempts to categorise game content. For example, the shape of Bismarck's beard in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* can be described as "fictional content" and thus falls into the category of "game-world" (*cf.* Aarseth 2003, 2), and the necessity of making it to the next checkpoint in *Turbo Outrun* supposedly originates in "the rules of the game, including the simulation rules", and could be thus described as a detail of "game-structure" (*cf.* Aarseth 2003, 2)

However, *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* could include a feature, due to which remembering what the leaders of opponent civilizations look like would be beneficial

to the player, as, we can assume that in the circles of international diplomacy it is important to be able to connect faces with names.[5] With the introduction of such a feature, the shape of Bismark's beard would become undeniable. While we can imagine it being technologically possible, such a feature is not, however, implemented in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*.

Thus, we can argue that the overlaps between the experiential ontology and objective categorisations of game content are *accidental*, and tell us more about the prevailing best practices of game design than they do about the structural similarity of the models. For example, that a detail of a story being told in the game, for example by means of cutscenes and other such features, is deniable, tells us that the game designers have failed to integrate the story into gameplay, in other words have not made the details of the story relevant in relation to the gameplay condition. The accidental nature of the overlap is further illustrated by the observation that sometimes it is hard to identify in which objective-ontological category a particular feature in a game should be situated, even if it is perfectly clear that the feature as experienced is either deniable or undeniable.

For example, in order to get through a particular door in an adventure game *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards* the player has to make the protagonist tell a password to a door-keeper. In the original version of the first instalment of the series, the player has to make the protagonist, *Larry Laffer*, look at the wall in the men's room. Once the password is displayed on the screen, the player has to memorize it. In the game's more recent remake, *Leisure Suit Larry 1: In The Land of the Lounge Lizards. VGA Edition.* (1991), the password is an object that has to be picked up into the inventory. The former password could be categorised

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[5]For example, we could imagine a feature that would make it necessary for the player to greet the other leaders by their names at the beginning of any negotiations, in order to set a good tone for the discussions to come. The game implements attitudes for the opponents the player meets. The spectrum of these attitudes ranges from "furious" to "pleased", and the current attitude of the opponent affects the player's ability to persuade the opponent into deals and diplomatic agreements. Remembering or not remembering an opponent's name could have an effect on the attitude, and thus affect the player's abilities to negotiate beneficial deals, and thus affect her chances of remaining as a player.

as a feature in "representation", whereas the latter password, being an in-game object proper, qualifies as a feature of 'simulation'. In both cases, the password is undeniable: if it is denied, new possibilities for choice and action are not opened up and the player remains 'stuck'.

It is challenging to compare the distinction presented here with 'objective' ontologies of game content, let alone demonstrating any regularities in their mutual correspondence, either in an essential sense or when applied to a particular game. Whereas for an objective eye the password required to access the first floor of Lefty's bar in *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*, the outfit Tommy Vercetti, the protagonist of *GTA:SA*, is wearing, and the shape of Bismark's beard in *Sid Meier's Civilization IV* might not seem commensurate enough to be fairly paralleled, as details of games as played they are comparable and can be categorised within the experiential ontology. However, this is possible only if the game as played is considered as *finite*.

6.2.1   (Un)deniability and finitude

Decorations for avatars and other such vehicles are a category of game content which can initially seem deniable due to its lack of functionality. Such an acknowledgment would imply that the player's emotions about a cool new jacket the game's protagonist is wearing, would be out of bounds for the argument that describes emotions in terms of their experienced significance in relation to the gameplay condition. However, this is not always the case.

Identifying a meaning as either deniable or undeniable is to pay attention to the consequences of its denial to the continuation of the gameplay activity. In other words, the experiential ontology considers game content as always situated within the *finitude* of the game as played.

I will unpack this claim with an example of stickers in *Need For Speed: Undercover* (2008) (later *NFSU*), which we discussed briefly in a footnote in subsection 6.1.3 and

with which a player of *NFSU* can decorate her car. Stickers in *NFSU* are bought with in-game money, which can be gained only by investing time and effort in successful completion of races and missions. While in theory, in-game money is an unlimited resource, as the player can repeat the same races over and over again to accumulate more money, in practice this conduct appears rather tedious, as for example winning the same race for the second time yields only a fraction of the prize won for the first time. Decorating a car with a sticker does not help the player completing races and missions, but neither does it hamper her attempts of doing so, as the cost of a single sticker is only nominal. Still it is worth noting that it is possible to spend all the in-game money earned on stickers, instead of using it for example to buy parts that boost the vehicle's top speed.

Using all the money earned on stickers instead of on tuning parts would prevent the player from advancing in the game. Without updating her car, the player cannot win races against cars that are faster than the one with which the player begins. The races are not only the player's main source of income, but also milestones of progress in the game. To not win new races is to not unlock new areas and new races. Eventually, insisting to buy stickers instead of tuning parts will stagnate the increase of the amount of possibilities available to the player and the player will find herself 'stuck' in the game.

These observations can be made concerning also with many other single-player games which allow their players to gain a resource in exchange for time spent playing and to subsequently exchange the gained resource for something. For example, the player of *GTA:SA* can buy not only new guns and ammunition but also new clothes for the protagonist. While a new gun might enhance the player's capabilities by allowing her to win previously impossible battles, new clothes can extend the player's capabilities only in particular cases. For example, partaking in some missions is not possible without a particular kind of outfit. However, acquiring new clothes requires the player to part with a resource that could be used for an acquisition which in

itself would open up new possibilities and thus extend the player's facticity.

Even though it is time the player needs to invest into repeating the missions in order to gain money with which to buy stickers in *NFSU* or clothes in *GTA:SA*, it is neither the in-game system of economics nor the temporality of a particular playing, but the *finitude of the game as played*, in relation to which we can establish the stickers as non-trivial and undeniable. In their multi-dimensional typology of games, Aarseth, Smedstad and Sunnanå (2003, 51) introduce "teleology" as one of the variables in their typology. They suggest that

> teleology relates to the final goal of the game. Some games never reach a clear winning state, and could in principle go on endlessly. These games have an *infinite* teleology, while the games with clearly defined successful outcomes for one or more players are teleologically *finite*

However, playings are always finite, even those of games with "infinite teleology": even the longest of the gaming sessions will end. This observation not only illustrates the difference between third-person and first-person accounts of games, but also has ramifications to the analysis of games as played. These ramifications can be articulated by building on the notion of *finitude* in Sartre (2003 [1943], 631). He suggests that finitude is

> to be carefully distinguished from "mortality." Finitude refers not to the fact that man dies but to the fact that as a free choice of his own project of being, he makes himself finite by excluding other possbilities each time he chooses the one which he prefers.

If I could go on playing *NFSU* indefinitely, or if I was considering, from an atemporal perspective, *GTA:SA* as a system affording, among other things, both repeating the missions and buying the piece of clothing, I might be tempted to consider the (price of the) clothes as deniable, as the source of money cannot be depleted: more money can always be made by engaging in criminal activities. However, due to the game as played always stretching over a finitude, exhaustibility or inexhaustibility of the source of the resource with which the stickers are bought is not relevant for the argument. The amount of in-game money spent on a sticker, no matter how little it is, is an amount of money *not* spent on purchases that directly enhance the player's

capabilities to act in the game. Thus, even though a sticker itself would be trivial in relation to the gameplay condition, due to having to be bought, the stickers and the clothes are undeniable.[6]

We may conclude this treatment of finitude of games as played by observing that accounting for deniability, a property by which to categorise meaning in games as played, requires considering the game as played as finite. To assert whether a meaning is deniable or undeniable, it is necessary to consider it not only in relation to the gameplay condition, but in relation to the game as played unfolding *as a finitude delineated by the gameplay condition*. In other words: stickers in *NFSU* and clothes in *GTA:SA* are undeniable because *each time the player chooses* to spend her monies on clothes for the avatar or stickers for the car *she excludes other possibilities* to spend her monies. Among these possibilities are those that are beneficial for the continuation of the gameplay activity.

We may observe that requiring the player to spend a resource which she has to gather to acquire an item that in itself is trivial in relation to the player's capabilities to act in the game and thus in relation to the gameplay condition, games can ensure that even the "useless" items become experienced as significant within the finitude of the game as played. This implies that emotions about such items, despite the items' lack of relevance to gameplay, are emotions about the undeniable and thus are not out of bounds from the proposed perspective.

While we can only speculate on the kinds of pleasures the players derive from nice clothing they buy for the protagonist in *GTA:SA* and the stickers they attach to their cars in *NFSU*, there is still something we can plausibly say about the emotions

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[6]For an analysis considering the game as a system without a finitude, the in-game money itself might appear as having a key role in the functionality. From such a perspective, we might initially consider that it is the *in-game money* that is undeniable, not that which the money is used to purchase. However, the in-game money can become meaningful within the finitude of the game as played – and thus categorisable as deniable or undeniable – only when the player chooses to exchange it to something. While the money on the bank account might perhaps somehow influence the player's mental landscape, the materiality of the game does not treat a "rich" player in any different way it treats players with empty bank accounts. Thus, for the analysis of the game as played, proceeding with the materiality as its premise, it makes little sense to consider the in-game money as separate from the choices to spend it and the outcomes of such choices.

about such things. Purchasing an enhancement that is trivial to gameplay, such as a sticker in *NFSU*, can be described as meaningful *indulgence* within the finitude of the game as played, with its pleasantness subject to the principle of relative intensity.[7]

In subsection 4.2.2, when discussing how events become meaningful in reference to the gameplay condition, we briefly discussed the example of being able to clear uniformly coloured lines in *Tetris*, and suggested that in relation to gameplay condition, the emotion of someone capable of such an achievement can be described as pride. We are now in a position to revisit this example. No extra score is accumulated from this achievement – instead it takes extra effort to store the blocks of unsuitable colour aside. Each of those blocks stored aside could have been used to further the project of clearing lines of mixed colour, and, when stored aside, each block represents a "wasted opportunity" to ensure that playing would continue. Thus, we can describe the insistence to clear only uniformly coloured lines as an example of indulgent in-game conduct.

We have now outlined the experiential ontology and observed how it, when considered in relation to the finitude of a game as played, can assist in describing the experienced significance of aspects and behaviours, also of those which from the perspective of games as systems would appear as trivial. Players, however, engage not only in activities that could be considered trivial from the perspective of the functionality of the game artefact, but also in activities which that are perhaps best described as outright *hostile* towards the gameplay condition. With these activities, I refer to *transgressive play*, which I will discuss in the next subsection.

6.2.2 Transgressive play: *denying the undeniable*

Aarseth (2007b) introduces the concept of *transgressive play*, which builds on the idea of an *implied player*[8] as a "role made for the player by the game." More accurately,

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[7]This is not unlike the observation that some activities, perhaps including play of all kinds, can be described as an indulgences, and as such perhaps even 'forbidden fruits', within the finitude of a human life.

[8]We discussed this notion briefly in subsection 3.2.2 in relation to the difference between

Aarseth (2007b, 132) describes the implied player as

> a boundary imposed on the player-subject by the game, a limitation to the playing person's freedom of movement and choice.

Transgressive play, then, occurs when a "historical player" (a human being) plays in a way that does not fit into role of the implied player. We observed that play often transcends the game artefact. Does this mean that by engaging in transgressive play the player can undermine the game's attempts of contributing to the players' emotions? I will deal with this question in this subsection.

To ground the concept of transgressive play, Aarseth (2007b, 130) reiterates how Gadamer (2001 [1960], 106) understood players as subordinate to the structure of the game ("Whoever 'tries' is in fact the one who is tried."):

> By accepting to play, the player subjects herself to the rules and structures of the game and this defines the player: a person subjected to a rule-based system; no longer a complete, free subject with the power to decide what to do next.

I am sympathetic to the idea of the player's freedom being altered at the moment of beginning to play. For example, I cannot play a game of solitaire with a physically existing stack of cards without *knowingly* subjecting myself to the rules of the game and *agreeing* not to be distracted by any temptations I may face. Without the conscious decision of doing so, which involves knowing the rules of the game and being capable of the necessary behaviours, the stack of cards remains yet another feature in the contingency of the world. However, the nature of the event of 'subjecting oneself to the rules' of the game becomes somewhat ambiguous if we consider it in the context of single-player computer games. Juul (2003, 43), writing about the relation between traditional games and computer games, writes that:

> while computer games are just as rule-based as other games, they modify the classic game model in that it is now the computer that upholds the rules. This adds a lot of flexibility to computer games, allowing for much more complex rules; it frees the player(s) from having to enforce the rules, and it allows for games where the player does not know the rules from the outset.

third-person and first-person perspectives toward gameplay.

The 'flexibility' of computer games is also in the requirements they pose for their players. Playing without knowing the rules from the outset amounts to proceeding by trial and error. Computer games can be played by, metaphorically speaking, banging one's head against the wall until a hole appears where previously was a wall. In some cases this qualifies also as a literal description: for example, while in *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992) many of the doors to secret rooms containing treasures and weapons are hidden behind rugs hanging on the wall, there does not seem to be any general rule by understanding which the player could fathom out the locations of hidden doors, *e.g.* that underneath all rugs with a particular kind of image, or underneath all rugs with a particular kind of image situated next to a chandelier, etc, there would always be a door. Thus, a viable method of finding hidden doors is to hold down the key used to open doors (space bar) while moving the camera/weapon perspective (the FPS avatar) along the walls in a 45 degrees' angle.

Referring to how Suits (2005) discusses mountain climbing as a game, Woods (2007, 6) suggests that "single player digital games constitute exceptionally effective mountains". Paraphrasing Huhtamo (2005), Woods (2007, 8) observes that

> solitaire arcade games operate as an automated skill-tester, over which a player may attempt to achieve a level of mastery through repetition.

The computer game as an automated skill-tester or an artificial mountain is patient, and never, with the exception of games with timers, gets tired of, what the player might perceive as teaching her the rules. Thus, with patience and perseverance the player can to a large extent compensate for and perhaps even substitute the lack of prior knowledge of the game's genre or rules.

Thus, if we want to hold that the event of 'subjecting oneself to the rules' happens always when beginning to play a computer game, we cannot take it as an event that involves pausing, reading the fine print, and self-reflecting, because such a procedure does not necessarily characterise the beginning of computer game play.

Instead of taking 'subjecting oneself to the rules' as a description of the player's conscious choice or a description of events from the first-person perspective, it must

be taken as an *external* description of what happens when player enters a game, seen from the scientific third-person perspective: by entering the game, the player enters a condition that forces him to abide to the rules, even though she might not be aware of them. Due to the involvement of the game artefact that takes care of enforcing the rules by way of its materiality, being aware of the rules of the game is not necessary in order to engage in gameplay as it has been defined here.

This is not unlike how one can become a stowaway on public transport by not paying a correct fare and be punished with a control fee even if one honestly thought one had paid enough. We can describe the passenger 'subjecting herself to the fare system', without her being aware of the correct fare to be paid[9], but we cannot assume this to describe the kind of mental processing that took place when the passenger entered the vehicle.

Thus, perhaps the phrasing should be revised – instead of placing the player (and the stowaway) in an active role, we might speak of the player being subjected to the rules. However, it is perfectly possible that through the procedure of trial and error, the player never achieves an understanding of any regularities in the behaviour of the game artefact to justify the term *rules*. (Consider for example the locations of hidden doors in *Wolfenstein 3D* we discussed.) The term *condition* seems to capture that against which the player can act in a more plausible manner than the term *rules*. Instead of speaking of rules, we might frame the event of beginning to play as the player being subjected to the condition of the game. Such a condition – that which the player needs to do and to acknowledge in order to remain a player – we already know as the gameplay condition. Thus, the player is *being subjected to the gameplay condition*. This formulation, which does not land the player the

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[9]In the contract law of (at least) United Kingdom, similar situations are known as a *ticket cases*. In Wikipedia (2009), they are described as "standing for the proposition that if you are handed a ticket or another document with terms, and you retain the ticket or document, then you are bound by those terms. Whether you have read the terms or not is irrelevant, and in a sense, using the ticket is analogous to signing the document." In our example of the stowaway, the ticket describes the area within which one can travel with the fare paid and in comparison "beginning to play the game" corresponds to being handed a ticket.

responsibility of knowing the rules, seems to be in concert with the observation of Giddings and Kennedy (2008, 30), that "*mastery* is only one pleasure among many" pleasures in computer game play.

If we try to frame the idea of transgressive play in relation to our experiential ontology, the distinction between *deniable* and *undeniable* features, it appears as *denying the undeniable and getting away with it.* However, this formulation is paradoxical: as we acknowledge that 'getting away with it' is possible, we would have to acknowledge that what we thought of as undeniable is in fact deniable. Should we try to avoid the paradox by defining transgressive play as play that succeeds in altering the gameplay condition itself, or should we content ourselves with its paradoxical nature and understand transgressive play as a *symbolic* gesture? I will explore these options in the following.

Perhaps we could postulate the category of "transgressive play" for activities that are characterised by consequentially transforming the gameplay condition itself. Consider for example being elevated to the status of a wizard in a multi-user dungeon. Depending on the design of the particular MUD, this can happen once the player has achieved a high enough level or accumulated enough score – both processes that can take years to complete. Also the role of a wizard depends on the design of the MUD, but in general it can be approximated as something in-between an administrator and a normal player. In his book *An Introduction to MUD*, Howard (1985, chapter 8) observes of becoming a wizard, that:

> It's not fair to say the game actually changes, it's still the same MUD, it's just that once you're a wiz it takes on a new perspective. If MUD were an ordinary adventure, you could expect at this point some kind of 'endgame', and that would be it. But MUD is not an ordinary adventure, and reaching wiz is where the fun really begins! When you're a wiz, you have power. You can do virtually anything. A forbidding array of commands lies at your fingertips. These are so virulent that it's easy to crash the game if you're not careful.

Examples of this behaviour are somewhat hard to find within contemporary single-player games, but achieving a "god mode" after completing a game would be one such example.

If the gameplay condition is used as a yardstick for defining transgressive play, the materiality of the game artefact appears as the source for evidence for claims considering what is transgression and what is not. This warrants accounting for 'bugs', 'glitches' or 'exploits' and their relation to gameplay condition, and thus finding out if making use of them amounts to transgressive play. In section 4.1.4, when discussing the relationship between materiality of a game and the "transmedial game" the materiality can allegedly be described as manifesting, we observed that bugs and glitches should not be elevated onto a special status. Consalvo (2007, 85) observes that:

> The rules of a videogame are contained within the game itself, in the game code. The game engine contains the rules that state what characters (and thus players) can and cannot do: they can go through certain doors, but not others[....] All of these things are structured into the code of the game itself, and thus the game embodies the rules, *is* the rules, that the player must confront.

Thus, if the computer "game itself" has a bug or an 'exploit', those who want to explain computer games with rules, must adjust their explanations to account for such rules. Consalvo (2007, 115) defines exploits as

> "found" actions or items that accelerate or improve a player's skills, actions, or abilities in some way the designer did not originally intend, yet in a manner that does not actively change code or involve deceiving others.

While we already in subsection 4.1.3 observed that attempting to solve the materiality's ambiguities by referring to the designers' intentions is problematic, what we can take from Consalvo (2007) is the "foundedness" of exploits; that they are a features in the game's materiality upon which the players can stumble. Thus, from the perspective that takes its starting point in games' *existence* rather than in their *essence*, we could argue that making use of something that might be judged as a 'bug' or an 'exploit' is *not* transgressive play, as the 'bugs' are part of the materiality that constitutes the gameplay condition according to which the players' facticities are extended. Making use of what is colloquially known as "bugs" and "exploits" is not transgression, but fits flawlessly in the description of the player 'making herself'

(*cf.* Sartre 2003 [1943], 82) against her facticity extended by the game artefact, or 'realising her existence' (*cf.* Verbeek 2005, 38) against the game artefact. This argument can be applied also to intentional cheating by for example using cheat codes found from a webpage: the possibilities for doing so are coded into the game artefacts, and, at least in theory, such cheats can be discovered with trial and error. Thus, even intentional cheating using pre-defined cheat codes does not amount to altering the gameplay condition.

However, there is a fine line to be trodden: if cheating is *not* transgressive play, what about patching, modding, and hacking the game artefact itself: the practice characterised by the emblematic POKE and PEEK commands used to tweak games on Commodore 64 platform? Allow us to approach this issue with the notion of a spoil-sport.

Huizinga (1998 [1938], 11) distinguishes between a spoil-sport and a cheater. Whereas the cheater "pretends to be playing the game",

> the player who trespasses against the rules or ignores them is a "spoil-sport"
> [...] [T]he spoil-sport shatters the play-world itself. By withdrawing from the
> game he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had
> temporarily shut himself with the others.

Like Consalvo (2007, 85), points out, in the context of computer games, the game artefact *is* the rules. Thus trespassing the rules is possible only by treating the materiality not as a *game* artefact but as a constellation of data, perhaps a 'software artefact', which is only possible by withdrawing from the game being played.

As a consequence of peeking and poking or hacking and modding the game artefact, one can argue, that its materiality is in fact transformed. Engaging in such practices implies "revealing the relativity and fragility of the play-world": acknowledging that there is something *beyond* the gameplay condition in the game artefact: code, assets, memory registers and such things, of which a player, no matter how well versed with the game, does not necessarily know anything about.

We have already observed that the game artefact and the player are not equal partners in deciding on the nature of their relationship: it is not in the *player's*

powers to alter the gameplay condition. However, the player is not like the stowaway who must, facing the possibility for being charged in legal court for resisting arrest, content herself with being subjected to the public transport fare system at the event of being fined. We observed that while the player cannot necessarily alter the qualitative texture of the gameplay condition, it is perfectly well in her powers to rid herself from the burden of the gameplay condition at any moment: the player can quit the game and 'fall back' on the human condition. This amounts to resigning from the hybrid intentionality relationship by stopping nourishing it, thus allowing the extension of her facticity to close itself. In order to alter the gameplay condition, the player must first re-assume the position of a non-player, of someone who knows *more* about the materiality than how it manifests the gameplay condition, to whom we might refer colloquially as a *hacker*.

The important watershed considering what is transgression and what is not is between rebeling against the *materiality as it imposes the gameplay condition* and rebeling against the *materiality beyond the gameplay condition*. The latter kind of activity is certainly transgressive, but it is perhaps better conceptualised as something other than gameplay. Perhaps it amounts to *playing with* the materiality of the game artefact. In other words: transgressing the gameplay condition requires the player to transcend the gameplay condition into the bare non-playable materiality of the game artefact, which requires giving up the gameplay condition.

Interesting examples of what we might from the proposed perspective call cheating are the devices which can be used to alter the behaviour of games on various platforms. One device of this kind is the *Action Replay* module, introduced in early 1980s for the Commodore 64 platform. These devices, when attached to the computer's extension bus, can be used to access and alter the contents of the computer's memory registers directly on the fly, as the game is being played. With a press of a button on a controller attached to the module, the player can perform what corresponds to POKE and PEEK *while* playing is still going on. On modern computer platforms capable

of multitasking, such actions are possible also without a purpose-built device and can be performed with programs that sit in the background.

We may conclude that from the premise that the materiality dictates the conditions for gameplay, transgressive play with game artefacts appears as a paradox. Transgressing the gameplay condition requires considering the game artefact as existing *beyond* the gameplay condition, with the help of software or hardware tools. Therefore, it is sensible to frame transgressive play primarily through the ramifications it has within the subjective experience of the player (*cf.* play as an *attitude*) instead of through its implications for the behaviour of the game artefact (*cf.* play as an *activity*). Then, like Aarseth (2007b, 132) suggests, it appears as

> a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game, a (perhaps illusory) way for the played subjects to regain their sense of identity and uniqueness through the mechanisms of the game itself.

In relation to our experiential ontology, this means that either *denying the undeniable* or *getting away with it* is actually not possible and did not happen, but the player gives in to the belief that it happened for the sake of subjective satisfaction.

6.2.3   Emotions about the deniable and undeniable

At first it may seem that we can grasp relatively little about how game content will be experienced, let alone about the players' emotions, without engaging in ethnographic, social or psychological research.[10] However, it is due to the *limitations* which *a priori* define the player's fundamental situation in the game, and to our assumption that players, *qua* players, desire to play, that there is still something to say about players' experiences without engaging in any sort of speculation and without having to resort to empirical-scientific methodologies. Hassenzahl (2004, 47) observes that

> emotions happen in context. They are volatile and ephemeral, and products alone cannot guarantee an emotion.

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[10]This is the standard "all experience is subjective" position, which Law et al. (2009) report as shared by most of the 275 user experience scientists they surveyed.

Hassenzahl's preferred solution for approaching the volatility of emotions is to assume people's "general needs" as a an anchor for design. Klastrup (2008, 145) suggests that from the subjectivity of the experience follows that

> game designers, or 'experience designers,' cannot design a specific experience that everybody using their system will have. They can, however, provide a framework of experience intended to provide a certain set of experiences.

We may observe that a project of approaching subjective experience in terms of its general or "objective" constituents, implying that emotions have certain designable contributors (*cf.* Hassenzahl 2004, 47), has established track-record. Our simple experiential ontology of the contents of games as played, and the notion of gameplay condition that precedes it, shed light on the issue of how game artefacts can contribute to their players' emotions.

We can fairly assume that undeniable game content becomes experienced as an object of the players' emotions subject to the principle of relative intensity. With game content, I do not refer to discrete units, but also to the ways in which meaning is interwoven within the game, encompassing also that to which we could refer as the *ideology* of a particular game. Frasca (2007, 123) observes that

> The Sims's ideology is conveyed through the playworld[11], by showing visual models of racially diverse groups of people living in U.S. suburban homes with a plethora of consumer objects. Additionally, it is also conveyed through its mechanics, notable its game verbs. As we have seen when it comes to sexuality, the player is allowed to fall in love with X, as long as X is human and an adult. That means that there is no sex with animals, plants or inanimate objects. There is no sex with minors. But players can love anybody else, regardless of gender, age, race, body build or number of polygons.

Paraphrasing Juul (2005b), Frasca (2007, 100) observes that the ideology of a game "is a negotiation between the player's interpretation and the game's materiality". We already know that the player is often the underdog in such negotiations. As falling in love is necessary to expand the range of possibilities available in *The Sims* by adopting babies, the player, subject to the principle of relative intensity, cannot deny the ideology Frasca (2007, 123) describes in *The Sims*.

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[11]Frasca (2007, 92-113) understands this term as encompassing a game's environment and objects

Solomon (1977) uses the notion of "ideology of an emotion" to refer to the matrix of beliefs and desires guiding the constitution of the object of the emotion. We can assume that, to the extent the two notions of ideologies, *ideology of the game* and *ideology of the player's emotions* cover same empirical territory, the ideology of the game, if implied by undeniable game content, becomes adopted in the ideologies of players' emotions, again subject to the principle of relative intensity. If falling in love in *The Sims* did not have consequences it has, *i.e.* if it did not open up new possibilities to act, and was *deniable*, we could not plausibly argue that it becomes adopted within ideologies of emotions.

However, it is important to note that ideologies of the player's emotions should not be confused with players' ideologies. Sicart (2009, 17) observes that:

> The player is a moral user capable of reflecting ethically about her presence in the game, and aware of how that experience configures her values both inside the game world and in relation to the world outside the game.

The argument that undeniable ideologies become ideologies of players' emotions cannot be extended to include the *players' ideologies*, as, like we have observed in several passages in this dissertation, the player's ability to quit the game at will, for example after finding oneself in a morally controversial situation, supposedly undermines the game's attempts persuade the player to have emotions.

The threat of the player retreating from the gameplay condition that looms over the game's attempt to contribute to the player's emotions can never be escaped. However, game content that is *undeniable* due to its relevance to the *gameplay condition* is the strongest of the means by which the single-player game artefact can transform our desire to play into beliefs concerning aspects of the player's facticity extended by the game artefact. These beliefs, boosted by the player's idiosyncratic psychosocial biography, may surface as emotions whose intensity is relative to player's desire to play.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

In this thesis I have looked at the relationship between materiality and experience in solitary computer game play. I have focused on the player's experience of single-player computer games, from the perspective of emotions in these experiences. Drawing on what might be approximated as a cognitive-rational theory of emotions, I have conceptualised emotion in terms of its *experienced significance* and suggested that emotions are essential components of the ways in which humans make sense of the world, and as such always already involved in computer game play. While emotions are directed at particular details in the world, they cannot be reduced to simple subject-object relationships. This is because the object of every emotion is ultimately the world in which the subject exists. Thus, emotions can, from the cognitive-phenomenological perspective, be described roughly as *interpretations of the world*. Even though the idiosyncratic emotional experiences of individuals are shaped by the individuals' personal psychosocial biography, emotions can be understood as part of our evolutionary heritage, thus sharing certain experiential structures across individuals.

Building on these observations, I have looked at how computer games contribute to being experienced as coherent realms of meaning, and suggested a mode of description which allows articulating how the materialities of computer games, by promoting and

enforcing certain interpretations and actions, contribute to the experiences of those desiring to play. I have articulated *the gameplay condition* as an invariant structure within the phenomenology of solitary computer game play, shaping the player's experience and the emotions it involves. From the overlap of the player's desire to play and the gameplay condition, I have derived *the principle of relative intensity*, a reductive approximation of the inexhaustible spectrum of the ways in which the player can care about aspects of the game world, the *conduct of emotional investment*, a description of the process of caring about individual features of game content, and the distinction between *deniable* and *undeniable* game content, an experiential ontology outlining the edges of inter-subjective plausibility of the suggested argument.

Along my way to these observations, I made several remarks and arguments that I find worth summarizing.

I observed that while many emotions in play seem irrational, paradoxical, and misguided if described against *the human condition*, they make perfect sense in the *world of the game*. Driven by this intuitive claim, I proceeded to fathom how we could plausibly describe such "worlds". I began this search by analysing how the notions of *play* and *game* are used in the contemporary literature. I suggested that play can be identified as both an *activity* and an *attitude*. I also observed that while the notion of *game* can be used for many purposes as a signifying shorthand that facilitates meaningful exchange of ideas, in the context of this study it is more feasible to define game as *that which is being played*. I observed that to understand emotions in play in terms of their experienced significance, it is necessary to give a similar treatment also to the phenomenon of computer game play.

I observed that accounting for the experienced significance of in-game events, objects, encounters, and states of affairs, necessitated adopting a *first-person perspective*: giving up the scientific attitude implied in objective ontology and postulating the *object of study as an ontological hybrid* incorporating material, technological, processual, and subjective qualities. While we can identify shades of this perspective

in the best practices of computer game studies, I suggested that the first-person perspective postulated in this dissertation can be described as distinct from the two dominant perspectives within the field of game studies: focusing on *players* and focusing on the *game*. I suggested that the difference between third-person and first-person perspectives toward computer game play resembles the difference between *natural attitude* and *phenomenological attitude* as it has been described in phenomenological literature.

I suggested that game studies that proceeds from the scientific third-person perspective can be characterised as *studying a game by playing it* while the perspective I employed in this dissertation, emphasizing a game's existence over its essence, can be described as *studying a game as played*. This postulation seems feasible given the principle of intentionality, that it feasible only to a very limited extent to study the subject without her world and vice versa. I observed that while game studies, which proceeds from the third-person perspective, can concern itself with questions such as what games are or what do games consist of, the first-person perspective makes it necessary to bracket such questions and give their place to questions concerning *how games appear in the experience of play* and *what games appear as consisting of.*

When discussing the role of bugs and glitches found in a game artefact's materiality, I identified three distinct biases which can creep into an argument concerning a particular game especially if the argument does not take the materiality of the game artefact as its premise. I observed that these biases can, each in their own ways, lead to labeling certain features of the game artefact as 'bugs' or flaws. While perhaps an unlimited number of such biases could be described, the three biases identified as avoidable from the proposed perspective illustrate the merit of analysis that proceeds from the first-person perspective toward the materiality of the game artefact as it appears as played.

Acknowledging the methodological and epistemological limitations, I suggested that from the proposed perspective it is possible to plausibly address the *conditions*

for a player's experience instead of any particular idiosyncratic experience. Assuming that the player desires to play *qua* being a player, I set out to look for experiential structures of emotions in play within the realm of what is given in the experience of play. I observed that the paradigms of games as *processual* and *transmedial* have to be complemented with an understanding of the game's materiality, to which the ontological hybridity of the object of study is grounded. This grounding contributes to inter-subjective plausibility by preventing the perspective from turning inwards into the realm of introspection, and assists in avoiding bias when constituting the object of study.

Looking at the implications of computer games' materialities, I distinguished between *playing a game* and *playing with a game*, thus adding to the working definition of game as *that which is being played* postulated earlier. Focusing on *playing a game*, articulated in a more convenient form as gameplay, I suggested that what from third-person perspective appears as for example *rules* and *goals*, can be described from the player's perspective as the *gameplay condition*.

I observed that being a *computer* game is not a requirement for something to impose a gameplay condition on its player, and proceeded to identify computer games as *technological artefacts*, which situate within *hybrid intentionality relationships* with their players, allowing modalities of intentionality which could not be possible without the involvement of the game artefact. I observed that what distinguishes *game artefacts* from other technological artefacts experienced within hybrid intentionality relationships is that they *regulate the qualitative spectrum of hybrid intentionality* and *require the player to nourish the relationship*. When articulating that into what the hybrid intentionality is directed, I revisited the intuitive claim concerning game worlds, and proceeded to unpack it.

Looking at how the notion of "game world" is used in the contemporary literature, I observed a ramification of the disparities between third-person and first-person perspectives in the form of discussion concerning the spatiality of computer games.

I observed that from the acknowledgement that computer games are *about space*, it does not automatically follow that the experiences of play could be described as experiences of *being in the space the game is about*. I identified spatiality as one of the many features in games that are subjected to the principles of gameplay, which we can grasp with the notion of the gameplay condition.

I observed that from the first-person perspective, it makes sense to understand the "computer game world" as an interactive conceptual metaphor, but this amounted only to providing a legitimate frame for the original intuitive assumption. Returning to the analysis of the materiality of computer game artefacts, this time from the point of view of *freedom*, *responsibility* and *facticity*, I described a computer game as extending the range of concrete details against which its human player can exercise her project of freedom – *i.e.* as extending the player's facticity. I identified the extension of player's facticity as the the target of the hybrid intentionality relationship. This amounted to unpacking the game world metaphor. Finally, looking at how, exactly, computer games are experienced as worlds, I identified the principle of relative intensity, by building on which I articulated the conduct of emotional investment and derived the experiential ontology categorising the contents of games as played.

7.1   Future perspectives

In this dissertation I have discussed games with only one player and content that is fixed before the player sets out to play. I have already pointed out that the gameplay condition in multiplayer games is most likely overridden by social norms that govern the playing situation, which, in the case of multiplayer games is admittedly characterised by processual qualities. However, on a path yet to be explored are games whose *materiality* could be characterised as processual and in the state of becoming. While procedural generation of assets such as landscape features implemented in contemporary games does not seem to challenge the theory presented

here, games whose gameplay condition evolves according to player's behaviour is certainly something that warrants a closer look.

Social single-player games, or 'massively single-player games', such as those implemented within social networking websites, are also an area that deserves attention. With such games, I refer to games whose players cannot encounter each other directly in situations governed by the gameplay condition but share aspects of the game world by for example exchanging items and messages, thus affecting each others' playings. In this kind of games, of which *Farm Town* (2009) is an example, the gameplay condition would appear in a new light as the social and ethical implications of its transgressions would no longer be trivial.

7.1.1 On single-player game artefact studies

The status of "single-player computer games" as games is a recurrent theme throughout the dissertation. It must be stressed once again that perhaps the things we are accustomed to call "single-player computer games" are in fact better conceptualised without taking the notion of *game* as the primary reference.

Maybe the connections the single-player game artefacts have with traditional *games* – whose players have to know about their rules and whose materialities are always subordinate to reappropriation within social exchanges – are *accidental*. Maybe single-player computer games have evolved far enough to justify complementing concepts such as rules, winning and losing with concepts that are better suited for addressing the technological materiality of single-player game artefacts.

When the contemporary tradition of (computer) game studies was conceived, the notion of *theoretical imperialism* (*cf.* Aarseth 1997, 18, Pearce 2002, 144) was used as referring to the assumption that one thing is to be studied with methods and concepts that are crafted for the purpose of studying another thing. Then, "one thing" were games and "another thing" were narratives. Based on observing in this dissertation how the materialities of game artefacts appear as distinctively different

from that which facilitates the playings of traditional games, I cannot rule out the possibility that it is necessary to revisit the argument of "theoretical imperialism" to see how the places of "one thing" and "another thing" could be filled today.

7.1.2 Aesthetics of computer games as played

Even though in this dissertation very little is done to help articulating whether a game is "good" or "bad", one could argue that the nature of the work done in this dissertation belongs to the realm of aesthetics, especially if aesthetics is understood as an attempt to articulate the grounds on which subjective value judgements can be made.

The gameplay condition, the principle of relative intensity, emotional investment, and the experiential ontology are all means to distinguish the inter-subjective from the idiosyncratic and articulate the relationship between the two, thus assisting one in unpacking subjective value judgements to a language shared across individuals.

With the notion of *game artefact* I intended to disconnect the empirical scope of this argument from its accidental limitations originating in the association with *computer* games. However, equally interesting would be to break up the connection with what we know as *games per se* and explore what other kinds of technological artefacts impose a gameplay condition on their users. Participatory media art, as a practice that produces playful technological artefacts that often involve their audiences in game-like processes, would be an interesting category of objects of study from the suggested perspective.

7.1.3 Simulating a (speculative) condition

Computer games are good at representing processes. However, when doing so, they always represent the process from particular location, and model a particular *condition* to their player. For example, some football games represent the process of football as seen from the location of the of the human kicking the ball. Football

manager games take an alternate angle, and look at the process of football from the perspective of the team's manager, whose position is distinctively different from the player on the field.

This idea of representing a process, choosing one or more vantage points and accordingly modeling the conditions for the players to step in is an interesting possibility for both analytic and artistic purposes, for example in the context of *documentary games*. In the spirit of *speculative realism*, the processes represented would not necessarily have to involve humans, and the condition modelled as the gameplay condition would not have to be in any way similar to the human condition. For example, while it is an *inapprehensible fact of our condition* that we are not bats, perhaps by observing the processes in which *bats* are involved, simulating them, and modeling an entry point into them, we could allow ourselves to *play at being a bat*, and find out, by means of speculation, *what it's like (for a human) to be a bat*.

Chapter 8

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