PLAYING AGAINST THE GRAIN

RHETORICS OF COUNTERPLAY IN CONSOLE BASED FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER VIDEOGAMES

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Alan Frederick Meades

School of Arts, Brunel University

February 2013

ABSTRACT

Counterplay is a way of playing digital games that opposes the *encoded algorithms* that define their appropriate use and interaction. Counterplay is often manifested within the social arena as practices such as the creation of incendiary user generated content, grief-play, cheating, glitching, modding, and hacking. It is deemed damaging to normative play values, to the experience of play, and detrimental to the viability of videogames as mainstream entertainment products. Counterplay is often framed through the rhetoric of *transgression as pathogen*, as a hostile, infectious, threatening act. Those found conducting it are subject to a range of punishments ranging from expulsion from videogames to criminal conviction.

Despite the steps taken to manage counterplay, it occurs frequently within contemporary videogames causing significant disruption to play and necessitating costly remedy. This thesis argues that counterplay should be understood as a practice with its own pleasures and justifying rhetorics that problematise the rhetoric of pathogen and attenuate the threat of penalty.

Despite the social and economic significance of counterplay upon contemporary videogames, relatively little is known of the practices conducted by counterplayers, their motivations, or the rhetorics that they deploy to justify and contextualise their actions. Through the use of ethnographic approaches, including interview and participant observation, alongside the identification and application of five popular rhetorics of transgression, this study aims to expose the meanings and complexities of contemporary counterplay. It examines counterplayer testimonies that articulate the practices and rhetorics underpinning the creation of incendiary user generated content, grief play, glitching, modding, and hacking on the *Xbox 360* platform in particular. This study represents a contribution to the field of game studies in an area so far under-researched, offering voice to a previously silent demographic, that of counterplayers. In focussing upon their practices, communities and motivations, this study challenges the framing of counterplay as reductively oppositional or hostile. Instead, counterplay is shown to be an act of seduction, a means of articulating identity, status and recognition, as an expression of hacker ideology, and as a re-engagement with the carnivalesque. These meanings, in addition to the rhetoric of pathogen, offer an expanded image of counterplay and the counterplayer that highlights the significance of counterplay within the context of contemporary popular and youth culture.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to friends, family and colleagues who helped make this research possible. I am incredibly grateful for the assured and confident supervision provided by Professor Tanya Krzywinska who managed the tricky task of giving me sufficient space to conduct my research while remaining a source of critical clarity. In addition, I am indebted to Professor Geoff King as my second supervisor, and the games research community at Brunel University, who have always been willing to offer advice and perspective. In addition to the financial support that I received I owe many thanks to my supportive colleagues at Canterbury Christ Church University, who each contributed to a work and research culture that encouraged me to follow my curiosity. I would like to especially thank Professor David Bradshaw, Dr. Karen Shepherdson and Dr. Andy Birtwistle for continually seeing the potential in my work. James, Ollie, Ryan, Nick, Lewis, Ben, Jed, thank you. I owe a deep gratitude to the hundreds of gamers that I played alongside and against, and for the individuals who had the patience to show me what they do, how to do it, and explain why. It would be improper to name you directly but this research simply would not have been possible without you. for what it's worth I'd take an arrow to the knee for any of you!

My period of study was funded by Canterbury Christ Church University's Staff Development programme and the completion of the thesis was enabled through a study-leave award from the Department of Media, Art and Design.

My greatest gratitude, and debt, is owed to my family. To Rachel, Elsie and Rose, I owe you everything. Elsie and Rose, who were born after I had started this PhD, this is for you.
Yes, I can come out and play now.

CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

While tens of millions of gamers play multiplayer games on the *Xbox 360* each day, enjoying their time spent playing by the rules of the games and in observance of the contractual terms of service and legal frameworks that regulate play, there are many who decide to play against the grain, seen as playing in opposition to and in violation of rules, contracts and even copyright law. Some scholars have suggested that this *counterplay* constitutes around three percent of all multiplayer interactions (Foo and Koivisto, 2004a, p.1; Smith, 2006, p.199). With an *Xbox Live* (*XBL*) population of 40 million gamers (Microsoft Corporation, 2012), this implies that 1.2 million individuals are conducting counterplay in various forms. While scholars such as T.L. Taylor (2007), and Mia Consalvo (2007) have called for counterplay activities such as cheating or griefing to be understood as situated and contextual modes of play that are employed by many players. When counterplay is observed it is often framed in terms of identity and may lead to ostracism, banning, and even legal censure. As videogames are valuable economic products, the implications of counterplay are moving from an understanding of *merely* playing against the rules, to an act of undermining and damaging a highly lucrative and commercially sensitive entertainment product, and potentially altering and ruining the leisure experiences of millions of others around the globe. Labelled as cheaters, griefers, modders, or hackers, and banned, ejected, or subject to legal censure these *counterplayers* are removed from the game ecosystem, creating a moral binary, a conceptual dualism between *good players* and *bad players.*

However, this approach is reductive in the extreme. It assumes (without basis) that these counterplayers *only* play in this manner, as opposed to being players who periodically do so. Potentially it may be the case that the majority of players periodically engage in counterplay, but as of yet this is undetermined. What this binary approach does offer is an efficient way of determining violation and punishing it accordingly, but this is an approach that lacks the sophistication of reading that is applied to transgressive acts in ordinary life. While these too are subject to censure and punishment, they are framed with a number of rhetorics – such as acts of resistance, or markers of subcultural identity – that in turn afford an understanding of transgression and violation that enables its management instead of only punishment.

Counterplay is addressed in this way as it emanates *symbolic challenge* to the authority and logic of the game, its commercial structure and the normative meaning(s) attributed to its play. This symbolic challenge is the true heart of counterplay, rather than the specifics of its manifestation, and it is these symbolic challenges that resonate with and articulate *rhetoric.* Rhetoric is the ways in which we each project a rational and persuasive view of the world in the explanations that we offer – assigning culpability,

innocence, authority, and hierarchy through which the distribution of power flows (therefore this study also is a rhetoric).

The perspectives that I uncover expose counterplay as more complex than offensive acts of insubordination (although there is certainly a rhetoric that would suggest otherwise), holding the potential to challenge the very form, meanings and affordances of the videogame medium, and its structures of production and consumption. In doing so, counterplay erodes the distinctions between game, player, gameplay, producer and consumer, creating a ludic ambiguity that captures a particular moment in time of the medium's evolution.

This study offers a *'media microecology'* within the realm of counterplay, as Ian Bogost suggests 'digging deep into one dark, unexplored corner of a media ecosystem, like an ecologist digs deep into the natural one' (Bogost 2011, p.7). In doing so I offer a series of *images* (to borrow Humphrey Jennings' terminology), or vignettes, exploring the manifestation, the culture of production, and the meanings attributed to a particular kind of counterplay form (Jennings, 2012/1985). This is an attempt to capture the testimonies of counterplayers, and, as a corollary, to offer insight into the seduction and purposes that the counter holds.

This is not intended as a comprehensive text – the shifting nature of counterplay practices and their myriad differences in manifestation would make such an exercise impossible – but is presented as an authoritative and representative series of images through which patterns and similarities may resonate.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to celebrate the *creativity of counterplay* and the cultures that surround it, nor to *canonize counterplay* or elevate the status of the various forms I explore. Instead I am concerned with the attitudes and ideals of counterplayers and the ways in which counterplay acts are framed, described and understood – what meanings and significance counterplayers place upon this activity and what rhetorics prevail in differing contexts.

It is my assertion that the current approach to the management of counterplay is inadequate, and that the creation of a more nuanced or sophisticated mode of managing counterplay is determinant of a greater understanding of the rhetorics that motivate and frame the counterplay act. Put simply, the aim of this research is to answer three questions in order to build a better understanding of the counterplay act:

What is the counterplayer doing?
How is the counterplayer doing it?
Why is the counterplayer doing it?

I explore the answers to these apparently simple questions by adopting participant observation and ethnographic approaches to counterplay, interacting with more than fifty counterplayers over a four-year period. This study exposes the often contradictory motivations and rhetorical meanings of counterplay. Ultimately, it will present counterplay as not simply an act intended to undermine and damage videogames

as commercial products and systems, but often as paradoxical manifestations of the deep love that these players hold for the videogames themselves. Instead of wishing to destroy, counterplayers often wish to become closer to the texts and products that they are seduced by.

This study constitutes an original and significant *contribution* to the game studies field in the following ways:

1. it documents a set of practices on the *Xbox 360* platform that have received little, if any scholarly attention despite the large numbers of players engaged within these ludic contexts. These practices include: *the creation of incendiary user-generated-content, grief-play, glitching, illicit modding, console hardware hacking, and illicit software development*;
2. it provides testimonies of a number of counterplayers engaged in the full-scope of counterplay forms, creating a historical record and captures the voice of a set of contemporary activities;
3. it attempts to reconcile counterplay into a continuum of transgressive activity, connecting lines of study from the humanities, social sciences and game-studies;
4. it exposes the often contradictory motivations of counterplayers, challenging the assumption that it is conducted to damage a videogame or simply to increase progression within a game.

It is hoped that this study will assist with the reconfiguration of our understanding of the counterplayer and lead to the creation of more graduated and effective forms of its management within games development and operation.

The thesis is presented in five sections:
Section one frames the study:

- CHAPTER ONE: GAME STUDIES AND COUNTERPLAY, explores the concept of counterplay tracing its development and resonance throughout the existing game-studies literature. Including definitions of cheating, grief-play, player productivity, and the rule-based, contractual, and legal contexts of counterplay.
- CHAPTER TWO: RHETORICS OF COUNTERPLAY, develops the concept of rhetoric in framing transgressive activities such as counterplay, it then builds upon the notion of *transgression*, and develops five popular rhetorics of transgression that in turn are used as critical lenses throughout the study.

Section two presents a pilot and initial case study of grief-play:

- CHAPTER THREE: METHOD AND APPROACH, presents the method and approach to the case studies, and the scope of the study more generally.
- CHAPTER FOUR: INCENDIARY USER GENERATED CONTENT, is a pilot case study that explores the creation and contexts of incendiary User Generated Content (henceforth UGC).

- REFLECTION ONE: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF INCENDIARY UGC, explores the inadequacy of purely etic approaches to counterplay and the relationship between etic and emic approaches more generally[1].
- CHAPTER FIVE: CONFESSIONS OF A GRIEFER, explores the practice of grief-play and trolling on the *PlayStation 3* game *Metal Gear Online* (*MGO*), through the testimony of a renowned griefer known as Ocelot.
- REFLECTION TWO: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF GRIEF-PLAY, attempts to reconnect the outcomes of the grief-play chapter to the five rhetorics of transgression.

Section three focuses upon the counterplay activity of glitching:

- CHAPTER SIX: GLITCHING COMMUNITIES, explores two established glitching communities – chaoticPERFECTION and mapMonkeys, through close reading and textual analysis.
- CHAPTER SEVEN: GLITCHING PRACTICE, details the process of glitching a game and documenting a glitch through participant observation.
- CHAPTER EIGHT: A TYPOLOGY OF GLITCHES, offers an illustrated typology of the more than 3,500 glitching videos found upon the mapMonkeys, and chaoticPERFECTION databases. This is presented not only to illustrate the range of activity and purposes that glitching enables but to offer a glitching vocabulary to allow further analysis.
- CHAPTER NINE: GLITCHER MOTIVATIONS, explores the testimonies of glitchers reasons for engaging in the counterplay activity.
- REFLECTION THREE: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF GLITCHING, attempts to reconnect the outcomes of section three to five rhetorics of transgression.

Section four consists focuses upon hardware hacking and software modding:

- CHAPTER TEN: HACKING THE *XBOX 360*, introduces the *Xbox 360 JTAG*, *RGH* and *Flashed Console* hacks, including their origins, the business structures that have developed around their deployment and sale, and their subsequent utilisation for the creation of modified games and profit making.
- CHAPTER ELEVEN: MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK, extends the exploration of modified games into the operation of *Call of Duty* franchise (Activision, 2003-current) 10^{th} *Prestige lobbies* and *infection lobbies* and their various uses.
- CHAPTER TWELVE: UNREAL MASTERY AND ISO MODDING, explores the practice of editing game disc images (ISOs) an in particular those conducted on the *Unreal Engine* middleware platform.
- CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE ILLICIT HOMEBREW CODER, offers the testimony of iHcJames, a counterplayer who has produced a range of illicit modding framework software, and as a result has received significant correspondence from Activision and Microsoft's legal departments.
- REFLECTION FOUR: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF MODDING/HACKING, connects the outcomes of section four to five rhetorics of transgression.

Section five contextualises the findings and concludes the thesis:

[1] According to Madden, an '…emic perspective is one that reflects the insiders' or research participants' point of view, whereas an etic perspective is one that echoes the outsiders' or researchers' point of view' (2010, p.19).

- REFLECTION FIVE: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS, sums up the research and presents the apparently conflicting motivations of counterplay that emanate from the research as five observations.

It should be stressed that the counterplay images here are not presented in sequential or chronological order. While the UGC section was the first to be undertaken, as a pilot, the proceeding sections were completed at varying times.

An edited version of CHAPTER FOUR: INCENDIARY USER GENERATED CONTENT, including elements of CHAPTER ONE: GAME STUDIES AND COUNTERPLAY, was published as *Imaginary monsters: Game 3.0 and the rise of the transgressive player* in The Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds Vol.2 Issue 2 (2010). An edited form of CHAPTER ELEVEN: MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK, focussing on modded lobbies, appeared a chapter in Guns, Grenades, and Grunts First-Person Shooter Games (2012), as *More Bang For Your Buck -- Hardware Hacking, Real Money Trade and Transgressive Play within Console Based First Person Shooters*. In addition, at the time of thesis submission, a modified version of CHAPTER ELEVEN: MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK, focussing on infection lobbies, is under review for The Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds, and an article including edited sections from CHAPTER SIX: GLITCHING COMMUNITIES and CHAPTER SEVEN: GLITCHING PRACTICE is under review for the Well Played Journal.

CHAPTER ONE: GAME STUDIES AND COUNTERPLAY

Approaching Counterplay

> …counterplay challenges the validity of models of play that suggest digital games compel the players' to play according to encoded algorithms, which they must follow exactly in order to succeed. Instead, it opens the possibility of an antagonistic relationship between the digital game and player. An antagonism that is considerably more high stakes than the player overcoming the simulated enemies, goals and challenges that the game provides, rather it is directed towards the ludic rules that govern the digital games configurations, processes, rhythms, spaces, and structures. (Apperley, 2010, pp.102-03)

As a rejection of the *encoded algorithms* that define a videogame and its appropriate use, counterplay enables alternate interactions that take on different significance and meaning than that of conventional or *normative play*. Despite this change in status counterplay still exists within the realm of the ludic – it still remains a playful activity – although it may not be perceived as so by its victims or many of its observers. In counterplay the meaning and purpose of the playful act is unclear and is in part this ambiguity that gives counterplay its power and capacity for rhetorical projection, i.e. its ability to challenge and alter the persuasive logic of a game event or context. Counterplay may very well constitute *play*, but not *gameplay*, the counterplayer (a term I will use throughout) may be playing *a game*, but not *the game*, and as such the counterplayer is different to our understanding of *the player*. They are marked as something different that does not belong. Instead, the counterplayer adopts an attitude that places their play in contrast to the norm and, through its opposition, the structures, contexts, and expectations related to the game – etiquette, rules, its *spirit*, rhetoric, ideology, or law. To be a counterplayer is not only to be oppositional, which contains implicit risk, but, as Apperley states, counterplay contains the 'higher-stakes' attributed to the adoption of a distinct *radicalism*, risking retribution from the normative – and to be *othered,* exiled and punished in an attempt to eject the counter and to return to norm. Counterplay may be a self-initiated *standing out* of the counterplayer through actions that proclaim distinction, or the reactionary (and potentially misplaced) labelling of deviance by members of the orthodoxy.

The term 'counterplay' was originally coined in relation to videogames by Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witheford in the Fibreculture Journal article, *A Playful Multitude?* (2005). It was used within the context of

the 'capture of counterplay' where emergent, unanticipated and often antagonistic player behaviour is utilised by the game development industry to create new forms of consumption – the counterplay is itself captured and incorporated into the milieu of videogame production and consumption. Since its introduction the meaning of counterplay has altered, and it is now generally understood to mean the counter or oppositional mode of play (and consumption), that can be, but is not necessarily, captured and utilised. As a result counterplay is homologous with concepts developed by others across the gamut of arts and humanities research: *games of order–disorder* (Sutton-Smith, 1977/1972), *pre-rational play* (Spariosu, 1989), *agonistic play* (Spariosu, 1997), *transgressive play* (Aarseth, 2007), *countergaming* (Galloway, 2006), *deludology* (Kücklich, 2007), and *bad play* (Myers, 2005, 2010). Each of these refers to a set of behaviours that deploy ambiguity, counter-rule, and anti-structure, in the face of norms, structure and rule. Counterplay is therefore a charged activity within the context of videogames, as games are generally regarded as intrinsically reliant on rules and the structures they enforce to exist.

> Rules are what differentiate games from other kinds of play. Probably the most basic definition of a game is that it is organized play, that is to say rule-based. If you don't have rules you have free play, not a game. (Prensky, 2001)

Through opposition to the '…ludic rules that govern the digital games configurations, processes, rhythms, spaces, and structures…' (Apperley, 2010, p.102), counterplay is more akin to free play than gameplay. It is hostile to the *game*, and therefore anathema to *gameplay*. Yet while gameplay necessitates rules (and their observation) to occur, so too does counterplay – gameplay observes rules, counterplay utilises them.

Many scholars have offered a definition of games that explicates their controlled and rule-based nature, and in its inverse sketches the edges of counterplay. Bernard Suits' attempt from *The Grasshopper, Games, Life and Utopia* (1978, p.41) is for me one of the most useful for Defining Counterplay:

> To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. (Suits, 1978, p.41)

Suits' definition, much like those of his peers, places rules and play at the heart of game. In doing so he develops some useful terminology: Games have *goals* – the intended target outcome defined by the game creators prior to the player entering the game (it occurs before the ludic play act and is therefore a *pre-lusory* goal); A game is intended to be stimulating, and its rules necessitate the use of inefficient and interesting ways of reaching the prelusory goal (these are *lusory means*). The player is then expected to adhere to these restrictions and does so voluntarily (they adopt a *lusory attitude*). Through the interaction of these three elements – goal, means, and attitude – the game is defined, but so too is the model of the player, the play attitude and gameplay.

We can then conceptualise a continuum of play, with regulated *gameplay* on one extreme and *free play* on the other, archetypes that Roger Caillois defined as *ludus* and *paidia* (2001/1961, p.14). *Paidia* can be considered the natural form of play '…common to diversion, turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety', while in contrast *ludus* represents *paidia* bound by '…arbitrary, imperative, and purposely tedious conventions' (Caillois, 2001, p.13). These conventions are Suits' *lusory means* – they are the rules that define and prevent each player from playing their own entirely divergent and different game.

While the written or coded rules of the game are fundamental in constituting the game, player and gameplay, these rules are subject to constant renegotiation and redefinition. As Jesper Juul explains '… gameplay is not a mirror of the rules of the game, but a consequence of the game rules and the dispositions of the game players' (Juul, 2005, p.88). Gameplay is therefore the product of contestation – within non-digital games the originator who creates the rules presents a persuasive rhetoric that is then validated or altered when players inhabit the space – they adopt some rules, reject others and introduce some of their own. Within videogames the same process occurs, but as De Paoli and Kerr point out, it is restricted by the materiality of the software itself – players can only redefine the rules in ways that they have been allowed to in the code, or alternatively through a social layer that sits above the coding of the game – such as through agreement to play in a certain way for a specific match.

In *Rules of Play* (2003) Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman present three distinct rule types (Table 1) whose interactions determine gameplay and each of which allow different levels of inscription by the player: *operational rules*; *constitutive rules*; and *implicit rules* (pp.129-30). Within videogames the *operational rules* and *constitutive rules* are seen as the pre-defined product of the game code itself, and are automatically enforced as the game routines are executed. *Implicit rules* exist in the social realm and hold significant capacity for constant alteration and redefinition on a variety of scales. Rules and perceptions of correct gameplay differ on an individual, group, or universal basis, and may be suspended or changed momentarily or in perpetuity. When individuals or groups hold different implicit rulesets, the gameplay of others is regarded contentiously – it is likely to be considered odd, deviant, or wrong, and it is through this *normalizing gaze* that counterplay is instigated.

Kind of Rule	Description
Operational rules	which are '…synonymous with written out "rules" that accompany boardgames and other non-digital games'
Constitutive rules	'…the underlying formal structures that exist "below the surface" of the rules presented to players. These formal structures are logical and mathematical'
Implicit rules	'…these rules concern etiquette, good sportsmanship, and other implied rules of proper game behaviour'
(Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, pp.129-30)	

Table 1 - Salen and Zimmerman's kinds of rules.

Gameplay is not simply defined by the rules encoded into a game, but is determined by the attitude and behaviour of the playerbase. The definition of *appropriate play* is therefore dependent on the observation of

rules within a profoundly social context. The player finds themselves and their actions defined by the game structure, but also the pervasive scrutiny of other players.

> 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. (Aarseth, 2007, p.130)

The issue here is that videogames offer players a great deal of latitude for different ways of playing the game, leading to different approaches, strategies and behaviour. When subject to the normalizing gaze, such as multiplayer environments or social contexts, play will be interpreted as allied or opposed to the spirit of the game – and judged on a continuum between normal play or counterplay.

In this sense counterplay (as normal play) emerges from the structure of a game and its capacity for alternate interactions – viewed through the lens of implicit rules and the effects of the social contract. Some videogame forms have a material quality that allows for greater latitude of alternate and unpredictable strategies, which are understood as *games of progression*. '*Emergence* is the primordial game structure, where a game is specified as a small number of rules that combine and yield large numbers of game variations, which the players then design strategies for dealing with' (Juul, 2002, p.323). In contrast, games of progression are those in which '…the player has to perform a predefined set of actions in order to complete the game' (2002, p.324). This game type '…yields strong control to the game designer: Since the designer controls the sequence of events' (2002, p.324), and allows the dictation of restricted or singular ways of playing.

While videogames are particularly suited to the creation of games of progression, they have the capacity to offer games of emergence. It is simply the case that videogames have tended to adopt the progression form. There are a number of videogames that adopt emergent structures – either as an explicit design decision, or as the result of their super-complexity or unanticipated player interaction within the gamespace.

Harvey Smith warns of the uncertainty that emergence introduces into a videogame where behaviour and outcomes become unpredictable (Smith, 2001). The uncertainty, created where the interactions and the causality of the game are not immediately clear to the player, creates a space with unknown latitude for players to form hypotheses and test the function of the game simulation. At a distance (created by the interpretive game world) players interrogate the constitutive rules of a game – such as gravity, force, object boundaries, damage, cover mechanics etc. The unpredictable behaviour *emerges* from the space of ludic uncertainty presented by the game.

The testing-out of the causality is *rule interaction* that can lead to a range of emergent modes: *combination*, the infinite different ways that a game can be played, and *emergent strategies*, which 'are not immediately deductible from the game rules' such as gameplay tactics (2002, p.327). These might be considered the benign, or beneficial outcomes of games of emergence and spaced of ludic uncertainty.

However, there will inevitably be interactions that fit outside of those anticipated and intended by the designer – such as those that make the game too easy, expose its limitations, or change it into something else. These are the negative outcomes of the space of ludic uncertainty - players may pick different goals, means, and attitudes, and therefore can be seen to play different, divergent or oppositional games in the same gamespaces. Examples might include the machinima artist that uses the game to make films, the glitcher who seeks out errors in the code to explore and exploit, modders who introduce new functionality into the game, and a more diffuse sense of those who just play wrongly. These types of behaviour cannot be easily reconciled in traditional formal definitions of games and gameplay due to their (inadvertent) deviation from lusory-goals, means and attitude – at best these might be understood as divergent *uses* of videogames, but not gameplay proper. As a result their identification is met with calls for ejection and hostility.

Even emergent strategies that are wholly focussed on the game's goals can be seen to deviate from appropriate play, such as in the case of *dominant strategies* or *complete strategies* (Juul, 2002, p.327). These occur where the player comprehends an aspect of causality sufficiently to identify a repeatable optimum strategy that guarantees victory, removing the *contingency* of the game, or '…that which could have been otherwise' (Malaby, 2007).

Malaby presents the adoption of dominant or complete strategy as '…a retreat from the demands of the new, and it signals a disposition that does not want to be performatively challenged' (2007). The use of dominant or complete strategies and their removal of the *chance* of play turns the interaction with the gamespace and other players as something other than gameplay – gamespace is *used* for something else.

In *How to do things with video games* (2011), Ian Bogost argues that videogames are not solely used for gameplay but are broader platforms for interactivity rather than simply spaces of restrictive ludus. He offers twenty alternate uses for games on the basis that 'understanding games as a medium of leisure or productivity alone is insufficient' (2011, p.7), and that instead locations between these two points are needed. Bogost offers *art, empathy, reverence, music, pranks, transit, branding, electioneering, promotion, snapshots, texture, kitsch, relaxation, throwaways, distillation, exercise, work, habituation, disinterest,* and *drill* as documented alternate uses. Within this the notion of pranks has some resonance with some aspects of the counter. Each of these examples of emergence suggest that gameplay might therefore be best regarded as simply one *use* of a videogame, and that of the uses some are inevitably deemed antagonistic or incompatible (empathy and pranks for instance). Dependent on the position and perspective of the observer the uses of another group will likely be regarded with confusion, distrust and horror, as seen in Bourdieu's 'sick-making' distaste of the preferences of others (1984, p.58). Once a game is played within the social arena it is subject to these restrictions and perspectives, and it is therefore fundamental to multiplayer games and any others that report socially (such as through public awards and gamerscores), or simply when play becomes a topic of conversation. What this raises is the issue that the rules (constitutive, implicit, operational) create a benchmark by which the play activity of others can be judged. This judgment

takes place perpetually through the inadvertent deployment and alignment with rhetorical discourses. In doing so, the player of a multiplayer or single-player game, whose behaviour is directly or indirectly visible to others is subject to rhetorics of counterplay and the scrutiny that defines the actor as *player* or as something *other*. The notion of *the other* is significant in its ability to denigrate and subordinate. In its philosophical origins the other is defined in contrast to *the same,* and to *the self*. The other becomes distant, unknowable, and foreign, and in doing so the management of the othered individual or group becomes possible. The normality of a players' activities are judged by other players, who hold other predilections and perspectives, with reference to the idea of player behaviour inscribed into the rules of the game, and the distant, but present attitude of the designer or developer. Espen Aarseth appropriated Wolfgang Iser's 'implied reader' (Iser, 1980, p.38) creating thusly the implied player (Aarseth, 2007, p.130) – the idealized model player imagined during development and reaffirmed once a game is released with varying levels of ferocity.

Espen Aarseth defines 'transgressive play' as any behaviour that goes against the notion of the implied player, which he argues when combined with Gadamer's games that '*master the player*' create a 'prison-house of regulated play' in videogames against which players naturally rebel (2007, p. 133). The conventional player is reduced to a mere *player function* and those who feel the restrictiveness may choose to oppose this and become 'active players' which in turn opens up alternate identities (Smith, 2006).

> Transgressive play is a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game, a (perhaps illusory) way for the played subject to regain their sense of identity and uniqueness through the mechanisms of the game itself. …These marginal events and occurrences, these wondrous acts of transgression, are absolutely vital because they give us hope, true or false; they remind us that it is possible to regain control, however briefly, to dominate that which dominates us so completely. (Aarseth, 2007, p. 133)

Through rebellion and the move towards active player states, players begin to take on alternate identities. They are seen to play in ways other than those expected by the game, and deemed as different *types* of players to those willingly complicit with the conventional game. As a result, the configuration of play behaviour explored by Aarseth and Smith resonates with the significant body of work on player types, which will be explored in more detail in the following section.

Approaching the Player

When considering the ways in which individuals play videogames there is a tendency to conceptualise them in 'a collective and abstract manner' (Sotamaa, 2007), based upon an assumed predilection for certain ways of playing, types of pleasure, and a configuration of this as identity. Attempts to move away from singular conceptions of the player to ones that allow for variations of implicit rules and predilections can be seen in *player*, *player type* and *motivational models*. Examples include the "Hearts Clubs Diamonds Spades" player type model (Bartle, 1996) its later adapted schema (Bartle, 2003), and work by Chris Bateman (2004), Nicole Lazzaro (2004), Richard Rouse (2005), Tracy Fullerton, Chris Swain and Steven Hoffman (Fullerton

et al., 2004), Jana and Neal Hallford (2001), Nick Yee (Yee, 2005), Marc LeBlanc (2001), and Kirsi Pauliina Kallio, Frans Mäyra and Kirskkia Kaipainen (Kallio et al., 2011). It is important to clarify that these models are subjective judgements based upon limited and specific points of reference, yet they offer a terminology and perspective that helps us to begin to contextualise counterplay.

These detrimental tropes may be articulated as those who approach videogames through a lens of 'negativism', for instance engaging in 'deliberate and provocative rule-breaking' (Apter, 1991), or who gravitate towards the 'killer' player type, examples of which include 'griefers, opportunists, hackers' (Bartle, 2003). The problematic here is that analogies formed from the interpretation of player behaviour have in turn been used not only to inform the types of activity that players might enjoy doing, but to define the identity of the player – the ideal player, the griefer, the hacker. This creates a moral dualism with 'good play' (and good players) being aligned with the motivations of the ideal player, and 'bad play' (Myers, 2005) or 'transgressive play' (Aarseth, 2007) (and bad players) as everything that deviates from this archetype.

Salen and Zimmerman, for example (Table 2), differentiate between the *standard player*, the *dedicated player*, the *unsportsmanlike player*, the *cheat* and the *spoil-sport*, on the basis of the extent that they possess the lusory attitude, respect rules, and care about 'winning' (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p.268).

	Degree of lusory attitude	Relationship to rules	Interest in winning
Standard Player	Possesses lusory attitude	Acknowledges authority of rules	Typical interest in winning
Dedicated Player	Extra-zealous lusory attitude	Special interest in mastering rules	Intense interest in winning
Unsportsmanlike Player	Sometimes resembles the Dedicated player, sometimes resembles the Cheat	Adherence to operational rules, but violates implicit rules	Intense interest in winning
Cheat	Pretends to possess lusory attitude	Violates operational rules in secret	Intense interest in winning
Spoil-Sport	No pretence about lack of lusory attitude	No interest in adhering to rules	No interest in winning
(Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p.276)			

Table 2 - Salen and Zimmerman's summary of player types.

We therefore encounter the *dedicated player,* who possesses an over-zealous alignment with the game, the *unsportsmanlike player* who is prepared to bend or break the implicit rules, the *cheat* who is preoccupied with the goal and is prepared to clandestinely violate any of the rules, while the s*poil-sport* rejects all of the restricting and motivating aspects of the game, and is perhaps that which most clearly aligns with the model of the counterplayer.

In contrast to Salen and Zimmerman's top-down schema, which is based largely upon Suits' game definition, Richard Bartle's *Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades* (HCDS) player type model (1996) approaches player behaviour from a grounded, observational perspective. HCDS articulates four player types: *achievers*, *explorers*, *socialisers*, and *killers,* which can manifest themselves with varying levels of commitment (Bartle, 1996). Each player type has the capacity to be destructive or understood as counter – such as the socialiser

who socialises so much as to turn the game into a chat room – however, it is the *Killer* and *Explorer* types that most clearly tie in with notions of counterplay.

Typified by imposition on others, *Killers* '…use the tools provided by the game to cause distress to (or, in rare circumstances, to help) other players', and *Explorers,* who '…find out as much as they can about the virtual world…' have the greatest capacity to overtly antagonise the community of players or identify emergent and dominant strategies (although perhaps paradoxically, it is *Killers* and *Achievers* who are most likely to actually utilise them) (Bartle, 1996). In 2003 Bartle amended the player types model along explicit / implicit axis presenting the following typologies: friend, grief, hacker, networker, opportunist, planner, politician, scientist (Bartle, 2003, p.169).

Opportunists: Implicit Achiever	Friends: Implicit Socialisers
If they see a chance, they take it. They look around for things to do, but they don't know what these are until they find them. If there's an obstacle, they do something else instead. They flit about from idea to idea like a butterfly.	They interact mainly with people they already know well. They have a deep/intimate understanding of them. They enjoy their company. They accept their little foibles...
Planners: Explicit Achiever	Networkers: Explicit Socialisers
They set a goal and aim to achieve it. They perform actions as part of some larger scheme. If there's an obstacle, they work round it. They pursue the same idea doggedly.	They find people with whom to interact. They make an effort to get to know their fellow players. They learn who and what these people know. They assess who's worth hanging out with.
Hackers: Implicit Explorer	Griefers: Implicit Killers
They experiment to reveal meaning. They have an intuitive understanding of the virtual world, with no need to test their ideas. They go where fancy takes them. They seek to discover new phenomena.	Attack, attack, attack! They're very in-your-face. They are quite unable to explain why they act as they do, although they may offer rationalisations they'd like you (or they themselves) to believe. Their vague aim is to get a big, bad reputation.
Scientists: Explicit Explorer	Politicians: Explicit Killers
They experiment to form theories. They use these theories predicatively to test them. They are methodical in their acquisition of knowledge. They seek to explain phenomena.	They act with forethought and foresight. They manipulate people subtly. They explain themselves in terms of their contribution to the virtual world community. Their aim is to get a big, good reputation.
(Bartle, 2005)	

Table 3 - Bartle's extended HCDS player type model.

In addition to these typologies Bartle identifies development sequences in which players change from one player type to another over time. The most common *main sequence* sees players move from *Killer* to *Explorer* to *Achiever* to *Socialiser* types – to effectively move from the least to most desirable members of a play community over time. Despite this observation, what is particularly interesting about player type models are the rhetorics that they support about the relationship between games, players and designers. Bartle does not prescribe an idealised ratio of player types within a game, nor argue for the expulsion of players exhibiting certain traits, but rather aims to enable developers to manage and support player communities of their games, inclusive of less acceptable elements. As such, HCDS and the eight-type model are inclusive towards the dedicated player. Yet despite their intended purpose, player type models invite the

categorisation of player behaviour *as identity* and the active management of groups whose behaviour is deemed as damaging to the game or incompatible with its mix of player types. This means that design decisions are implemented to dissuade certain player types from joining or remaining in the game. Player models lead to the conceptualization of deviant or negative forms of play – and these are then sought out and managed accordingly.

Despite this, we should remember that within these models there is an assumption that these players are still primarily playing by the rules of the game – the *Killer* for instance uses game mechanisms in which to kill, the *Politician* aims to build a 'big, good reputation' in relation to the community of the game, and even though the *Hacker* has the capacity to uncover emergent strategies there is an assumption that is done from *within* the game, *utilising the tools made available by the developer*, as opposed to hacking the game using external software tools.

Another potential issue with these player type models is that ultimately they are built from a conception of certain types of behaviour – the *Killer* for example is only identifiable because this type is attributed with certain kinds of behaviour – each of these player types is an analogy based upon a type of behaviour. Despite this potential flaw, player models have been applied to game development and operation with vigour and success and have contributed to our broader understanding of the variety of manifested play modes. Richard Bartle vocalizes the potential problems where player types have been overly applied (2012), arguing that there is a tautological danger of viewing the analogical type 'as if it were identity'. The *Killer*, or counter behaviour is understood primarily as detrimental and therefore the player should be managed, punished, or ejected from the game, or, more often, the design of the game altered to reduce the capacity of negative play forms.

From a developer centric approach, some forms of play are particularly damaging to the experience of a game. They are seen as undermining the intended game structure or being antagonistic towards the player base they are *cheating*, and *grief play*.

Approaching Cheating

Cheating as a mode of play has received attention from scholars within game studies, software development, and to a lesser extent social sciences. As a result it is possible to detect two relatively discrete perspectives: a *formalist* approach that attempts to offer definitive taxonomies or schemas to enable management and protection of systems against cheaters; and alternatively a *situationist* position that presents cheating as an important natural repercussion of games as culturally situated phenomena. The work of Jim Parker (2007), Jeff Yan and Hyun-Jin Choi (2002), Jeff Yan and Brian Randell (2005), Steven Webb and Sieteng Soh (2007), K.K Kimppa and A.K Bissett (2005), can be considered to fit within a formalist definition that presents cheating as an issue that requires management by developers and live teams.

Yan and Randell's article, *A Systematic Classification of Cheating in Online Games* (2005) offers a comprehensive and useful overview of what is understood as cheating from a formalist perspective. The classification of cheating, adapted below in Table 4, lists fifteen forms of cheating, ranging from 'misplaced trust', to 'denying service to peer players', and 'compromising game servers' (Yan & Randell, 2005, pp.2-4).

Cheating form	Description
Cheating by Exploiting Misplaced Trust	Trust in relation to the player being entrusted with too much information and data on the client side – such as the location of opponents that is only obscured by the game GUI. By manipulating or interacting with the client software or data directly the cheater can benefit.
Cheating by Collusion	Colluding with other players to manipulate the outcome of games
Cheating by Abusing the Game Procedure	Disconnecting when losing a game, or the use of alternate game processes
Cheating Related to Virtual Assets	Real money trade and the advantage conferred by obtaining items / virtual assets through such trade.
Cheating by Exploiting Machine Intelligence	Using simulations and other forms of machine intelligence to present alternative or augment player strategies. E.g. by running a chess program in tandem to a chess game
Cheating by Modifying Client Infrastructure	Altering the code on the client software to offer advantage, e.g. transparent walls
Cheating by Denying Service to Peer Players	Flooding the network address of another player denying their ability to connect
Timing Cheating	Delaying game data packets in order to wait for an opponent's move before countering
Cheating by Compromising Passwords	By using password cracking software or by guessing passwords
Cheating by Exploiting Lack of Secrecy	Intercepting communication data and reading it
Cheating by Exploiting Lack of Authentication	Appearing to be a game server and collecting credentials as players attempt to join.
Cheating by Exploiting a Bug or Loophole	To exploit a bug or loophole in game programs or the game design itself, without involving any modification of game code or data .
Cheating by Compromising Game Servers	To tamper with game server programs or change their configurations
Cheating Related to Internal Misuse	A system administrator misuses their privileges.
Cheating by Social Engineering	Phishing attacks in order to obtain credentials
(Yan & Randell, 2005, pp.2-4)	

Table 4 - Yan & Randell's classification of cheating.

What is interesting from this classification, which it should be noted presents similar categories as the work of Parker (2007), Yan and Choi (2002), and Webb and Soh, (2007), is the breadth of what is considered cheating – including the use of technological techniques such as *distributed denial-of-service* (*DDoS*) attacks, social techniques such as *phishing*. The formalist approach does not attempt to situate the social or cultural contexts of cheating – it simply describes its forms. It is defined by the rules of the games as set out by the designers, or at the discretion of the 'game operators'. Yan and Randell's definition of cheating makes this distinction clear:

> Any behaviour that a player uses to gain an advantage over his peer players or achieve a target in an online game is cheating if, according to the game rules or at the discretion of the game operator (i.e. the game service provider, who is not necessarily the developer of the game), the advantage or the target is one that he is not supposed to have achieved. (Yan & Randell, 2005, p.1)

Yan and Randell's *cheater* is any player that adopts alternate goals or unintended means – that '…he is not supposed to have achieved' (2005, p.1), and as such it is a rather fuzzy and diffuse definition – I would suggest that it encapsulates not just cheating, but other forms of counterplay including grief play and hacking. Yan and Randell's definition is highly dependent on the idea of *advantage* and *target* – could a *target* be simply to upset other players as in grief-play? Could an *advantage* be to edit game code or run pirated software – as in piracy enabled by hacking? The model of cheating offered here therefore is rather flawed, it could in fact offer a better definition for the notion of counterplay that I am attempting to locate, as it retains enough flexibility to incorporate any act that violates any rule or mandate – although it does focus on that defined by the game developer or operator.

Cheating here is measured through the adoption of unfair advantage as defined by the designers and game operators – not the other players. This definition allows emergent strategies to be interpreted as cheating at the behest of the designer or operator, the ambiguity with which play is labelled as abject by different groups with their own implicit rules is now compounded by its definition by game designer and operator. Perhaps within this context it is most beneficial simply to regard the developer or operator as another games stakeholder with their own implicit rules.

In contrast to these definitions, situationist approaches to player activity are typified by a tendency to view play as a temporal and situated response to a specific set of circumstances. Scholars such as T. L. Taylor (2003, 2007, 2009), Mia Consalvo (2007, 2009), Julian Kücklich (2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009), Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter (2005, 2009), Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (2006), Thomas Malaby (2007, 2007), Duh & Chen (2009), Wright, Boria and Breidenbach (2002), and Sue Morris (2003a, 2003b) amongst others, have contributed towards a situationist understanding of games, and more specifically counterplay activity such as cheating. It is along these lines that this study is located.

T. L. Taylor's work highlights the subjective and relative nature of the definition of both cheating, and griefing, pointing out the reliance on outside agents and contexts within its definition. '…these categories – griefing and cheating – are both socially produced and only made meaningful via contextualisation. …the meaning within the game is based on something other than formal structures, which often leave significant spaces of ambiguity' (2009, pp.51-52). She believes that such modes of counterplay often occur within the liminal spaces that are created when rulesets are unclear, what she calls the 'boundary lines of the game' in which the rule set or system itself is ambiguous' (Taylor, 2009, p.51). This is precisely the same space that Yan and Randell's 'game operator' and Juul's 'player opinion' has the capacity to influence – in a vacuum or absence of clear rule or causality individuals will assert their own preferences. In doing so these define the

edges that characterise normative play and counterplay. Within ambiguous spaces, before an implicit rule has been asserted, there is uncertainty in the mind of the player: is what I'm doing cheating? Is what that person doing griefing?

This is arguably recognisable in Mia Consalvo's *Cheating: gaining advantage in video games* (2007), in which she observes significant ambiguity over how players defined cheating, and found that even those behaviours that were regarded as cheating were frequently deployed by those she interviewed (2007, p.93). Players described cheating as, 'anything other than getting through the game all on your own', 'breaking the rules of the game', while others argued that cheating was only possible when another human player was disadvantaged (2007, pp.88-93).

Much like the definitions offered by the formalist school, Consalvo presented cheating as a violation of rules and emphasised the inequality of cheating as the primary factor of its identification and opposition. It is therefore not necessarily *the breaking of rules* that defines cheating, but doing so in an *unfair manner*. For those interviewed '…cheating was more than just *breaking* a rule or law; it was also those instances of bending or reinterpreting rules to the players' advantage' (p.87). Perspectives such as this present a play 'ecosystem' where players are constantly observing and contextualising the play of others for evidence of inequality and unfairness. Players are constantly making ethical judgements about the behaviour that they experience and engage in, balancing their observations in relation to equality and the structure of the rules.

Consalvo's players offered a range of reasons for cheating, rationalising it through being 'stuck' in a game, for the implicit pleasures of the cheating experience, to enable 'time compression', or as a way to 'be an ass' (pp.95-101). Yet within player communities cheating did not receive the moral prohibition that might be expected, instead Consalvo observes that 'in the world of multiplayer cheaters, a subculture of cheaters can subscribe to its own beliefs about skilled gameplay and the clever exploitation of game resources' (2007, p.123). For these cheating is part of the implicit rule set, cheating as the mark of appropriate play, and therefore the way of achieving status and reputation within the cheating subculture(s). This resonates with Thornton's notion of 'subcultural capital' (1995) (which will be explored in the following section), or as a specific subcategory of Consalvo's 'gaming capital' (2007, p.18) – both appropriations of Bourdieu's social capital (1986) into subcultural and gaming spheres respectively.

In *Homo Deludens*, Julian Kücklich argues that games are '…entities in which the impulse to play is inextricably linked to the desire to cheat' (2007a, p.355). The constant restriction of gameplay creates a tension and a desire for disorder, but in addition to this emotive urge to cheat and counter there is an instrumental justification to cheating, much like Consalvo's players cheating because they are stuck – the countering of rules can create a path that enables greater interaction with the game. Cheating and countering '…can help us attain knowledge about a game more quickly than by playing by the rules, it is also possible to see cheats as tools that allow us to gain a more profound insight into games and how they are put together' (Kücklich, 2007a, p.359). In a later article Kücklich identifies three broad purposes of

cheating within videogames (2008), suggesting that they: *speed up narrative progression*; *increase frequency of interaction*; and *enhance the range of player options*.

This implies that cheating may serve another purpose – as a trapping of a gaming subculture, but also implies that cheats and cheating may have their own positive benefits, *values* and *meanings* that are not always evident from a formalist, or observational perspective. Within a community of gamers the breaking of the intended mode of play may serve a range of purposes that are not clear. As Consalvo puts it, 'It may have nothing to do with advancing the game or gaining skill. The player is gaining more enjoyment from the game, in a variety of ways' (2007, p.104).

Consalvo (2007), and Malaby (2007) have arguably identified *instrumental*, *social*, and *impoverished* uses for counterplay, and Bogost (2011) has implied that there are many other ways of using gamespaces beyond play. While T.L. Taylor (2009) identified that points of ambiguity within game spaces were frequently where players devised their own implicit and often contradictory rules, the reality is that certain aspects of a videogame are intentionally obfuscated and made ambiguous during the design process as with the development of a game of emergence. This process of obscuring causality and process is known as 'black boxing', based upon the sectioning off and coating of sensitive circuit board components within literal black boxes, hidden from view the impulse to understand and to tamper is reduced. Within videogames black boxing can be understood as the '…efforts to hide or to build certain assumptions into the very fabric of the virtual world in order to get the players to perform certain prescribed roles' (Jakobsson and Pargman, 2005, p.1). It occurs where the mechanics and process are hidden as constitutive rules. Within this context cheating can be seen as a method for stripping back the black tape and peering at the functions below, as a way of challenging and breaking apart black boxes – as a way of making sense of the operations beneath.

As Kücklich explains, the use of cheating or countering in this manner, requires an alteration of the mode of play '…it involves a radical change of context; from seeing, as it were, eye to eye with the signs produced by the game, to an overview of the gamespace that lays bare the arbitrariness of its topological constraints' (2009, p.67). This anti-black boxing is part of a mode of play that Kücklich has called *deludology* (2007), which can be seen as a way of learning more about games and gameplay through a systemic approach. These alterations allow '[…] us to gain a more profound insight into games and how they are put together' (2007b, p.359), and '[…] offer numerous ways of changing players' perceptions of gamespace' (2007b, p.118). It implies the difference between a *close reading* and a *critical reading* of a text. It offers the player another way of learning more about the game and therefore allowing them to play the game better, breaking the rules in order to better understand them. From this kind of approach cheating and other forms of counterplay become highly sophisticated tools for the analysis and exploration of games, useful to players and game scholars alike. Crucially counterplay becomes a temporary strategy (much like a developmental player type sequence) that may be deployed when deemed necessary by the player – what it is not is necessarily a permanent identity or style.

Such arguments highlight the subjective, unpredictable and ambiguous interpretation of cheating and seems to reinforce the notion that it is not cheating itself that is problematic, but the extent to which it is deemed unfair. If it is a cheat that offers some potential to be undone, or alternatively is one that the victim is able to deploy at a later date, then it may be considered by some an addition to the gaming repertoire – irrespective of the views of the operator or developer.

In contrast to these instrumental readings of cheating – that may help the player to return to the game in a more efficient manner, grief-play is a counterplay activity that is much more difficult to reconcile. By testing the game structure to breaking point the counterplayer may become better at navigating the gamespace, but what instrumental benefit does challenging and breaking the social aspect of the game hold? Does it make the griefer better at manipulating *people*? As a result it is difficult to read grief play as anything but instantaneous and temporary counterplay – it does not serve any broader instrumental purpose other than the pleasure derived from its invocation.

Approaching Grief Play

Grief play is a concept that Chek Yang Foo (2008) and Elina Koivisto (2004a and 2004b) have explored in detail. Koivisto defines it as, 'intentionally engaging in actions that disrupt the gaming experience of other players' (2004a). They see grief play as consisting of three explicit categories: *Harassment*; *Power Imposition*; and *Scamming*, where the griefer intends to cause offense, and a fourth implicit form, *Greed Play*, where the griefer behaves in a manner oblivious of its impact upon others.

Key to the understanding of grief play are the notions of intentionality and enjoyment that Foo and Koivisto associate with it:

1. The griefer's act is intentional;
2. It causes other players to enjoy the game less;
3. The griefer enjoys the act (2004b, p.246).

The act of griefing is enjoyable, it is intentional and it has a negative impact upon players – it is therefore subjective and dependent on ascertaining the intent and impact of the act. It cannot simply be identified in relation to a set of criteria or rules, as it exists purely in the social arena. Foo offers the following taxonomy of grief play (Table 5) which contextualises the rather abstract definition:

A taxonomy of grief play–categories and subtypes

Categories	Subtypes
Harassment	Slurs Intentional spamming Spatial intrusion Event disruption Stalking Eavesdropping

	Threatening
Power imposition	Use of loopholes Rez-killing (killing players that are in a weakened resurrected state) Newbie killing (killing inexperienced players) Training (leading trains of multiple enemies to attack other players) Player blocking
Scamming	Trade scamming Promise breaking Identity deception
Greed play	Ninja-looting (taking the rewards dropped by another player's kill) Kill-stealing (killing an enemy weakened or claimed by another player) Area monopolizing Item farming (repeatedly and systematically harvesting items from a game world, treating the game world as a resource to be exploited) (2008, P.79)

Table 5 - Foo's taxonomy of grief play (adapted).

These formalist taxonomies of cheating and grief play are useful in the way they give us concrete examples of what behaviour is considered to violate the rules, spirit and goals of the game – I.e. that may constitute counterplay. Of particular note is the extent to which each of these manifestations of grief play are subjective and open to interpretation. Was the player stalking intentionally? Were they playing in-character? Was a promise made? Was an area monopolized? These points highlight the subjective and potentially problematic nature of defining and conceptualising cheating, griefing, or counterplay more generally.

The acts perceived as griefing by some may be considered legitimate or appropriate by others – although it is difficult to justify this in relation to some forms such as trade-scamming, promise-breaking, and identity deception (although *Eve Online*'s infamous covert trade-wars would offer at least one example where the inverse is true). There is little to say with regards to these specific grief-play modes except to argue that without hearing the testimonies of both sides and understanding the context of its manifestation I would be cautious to label an activity as 'griefing', and as a result I am hesitant to embrace typological models such as this. Instead this leads us to issue of community, and community practices, within games. It is also important to note that griefing needn't contravene any game rules, it can purely be a product of the social realm and personal attitudes towards play and victimisation.

Approaching Player Productivity

An example of the ability of players to establish and maintain communal values and to use these in unexpected productive ways can be seen in Celia Pierce's *Communities of Play* (2009), which details the emergent culture of the *Uru diaspora* and their productive practices. The *Uru diaspora* is made up of a community of *Uru: Ages beyond Myst* (Cyan Worlds, 2003) players who emigrated onto other virtual worlds following *Uru*'s closure, notably *There.com* (Makena Technologies, 2003), and proceeded to

reconstruct locations and practices from the previous game. By recreating architectural forms and rituals the *Uru diaspora* highlights the capacity of videogames to sustain sophisticated communities and cultures, and in turn lead to expressive forms of production that undoubtedly have the simultaneous capacity to be deemed as counter. Pearce does not go into detail, but one might wonder what the other residents of *There.com* felt about the *Uru* immigrants refusal to adopt their societal norms of their new residence? Was their behaviour seen as greed play, as a rejection of the conventional rules or some other counter-form?

There.com is a videogame space that offers its players the tools to create and share their own content, it builds upon a participatory culture model which has been designated as *Game 3.0*.

> It's all about social interaction. It's about content creation empowered inside the game experience. It's about community. It's about collaboration. It's about customization. It's about emergent entertainment powered by the audience at the centre of the entertainment experience. (Harrison, 2007)

Game 3.0 elevates the status of player from consumer to active participant, while simultaneously extending the longevity of a videogame release, and offering potential reprieve from the escalating art costs of game development.

Game 3.0	Network Centric	Social	User Behaviour
Community	Commerce	Service	Content Creation
Customization	Creativity	Open	Collaborative
Extendible	Emergent Entertainment	Iterative	Audience Driven

Table 6 - Harrison's Game 3.0 principles

The principles presented by Phil Harrison (Table 6) give indication of the idealized core values of *Game 3.0*. While the principles suggest a major change of emphasis for console videogame content, players have been engaging with similar activities in PC games for decades, either through included game functionality or as the result of unsanctioned 'grassroots convergence' (Jenkins, 2006, p.141). The behaviour afforded by these principles span the gamut of activity, from the sanctioned to the illicit, and revolve around the 'archival, annotation, appropriation and recirculation' of game content between players (Jenkins, 2006, p.18).

These practices, where players, or fans, engage with texts in inappropriate manners are not unique to videogames, or digital participatory culture per se, but have a heritage in fan studies that goes back more than two decades. Henry Jenkins' work on fan fiction seen in *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture* (1992) and later *Convergence Culture* (2006) highlight identical concerns of copyright holders and the unwarranted interactions by fans.

In turn the *Participatory culture* in which *Game 3.0* sits offers '…low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal

mentorship' (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009). It should be highlighted that participatory culture is almost diametrically opposed to the restrictions of ludus – it is in its nature spontaneous and entirely within the social. Participatory culture as seen in the content created, uploaded and shared on websites like YouTube, Deviantart, Flikr and Facebook, interacts with videogames more generally in relation to game content, such as videos that find their way onto these sites, or more generally in an approach to ownership, interaction and *player productivity*, where players feel the need to produce media about or within games.

Hanna Wirman's article 'On Productivity and Game Fandom' (2009) explores the range of modes of player productivity: *Instrumental productivity* that assists with goal achievement and playing the game; *Expressive productivity* that focuses upon the wider meanings, narratives and cultural resonance attributed to games; and *Hybrid productivity*, such as the creation of mods and patches that bridge both instrumental and expressive categories (Figure 1). Both instrumental and expressive forms of productivity have the capacity to oppose, or be interpreted as damaging to the experience of game itself, or violating the wider legal frameworks that regulate their use.

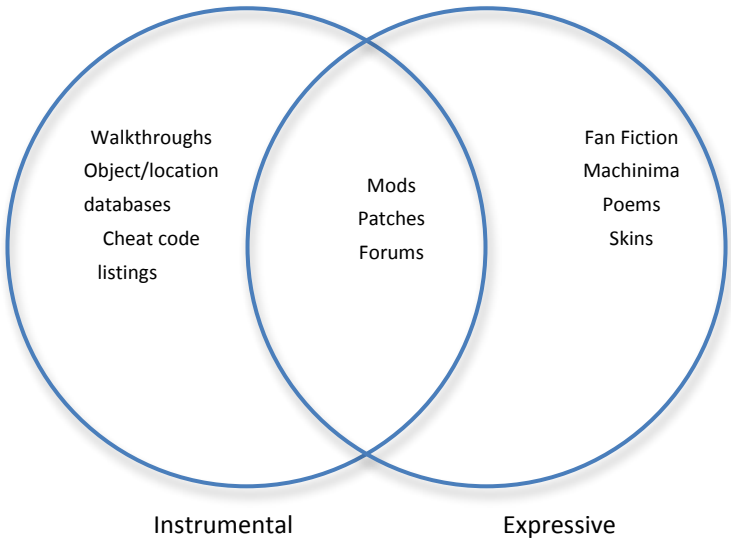

Figure 1 - Wirman's modes of player productivity (2009).

These examples of player productivity illustrate the way in which the experience of playing a game and its contexts are influenced by elements beyond the control of the developers and outside of the scope of conventional play: Cheat codes, location databases and walkthroughs lead towards dominant and complete strategies or the reduction of contingency attributed with knowing advantageous interactions. Fan-fiction, skins, and machinima alter the context of the game, they may reinforce aspects of its meaning that were not intended. While mods, patches and forums have the capacity to alter the game experience and its context through changing the materiality of the game, or by organising the adoption of groups and activities. Fan production therefore holds the capacity to not only produce complementary texts and artefacts, but ones

that alter, challenge and change the game. Fan production becomes part of the expression and solidification of implicit rules, and accordingly to the observer, counterplay.

Game 3.0 and its freeform player productivity enables players to produce new content for games inspired by a range of motivations including playing, hacking, researching, artistic expression, and cooperation (Sotamaa, 2010). These tools are seen as a way of fostering community around a release, extending its lifespan, and even facilitating new commercial releases, as seen with *Counter-Strike* (2000) and *DayZ* (Hall, 2012) which started as *Half-Life* (1998) and *ArmA II* (2009) player mods respectively.

While many mods add value through the extension of a games lifespan or by establishing new intellectual property for the developers, there are many mods that undermine or are seen as incompatible with the spirit or terms of service of the original game. Such as those that introduce external intellectual property into the game space, or those that undermine the core game mechanisms by automating or simplify aspects of player interaction. These mods are often removed from centralized mod websites and are subject to censure and challenge, but when they are developed for a single-player game their damage is negligible. Some players may well choose to have nude characters, but this has little bearing on the experience of *others*, or indeed the security of the canonical text. In contrast modifications that are introduced into multiplayer spaces, particularly those which offer little player control over what matches they connect to (such as is the case with *XBL* and *PSN*), can be regarded as a hi-jacking of conventional play and can have a wide detrimental effect.

In contrast to the PC console gaming does not have an established modding culture and console games are almost rarely shipped with modding / content creation tools inbuilt. The closed systems that interface directly with an online service such as *XBL* or *PSN* include multiple security countermeasures to prevent players from altering the game code and hardware that runs upon. On these platforms modification must be done in spite of these restrictions – overcoming barriers and developing software processes and hardware alterations to do so. Some scholars have explored these kind of interactions including the hacking of the original *Xbox* and deployment of the *Xbox Media Centre* (*XBMC*) homebrew application (e.g. Huang, 2003; Schafer, 2011); the creation of art-installations through NES cartridge modification (Jordan, 2007), and the creation of PC based software 'bots' (Consalvo, 2007).

The game-located production of *Uru* elements in *There.com* is one example of player productivity. Inevitably as the range and quantity of productive output increases and as players find themselves feeling increasing bonds with the texts that they interact with – as the practice of production feels increasingly natural, automatic and therefore emotive some forms of production will be deemed inappropriate by other players, the game operators, and custodians of the commercial product. Examples of this can be seen in the work of Banks (2005), Banks and Humphreys (2008), and Hector Postigo (2008).

There has been some work already done exploring notions of value relating to player-generated content, notably within the context of mods. Mods are technically and culturally sophisticated artefacts that have

cultural value, but lack financial value, to players. In contrast the production of mods – Julian Kücklich's 'Playbour' (2005) – has significant commercial value for the developer. This leads to an apparent inequality where the individual play activities of some – such as mod-making, the creation of new levels, or interaction with other players – can be seen as simultaneously play (leisure) and labour (work), of entertainment value to the actor, but also of financial value to the owner of the game.

Hector Postigo (2003) hypothesized that a successful mod that is ready to be developed into a commercial release represents over $500,000 of playbour to the 2003 developer. When we look at the unprecedented scales content creation in *Game 3.0* releases the potential value of playbour becomes apparent. It was announced at the GDC 2008 that the *Halo 3* player community were uploading on average 100,000 pieces of user-generated content daily, 30% more than was being uploaded to YouTube over the same period of time (Schappert, 2008). Similar prodigy of player-generated-content is seen on *LittleBigPlanet* (Media Molecule, 2008), with over one million levels produced by July 2009, each level having been downloaded and played an average of 244 times (Robinson, 2009). Over 100,000,000 *Spore* (Maxis, 2008) creations had been produced by May 2009, 'an average of 306,000 daily' (Electronic Arts, 2009). The multiplayer population of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (henceforth *MW*) (Infinity Ward Inc., 2007), had stabilized at 'between 1.2 and 1.3 million users every day' in 2008 on the *Xbox 360* alone (Minkley, 2008), while subsequent releases in the franchise increased this player base. While this game does not revolve around player-generated content, the multiplayer nature of the game arguably presents player-generated-narrative (see Wright et al. 2003).

In *Game 3.0*, playbour and its consumption are promoted as one of the primary dynamics of the game, instead of being a niche, secondary activity as it was with modding. As a result, playbour within *Game 3.0* releases has a financial value, but not in the same way as Postigo's $500,000 mod. Instead of generating financial value from a small number of high-quality examples of player-generated content (that may require further development before returns are made), *Game 3.0* generates commercial value from a large number of items with lower per-capita value that replace content that developers would have had to have employed staff to create. The translation of playbour into saving is instantaneous. Using playbour as art-content is a savvy move, as it now represents a disproportionate amount of development costs; e.g. it is estimated that 70 per cent of the *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2007) development workload was artwork (Woodard, 2007), while *Gears of War 2* (Epic Games, 2008) had a $12 million budget that employed forty-five artists and fifteen programmers over its two-year development (Sweeney, 2009). The implication here is not that the player replaces these roles in entirety, but partially – some of the costs of development are placed upon the player, who does so willingly.

The political economy and context of this type of activity – where play and work are intermingled have been described as 'free labor' (Terranova, 2000), 'invisible labor' (Postigo, 2003) or 'playbour' (Kücklich, 2005) and may be framed as a source of disquiet within player populations. While it is not necessarily the case that players openly oppose the transaction, but that they are conscious that a transaction – and an imbalanced one at that is taking place. This is something recognised by John Banks and Sal Humphreys

who see modders display '…sophisticated understanding of negotiations with enterprise, and their decision-making in the directions of both commercial and non-commercial production' (2008, p.415). Those engaged in playbour may therefore frequently negotiate the territory presented by notions of exploitation and entertainment, deciding what pleasures and practices are acceptable within the transaction.

While fan production may be motivated through out of a willingness to engage with the text and a genuine fandom, it could potentially be created with the explicit intent to oppose, damage and interfere with the contexts and expectations of a game. Such as the much celebrated example of *Velvet Strike*, Anne-Marie Schleiner's online protest modification for Valve's *Counter-Strike* (2000) in which the player is able to daub counter-military graffiti within the military FPS (Schleiner, 2002). Schleiner questions the meaning of *Counter-Strike*, wondering whether it represents a 'Harmless release of tension or co-conspirator in the industrial war complex? Playful competition or dangerous ethnic and gender politics of the other'? (2002). The modifications that Schleiner created are counter to the intended use and meaning of the space. Counterplay has the capacity to radically alter and subvert the experience of the game and therefore the rhetorics that surround it.

Approaching Rhetoric

As Anne-Marie Schleiner's *Velvet Strike* shows, it is possible to think of games as having ideological or persuasive positions – in the case of *Counter-Strike* the player is inculcated into a world of military conflict, particularly that of insurgency and counter-terrorism, and is invited to be complicit to the position of the game. It is not implied that a player automatically becomes subject to, and aligned with, the ideological frame of a game – they do not adopt the attitude and position of the avatar in the same way that an actor does not necessarily adopt the views of a role that they play – but rather that the game presents a persuasive simulation through its design that is created to articulate a certain position, but it is incapable of supporting other positions due to the omission of coded resources. A game therefore presents a persuasive representation of *its reality* – it has a rhetoric.

Videogames not only contain a rhetorical element, but require the player to play along the lines of this rhetorical projection in order to continue (not to face the game-over screen or the equivalent of relative failure) and to progress towards the pre-lusory goal. This resonates with Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation (1971) as applied to games by Tanya Krzywinska and Geoff King, who describe it as a '...tendency to 'Hail' the observer and participant, to create what is in effect a 'call and response' relationship in which the subject answers the call and, in the very act of acknowledgement, is situated in a particular position…' (2006, p.197). The interpellation is therefore used to create the player as a *subject,* 'creating a space that can be occupied only from this position' (King and Krzywinska, 2006, p.198). In the military FPS we play as being a soldier or counter-terrorist in a simulation that is built to model combat from *that perspective.* Despite our attempts to do so, it is far more difficult to take the role of pacifist or

double-agent within these environments as this functionality is not within the code – but as a result the adoption of these roles in spite of the rhetoric of the game takes on a radical capacity.

If videogames demand certain behaviours and ideological positions from their players in order to enjoy the game and create enjoyable adversaries for their foes, they do so through a process of rhetorical indoctrination and persuasion. Dovey and Kennedy see the alignment of players to the rhetoric of the game '…not only as a desired quality for the production of active, engaging and meaningful experiences, but also simultaneously as the means through which the gameplayer is most likely to be exploited in the interests of monster conglomerates' (2006, p.9).

Despite their persuasive properties and potential for ideological framing it does not follow that players will naturally align themselves with the rhetoric – they may be required to listen but they need not agree. As Miguel Sicart outlines in *The Ethics of Computer Games*, 'Though playing a game is an experience painted by a formal and fixed set of unambiguous rules, it is also an experience of evaluating the game and creating implicit rules' (2009, p.36). The player must constantly evaluate because the videogame environment is entirely deceptive – it appears to present a rational ecosystem, but it is simply attempting to persuade that this is the case. For Sicart players are *moral beings* capable of assessing whether and not they agree with the behaviour that the game is forcing them into – hence they are able to play a game like *Counter-Strike* without ascribing to its ideological perspective. Instead they may see the ideological position for what it is and intentionally counter it. According to Sicart '…being a good player is being virtuous player. A virtuous player is the one who engages in a game and enjoys its ludic experience, but is also she who, in the face of a moral challenge, uses the practical wisdom acquired by playing that game, and all those games from her repertoire, in order to make the most ethically informed choice' (Sicart, 2009, p.92). The player is able to select the most ethically appropriate strategy in a game, perhaps even working against the rhetoric of a game if necessary. These players, if sufficiently motivated may intentionally behave in manners that undermine or counter the ideology that they find problematic, they may 'play against the grain' (King and Krzywinska, 2006, p.217).

This presents the rhetorical and ideological framing of videogames – their ability to present a world that has persuasive properties, and that necessitates us to entertain its position in order to progress within the game. It simply does not simulate what is deemed insignificant or counter, and therefore in the military FPS the peaceful protest must be introduced via a mod or other forceful introduction into the gamespace. To introduce discourses that are critical or opposed to those of the game one must seek out alternate means – and in doing so this is likely to be seen as counterplay. Mary Flanagan's work *Critical Play* (2009) combines the notions of game rhetoric and Sicart's *players as moral beings* detailing the ways that games are used in critical ways to challenge and alter perceptions of hegemony and inequality – games can be played in resistant ways. Counterplay therefore becomes a critical tool for countering rhetorics and ideology, such as through activist games or serious games, and for (subjective) social good.

From such a context rule breaking, the creation of seditious or inflammatory content or other forms of counterplay may be reinterpreted as media activism - as a reactions to and against the unethical ideological space of a videogame, and as a way to challenge the orthodoxy and lead to change. From this perspective, combined with those explored by Sicart (2009), Ensslin (2012), Bogost (2011), and Pierce (2009), counterplay becomes significant interventions against the domination of the game rhetoric and the deceit by which the player is given the impression of freedom. Instead of an act of negativity or nihilism the counter, manifested as grief play, cheating, modding or hacking might be understood as acts of resistance that holds the capacity for change.

Counterplay Impacts

While its emblematic releases, such as *LittleBigPlanet* (2008) and *Halo 3* (2007), have generally received critical acclaim and obtained large active player bases, there are indications that developers have found the realities of *Game 3.0* much more contentious, with some already intending to make content creation an offline activity due to an 'unwillingness to police user generated content' (Edge, 2009). Developers are encountering persistent cases of transgressive activity: copyright infringement, the distribution of offensive content, and incendiary player behaviour. This points to an industry and player base coming to terms with the value of *Game 3.0* and the 'upheavals in terms of distribution, pricing and social media' that it presents (Edge, 2009). As Postigo details, these kind of violations are often met with intervention from copyright holders and a threat of civil action, such as a 'cease and desist' letter (2008). Alternatively litigation may be instigated directly between the copyright holders on the basis that players are able to, or not prevented from engaging in copyright misuse, as seen with the Marvel vs. NCSoft/Cryptic case (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2005).

Of course, such negative behaviour is not unique to networked environments, it can be seen in wider society as delinquency, criminality, vandalism and sedition. Such activity is often associated with the idea of social exclusion where individuals feel little affinity with wider society and hence perceive few incentives to maintain or subscribe to its values. Video game networks aim to promote inclusion by the virtue of the services they offer; the attractiveness of the games, and the opportunities for interaction and social engagement. Conversely, games companies attempt to enforce a sense of social responsibility in a panoptic sense by demanding that players use visible, unique, persistent usernames and subscribe to stringent End User Licence Agreements (*EULA*s) in order to access the service. These usernames serve as the players' contact address, passport and criminal record within the game spaces that they inhabit (and in a more abstract level the serial numbers of their console hardware and the IP addresses of their internet service). If a player is thought to have broken any rules, their username can be obtained and the associated access privileges can be revoked. Players that break the rules of a videogame, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are engaging in a process of counterplay.

Defending Against Counterplay

The examples of counterplay explored in this study are necessarily defined and characterised *by violation* – they each are seen to break an expectation of behaviour, a rule of a game, a contract or law that defines the acceptable and the profane. Unlike conventional games, videogames are hedged in by additional rules and laws – they are commercial entertainment products worth billions of dollars in revenue, and as such they are given legal protection (and classified under copyright law as *literary works*) to maintain profitability and to protect the investments of the corporations that produce them. This takes the form of giving legal protection to the technical methods deployed to ensure the security of the game systems and services under copyright law, and the regulation of negative or problematic behaviour through the use of terms of service and contract law. In the case of the *Xbox 360*, on which the majority of this study takes place, players are subject to multiple levels of restriction:

1. The implicit rules that define how a game is to be played properly, *according to the players*;
2. The specific rules of the game that define how the game is to be played correctly *according to the designers*;
3. The End User License Agreement (*EULA*) that defines how the player is able to interact with *the game as a piece of software*;
4. The various laws that restrict behaviour within public more generally, such as *The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act* 1994, and the *Computer Misuse Act* 1990 and those that protect copyrighted works such as the *European Directive 2001/29/EC*, or the US *Digital Millennium Copyright Act* (*DMCA*);

In addition, when counterplay exists within *multiplayer environments*, which it frequently does, players are subject to additional restrictions:

5. The *XBL* Terms of Use (*ToU*), which determines the way in which the *XBL system can be interacted with*;
6. The *XBL* Code of Conduct (*CoC*), which determines *how a player should behave when using XBL*;
7. The game *CoC* that specifies what types of behaviour are sanctioned within its online element e.g. banning policies.

As a result many of the counterplay acts explored here are in violation of the rules and restrictions set out in *EULA*, *ToU*, *CoC*, and copyright laws. This informs the way that they are responded to when individuals are caught in violation.

The Activison *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* (2011) (henceforth *MW3*) *CoC* explicitly defines a range of behaviours that result in player and console bans.

> This includes 'boosting, glitching, hacking', 'modifying the executable', 'organizing cooperative or single game play for the purpose of gaining …in-game unlocks', 'Exploiting map holes, …glitch[es], and participating in modded lobbies', 'demonstrating an offensive in-game gamer tag', and 'verbal abuse, harassing, or other related behavior deemed as universally unacceptable to other players' (Activision, 2011a).

The *MW3 CoC* is predominantly enforced through *limiting access* to the game by banning player accounts and referring offending details to Microsoft to enable the console(s) involved to be *banned from the service directly*. This *CoC*, while specific to *MW3* is consistent with those found on other games on the *Xbox 360*, particularly those that have online multiplayer aspects. In contrast, the game *EULA*, in this case from *BLOPs,* is predominantly concerned with regulating the interaction with the software and the protection of rights of ownership and copyright. The user is prohibited to:

> Reverse engineer, derive source code, modify, decompile, disassemble, or create derivative works of this Program, in whole or in part.
>
> Hack or modify (or attempt to modify or hack) the Program, or create, develop, modify, distribute or use any software programs, in order to gain (or allow others to gain) advantage of this Program in an on-line multiplayer game settings including but not limited to local area network or any other network play or on the internet. (Activision 2011b)

Similar restriction is placed on the user from Microsoft, who prohibit offensive behaviour, activities that undermine the operation of the *XBL* service, gain unauthorised access to aspects of the service, and others that are deemed to damage the experience of play.

> Some offenses warrant an immediate permanent suspension, including without limitation: hacking, modding, fraud, severe racial remarks, nudity on the Xbox LIVE Vision camera or Kinect camera, repeated creation of inappropriate gamertags or profile content, or posting viruses or URLs to viruses. (Microsoft, 2010)

While much of the counterplay activity is penalised and addressed through the invalidation of player accounts and consoles there is scope for some violations to be escalated into more powerful forms of regulation – particularly those relating to copyright. As of the development of the World Intellectual Property Organization copyright treaty (*WIPO*), in 1996, residents of the US and Europe were made subject to a more explicit set of laws related to copyright use. Established as a the '*European Directive 2001/29/EC*' and the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act (*DMCA*), these laws define the offense of circumventing security measures designed to limit access to copyrighted works. While it was originally devised with the VHS *macrovision* encryption technology in mind (it is explicitly mentioned in the *DMCA* statute), within the digital sphere it takes on a much more universal nature – effectively protecting any work that can be seen to have deployed an 'effective technological measure' of protection.

> Technological measures shall be deemed 'effective' where the use of a protected work or other subject-matter is controlled by the rightholders through application of an access control or protection process, such as encryption, scrambling or other transformation of the work or other subject-matter or a copy control mechanism, which achieves the protection objective.

This presents a legally powerful technological control, and makes anyone found to have violated this (such as illicit modders or hardware hackers) potentially subject to the full interpretations of the law. While the *DMCA* does contain a process by which copyrighted work must be removed following a legal 'takedown notice', there is also the potential in some instances to attempt to try the individual(s) involved.

Penalising Counterplay

In 2009, an American student, Matthew Crippen, was accused of violating the *DMCA* on two counts as the result of being caught on covert video performing *Xbox 360* hacks for $60. The USA vs. Crippen case represents the first time that a *DMCA* violation related to videogame hacking has reached a court of law, with the accused facing a penalty of up to five years imprisonment for each violation. This case served as a crucial test case defining the literal interpretation of the *DMCA* in relation to hardware hacking and potentially the beginning of a new culture of fiercely enforced limitations placed upon the ways in which commercial electronics can be used.

Fortunately for Crippen the prosecution abandoned the indictment 'based on *fairness* and justice' (Kravets, 2010). The prosecution appeared to fail due to a lack of understanding of the intricacies of the *DMCA* and the inadmissibility of covert evidence captured by a civilian. The case failed not because Crippen was found innocent but because the specifics of the evidence precluded a fair trial. Against all odds Crippen avoided a considerable prison sentence, and we still await a trial that appropriately defines the legal interpretation of the *DMCA* and its implications upon videogame hacking and transgressive play.

On the 9th December 2010 the BBC and other news aggregators published a story about the Metropolitan Police arresting a 17-year-old boy in the Greater Manchester area, after being alerted to his activities by Activision (BBC, 2010). Although information is relatively sparse, it appears that he was using 'Phenom Booter', a distributed denial of service (*DDoS*) application, where a network of computers overload an individual IP address with requests, stopping its use. It appears that the youth was using *DDoS* attacks to eject, or 'boot', particularly good players from multiplayer *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (2009) (henceforth *MW2*) matches in order to manage the difficulty of the matches and to maximise experience gain.

Unlike the Crippen case, the perpetrator was using the booting tool on a PC instead of hacking a console, although similar software exists that allows users to boot players from *XBL* using only their gamertag. In this case, one assumes that the youth was identifying individual players' IP addresses and subsequently

booting them, which should not have been detectable by Activision. Instead one assumes that the *DDoS* attacks were aimed, perhaps in error, at the Activision game servers themselves, leading to the accumulation of data and subsequent arrest. While it is important to note that such activity against a company is considered an act of corporate sabotage, and in this case in violation of the *1990 Computer Misuse Act*. Speaking to the BBC about the case, Detective Superintendent Paul Hoare stated, 'Programs marketed in order to disrupt the online infrastructure not only affect individual players but have commercial and reputational consequences for the companies concerned' (BBC, 2010). While the means may be subject to varying rhetorics of prohibition, one should still remember that the motivation that incurred the crime was to improve standing within a FPS videogame.

While *DDoS* attacks might be considered of a different order than that of counterplay due to their many criminal uses and potential for wide-reaching damage, there are cases where players resort to the use of *DDoS* tools. This illustrates the extent to which individuals may unwittingly be engaging in activities that violate criminal law but also hold significant penalty, even imprisonment. These two examples show the range and significance of counterplay as an activity and highlight the potential ways in which these violations may be interpreted – some forms of counterplay, irrespective of their intention or the awareness of the protagonist, may be understood as violation of criminal law.

While the use of a *DDoS* is subject to particularly stringent restriction on account of their potential damage, players are subject to a range of contracts (such as the *EULA* and *TOS*) that they must agree to if they are to play the game or access the service. These are described as *click-wrap contracts* '…long lists of oddly-worded terms and conditions that software and Internet users agree to abide by without actually reading' (Lastowka, 2010, p.105). There is considerable scope for the interpretation of contract law, and much of it is based upon the equity at which the contract is instigated. Greg Lastowka, who has written extensively upon the law of videogames, states that '…use of non-negotiable consumer form contracts is not consistent with the animating theory and justifications of contract law. In practice, one party, the consumer, does not understand the terms of the bargain and is potentially bound to obey unknown (though ostensibly disclosed) rules' (2010, p.106). As a result Lastowka argues that many courts of law would not necessarily support click-wrap contracts, and one might infer that this, combined with the limited opportunity for reclaiming financial damages from the counterplayer, is partly why violations of these contacts rarely reach court.

Yet despite the existence of these binding laws that regulate play many, if not the majority of players, have limited awareness of their scope and power. Lastowka presents this as *a gulf between law and games*, that the various *ToU*s, *CoC*'s, and *EULA*s attempt to bridge, largely unsuccessfully, 'due to the fact that games constitute a rival regime of social ordering. The rules of games are inherently in tension with the rules of law' (2010, p.106). Games, whether digital or not, are understood socially as being separate from ordinary life. In addition, according to Lastowka, their 'intense and utter' absorption, and framing as non-productive place them conceptually out of synch with law, instead they are controlled by rules, which can be bent or opposed. Socially speaking, games and videogames, are therefore *other* – they conceptually exist within an

alternate frame, a magic circle, and are generally regarded *as separate, engrossing, and unproductive* – they are enjoyable pastimes, not *serious* like ordinary life.

While this perception may be at odds with the contracts that define interactions with games and the laws that protect copyrighted works, they are still widely held within society, juries, and in the playerbase. Irrespective of this an awareness of the legal and contractual significance of counterplay informs and contextualises the act, and in addition exposes that few counterplayers are conscious of the potential legal ramifications of their activity.

To surmise, Lastowka presents a useful overview of the legality of videogame play:

> …the law generally respects the exclusive right of virtual world owners to control the functioning of the key technology at play …In addition, the law generally enforces the contractual agreements drafted by virtual world owners. …property and contract are reinforced and extended by anti-hacking laws that prohibit unauthorized access to the machines hosting virtual worlds. [and] …copyright law allows virtual world owners to enjoy the additional benefit of copyright control over the code of their virtual worlds. (Lastowka, 2010, p. 180)

The counterplayer, while often working upon, and against the rules of the game, also moves outwards into acts that are violations of the contracts that a player automatically agrees to, while those that hack or illicitly mod may be seen to violate the security circumvention aspect of copyright law, and those that create derivative works or repurpose elements of videogames without express permission may be regarded as in violation of copyright law more broadly.

While this study is not intended as an exploration of the legal contexts of counterplay (although such a study is much needed), it aims to understand what rhetorics frame and motivate the manifestation of counterplay within a player population, and this, in turn, is influenced by the scope of rules, contract law, and criminal law. None of the counterplay forms explored or engaged with within this study are of an express criminal violation, such as *DDoS* attacks and the UK *Computer Misuse Act* 1990*,* although some of the individuals interviewed, such as iHcJames (p. 200) have been subject to restrictions on account of direct *DMCA* notices. The *DMCA* is something that many of the counterplayers interviewed have experience of, largely through the process of video suspension through copyright claims.

While any violation of a contract or law is dependant on the decision of a jury within a court, as of yet no examples of counterplay have reached this point and no precedent is set. Instead the videogame publishers, developers, and platform holders have reached an agreement with counterplayers prior to requiring a court ruling. However, despite this mediated approach the *DMCA* and *European Directive 2001/29/EC* have the capacity, if interpreted by the letter, to respond to counterplay forms explored here with incarceration. What this brief discussion of the legal restrictions of counterplay does is offer greater context to the

counterplay acts that this study explores, and in turn exposes that very few of the counterplayers are aware of the full risks and implications that bind their counterplay.

Counterplayers appear to view the gulf that Lastowka observes, even while the legal teams that protect videogames attempt to provide a bridge. Where this gulf has already been bridged, rebranding of what was once an asocial mischievous act occurs – that of playing against the rules, turned into an offense. The imbalance raises further interesting perspectives on counterplay and justifies the need for its study, and to study it necessitates an exploration of the context and purposes of counterplay. The thesis aims to answer what it is that these individuals are doing, how, and why, to enable a more equitable way of managing such behaviour, or simply to allow better understanding of the intent of these acts in the face of legal challenge.

Towards a Taxonomy of Counterplay

Counterplay is not restricted to within the textual boundaries of videogames but can occur beyond it as instrumental or expressive player production. This in turn means that the territory that must be guarded and managed by game operators and publishers is enormous and ill-defined – players may oppose the rules and contexts of a game, *EULA* by posting upon a forum, by uploading a video, by sharing a cheat, strategy or gamesave – all of which may seem entirely legitimate activities that are encouraged and supported by the communities that they are members of.

> The policing of game boundaries, of what constitutes legitimate play and cheating, and more generally who controls knowledge about the game, is common and comes with an increasingly well-developed repertoire of enforcement strategies, many of which raise controversial free-speech and intellectual property issues that remain untested in the courts. It is a particularly poignant strategy, given the reliance of game companies on their players to develop active (and by extension, promotional) grassroots communities for the game. As in-game experience becomes central to the lives of many individuals, and as the games foster an increasingly broad range of associated activities, these contractual arrangements bleed into other areas of life, following individuals and challenging what they can do with their online lives. (Taylor, 2007, p.122)

This presents a hugely problematic context where player activity within many spheres has the capacity to be seen to potentially damage a game or be hostile to the rules and expectations that inform it. This moves counterplay forward as a concept:

- it is not simply an opposition to rules;
- it occurs within the social as well as the formal and technical;
- it has the capacity to be contested by player groups or game stakeholders;
- it may be seen as normal behaviour or fan productivity;
- it may occur outside of the boundaries of the game;
- and, it may alter the meaning of the game.

What this articulates is the ambiguity with which counterplay is defined. To repurpose Malaby's contingent terminology, we might, in addition to *locative ambiguity*, where one is unclear of the jurisdiction of rules and expectations, say that counterplay is a product of *social ambiguity* '…never being certain about another's point of view (and often, resources)…' as when the player base labels a behaviour as counterplay, or *semiotic ambiguity* 'the unpredictability of meaning that always accompanies attempts to interpret the game's outcomes…' when players adopt strategies that are deemed counter by the designers or operators (2007, p.107). In addition we might add *ludic ambiguity* - the sense that the rules of the game are unclear and uncertain.

This is not to suggest that counterplay is solely the product of misunderstood well-intentioned behaviour that occurs within ambiguity, but to highlight that this may be the case as well as explicitly oppositional activity. In other instances we should assume that counterplay is adopted in the full understanding of the rules it violates and the tensions and offense that it generates. What this illustrates is the importance of intent in our understanding of counterplay. Behaviour, whether normative or abnormal, is conceptualized with a projected notion of intent, whether this is the actual intent of the actor or one retrospectively applied by the observer is immaterial, the observer attributes motivation and therefore meaning to the act. It is therefore intrinsically based upon a judgment of intent, which in turn raises the fundamental and profound question – how does one ascertain another person's intent for anything?

In order to attribute intent it would be necessary to know the motivations of another individual, or to conduct counterplay oneself – the former raises the quandary of how to obtain genuine motivational insight from another, and assumes that this is possible. It assumes that the motivation is observable or deducible, that it is common-sense and can be articulated. Yet could the motivational antagonism be unconscious, unclear, diffuse? Would an actor be able to explain their motivations? Would they be truthful? The alternative, conducting the counterplay personally is certainly of use, but it would say very little about the motivations and behaviours of others – it would be a biased projection of motivation as opposed to grounded insight.

In his later work Myers argues that game studies literature largely fails to acknowledge the implicitly transgressive nature of play, which he sees as 'most frequently non-serious and therein bad, ignorant, destructive, and/or illegal' (Myers, 2010, p.20). This aspect of play is seen as non-productive, dysfunctional and unfathomable from developmental and designer-centric perspectives, and is therefore rejected and censured – very much like the modifications explored here.

> …ignorant play is often denigrated as noob play; destructive play would include griefing and the like; and illegal play in game contexts involves, among other things, exploitation of game rules and codes (including commercial rules) during pirating and hacking activities. (Myers, 2010, p.15)

Such treatment of aggressive, inappropriate or antisocial forms of play is both commonplace and understandable – it is universally discouraged and socially censured, yet it still appears attractive to a

significant number of players. In addition to this cultural resonance and value, Myers suggests that the pleasures unlocked by bad play '…seem as direct, immediate, and engaging as those of good play' (Myers, 2010, p.16). If 'bad play' is both culturally and biologically indistinct from 'good play', it becomes difficult to differentiate it formally and thus, one is forced to rely on external normative contexts to define it, such as offered by rhetoric.

Instead, when considering the intent of an individual other one may propose a logical or persuasive narrative that contextualises the aims and objectives of the individual. We begin to think of logical meanings of an activity from our ideological frame, even if the activity is fundamentally counter-logical, such as that which intends to bring about disorder. What we do is construct conceptual frameworks that are tested by the behaviour until we find the best fit or adopt a prevailing truth – it is a speculative process where we propose the workings of a situation and view behaviour through it. The rational and persuasive simulations are an application of rhetoric. This move towards a definition and understanding of counterplay highlights the importance of rhetoric which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

Towards a Definition of Counterplay

Returning to Tom Apperley's definition of counterplay as '…an antagonistic relationship between the digital game and player … directed towards the ludic rules that govern the digital games configurations, processes, rhythms, spaces, and structures (Apperley, 2010, pp.102-103), the 'directed towards' becomes problematic due to the issues of identifying intent.

Counterplay might be best be understood as a product of Constance Steinkuehler's *mangle of play*, where play is seen to '…shift and evolve, often in unpredictable directions, seemingly holding still only when the "mangle" of designers' intentions (instantiated in the game's rules), players' goals and agency (instantiated in shared, emergent practices), and broader economic, legal, and cultural issues reach a (temporary) point of stabilization' (2006). Before settling on a working definition of counterplay and a frame for the activities that fall within its scope (and therefore within the scope of this study), it is useful to retrace the qualities that this literature review has exposed:

- Counterplay is a form of play closely linked to paidia and in contrast to gameplay;
- Its distinction from gameplay is dependent on its observed deviation from a normative framework;
- It may oppose the rhetoric or ideological frame of the game and may do all of this intentionally or unintentionally, its identification occurs within the social realm;
- The counterplayer is often attributed a special status – they are differentiated and their actions are frequently associated with identities e.g. griefer, killer, hacker;
- Counterplay acts may be conflictingly viewed as legitimate uses of gamespaces by different player groups or stakeholders;

- Participatory and fan production cultures have extended the scope and frequency of potential counterplay engagements due to players interacting with videogames on a productive and closer emotional level.

These qualities might allow us to propose this broad definition of counterplay:

> *Counterplay is activity that is recognised to utilise or interact with game elements such as its constitutive software, hardware, communications, content, rules, etiquette, and legal contexts, in a way that constitutes a violation and invites a response.*

This definition moves entirely into the subjective territory of the social, basing itself not on an (impossible) understanding of the *intent* of the counterplayer, but its recognition. This definition does not prescribe whom does the recognition or identification – as this is subject to significant ambiguity in itself – however it is reasonable to anticipate that this would be done by the normative player base, by the game operators and by the developers. The acknowledgement of the importance of opinion and recognition within this definition highlights the significance of rhetoric within the understanding of counterplay. The rhetorics that define what is acceptable play also characterise its corollary – and in turn offer opportunities for the deployment of alternate counter-rhetorics. Counterplay is therefore the product of the contested space where various rhetorics vie for control and authority – counterplay is in effect the symptom of the definitions of the dominant and prevailing rhetoric(s) that define play.

The definition allows us to define broad modes of counterplay, listed in a subjective escalation of the scope or significance of the act – its capacity to impact upon the system as opposed to the individual. It includes player behaviour and productivity is defined as 'Noob play', 'destructive play', 'ignorant play', 'illegal play' (and other modes of bad play):

- Incendiary, offensive or oppositional player productivity e.g. user generated content, mods, skins;
- Offensive or asocial player interactions e.g. grief play;
- Unfair player behaviour e.g. cheating and the use of exploits;
- Unsanctioned peripheral modification e.g. autofire controllers, lag-switches;
- Unsanctioned hardware modifications e.g. consoles that have security countermeasures removed;
- Homebrew and illicit software development and use e.g. modification programmes, aimbots, *DDoS* attacks etc;
- Game and system piracy and copyright abuses e.g. game copying and distribution.

CHAPTER TWO: RHETORICS OF COUNTERPLAY

Classical Rhetoric

As I have already identified, counterplay, roughly defined as *the act of being seen to interact with a game system and its components in an oppositional way* – is reliant on the perception of a violation. But the observation of a violation alone is troubling – *the counter necessitates response*, it necessitates management, but part of this management is dependent on understanding what is being done *and why* – giving the act a context and intent. Therefore while the *observed act* is a fundamental component of the construction of counterplay so too is the *authoritative model* with which it is defined in opposition. However, Constance Steinkuehler's mangle of play (2006), Mia Consalvo's ambiguity of cheating (2007), and Lastowka's gulf, highlight that there is no one authoritative model with which behaviour is rationalised. Each authoritative model can be understood as rhetoric – their interactions determine the current prevailing truth. Rhetoric controls how we understand normative and oppositional behaviour, how we manage it and ascribe culpability, blame and appropriate penalty.

Rhetoric as a method has its origins in the Greek Classical period, from around 500 to 300 BCE., where it was used as the primary tool of governance within the forum. All free, native-born, property-holding, adult male citizens were able to deploy rhetoric as a way of persuading their peers and reaching consensus – which determined what policies the city states adopted, and therefore the power-relations with its subjects and outside nations. Rhetoric *as a method* utilises the deployment of a range of persuasive methods (such as *logos, ethos, pathos, arrangement, style, delivery* and *memory*), which if artfully used convince an audience of the merit of a speaker's words. If conducted effectively, rhetoric gave the actor extraordinary power defined as '…the *ability to control events and meanings* (Brummet, 2006, p.5)'. Yet Rhetoric is no longer seen solely as a *method* of persuasion, but is understood additionally as the *persuasive qualities* of a statement, performance or text. It places the text and its reader in a specific hierarchy and context, and attempts to make 'this simulation' persuasive.

Rhetoric influences and controls these figured worlds – the authoritative *models* with which we understand the behaviour we encounter – altering our perception of '…how to distribute social goods in a society: who gets what in terms of money, status, power, and acceptance on a variety of different terms' (Brummet, 2006, p.7). Rhetoric, such as that encoded within a videogame therefore presents a way of attributing meaning that distributes 'social goods' that people would desire, such as recognition of skill, leisure or entertainment

(Brummet, 2006, p.7), and is part of a process of constantly renegotiated power-relations. The context and relationships presented by rhetoric can be regarded as 'figured worlds', '…simplified, often unconscious, and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works that we use to get on efficiently with our daily lives' (Gee, 2011, p.76), one of the most naturalised processes in which we regulate and configure what is normal and what is other.

Rhetoric is therefore deeply powerful. It influences the way that we understand the world around us, and within the context of videogames, determines how we perceive and respond to counterplay.

Procedural Rhetoric

Ian Bogost's notion of *procedural rhetoric* in *Persuasive Games* (2007) can be understood as *a method* in videogames, '…the *art of persuasion* through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures' (2007, p. ix). It presents the ways in which games persuade but is not concerned with the rhetorics of specific *games*, nor of *play* as an activity. Bogost argues that videogames become persuasive through the interaction of Fogg's seven types of persuasive technology (Fogg, 2003):

- Reduction – altering the level of complexity of a model, inferring significance through sophistication and inconsequence through omission;
- Tunneling – sequencing events in a specific non-negotiable order, inferring causality;
- Tailoring – presenting information to an actor on their progress, allowing them to change their behaviour or attitudes to better fit the expectations of a system;
- Suggestion – on-screen prompts in specific situations;
- Self-monitoring – allowing users to monitor performance through the creation of a metric or integer;
- Surveillance – the ability to observe the behaviour of others in order to modify play;
- Conditioning – offering greater reward for some ways of play, while comparatively punishing others (2007, p. 60).

These rhetorical statements signal the rules and parameters of the game to its potential players. They signal what they must contract themselves to in order to play. They learn to play the game as intended and appreciate its various pleasures. This creates a persuasive rhetoric that contextualises and produces both sanctioned and illegitimate play, distilling into an idealised kind of 'pure play' and a transgressive, othered opposite which is treated with suspicion and censure.

In contrast to Bogost, in *The Ambiguity of Play* (2001), Brian Sutton-Smith *does* focus on the persuasive discourses that influence our understanding of play, the rhetorics that attempt to influence our figured

worlds and define what play *means*. He therefore focuses in on what it means to be seen to play *wrongly*. These prevailing rhetorics are inevitably important for the study of counterplay.

> These 'popular ideological rhetorics' of play …constitute the incessant discourse about who we are and how we should live. …but are more limited in their present usage because they are applied only to the specific subject of play theories. (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p.13)

Sutton-Smith sees the *popular ideological rhetorics of play* as large-scale cultural patterns of thought that constitute ancient, pre-modern, or more contemporary figured worlds that manage and inform play. They each share '…a clear basis in well-known cultural attitudes of a contemporary or historical kind', 'their own specific groups of advocates', apply '…primarily to a distinct kind of play or playfulness' and '…distinct kinds of players', and '…the group that maintains the rhetoric benefits by the exercise of hegemony over the players, over their competitors, or over those who are excluded from play' (2001, pp.15-17). These rhetorics of play are therefore not simply related to the way that play is understood, but the meaning and perception of players – these rhetorics alter the significance of modes of play by attempting to present justifications for their invocation.

This is particularly interesting when we consider that some of the rhetorics are of *ancient origin, and* have become dormant or incompatible with contemporary cultural and moral attitudes. As a result these modes of play, which previously were legitimate, are now likely to be regarded as irrational, oppositional, or counter. They become annexed forms of play due to the damage that they cause or their violation of social codes. The seven ideological rhetorics Sutton-Smith indentifies are:

1. *Play as progress:* '…the notion that animals and children, but not adults, adapt and develop through their play. …socialization and moral, social, and cognitive growth' (of modern origin).
2. *Play as fate*: '…human lives and play are controlled by destiny …but very little by ourselves, except perhaps through the skilful use of magic or astrology' (of ancient origin).
3. *Play as power*: '…play as representation of conflict and as a way to fortify the status of those who control the play or its heroes'(of ancient origin).
4. *Play as identity*: '…is seen as a means of confirming, maintaining, or advancing the power and identity of the community of players' (of modern origin).
5. *Play as the imaginary*: '…playful improvisation of all kinds in literature and elsewhere, idealises the imagination, flexibility, and creativity of the animal and human play worlds' (of modern origin).
6. *The rhetoric of the self*: '…is idealised by attention to the desirable experiences of the players – their fun, their relaxation, their escape – and intrinsic or the aesthetic satisfactions of the play performances' (of modern origin).

7. *Play as frivolous:* '…it inverts the classic "work ethic"… [it] is not just the puritanical negative, it is also a term to be applied more to historical trickster figures and fools…' (of ancient origin) (2001, pp.9-11).

Despite these categories, Sutton-Smith acknowledges the fundamental ambiguity or unknowability of the popular ideological rhetorics of play, saying that '…play, like all other cultural forms, cannot be neutrally interpreted, it is impossible to keep ambiguity from creeping into the relationship between how they are perceived and how they are experienced' (2001, p.216). The rhetorics impede the ability to objectively think about play, perhaps the most useful action in this situation is merely to acknowledge that rhetorics exist and their prevailing power to alter and control the meanings of everyday play in its normal and abnormal manifestations.

Sutton-Smith calls for a widened definition of play that addresses some of the restrictions that he finds problematic within current models, and in acknowledgement that our interpretations are so influenced by the popular rhetorics. He argues that play 'should not be defined only in terms of the restricted modern Western values' which determine that it is 'non-productive, rational, voluntary, and fun'. Instead it should be understood as temporally and locatively varied, 'as momentary as a piece of wit' or as long as an Olympic cycle, or be as spatially diffuse '…as a daydream or as articulate as a sports stadium'. Play therefore becomes an ambiguous mode of behaviour that contains its own rhetorical capabilities. It becomes 'a system of communication and expression, not in itself either good or bad' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, pp.218-219). It is merely framed as such through the prevailing rhetoric of play.

This brief sketch of rhetoric illustrates its capacity to fundamentally alter our understanding of gameplay in both normative and counter forms – and highlights the ambiguity that surrounds that which is evident in game studies literature. What this implies is that our definitions of play are inextricably imbricated in rhetorical discourse, and influenced by not only the rhetorics that attribute meaning to forms of play, but frame what play is. If we cannot be certain of the legitimacy of the boundaries that define *play* and *games,* and therefore counterplay, counterplay becomes simply that which is seen to violate or transgress rule and interdiction. What follows is an exploration of the theories relating to oppositional behaviour more generally, with the intention of considering how these may interact with Sutton-Smith's popular ideological rhetorics of play. I aim to provide through this analysis some different perspectives on counterplay that the more commonly held rhetorical positions entail. In addition, I will apply these models to actual examples of counterplay.

Counterplay and Transgression

> *Counterplay is activity that is recognised to utilise or interact with game elements such as its constitutive software, hardware, communications, content, rules, etiquette, and legal contexts, in a way that constitutes a violation and invites a response.*

This is the definition of counterplay that I reached at the end of the previous chapter and it resonates across a range of game studies literature and accounts for a broad spectrum of observable player activity. It includes hacking, grief play and the creation of inflammatory user-generated content. By contrast, I will now present a definition of the concept of transgression in order to establish a broad correlation between the two terms and justify the application of theories (or rhetorics) of transgression to counterplay.

The term transgression has a range of meanings and specific uses in various fields of study, each of which may offer insight into transgression within the context of videogames. Within anthropology it is seen as a key function of 'boundary maintaining systems', serving to support the centrality and power of the hegemony (Parsons, 1951). In psychoanalysis it is a fundamental tool and process used to challenge negative internalized values and preconceptions; transgression is the act of violating the established patterns of thought (Freud, 1999). Outside of these specific example uses the notion of transgression is encountered where it represents the violation of the anthropological notion of taboo, an activity that is under prohibition in a given cultural context and which underpins a culture's values. It is within this general anthropological context that I will use the notion of transgression, although the various alternative meanings and uses may offer interesting additional insights into the complexities of the videogame transgressive.

Transgression can be understood as the act of violation of rule or moral principle that defines the boundaries of a society, delineating between the profane and sacred. Within society we largely understand boundaries through interrelated social and legal frameworks that are informed by social etiquette, religious instruction or law. The legal framework, defined by law, is merely a 'visible symbol' that represents consensual solidarity regarding behaviour (Durkheim, 1982, p.64). Law protects the central cultural and economic interests of society and asserts a force of governance that has the power to exert repressive or rehabilitatory authority, i.e. the ability to reprimand and/or socialize the transgressor (Foucault, 1991 [1977]).

> …to transgress is to go beyond the bounds or limit set by commandment or law or convention, it is to violate or infringe. (Jenks, 2003, p.2)

This definition of transgression paints it as a simple act of violation – a going beyond a boundary that has been set – and is analogous to any form of antagonism or rule-breaking. It therefore fits closely with the simplified definition of counterplay. However, this is not all that transgression entails. Jenks continues:

> But to transgress is also more than this, it is to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law or the convention. Transgression is a deeply reflective act of denial and affirmation. (Jenks, 2003, p.2)

This quote, from Chris Jenks' *Transgression* (2003), highlights the greater complexity of transgression over violation – that of contradiction and antagonism. Transgression is seen as a curious simultaneous *denial*

and affirmation in which the act is dependent on both the rule and observation of its violation to exist. Transgression does not simply reject a prohibition or rule, but does something with the boundary - it simultaneously objectifies it, breaks it and counters it, *visibly*, in doing so it calls for a response. The transgressive lacks the potential to change directly, but instead calls to the public and the orthodoxy for a response that may alter, distort, or ultimately reaffirm the rule. This is a crucially important distinction as it moves transgression away from mere rejection or circumvention – it becomes a questioning, dialectical and reflective process that is entirely dependent on the power of prohibition for its definition and dynamic. Michel Foucault further expands on this concept, describing transgression as:

> …a limit would not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. …Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. (Foucault, 1977, pp.33-35)

Transgression is a working upon a rule; it simultaneously challenges and traces the edges of a mandate. Transgressive acts can be seen to parasitically leech their 'density of being' by interrupting and channelling the power of rule. The more monolithic the rule that they counter the greater the power they adopt, but also the greater the likelihood of consensual defence. This is the denial and affirmation dynamic that Jenks is talking about. It is a symbiotic or spiral relationship that challenges the rhetorics bound up in the rule. Transgression places itself in opposition to the rules that restrict and define hegemony and therefore questions the logic of all of the structures within.

For the transgressor the power the act contains is temporarily seized as increased status and influence; however, persistent transgression is untenable (it is punished or it loses its power through familiarity) and as a result the transgressor is driven to repetition and escalation. The act of transgression is an addictive mix of institutional challenge and assertion of power. The transgressor seizes power through the recognition demanded from the institutions under attack. Transgression is not a benign activity; while it can be used as a tool for political redress, it is at heart a selfish, egotistical and intoxicating process. According to Freud, where a law or taboo prohibits an action, it represses the pleasures associated with it, and by violating the taboo the transgressor releases and experiences these 'repressed pleasures' as a heady euphoria (Freud, 1950 [1912]). It is this intoxicating rush of repressed pleasure, recognition and feeling of assumed power that presumably compel many to transgress. Roger Caillois alludes to similar pleasures associated with *paidia*, a way of playing that addresses our 'elementary need for disturbance' which he suggests we lose through socialisation (2001, p.28).

In so doing transgression drives a wedge between the people and the rule, elevating the power of the transgressor and creating yet another ambiguous space or vacuum in which the authority of the orthodoxy is seen to have been temporarily breached. It may expose injustice, stupidity, and the need for change, or nothing but the cruelty or negativity of the transgressive act. What determines the interpretation is the way in which the people respond and fill that vacuum, the way that rhetorics are used to explain away the act and allow its reconciliation and return to normality.

The transgressive act is consonant with counterplay (the emergent actions of the cheat, the griefer, the hacker, the illicit modder etc.). The people become the player base or implicit rules, and the intervention by the orthodoxy can be seen as the dictation of rule by the operators and developers, by decree (cease and desist) or by an alteration of law (a software update). Transgression and counterplay may be viewed as expressions of the same process within different spheres. Transgression is seen within the sphere of everyday life, while counterplay is transgression manifested through and within play. The linking of transgression and counterplay as concepts can be seen in Espen Aarseth's adoption of term *Transgressive Play* in the discussion of counterplay acts (Aarseth, 2007).

If counterplay and transgression are interchangeable, or at least related, it is reasonable to think that the rhetorics that are applied to justify or censure transgression may have relevance to the study of counterplay – much like Sutton-Smith's seven rhetorics did to play more generally. It should be stressed at this point that these rhetorics are not discrete, they overlap. They are after all attempting to reconcile and frame the same *activity* so will inevitably have points of contact. Instead it might be best to regard the rhetorics of counterplay and of play as being different but related. The rhetorics of counterplay emphasise different meanings and qualities, i.e. those that are related to the counter as a concept. It is my intention to view rhetorics of transgression as apposite and pertinent to the understanding of non-normative player behaviour in videogames.

Five Rhetorics of Transgression

This study will approach counterplay through five lenses or rhetorics of transgression:

1. Resistance – as opposition against a rule or edict. It recognises the power of the rule (but not necessarily its authority), and attempts to alter the power-structures that the rule creates through introducing chaos and undermining its logic. Individual or communal;
2. Mastery – recognises but disregards the power and authority of the rule. Is an act that asserts mastery of the protagonist in the sense that it does not recognise the authority of others. It does not attempt to change or alter – it simply does. Individual;
3. Identity – violation of rule as a means of creating and / or maintaining an identity forged on distinction and difference to the norm. Individual or communal;
4. Creativity – the transgression and violation of rules in order to create. This is a particular product of the contemporary dominance of the idea of creativity (such as artistic expression) as an important human characteristic. Individual or communal;
5. Carnival – an invitation to join a temporary communal and unilaterally vicious articulation of inversion, misrule. Communal.

These five rhetorics first need to be defined in regard to the normative position, the notion of *transgression as pathogen*.

Pathogenic Transgression

It is possible to trace the origins of pathogenic transgression to Emile Durkheim's *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1982) in which he articulates the notions of deviance and criminality, and highlights the centrality and the importance of the average within a population. Durkheim defined three non-normative behaviours: the different; the deviant; and the criminal, which were determined by the extent to which they differed from 'social facts'. A social fact was what was considered the normal behaviour of 'a given social type …at a given phase of its development, when it occurs in the average society of that species' (Durkheim, 1982, p.97). Normality and abnormality are defined in reference to the average, the less average something is the more deviant it becomes until it is deemed criminal (or transgressive). Normal, healthy behaviour promotes solidarity, continuity and union, while that which transgresses, which is unhealthy or pathological, promotes individualisation, fragmentation and interruption (Jenks, 2003, p.25). Within a biological system the abnormal threatens the normal operation of the whole and therefore jeopardises its longevity. Abnormal behaviour can therefore be pathogenic.

The ways in which the pathogen is managed is by through identifying, categorising behaviour as different, deviant, or criminal, labelling intent and then forming an appropriate response. The different may be embraced, the deviant may be tolerated (with some form of social repression), but the criminal, or that which transgresses fully, must be managed with repressive prejudice. The active management of abnormality requires its definition and description as a category or type. Society manages events by labelling them, rationalising them and invoking rituals that enable a return from the recognised state of difference to one of normality. These rituals take place everywhere around us in events and institutions that manage category alterations and articulate our social anxiety regarding change. We see this in a court of law, a funeral parlour, the end of a period of festivity, or the celebration of a birthday.

Anthropological scholars such as Arnold van Gennep, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner extensively studied the complex 'rites of passage' rituals that manage alterations to defining categories – both those which are considered pathological and those which are normal (e.g. the move from adolescence to adulthood, freedom to incarceration, or those that manage the passage from life into death). Such rituals avoid tension because they complete. The individual who enters is reintegrated with their new status: adult, prisoner, corpse. If these rituals are interrupted or do not reach a point of reintegration they can be a source of significant social tension, forcing the individual into perpetual liminality that exudes a dangerous aspect: the extended adolescent; the wanted man; or the missing person.

> Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, is indefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. (Douglas, 2002, p.119)

This process captures some of the pathogenic capability of the transgressive act as a radical changing nature where a rule has been violated, once its authority has been rejected without censure, it opens up the

potential for more transgression and a repetition and extension of the transitional state. It is only when the transgression stops, when it is objectified and rationalised, does the transgressor exit their transitional state. The incomplete broken rule therefore emanates risk to all who encounter it. They may be tainted by it, but it also has the potential to undermine the system.

In a developed, and non-biological form, this is the conventional rhetoric that defines and approaches the transgressive act. It frames the act of disobedience as presenting a threat to the system that must be checked lest it undermine the whole. These actions challenge the authority of the rules and the permeability of categories, and through proximity, invites others to do so too. As a result it must therefore be quarantined and eradicated in order to protect the system.

The biological aspect of this rhetoric has diminished over time, but its core principles – dangerous infectious deviance, otherness, and distrust of the ambiguous still exist. They now manifest themselves in the ways that transgressive elements are presented as escalatory threats, as the 'thin end of the wedge', that may instigate a wider descent into chaos. It is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a rhetoric conventionally deployed by the dominant (who have the most to lose within a system), and can be seen in the ways that the *threat* of an act is emphasised, and it is in this emphasis that the bodily is sometimes invoked.

Transgression and counterplay may be viewed as expressions of the same process within different spheres. Transgression is seen within the sphere of everyday life, while counterplay is transgression manifested through and within play. It holds the same relationship to rule, and is controlled by a common reference to the rhetoric of pathogen. The linking of transgression and counterplay as concepts can be seen in Espen Aarseth's adoption of term *Transgressive Play* in the discussion of counterplay (Aarseth, 2007).

While this presents a definition of the normative transgression as pathogen rhetoric, the five additional rhetorics of transgression utilised in this study have a basis in commonplace cultural attitudes and perspectives. Like Sutton-Smith's seven rhetorics of play (2001), they also have distinct groups of advocates and align with specific play practices. It should be stressed that the five rhetorics of transgression that follow are not necessarily discrete. Instead the rhetorics frequently overlap, offering perspectives on counterplay that interact and tessellate, altering meaning of the counterplay act.

1. Transgression as Resistance

Resistance can be understood in its most abstract sense as a process where an act is instigated in opposition to a stimulus – such as a request, mandate or prohibition. It is the natural oppositional force of a *subordinate entity* against the will of the dominant.

Resistance is therefore determinant on the perception of inequality, this is not necessarily inequality determined by the normative, nor the hegemonic, but is subjective in the extreme. The inequality is perceived by the subordinate, or the disempowered, who can choose to lodge complaint about this

inequality through mechanisms of *hegemonic resistance*, such as the courts of law, or where these methods are perceived as corrupt, inaccessible, or impotent, may resort to *transgressive resistance*. Within this context transgressive resistance becomes an explosive and temporary means of challenging or reversing the force of the edict. Inevitably for those that do not share the perception of inequality it is deemed unnecessary, senseless and merely pathogenic. The disenfranchised can fleetingly assert power and control which they have no authority to wield. They resist the power relations projected onto them, and this has the capacity to stretch out over time or space, undermining the authority of rule and undermining its logic and power.

By undermining the logic of the orthodoxy, transgressive resistance attempts to create a vacuum and redefine the distribution of power as the rule is reconstructed. It aims to shatter the normality of the prevailing order and through a descent into chaos expose the unfairness of the rule itself. Transgressive resistance can be understood as direct action – the violation of rule in order to expose its inequality. Conventionally, within a Modernist perspective, resistance frequently occurred in the collective, such as with resistant movements based around gender, racial, or political injustices. These examples of resistance gain momentum with each instance of resistance, becoming a cause, that ultimately may prevail. The point is that the isolated acts of individuals tessellate into a more cohesive form, each act of resistance, even those that are neutralised, contribute collectively and accumulatively to the momentum of the cause.

In *What is Resistance?*, Rebecca Raby (2005) develops Peter Aggleton and Geoff Whitty's (1985) *typology of resistance* to challenge the perceived prevalence of group-based or communal resistance, arguing for the view of resistance as a primarily individual exercise that is *fractured and personal.* It does not necessarily interconnect with other acts of resistance and articulate a cause, instead it is an individual and localised opposition where the protagonist decides to resist irrespective of a wider social context.

As a result Postmodern resistant acts '…may be less able to celebrate collective, organized, oppositional resistance, they do address complex flows of power relations, fragmented, constructed subjectivities and local and individualized activities' (Raby, 2005, p.161). Resistance can then be subjective and instanced, manifesting in the way that the protagonist chooses. This creates a situation where a matrix of individual transgressions are motivated as resistance, but one that builds no momentum or connection. To the observer these acts will most likely align with the rhetoric of pathogen, as unfounded and barbaric acts.

J. Patrick Williams (2011, p.93) offers some way of bridging the discontinuity and presenting a way of articulating the *similarities and interconnections* between Postmodern resistant acts. This is done by describing the formal characteristics of resistance, such as its *mode*, its *scale*, and its *visibility* (pp.94-106). A resistant act works along a *passive / active* axis, according to how direct the challenge to the orthodoxy is. If it is direct opposition it is *active resistance*, while if it seeks to evade the rule it is *passive resistance*. The micro /macro scale can be used to think about the target of the act, the type of response it elicits, and/or the extent to which it originates from individual or group activity. Micro works on the individual scale, meso the scale of groups and institutions, while macro focuses on wide scale issues, such as *economic systems* or

political ideologies. The *overt / covert* axis is the extent to which resistance is visible and recognised by targets and observers alike. Overt resistance is vocal and public proclamation of opposition and refusal, while covert resistance is duplicitous and ambiguous where not all parties are aware of the existence or meaning of the resistant act. Covert resistance becomes an act with double meaning understood correctly only by those who are complicit or '*in the know*'. This double-inscription highlights the issue with each of these categories offered by Williams, that resistance can be simultaneously read contrastingly dependent on an observer's understanding and attitude.

Resistance is multidimensional, where '...any particular action or event identified as resistant may be simultaneously analysed as relatively passive or active, micro-or macro, and covert or overt (Williams, 2011, p.105).' This forces us back into the ambiguity of transgression – and illustrates the compelling need to understand the emic motivation of a resistant act, without that knowledge we are likely to misrepresent its formal qualities.

At its core, resistance builds upon dialecticism, which sees conventional power-structures being opposed and leading to a new reality as a *synthesis*. Resistance is defined through opposition bringing about change to power relations through the challenge and opposition of rule. Its aims are to reconfigure the distribution of power and relationships between the dominant and subordinate. Contrasted to transgression as pathogen, the rhetoric of resistance is predominantly invoked by subordinate groups to accentuate the injustice of a system or state of affairs. It justifies transgressive or counter activity through the reference to a greater (subjective) injustice.

2. Transgression as Mastery

The rhetoric of transgression as mastery has its basis in the concepts of slave/master roles, and the conceptual foundations of the *master morality* and the Übermensch (overman) initiated by Frederick Nietzsche and later extended by Georges Bataille. Essentially the rhetoric of mastery is one which does not recognise the restrictive authority of others. The protagonist becomes a master, free to do as they wish instead of the dominated slave. While this is the theoretical basis for this approach, it can be seen manifest in attitudes that refuse to recognise the repressive authority of another party and has particular resonance with the hands-on-imperative that characterises hacker-culture, which in turn was instrumental in the foundation of the videogames industry.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1969), and more explicitly in *Beyond Good and Evil* (2003), Nietzsche contemplated the origins of moral concepts such as *justice, law, conscience*, and *responsibility*. His thesis was that normative Judaeo-Christian morality was a violently limiting constraint that dominated and subordinated human potential. When expressed as the Slave/Master model, the anger and sense of injustice felt at constant social domination is channelled as guilt and inverted back on the individual. The individual becomes *slave* to the *master* of socialisation – surrendering their potential in the name of the social, which

is an unhappy and bitter experience. For Nietzsche there was a prevalent Judeo-Christian *slave morality* which is typified by pessimism and cynicism, in contrast there was a lost *master morality* which prioritised ancient Greek values of strength, wealth, and health. Nietzsche's argument was that a return to the emancipatory master-morality was preferable to the continuation of the repressive slave morality, even though its rejection would necessarily be understood as transgression and pathogen.

Nietzsche embodies master-morality in the figure of the Übermensch (the overman) – the *creator of new values*. It is an individualistic manifestation of 'aristocratic values' that reject the restrictions of the slave-morality and the compulsion to live in fear of social rejection and censure. The Übermensch asserts a *will to power* – that does not recognise the legitimacy of the restrictions and pursues its aims with self-control, self-affirmation, and self-determination – irrespective of the social and moral implications. Nietzsche's work, and that of the Übermensch in particular, has historically been utilised and distorted to support the agenda of extremist groups such as the Nazi party and Anarchist movement. who utilised its image as a model of radical and amoral change. Subsequently, the rhetoric of mastery, the Übermensch, and will to power, have received significant criticism due to their implicit rejection of normative moral values and association with ideological extremism.

Georges Bataille's writing develops some of the themes implicit within Nietzsche's work, particularly that related to the limitations of morality and the desire for freedom. Strongly critical of capitalist economics and their limitation of human relations (much like Nietzsche's morality), Bataille developed a 'general-economy' that seeks emancipation and sovereignty through conspicuous waste and the creation of no-use-value. The logic is that waste and no-use frees the protagonist from the limitations of economics in their broadest sense. By consumption in excess and the creation of waste and loss, an *economy of unproductivity*, the individual shakes off the shackles of necessity and has the potential to become Nietzsche's infinitely free Übermensch. Through rejecting the need to generate profit Bataille's transgressive rejects the fear of the future and becomes steadfastly focussed on the bodily now, the acts refute the authority of restriction and represent absolute individual freedom and a profoundly spiritual recognition of the individual will.

This is what is meant by transgression as mastery – as becoming freed not just from a rule, but from all rules, from the restrictions and expectations of the system – to go beyond its limit and become lost within it. Freed by the taking, this becomes the assertion of a master morality. To transgress wilfully and far beyond the scope of prohibition is to become human and free. From such a perspective the transgressive element takes on another valence – as a noble, self-exhausting step towards sovereignty and human liberation. This is the transgressor who continues despite the inevitability of prosecution. It is the wilful transgression that anticipates destruction. It creates spectacle that symbolises freedom, although its concern is not with the emancipation of others, nor anything else that is contingent on the future of the actor, but simply upon the joy of individual located sovereignty. While this offers some of the core theoretical background to the rhetoric of mastery, it is important to consider how it is manifest i.e. what behaviours might be considered to align with this rhetoric.

The notion of transgression as mastery has a longstanding thematic resonance within computer culture and videogame culture, and is perhaps most clearly understood when it takes the form of the *hack*, and the expertise and mastery of a system that this necessitates. While hacking is often regarded as anti-social, illegal or degenerate, its development *as a practice* revolves around ideas of total access to information and the rejection of any restrictions to this access. According to Steven Levy, the early hacker communities (revolving around the *Tech Model Railroad Club* – TMRC – at Massachusetts Institute of Technology), utilised the *hands-on-imperative* where 'all information should be free', irrespective of notions of ownership that prevented access (2001, pp.40-45). This masterful approach to open source information manifested itself through practices such as the circumvention of security systems, reverse engineering and social engineering – all techniques to erode the barriers that prevented access, justified on the basis that 'access to computers – and anything which might teach you something about the way the world works – should be unlimited and total' (Levy, 2001, 40).

This ideology permeated through hacker culture and the industries that emerged from it, informing the attitudes of programmers and developers if not necessarily the corporations that they eventually formed. The 'hack' became the symbol of the hands-on imperative, with the most highly regarded hacks, displaying 'simplicity', 'mastery', and 'illicitness' (Taylor, 1999, p.15), and conferring status upon the protagonist. The hack demonstrated that the hacker understood the system implicitly, was able to master the system as a result, and deployed a counter-culture or hostility towards rule.

The most commercially astute and entrepreneurial of those in the hacker community, such as Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, became instrumental in developing the personal computer and software markets. Yet, despite the adoption of corporate structures in order to enable industrial software production, the industry retained certain aspects of the hacker ideologies, which permeated through the work environments and attitudes. This combination of capitalism and counter-culture is something that Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron called the *Californian Ideology* (2001, pp.363-364).

The *Californian Ideology* has a propensity towards mastery and counter-cultural attitudes towards information access, and this resonates throughout videogame development, where Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy argue that many pioneers entered into the videogames industry from the perspective of the hack. They '…were able to intervene in the processes of technological innovation and development by altering, extending and manipulating the technology in unexpected, playful and often illegitimate ways' (2006, p.74).

These unexpected, playful and illegitimate acts of alteration, extension, and manipulation, resonate deeply with the notion of mastery and counterplay. The protagonists do not recognise the authority of the restrictions and simply interacts with the text in a way that they wish – they become masters of that technological sphere. Dovey and Kennedy argue that for those developing videogames, such as Richard Bartle, Roy Trubshaw, John Carmack, John Romero, Ken Kutaragi, and Sean Blackley, '…computer game playing and programming feature …as the key means through which these figures are able to articulate their defiance of the 'corporate' system; yet also the means through which they develop the critical technical

skills which are recognized as commercially highly valued and valuable' (2006, p.72). Videogame development is based upon a masterful approach to information access and interaction, and as a corollary it is reasonable to assert that videogame consumption may also take on this mode.

Returning to a more generalised or abstract approach transgression as mastery can be considered an individualistic mode of transgression – the protagonist rejects the restrictions that surround them and takes what they wish, does what they wish. This would be the transgressive act that holds no justification other than *I needed to do so*. Because knowledge is power it is an act of will and therefore resonates with the dynamic of the Übermensch.

3. Transgression as Identity

In contrast to mastery's assertion of individual power, the rhetoric of identity frames transgression as an expression of community identity. It does not seek to alter the power of the orthodoxy like *resistance*, or to ignore the authority of the orthodoxy like *mastery*, but instead it aims to carve out a social space within which alternate realities and power-structures exist simultaneously with the normative. Transgression as identity is therefore closely linked to the concept of subculture, which owes much to the work of the *Chicago School of Sociology* in the 1920s and 30s, Birmingham University's *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* (CCCS) in the 1970s, and Manchester Metropolitan University's *Institute for Popular Culture* in the mid 1990s. Subculture is typified as the formation of alternate communal identities by youth groups that are distinguished against the hegemonic, through the deployment of deviant or transgressive practices and rituals. The notion of subculture builds extensively on the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) notions of distinction emanate from his work exploring the origins of class division and social immobility, and the ways in which these were consistently predicated over time. He observed that forms of capital other than economic capital such as cultural capital (individual cultural knowledge signalled by certain predilections or tastes), and social capital (the advantages of having a durable network of social ties and recognitions), were intrinsic to the maintenance of social divides and hegemony. Bourdieu's argument was that *distinction* or *taste*, and the rejection of the tastes of others, was one of the ways in which the classes created and sustained exclusive spheres, different identities, and ultimately constituted mechanisms of power and control. Yet Bourdieu configures subculture along the pre-existing conceptual fault lines of class – implying that there are only as many subcultures as classes, and taking on a fundamentally Marxist interpretation.

Bourdieu's Marxist approach was binary, inflexible and overly reliant upon categories, notably class, but its power was in showing how marginalised groups could create spheres of autonomy and establish power while still subject to the restrictions of the dominant. Through behaving in certain ways and demonstrating 'manifested preferences', the subcultural actor is able to signal identity, communality, and hierarchy. From within this space status can be established – and capital generated - offering a framework for the

subordinate to carve out their own spaces and legitimacies, irrespective of the normative interpretation of their activity. Thus apparently deviant or transgressive activities may be the expression of, or creation of, subcultural identities that serve to legitimise the behaviour and create spaces in which alternate power can be established.

Dick Hebdige saw subcultural identity as communicated through *stylistic acts* presented in three ways: *argot*, *demeanour*, and *image* – the ways that subcultural members talk, act, and look (1979). This may take the form of the adoption of intentionally distinctive slang or impenetrable speech, by behaving in ways that violate normative etiquette and rules, and by engaging in overtly transgressive acts – e.g. from Hebdige's punk context, vandalism, affray, and the use of illicit drugs. From this perspective, to oppose the orthodoxy, and for this opposition to be recognised, is to signal subcultural membership – from within which the actor is able to attain status that may be missing or unattainable within conventional social groups.

As seen with resistance, subculture has also conducted a postmodern turn, documented through the *post-subcultures* work of Steve Redhead, and Sarah Thornton's exploration of rave identity and behaviour (1995). Whereas Modernist perspectives on identity and subculture emphasised the communal, spatial, and behavioural coherence, Redhead and Thornton document a point where subcultural identity is in permanent flux and renegotiation, and the connection of taste and communality was increasingly difficult to make. Within post-subculture, identity and behaviour is individually mediated largely through consumption practices, and the alignment of identity can occur in a diffuse manner – with identification occurring beyond location or practice. Placed within an online context this becomes clearer – that behaviour can align oneself with a subculture within which the protagonist has not even met any other members (corporeally), and whose subcultural spaces exist on the internet and whose members live on different continents. Despite the issues with the diffuse nature of post-subcultures, conducting the right kind of behaviour confers *subcultural capital* upon members (Thornton, 1995, p.11).

> Subcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. In many ways it affects the standing of the young like its adult equivalent. Subcultural capital can be *objectified* or *embodied.* (Thornton, 1995, p.11)

By obtaining status and subcultural capital, the subcultural actor is able to advance their project and do more of what they wish. Yet, like Raby's resistance (2005) (see p.54), Thornton's *post-subcultures* work rejects the notion that subcultural identity is necessarily collective – instead alignment with subcultural identity can be weak and take place through modes of consumption and individualisation. Buying the right kind of products, using them in the right way, wearing the right clothes, having the right white-label records or consuming the right kind of drugs – these for Thornton becomes the markers of distinction and definitions of subcultural identity.

The way in which individuals consume relates to identity – but it differs from mastery in that it recognises a larger group even if this is done *at a fractured distance*. In relation to game cultures Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy raise a similar concept through the use of the term *technicity* - '…to encapsulate, in conceptual terms, the connections between and identity based on certain types of attitude, practices, preferences and so on and the importance of technology as a critical aspect of the construction of that identity' (2006, p.17). Instead of Thornton's haircuts and white-label records, technicity can be understood as technologically objectified subcultural style – playing the *right games* in the *right ways* in distinction to how the majority do. From this perspective the argument is that engaging in counterplay may be seen as the right way to play by a specific subculture, and that identity which aligns with subculture is formed through counterplay practices.

4. Transgression as Creativity

Transgressive creativity rejects or ignores the boundaries that determine appropriate use and interaction with texts, often altering and inverting the roles of author and consumer. It justifies transgression through a focus on the generative creative act. It has considerable overlap with the notion of subculture, particularly in examples such as fan-studies, where part of the manifested preferences revolve around the creation and appropriation of existing texts, such as Henry Jenkins' work on Star Trek fan fiction. It can be understood as the institutionally negative, or oppositional aspects of Wirman's player productivity (see p.30).

According to Henry Jenkins, an individual becomes a fan at the point at which they become active creators: 'For fans, consumption naturally sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable...' (Jenkins, 1992, p.41), and in turn many forms of writing place fans in opposition with the owners of the texts that they focus upon. While fan productivity may be benign or complimentary to a text it also has the capacity to transgress and violate expectations and models of authorship and consumption. This is frequently understood as the mark of 'resistant' fandom (i.e. slash fiction).

Fan production is often placed within a resistant frame with reference to the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), who argued that the mass media deployed 'strong strategies' that reinforced attitudes of distinction, division and inequality within society. In the face of such a persuasive media ecosystem 'passive consumers' are viewed as having little opportunity for autonomy and authenticity, bar the use of 'weak tactics of consumption', such as through the acting out of rituals, alterations and other forms of rewriting that temporarily undermine the rhetorics of control. Where weak tactics of consumption extend to the re-writing and alteration of texts deemed to violate or damage their original authorial intent, this can be considered transgression as creativity or appropriation – something that is especially salient within the context of participatory culture. This can be seen as the collision between fan-production, such as documented by Hills (2002), Jenkins (1992) and Wirman (2009), and commercial protectionism, which has been exacerbated within recent decades due to the movement of production onto the internet and the creation of powerful media conglomerates. According to Henry Jenkins '…the web has pushed the hidden

layer of cultural activity into the foreground, forcing the media industries to confront its implications for their commercial interests' (2006, p.137).

Yet, paradoxically, at the same time as protectionism has increased so too have the number of invitations to engage with and create (such as seen with *Game 3.0*), and this has expanded the opportunities for productive practices to overstep a mark, or for individuals to tactically puncture and assert momentary control. As was seen in the previous section there are a number of robust forms of protection, such as the US *DMCA* and *European Directive 2001/29/EC*. While the legal frameworks such as copyright are robust on this matter some, such as Lessig (2008), speaking specifically of the situation in the US, argue that the protectionism is out of synch with realities of contemporary cultural expression:

> We thus have a system of technology and invite our kids to be creative. Yet a system of law prevents them from creating legally. The regulation of his creativity thus fails every important standard efficiency and justice and Congress should immediately address how it could be changed to make it work better. (Lessig, 2008, p.266)

The creative fan output mentioned here is one reading of the creative appropriative rhetoric. There is also the potential that output is created with the explicit intent to undermine or challenge the authority of the original texts (it is transgressive resistance), or simply to parasitically leech revenue from a franchise (theft?). These acts move into the ambiguous borders between these rhetorics. This rhetoric is simultaneously: the justification of transgression in the name of creativity, something that Kieran Cashell calls 'aesthetic transgression' (2009, p.1) – or rather creativity that is manifest in transgression, and, the perception of inappropriate access and use of the creativity of others.

Examples of transgressive creativity would typically take the form of contemporary practices such as the mashup, or remix – the creation of something new from other often protected works. This has become a common cultural practice, something that Lawrence Lessig recognises in his suggestion of '*remix culture*', or '*Read/Write*' (RW) culture (2008, p.28), that constitutes one of the primary modes of creativity, especially online. The creation of mashups, the recombination of images, sounds, and video without recognition of their ownership, despite often being a violation of copyright law, is an apparently natural practice. Within videogame culture this may take the form of machinima, the editing of captured images, the ripping of textures and resources, and more active forms such as illicit modification. The point here is that the sheer prodigy of the content produced makes many unaware of the potential implications of these interactions. Transgression as creativity is that which focuses upon the generation of content in violation of rules such as etiquette and copyright.

5. Transgression as Carnival

The rhetoric of transgression as carnival owes much to the work of literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's book, *Rabelais and His World* (1984), explores the depiction and dynamics of the carnival as seen in the work of Renaissance writer Francois Rabelais. The carnival took place in the Middle Ages and Renaissance period throughout northern Europe, in the form of a period of festivity where people were permitted to act outside and beyond the boundaries of conventional etiquette and norms, representing a wide-scale but temporary descent into play, subversion, parody, and ridicule of the orthodoxy.

Typically the carnival consisted of a range of activities such as physical '*ritual spectacles'* and *'comic verbal compositions',* suffused with offensive language and argot that was translated as '*Billingsgate'*. Each of these communicated the notion of *'Ritual Laughter'* – where individuals and most significantly the feudal structures of power (ecclesiastical, monarchical, legal, economic) were openly challenged, ridiculed and humiliated. Yet instead of being the conspicuous activity of an individual or minority group, the carnival was all-encompassing and collective, and did 'not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators… …because its very idea embraces all the people' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.7). However, despite its communality the carnival was not anodyne or accommodating. It did not champion the weak, but was indiscriminately hostile with its targets and their treatment. The carnival 'violently abuses and demonizes *weaker*, not stronger, social groups – women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who 'don't belong' – in a process of *displaced abjection*' (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.19). The carnival is a descent into misrule and hostility, all supported through an adopted homogenous anonymity and the sense of communality in the bristling crowd.

The carnival originates from the people, not through organization by the ruling classes or institutions, and can be understood as having a social or communal aspect that resonates with Victor Turner's concept of *communitas*.

> Communitas is, essentially speaking and in its origins, purely spontaneous and self-generating. … It is essentially opposed to structure… …closely hedged about by rules and interdictions – which act like the lead container of a dangerous radioactive isotope. (Turner, 1974, p.243)

Communitas is the social bond that forms between individuals within a liminoid space, such as the carnival, and may be seen in the right circumstances as the fuel that drives for subversion, transgression, and even revolution. Communitas prioritises solidarity, equality, and a sense of joy that is unanimously hostile.

Within the carnival people would don masquerades and disguises in order to protect themselves from repercussions and to signal their otherness from the conventional. It represented '…temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank,

privileges, norms, and prohibitions… It was hostile to all that was immortalised and completed' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.10). In so doing it offered an alternative structure in which norms and hierarchy were inverted, it became a 'second world and a second life outside officialdom' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.6).

Carnival has become an important theme in relation to the study of transgression, not necessarily because of what constituted, but rather what it represented to the people. The Carnival was not dialectic, it did not serve to change political or social relations. It did not create a persistent identity. It did not assume authority, or escape the grasp of the dominant, nor was it intrinsically creative. But, instead represented a simple antagonism towards the institutional, the hegemonic and all who stray into its path. It is viewed as an articulation and recognition of the brutally repressive nature of life in the Middle Ages. In this regard carnival communicates some of the inverted anger of Nietzsche's slave-morality but with no sense of escape through a will to power.

From our modern perspective it is difficult to fully grasp the nature of Rabelais' carnival, and its contemporary manifestations have lost much of its ritual laughter. There is instead a tendency for us to view Rabelais' carnival '…as the vulgar practices of a superstitious and vulgar population' and a 'purely negative phenomenon' (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.9). Yet for its participants ritual laughter had a 'special philosophical and utopian character' (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.12), that '...when it triumphed over the fear inspired by the mystery of the world and by power, boldly unveiled the truth about both. It resisted praise, flattery, hypocrisy. This laughing truth, expressed in curses and abusive words, degraded power' (Bakhtin, 1984, p.92).

Yet despite this cathartic aspect, the symbolic *laughing truth* is perhaps the true transgressive danger of the carnival, as John Jervis points out in *Transgressing the modern*, '…humour exposes the pomposity, the pretensions, the arbitrary nature of the given order; it involves unexpected juxtapositions and category transgressions; innate adaptability and creativity possible; it is parodic and reflexive' (Jervis, 1999, p.17). In so doing the carnival, and the ritual laughter that it invokes, hold dangerously subversive connotations, flattening hierarchy, it '...contains something revolutionary… [as] ...only equals may laugh' (Herzen in Jervis, 1999, p.18).

Despite its discontinuation, there is a sense that the *human need* for it still exists, and as a result we now engage in the carnivalesque in different ways – including through playing videogames.

> People have the real need, and "need" is not for me "a dirty word," to doff the masks, cloaks, apparel, and insignia of status from time to time even if only to don the liberating masks of liminal masquerade. (Turner, 1974, p.243)

As a result, carnival has entered the 'cultural world of the imagination' (Jervis, 1999, p.24), where it becomes an *attitude* as opposed to a space and location. We enter a position where the carnival may be individually invoked whenever and wherever we see fit, leaving us in a 'strange carnivalesque diaspora'

(Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.190). Leisure, conspicuous consumption, binge-drinking, extended adolescence, hen-parties, sport, raves etc. – each of these contain distasteful aspects that implicitly criticise the normative and echo ritual laughter. These constitute pleasure at the margins that represent a reconnection with the carnival.

Cultural criminologist, Mike Presdee, develops this concept further, arguing that while these contemporary activities may constitute the neo-carnivalesque, they lack two important qualities – the explicit communal nature of carnival, and its clear demarcation in space and time. For Presdee, the lack of synchronicity prevents the satisfactory outcome of transgression – the cessation, and rites of reintegration that marks its end and the reintroduction of the authority of the orthodoxy – and that as a result we become socially suspended and isolated. '...We are left with disappointment, dissatisfaction, discontent and the expectation that the carnival of crime will be performed, must be performed, again and again' (Presdee, 2000, p.48).

Biopolitical Paradox

Each of these rhetorics of transgression ultimately resonate around power, or, to be more precise, present a justification for a different interaction with power. In *pathogen* we sense the fear of the orthodoxy of its loss. In *resistance* we seek change to power-relations by any means necessary. In *mastery* power is asserted through the rejection of the authority of the orthodoxy. Within *identity* we see the creation of alternate and simultaneous spaces of power. In *creativity* we sense tactical poaching and renegotiation of the power relations between author and consumer. In the *carnivalesque*, power, all power, is debased and undermined. These forms highlight that power and its formation, exertion and manifestation is crucial to the understanding of transgression generally – and therefore counterplay specifically. However, notions of power and the control that it exerts have been subject to significant change as a result of the postmodern turn, but also through the development of more pervasive and efficient methods of managing and controlling populations, as necessitated in modern society.

Michel Foucault (1977) wrote extensively upon the role of power and control in society, and in particular development and change during the modern age, charting a path from practices of punishment (retribution acts such as torture) through to modes of discipline (preventative or rehabilitatory practices). In effect this can be seen as a movement from punishment of violator(s) through to a prevention of crime through a management and control of the freedoms to conduct crime. Foucault's core example is the panopticon, the glass-donut prison where prisoners are compliant through the fear of observation rather than the fear of punishment.

Foucault's observations led to the creation of his concept of 'Biopower', which in turn helps with the understanding of transgression and counterplay in particular. Within Biopower control is exerted by the very body of society: its births, deaths, health and reproductive capabilities. Biopower limits the individual's potential directly as opposed to retroactively punishing the transgressive or oppositional act, it exerts

power through the structures that people inhabit. Power and control become internalised and self-limiting and therefore akin to interpellation:

> The behaviours of social integration and exclusion proper to rule are thus increasingly interiorized within the subjects themselves. Power is now exercised through machines that directly organize the brains (in communication systems, information networks, etc.) and bodies (in welfare systems, monitored activities, etc.) toward a state of autonomous alienation from the sense of life and the desire for creativity. (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 24)

The purpose for the adoption of this system of control is the way in which value (economic, social, cultural etc.) can be more easily extracted from the social body in precisely the same way that a mod might confer value to a developer – through immaterial labour.

> First, immaterial labor tends to move out of the limited realm of the strictly economic domain and engage in the general production and reproduction of society as a whole. The production of ideas, knowledges, and affects, for example, does not merely create means by which society is formed and maintained; such immaterial labor also directly produces social relationships. Immaterial labor is biopolitical in that it is oriented toward the creation of forms of social life; such labor, then, tends no longer to be limited to the economic but also becomes immediately a social, cultural, and political force. …Who we are, how we view the world, how we interact with each other are all created through this social, biopolitical production. (Hardt & Negri, 2005, pp. 65-68)

Through immaterial labour the Biopolitical empire limits the opportunities, roles, behaviours, and interactions of its subjects, who Hardt and Negri call the multitude:

> The multitude, designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common. (Hardt & Negri, 2005, pp. 99-100)

The multitude can be understood loosely as *the people* that are constructed and managed through Biopower – although Hardt and Negri are careful to point out that the multitude are not the people, the crowd, the mob, etc. on the basis of the multitude's inability to rule, social cohesion, its logic and its multiple-ness. The point of the multitude is that it is simultaneously the subject and the force of biopower, it is subject to the very control that it exerts. The multitude are therefore self-limiting but paradoxically have the capacity to overthrow and to alter. However, due to its predominantly self-limiting behaviour its experience is isolationary and fractured. This explains in part the power and superiority of biopower: it is a system in which the subjects rule themselves with limiting scrutiny, and it therefore is automatically hostile to insurrection or opposition – its self-limiting protects the system and perpetuates the power-relations

therein. As a result the notion of the collective and, as a corollary, that which should be opposed is incompatible. Instead the sources of power and emanations of control are diffuse and ambiguous. Control is everywhere unity and collectivism are nowhere. This aligns comprehensively with the postmodern turn. Returning to the notion of the counter this partially goes to explain the inadequacy of collectivist or modernist approaches, and the rise of individualistic expressions of resistance and opposition as expressed in the rhetorics of transgression:

> …some of the basic traditional models of political activism, class struggle, and revolutionary organization have today become outdated and useless. In some ways they have been undermined by tactical and strategic errors and in others they have been neutralized by counterinsurgency initiatives, but the more important cause of their demise is the transformation of the multitude itself. (Hardt & Negri, 2005, pp. 149)

Within the biopolitical environment, where the multitude is unable to confidently identify the lines of influence and domination, who is oppressing or needing opposition, resistance becomes entirely symbolic and abstracted. From this perspective the multitude simultaneously perpetuates the mechanisms of control and represents the power that can undermine them. The multitude thus ultimately maintain and hold the potential to challenge the biopolitical empire, while in turn the biopolitical body equally becomes the source of tensions and joys for those it controls.

Returning to the subject of videogames, which are seen as 'a paradigmatic media of Empire' (Dyer-Witheford & de Peuter, 2009, p. xv), transgressive or counter play need not be viewed as directly oppositional to the text in which it manifests itself. The transgression may be against any one of the empirical structures that impose order on the player. The issue here is that it is impossible to adequately identify the source of power or control – as it is everywhere – therefore any action can be construed as opposition to rule. What then happens is that the individual protagonist defines the target and the scope of power, but the identification of this is subjective and prone to contest. Individuals will disagree over what restricts them and what the wish to oppose. By internalising control the ability to define dominant forces is made almost impossible – instead, the force is everywhere and its opposition as meaningful or meaningless as that entails. A transgressor may in fact be seduced by the text they appear to be attacking, such are the apparent paradoxes of agency the biopolitical terrain.

> Rather than a political body with one that commands and others that obey, the multitude is living flesh that rules itself. (Hardt & Negri, 2005, pp. 190-194)

While this line of discussion has presented biopower and the multitude as problematic constructs – as ways in which individual sovereignty is undermined – the multitude, according to Hardt and Negri, represents a democratic and self-governing group. It holds the capacity to justify its own actions and to reject the authority of the orthodoxy. It is after all only through the self-governance of the multitude that power is realised. Therefore the multitude presents a curious body that holds the capacity for radical change, but

generally, most often, maintains stasis. If sufficiently motivated the multitude has the potential for direct resistance and opposition, but more frequently has a tendency towards 'exodus', a process:

> …of subtraction from the relationship with capital by means of actualizing the potential autonomy of labor-power. Exodus is thus not a refusal of the productivity of biopolitical labor-power but rather a refusal of the increasingly restrictive fetters placed on its productive capacities by capital. (Hardt & Negri, 2011, p. 152)

While in relation to immaterial labour and the extraction of value from everyday behaviour this exodus takes the form of fleeing – refusing to be subject to the restrictive systems that extract value. Within the biopolitical context of videogames, as explored by de Peuter and Witheford, exodus may take the form of a pause, a refusal to progress, to be subject to the mechanisms that create value for the system – the multiplayer gamer who refuses to play correctly, or more broadly the counterplay acts that we explore. These counterplay forms are critical of biopolitical value-extraction in the sense that they present alternate ways of consuming the games that extends their longevity or meaning beyond the production and consumption cycles. In addition, where they are openly antagonistic to text or player alike, they undermine the system's ability to control and extract value. Yet despite this inherent antagonism or potential for resistance these counterplay forms still require consumption of some form – they still align themselves with aspects of biopolitical control.

These paradoxes of the multitude will become especially salient as this thesis progresses and I uncover multiple examples of activities that can be formally defined as counterplay i.e. they constitute a violation of rule and expectation within the ludic that challenges the limitations of the encoded affordances of games, but where these actions are done from apparently contradictory motivations. Where individuals appear simultaneously seduced and opposed to the same text: loving the game, hating the developers; love the franchise so much they have to download it illegally; want to work as a developer, must hack their servers; care so much about the structure of this game that they must modify it illicitly.

While these perspectives may seem initially spurious, and somehow untruthful – as if the true meaning and purpose of these acts is yet to be exposed through greater analysis or challenge – there is a growing scholarly base that recognises these contradictory practices in consumer behaviour, such as work on *tribal consumers* by Bernard Cova, Robert Kozinets, and Avi Shankar (2007), and Bernard Cova and Daniele Dalli (2008).

Tribal consumers are viewed as the multitude as consumer, who holds the self-regulating capacity through the creation of trends and brand-awareness, to either generate significant income or destroy a product. Tribal consumers interact with brands and the systems of commerce in unpredictable manners. They may be regarded as: 'activators' who play the market, consuming in a particular manner and who are easily captured to inform new product strategies; 'double agents' who wilfully pass on tribal information to marketers; as 'entrepreneurs' who openly co-create and legitimately exploit markets for their benefit; as

'plunderers' who 'actively play with and shape objects whose rights may belong to others' (Cova, Kozinets and Shankar, 2007, p.6).

While these types resonate with the identity perspective of player types, Cova et al point out that consumers move between these 'modalities and identities fluidly, shifting from one form of market interaction to another effortlessly' (2007, p.7). While these consumers hold the power to make the products that they align themselves with succeed, by purchasing and consuming, they also – duplicitously – have occasional and temporary predilection towards 'plunder and pillage', an oppositional interaction where they temporarily take what they wish, as they wish, from a product, service or brand. This is to be differentiated against the *corporate hi-jack*, where the fans and audience perceive that the publishers/creators undermine the true spirit of the product in order to generate income. The logic is that in the face of the hi-jack the periodic plundering is both legitimate and preferable, as after all 'something is only worth plundering if it truly captures the heart' (Cova et al. 2007, p14).

Plundering, within the context of videogames, would represent any unauthorized and spontaneous interactions – a taking of what the player wishes from the gamespace, and therefore could align with any of Bogost's twenty uses of for a videogame (2011), or any other interactions that a player chooses, including those that are interpreted as oppositional, resistant, or other. The issue here is not to automatically assume the conventional, communal, modernistic reading of the act that then aligns with traditional attitudes regarding the definition of transgression, and secondly not to regard apparent contradiction as necessarily problematic. The nature of agency in the biopolitical sphere is paradoxical, it is even the nature of being a consumer that cares deeply about brands. It is not necessarily an act of oppositional resistance, but may constitute a mark of seduction and love, expressed as a momentary dip into plunder.

> …plundering is less and less of a conscious, revolutionary countercultural action, and more of an aestheticization of the daily experiences …Consumers hijack commercial reality when they work in a group and with relative unawareness of exactly what they are doing, devising a zone of ephemeral and limited autonomy inside of the market system …It is a stylistic move. In the commercial interstices of temporary autonomous zones …and in hypercommunities …what is created is not only community, meaning, or matter, but also pop vox, bleeding edge, lead user style, and fashion: art. (Cova et al. 2007, p16)

The transgressive act, the pillaging, the act of counterplay, may simply be part of the repertoire of expressive forms within the biopolitical empire – a manifestation of the power and self-legitimisation of the multitude, an expression of exodus or a product of its self-regulation. From this perspective counterplay needn't represent a direct resistance against the tyranny of the game. Within biopower, with it's omnipresent and panoptic *interiorisation of control* and its *exercise through machines and systems*, the identification of a dominant power to oppose may be problematic in the extreme. Each member of the multitude, feeling the restrictive pressure of control but not able to detect its origin may strike out where

and when they see fit. Additionally the player may never even recognise it as a striking-out, but instead a periodic descent into pillage.

While speculative, these perspectives introduce a different attitude to counterplay – and challenge the tendency to view antagonism as identity. Through the biopolitical lens the counterplay act need not simply be interpreted as oppositional or negative, can be oppositional and simultaneously an act of love and seduction. Counterplayers may simply be pillaging and engaging with the brands and products they care about in a manner that makes sense to them. From this perspective grief-players, illicit modders, hardware hackers, those that create incendiary UGC, may paradoxically love the videogames and systems that they play with and against, and their contradictory testimonies may be a true measure of their acts, intentions, and the rhetorics that surround them.

Interestingly the work on tribal consumers, coming from a marketing perspective that additionally advocates the practices of 'marketing the savage' and 'cool hunting' – suggesting that tribal consumers have the potential to expose new commercial opportunities - brings us full-circle on the concept of counterplay, and back to de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford's 'capture of counterplay' (2005). These marketers are beginning to view the apparently oppositional or counter in a new light – as opportunities for incorporation and exploitation, and, as we will see many of the counterplayers that are interviewed within this study are not opposed to, but are in favour of such an approach. It is evident then that the meanings attributed to counterplay are ambiguous and protean in the extreme – this at least offers interesting, if unsure ground with which to capture images and to trace out the boundaries. The rhetorics that individuals and groups utilise are therefore of prime importance as they at least offer some perspective on the motivations and meanings of the acts.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD AND APPROACH

Having set out the five rhetorics that will be used as lenses to consider the meanings and motivations of counterplay it is important to say a little about methodology and approach. I intend to produce a hybrid study utilizing both emic and etic explorations of counterplay – obtaining emic testimonies that explore the rhetorics and meanings attributed to the counterplay acts by their protagonists, and then to apply an etic perspective through reflection and analysis in relation to the five rhetorical lenses. Although firmly rooted within an Arts and Humanities context this study generates images or vignettes of counterplay through the utilisation and deployment of multiple methodologies, including a number more readily associated with ethnographic or anthropological research. I will initially attempt to find out what it is that counterplayers do, the pleasures that these acts afford and their justifications, which I will then attempt to place into a broader epistemological context by exploring the rhetorics that are used.

These examples, or images, of counterplay, existing and manifesting themselves across a range of digital spaces – videogame environments, websites, video and image archives – make the utilisation of singular methodologies or approaches problematic. This is something recognised by Charles Ess and the *Association of Internet Researchers* (AoIR) (2002, p. 3), who state that '…researching the multiple uses of texts and graphics images in diverse Internet venues [such as a videogame environment] often benefits from approaches drawn from art history, literary studies, etc'. While the AoIR mentions these approaches the inference is that the study of online spaces benefits the flexible application of pre-existing methodologies and the development of hybrid or new approaches that are responsive to the nature of the digital environment. The development of a new approach, devised especially to address the peculiarities and opportunities online, can be seen within what Robert Kozinets (2010) calls *netnography*. In addition it should be regarded that part of the process of this thesis is a process of exploration and identification of suitable methods for the study of behaviour within and around videogames. Within netnography, Kozinets stresses the suitability of ethnographic methodologies to digital spaces, in particular (and especially salient here) is the notion of the *blended netnographic / ethnographic approach*. While there are examples of 'pure' ethnography that utilise wholly ethnographic methods to the analysis of game studies, Tom Boellstorff's *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008) being a particularly notable example, the blended netnographic / ethnographic approach differs from its flexible and interpretative use of method. Netnography recognises that the materiality and structure of digital spaces offer different opportunities than available within conventional ethnographic field-work, and that in turn argues that it is logical for researchers to utilise these. Kozinets makes the distinction thus:

> Whereas '[a] 'pure' ethnography would be conducted using data generated via face-to-face interactions and their transcription in field-notes, with no data from online interactions. A 'blended' ethnography / netnography would be a combination of approaches, including data gathered in face-to-face as well as online interaction. Blended ethnographies / netnographies could take many forms, using many particular methods and favouring different ratios of online to face-to-face interaction, data, and analysis. (Kozinets, p.65)

This research adopts an expanded form of Kozinets' blended ethnography / netnography. Initially it adopts face-to-face and online semi-structured interview techniques, counterplayer participant-observation within gamespaces – each of which would fall within Kozinet's model. Additionally, however, methods more associated with the observations of the AoIR, such as the textual analysis of artefacts within gamespaces and websites (amongst other hybrid approaches) is utilised, particularly during data collection phases and the creation of the counterplay images. Subsequently the additional layer of analysis whereby the counterplay images are subject to critical scrutiny and interrogation via the five rhetorical lenses of transgression expands this approach further - reintroducing concepts from the arts and humanities. The intention is that by doing so this study retains the flexibility to adapt to opportunities and information encountered while presenting a richly textured analysis – serving to best locate and make sense of counterplay in its manifest forms.

Following the creation of the images / examples, the five rhetorics of transgression (and by association the sixth rhetoric of pathogen) are used to inform and direct their coding and analysis. Once the process of counterplay is sufficiently understood to be rearticulated or represented, *as qualified by the counterplayers interacted with and / or through direct participation*, the interviews, responses and statements made by the counterplayers can then be analysed through the same rhetorical lenses. The responses and practices explored for resonance and relationships with the rhetorics of transgression. In doing so it is intended that this research documents the counterplay process in an authoritative manner, that it critically appraises the acts for meaning, and explores the reasoning and motivations that resonate through the counterplay testimonies. Thus situating and answering the questions identified earlier in this thesis:

What is the counterplayer doing?

How is the counterplayer doing it?

Why is the counterplayer doing it?

The research instrument can then be summarised as consisting of interaction with counterplayers and counterplay forms, the initial recording, interpretation, and subsequent articulation of examples of counterplay followed by a secondary critical analysis which refers to the five rhetorics of transgression.

This is systematic approach is adopted due to its ability to remain flexible and coherent in the face of variation and unpredictability, something that is inevitable when investigating emergent or undocumented practices. It facilitates a flexible and responsive interpretive approach, allowing opportunities and new lines of research to be adopted, informed by the object under study (Flick, 2009, p.5). This is important as while broad *target* counterplay forms have been identified (incendiary UGC, grief-play, modding, glitching and hacking), that have been justified through the tracing of a basis within existing game studies literature, the specific examples of counterplay encountered are so determinant on specific platforms, software releases and game affordances, that it is impossible to predict what form they may take. This unpredictability problematises the use of any singular methodology, and highlights the suitability of multiple / hybrid / blended methodologies.

Within this *blended netnographic / ethnographic approach* the following predominant (but not exclusive) methods can be seen:

- Semi-structured interview - via email, telephony, within gamespaces and face-to-face;
- Participant observation - where possible observing and conducting counterplay to better understand its manifestation and utilisation;
- Textual analysis - particularly in the case of objectified counterplay, such as videos, images and forum posts.

The adoption of the participant-observation approach is not without its challenges, it raises particular questions over the role of the researcher and their relationship to the practices being studied. In this case the search for emic testimonies, those that reflect the views of the participant instead of the observer, twinned with the complexity (and admittedly the personal appeal) resulted in an eventual transition from distanced researcher to close participant. In order to better understand counterplay I became a counterplayer. In light of this transition, or rather the tension between participant and observer, it was intended that the utilisation of the five rhetorical lenses serve as an objective mode of critique. While I may have found myself subject to the persuasive rhetorics that surrounded the specific examples of counterplay that I participated in, the analysis through rhetorical lenses, emanating from the existing scholarly literature, remained impartial.

In addition to the challenges raised by the adoption of participant-observation methods any research including human subjects is subject to ethical consideration. This is problematised further through the adoption of blended / multiple methodologies that bridge disciplines and research fields, such as the between Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences. Charles Ess and the AoIR recognise this challenge and offer recommendations of how to address these issues ethically in *Ethical decision-making and Internet Research* (2002):

> This interdisciplinary approach to research leads, however, to a central ethical difficulty: the primary assumptions and guiding metaphors and analogies - and thus the resulting ethical codes - can vary sharply from discipline to discipline,

> especially as we shift from the social sciences (which tend to rely on medical models and law for human subjects' protections) to the humanities (which stress the agency and publicity of persons as artists and authors). (Ess, 2002, p.3)

Instead of seeing this as an impasse, Ess and the AoIR highlight a number of guidelines and considerations to ensure the ethical treatment of research subjects online which are applicable to the study of counterplay: in particular the *publicity of the venue*, the *vulnerability of the author / subject*, the *assumption of privacy of communication*, whether those being studied are better understood *as author or subject*, and crucially the *risks versus the benefits* attributed to the research (Ess, 2002, pp. 5-8). These can be considered the primary concerns that in turn are framed by the need for informed consent from research participants.

Much of the location of counterplay, particularly its documentation, exists within open and functionally public spheres: on websites such as Youtube or gaming forums that are freely interrogated by search-engine bots. Where content is visible to those searching or browsing upon the internet, where it is not restricted by credentials or website membership, it is treated in this study as existing within the public sphere. It is treated under the assumption that the authors understood that their comments / artefacts were public, as opposed to private, communications. In these instances consent was not sought from the participants and the default position that authors names were not made anonymous.

In contrast any interview / participant observation / interactions conducted expressly for this research, such as semi-structured interviews conducted via email, are expressly treated as *private communications*. The default position is that these responses are made anonymous, however participants were offered veto on this aspect. A number of individuals, such as iHcJames, expressly asked to be referred to with their publicly known name / pseudonym – this resonates with Ess' consideration of author versus subject (2002). It also highlights that some counterplayers were keen to be recognised for their actions and deemed the risks of identification minimal. This betrays one of the challenges of blended or netnographic approaches, the need to balance the demands of participants as authors. In addition to these considerations research participants under the age of 18 were excluded from this study (in relation to the semi-structured interviews / ethnographic practices) on account of issues related to informed consent. The same cannot be authoritatively asserted when discussing the publicly visible content (such as that found on game websites or Youtube) as there is insufficient information to make judgement regarding the demographics of authors, made more ambiguous due to the widespread practice of the creation of digital alter-egos. These factors remove any practical way of corroborating author demographics within most public online spheres.

Another ethical consideration is the recognition that counterplay is often manifest in multiplayer spaces to significant detriment of the experiences of other players. While some might argue that the potential damage is subjectively minimal, causing interruption or the subversion of a period of play, I believe that the disruption and damage has the potential may be considerable (or rather I do not assume inconsequence). As it is difficult to ascertain the individual impact and interpretation of counterplay by its victims this study avoids direct participate directly in counterplay within environments *containing conventional players*.

While I conduct counterplay in private and restricted game environments (such as the *Rezurrection* game instance), and interview counterplayers about their use of counterplay within public spheres / against conventional players, at no point for this study do *I* counterplay *against* conventional players.

It was my intention in this study to identify a range of case studies that once adequately explored and articulated could be interpreted through the lenses of counterplay rhetorics detailed in the previous chapter. By doing so it would allow me to continue the literature review and to develop my contextual understanding – such as of the range of sociological, philosophical, and game-studies discourses around counterplay that I was unfamiliar with – while simultaneously learning about and documenting instances of counterplay. I thought that this would be especially suitable as a method as it would allow constant progress and still retain flexibility. The interpretation of the counterplay rhetorics within the case-studies would represent the final, and concluding activity – effectively 'capping off' the research and concluding it as a scholarly activity.

I hoped that by utilising a grounded, experiential, reflexive approach – responding to and exploring examples of counterplay as they exposed themselves to me, I could make best use of events and phenomena as they unfolded. I could then become familiar with the counterplay practices, understand their methods and outcomes, identify terminology, hierarchies and the assignation of values, and where opportunity arose, to appropriately engage in the activities themselves. In so doing I could be confident that the case studies or the *images* would be an accurate representation of the activities taking place at that point in time.

At the point of starting the research I already had an idea of the types of activity that I would be particularly interested in exploring: the creation of incendiary UGC, grief-play, and hacking. However it was my intention to only actively pursue these *if* the attempt to spontaneously encounter counterplay became problematic.

In addition it was a core necessity that my actions did not impact negatively upon the experiences of others. I was not interested in ruining the play of others, or explicitly instigating counterplay acts, but was interested in understanding the processes and motivations for those doing so. Instead I played multiplayer videogames and spoke with players during the pauses and breaks in play, I extended and continued to play multiplayer games as I had previously, but used it as an opportunity to learn about the game cultures and the counterplay practices that emanated from them. I found that as I spoke with players and explained my project that many offered advice or insight – such as asking whether I'd seen a website, if I knew of a glitch, or had heard of a hack. What did not occur was much direct evidence of counterplay however.

However, almost immediately upon beginning the research the limitations of such an approach became apparent: the very nature of counterplay, *as a transgressive or semantically loaded practice*, is subject to censure, derision, and regulation, and its practitioners must therefore be cautious of observation and scrutiny by others. Individuals that make their counterplay activity *too visible, too soon*, are likely to be reprimanded and penalised – effectively stopping the counterplay act from reaching its intended form.

Therefore counterplay must remain hidden until it is ready to be presented – until it is done, completed or primed. For me, hoping to simply encounter it in the wilds of a videogame, this was realisation both disheartening and problematic.

The reality is that counterplay is difficult to identify and document *within* a videogame, and that the act of entering a videogame space in order to look for counterplay necessitates a different approach: observing, close attention, interrogation, and as a result the very activities of the researcher are likely to be regarded as non-normative and counter. Additionally, due to its illicit and managed nature, much actual evidence of counterplay is to be found in secondary artefacts – documented as player productivity objectivised as images, video, or text, and frequently online as opposed to within the gamespace. Once it occurs within the gamespace it is generally prohibited and removed.

Despite this I attempted to spend as much time in-game as possible under the hope that counterplay activities would become apparent, or that at least my immersion in the gamespace would better attune me to opportunities for exploring counterplay. I spent the majority of December 2008 and January 2009 in the digital trenches of *Call of Duty: World at War*'s (henceforth *W@W*) multiplayer environments, but while I did encounter potential counterplay my experiences highlighted the unsuitability of this approach.

Counterplay was, frustratingly, at once everywhere and nowhere – I'd encounter screaming or abuse over the multiplayer-chat channels, but as quickly as this occurred it finished. From my experiences it appeared that low-level counterplay was endemic, or perhaps that the threshold level at which a violation is deemed significant was much higher than I had expected, but these violations seemed fleeting and meaningless. They were rejected as trivialities or mere annoyances by even the players periodically targeted and aside from any questioning on my part were rarely even acknowledged. These moments simply passed and the game returned to normal – the counterplay (if it was) made no ripples of recognition.

More specific to the competitive multiplayer FPS environment itself I found other activity that was incredibly ambiguous, in many instances I found myself with an opponent who would kill me almost instantaneously. While this is not necessarily unusual in itself on account of my general ineptitude at multiplayer games, the manner in which it occurred, repeatedly in some matches, did create a certain amount of confusion and raise suspicion about how these players were playing. They were able to fire faster than I physically could, and while this only happened a handful of times each day, when it did there was a prevailing sense that something untoward was taking place. It was difficult to quantify but it felt as if some aspect of the game rules were being bent or countered.

As a result I found myself focussing on almost every potentially abnormal occurrence, and began to find it difficult to ascertain what constituted legitimate, normal, illegitimate and counter – much of the everyday interactions seemed to have elements of ambiguity, or contain latitude for reading the abnormal where (one assumes) there was none. In other situations where I detected nothing abnormal a player would suddenly shout out asserting that another in our midst had been glitching or using 'lag switches' that

interrupted the flow of communications data to the main servers, preventing their opponents' systems from accurately determining their location on a map. Sometimes this could be verified, but most often the announcement just added to the ambiguity (and my paranoia) – Who? Doing what? Where? How? This illustrates the problem of *observing* counterplay – that its identification is largely subjective and ephemeral.

Other experiences pointed to something more substantive, laying the foundations for later sections. I found that I was being killed repeatedly by players that had *somehow* found a way under the floor on two maps on *W@W,* they were *glitching*. While I found this enormously interesting, making attempts to contact them through the chat channels none of them replied. Again, much like the chat-channel abrasiveness the moments passed – there were no ripples – and I was left facing the conventional gamespace once more. I began to hypothesise that much counterplay may actually be *fleeting and mundane*, or remarkably uncommon, and that the scale and nature of contemporary videogames mean that the majority of its manifestations may fail to be noticed or exist in such an ephemeral form – an action, a statement, a juxtaposition – that beyond the timeframe of their invocation they cease to exist.

It was partly in response to the lack of concrete evidence of counterplay that I began to look for examples of *manifested or objectified* counterplay that would better lend themselves to scrutiny e.g. counterplay that took the form of UGC, images, video etc. At the same time the *Game 3.0* concept was being embraced by a number of releases that prioritised the significance of player-creation, such as *LittleBigPlanet*, and *Spore*, and I assumed that games that made production such a core aspect of play would be inevitably ripe grounds for seeking out counterplay UGC. Frustrated with any sense of progress on the spontaneous discovery of counterplay, I decided to approach the subject from the perspective of incendiary UGC – seeking out examples of objectified counterplay. By focusing on UGC, the *artefacts*, *the evidence of the transgressive act*, I hoped that I would at least able to identify, observe and consider the act and its meanings, and in turn this would better introduce my media microecology of counterplay. The various chapters that follow are based upon close reading of videogame texts, interaction with gaming websites and communities, playing alongside counterplayers and discussing their motivations. All of the participants have been made anonymous, substituting their names with characters from their favourite games, apart from those who explicitly asked to retain their true names. Participants ranged from 18 to 35 years of age – all were male, and resided in the UK, continental Europe and the US.

CHAPTER FOUR: INCENDIARY USER GENERATED CONTENT

Strain Theory and Counterplay

Robert Merton's now unfashionable concept of strain theory (1938) may offer us some speculative insight into the range of transgressive play experienced in videogame environments. Merton argued that anomie was the motivation to transgress that stemmed from strain caused by tensions felt on a daily basis between 'culture' and 'social structure'. For Merton, pre-war America was a *culture* that ostensibly promoted themes of fair-play, meritocracy and prosperity, while the *reality* of the *social structure* was that the economy could not support limitless expansion. Widespread adherence to the capitalist and consumerist ideologies meant that what constituted an aspirational goal on one day was replaced by a successive goal the next. Merton called this 'infinite aspiration'. Presented with infinite aspiration and limited means to achieve a cultural tension, anomie, was formed.

Within the anomic model types of transgressive behaviour can be differentiated by the extent to which the perpetrator values the goals and available means within society - innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. *Innovation* rejects the conventional means leading to new, generally unacceptable ways of attaining the goal. *Ritualism* is perceived as an abnormal obsession with the methods but a rejection of the goal. *Retreatism* is an act of escape, a rejection of the means and goals that are socially ascribed. *Rebellion* is where the means and goals are rejected and replaced by others originating from the individual.

Anomie has been subject to extensive criticism due to its reductive nature and inherent assumptions – it fails to acknowledge the range of goals and means actually pertinent to society, while simultaneously assuming that 'infinite aspiration' motivated *every individual*. Yet, while still too reductionist to adequately explain transgression in wider society, anomie theory may offer significant potential for studying the comparatively simplistic videogame environment.

Unlike wider society a videogame:

- explicitly presents a set of available means - as defined by the constitutive, operational and implicit rules (jump, shoot, reload);
- explicitly defines a goal – as defined by the narrative context of the game (rescue Princess Peach, eliminate the other team);

- implicitly presents a set of values – as defined by the implicit values informing play (ascendency, mastery, progression).

If anomie has relevance within a structured, comparatively simplistic environment, such as a videogame the types of transgression identified by Merton may offer insight into tropes of counterplay. Table 7, below maps Merton's anomic types of transgression alongside speculative equivalents that exist within contemporary videogames.

Anomie and videogame transgression			
Anomic type of transgression	Culturally prescribed goal	Institutionally available means	Videogame adaptation
Conformity	Acceptance	Acceptance	Implied player
Deviant adaptations:			
Innovation	Acceptance	Rejection	The cheat
Ritualism	Rejection	Acceptance	The bully
Retreatism	Rejection	Rejection	The artist
Rebellion	Replacement	Replacement	The subversive
Adapted from Downes and Rock (1998: 126).			

Table 7 - Merton's Anomie speculatively applied to videogames.

In relation to Table 7 the following anomic adaptations relate to videogames:

- The cheat – values the goal but not the means presented to the player. The cheat uses any methods to obtain to progress towards the goal, e.g. hacking, exploits, rule breaking;
- The bully – values the means but not the goal presented to the player. The bully subverts the mechanisms within the game to achieve alternative goals, e.g. grief-play, real money trading ('RMT');
- The artist – values neither the goal nor the means presented to the player. The artist utilizes the game space in alternative and unpredictable ways but with passive intent. There is rejection of the values but no motivation to resist the status quo, e.g. machinima, modding, videogame art;
- The subversive – values neither the goal nor the means presented to the player. The subversive utilizes the game space in alternative and unpredictable ways but with seditious intent. It is an ideologically motivated act of subversion and transgression, e.g. in game protest, distribution of offensive content.

Social consensus or institutional edict defines whether the players' activities are those of the cheat, bully, creative or subversive. The game community and developer attempt to ascertain the motivation of the transgressor and therefore the transgressive potential of the act. This process shares elements of Foucault's 'normalizing gaze', in which the observer exerts control through gazing at a subject, in so doing labelling the subject (innocent or criminal), categorizing the activity (type of crime) and enabling punishment (Foucault, 1991, [1977]). Yet unlike Foucault's gaze, which is typically applied to surveillance or broadcast media, multiplayer videogames present an environment where boundaries between observer and subjects

are ambiguous. Each player is simultaneously a subject that is observed as they play, and an observer gazing at the behaviour of other subjects. Through this process each player attempts to make sense of the motivations of the other players that they encounter, for example whether the other player is cheating or simply playing badly. The process of prediction of intent is a central aspect of multiplayer games – literally second guessing your opponent - yet it is also a process which is conducted when we encounter troubling or potentially transgressive events in games. We ask ourselves: why is this person doing this, and what are they trying to do?

Observing Counterplay

The process of identifying transgression within games is made increasingly problematic as it may result in different outcomes with varying life spans and potential for distribution and broadcast. Transgression can alternatively take the form of a temporary performative act, or a more permanent digital object such as an element of user-generated content, chatlog or video that documents and/or represents the transgression. It should be noted that while artefact-based transgression allows each viewer to experience the full force of the transgressive act, rather than the limited efficacy of third-party recollections, the performative act can hold significant transgressive power as illustrated by the infamous 'rape in cyberspace' (Dibbell, 1999).

Personal experience suggests that opportunistic performative transgression is most commonly experienced by players, consisting of slurs, insults and profanities apparently motivated by little other than amusement. This kind of transgression appears to be routinely ignored by many players, perhaps regarded as a form of postural 'psyching' common to many competitive games, yet occasionally players seek to have such activity reprimanded. The temporal nature of such transgression combined with the ambiguity of player response often makes it difficult to identify and reprimand. In comparison artefact-based transgression leaves evidence of the transgressive act that can be scrutinized by the player community over a period of time and consensus reached. As a result artefact-based transgression is more likely to elicit strong consensual responses from the player community and official reprimand from the developer.

Transgression necessitates the perceived violation of at least one boundary, that can be considered the target of the transgressive act. Broadly speaking the transgressive act has three spheres or boundaries that it can act upon within videogames; the videogame construct itself (game engine, code, ruleset), the social construct (players), and the institutional construct (the developer, the game infrastructure, administrators, moderators etc.). Table 8 attempts to align the main focus of the transgressive act with its types, suggesting that different spheres of transgression lead to different modes of counterplay.

Primary sphere of transgression	Illustrative behaviour
Environmental transgression	Hacking, exploits, RMT.
Social transgression	Grief play, offensive content, trash talk.
Institutional transgression	Copyright infringement, vandalism, protest.

Table 8 - Spheres of transgression and illustrative behaviour.

Objectified Counterplay

As we have already alluded, transgressive content exists on a scale of perceived power, threat and objection. In its least potent form it may be ignored by victim and witnesses alike; it may titillate and amuse, however, and potent examples have the potential to elicit moral outrage within the player base and game institution. The reading is made problematic through the acknowledgement of the implicit tension that drives transgressive content to amuse – notably that we laugh because we are aware of its transgression and its potential to offend others. The images in Figure 2 are illustrative of perceived transgression against the social element of the game. They include depictions of coitus and profanities through the creation of user-generated creatures in *Spore* (Maxis, 2008), pornographic imagery created through the placing of weapons and objects on a user-generated level in *Halo 3* (Bungie, 2007) and finally a neo-Nazi themed paint job for a car in *Forza Motorsport* 2 (Turn 10 Studios, 2007). While we may denigrate the first three examples as representing a relatively anodyne social taboo (puerility such as public acts of fornication, obscene language, and pornography), in contrast the final image holds an ideological charge due to its widespread ability to offend and the sensitivity of the subject matter – it is less easy to dismiss.

Figure 2 - Objectified social transgression.

From top-left to bottom-right: Humpasaur Spore creature (Apophis_dd, 2008), Fuck Slug Spore creature (EntropyGuardian, 2008), pornographic *Halo 3* player-generated level (hatimaki73, 2008), Forza 2 neo-Nazi car livery (360Gamer, 2007).

The images in Figure 3 are illustrative examples of perceived transgression against the institutional element of the game. They include unauthorized interaction with copyright material, such as the creation of Homer Simpson in *Spore*, or the recreation of Konami's *Gradius* (1986) in *LittleBigPlanet*. It is unlikely that these examples were intended to shock; instead, it is most likely that they are intended to elicit recognition and fondness for the original, 'lovemarks' (Jenkins, 2006, p.68). Such examples may be symptomatic of the differences in imagined ownership between the players and developers – the players feel justified in engaging with texts that they feel affinity towards, while the developer regards this as transgression. Other examples include the *Left 4 Dead 2* (Valve, 2009) boycott group that perceived the original games sequel as representing an update instead of a full-priced release (L4D2 Boycott, 2009). Interestingly the protesters agreed to boycott the new release but did not attempt to subvert or damage the existing game in any way – the protest was external to the game. Finally, we come to an example of internal protest where *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004-13) (henceforth *WOW*) players attempt to motivate changes to game rules by subverting the game for others – in this case through large-scale naked protest and the subsequent latency that it caused in an area frequented by necessity by all alliance players.

Figure 3 - Objectified institutional transgression.

From top-left to bottom-right: Homer Simpson Spore player-generated creature (XikazeSpore, 2008), *LittleBigPlanet* Gradius recreation (RRR30000, 2008), Left 4 Dead 2 boycott group logo (NO-L4D2, 2009), the gnome tea party (Abalieno, 2005).

The Value of Counterplay

MMO developers such as Blizzard Entertainment also make commercial use of playbour. In March 2009 Blizzard announced an add-on development policy in order to regulate and manage the widespread creation and use of third party content for their popular MMO, *WOW*. The development policy explicitly defines the context of third party add-ons: they must be free of charge, visible to other players, not contain offensive or objectionable material and confer Blizzard Entertainment the right to disable the content (Blizzard Entertainment, 2009). While this appears a remarkably fair and transparent policy, Blizzard utilize this production as playbour. Successful third-party add-ons indicate desirable game functionality that is not implemented in the commercial release, which is subsequently introduced through a periodic update or patch. For example the official *WOW* 'quest-tracking' feature included in update 3.3.0 supersedes the once popular third-party 'Quest Helper' add-on written by ZorbaTHutt. While the add-on has a value, to the point that its functionality is implemented into the game, the add-on developer does not receive recognition.

It is difficult not to see this monetization of playbour within neo-Marxist terms; the overt power imbalance between modder (or player) and that of the developer seems to chime with Weber's notions of social inequality and Merton's anomie in its unequal value of reward. Tiziana Terranova (2000, p.33) described the socio-economic construct that playbour fits in as the 'social factory', presenting a space where work is 'simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited'. Terranova sees through the utopian rhetoric of digital content creation, suggesting that instead of offering new models of power and economics the social factory 'is rather a mutation that is totally immanent to late capitalism, not so much a break as an intensification, and therefore a mutation, of a widespread cultural and economic logic (Terranova, 2000, p.54). *Game 3.0* simultaneously presents play, work, reward and exploitation. It is this exploitation inherent in *Game 3.0* that presents an economic incentive to the developer, and if we adhere to Terranova's argument, a source of anomie within the player body and motivation for transgression.

John Banks and Sal Humphreys (2008) disagree with Terranova's reading of the socio-economic terrain of participatory culture. Their analysis questions the extent to which anomie is produced. Instead of the intensification of the existing structures that Terranova alludes to, they believe that 'social networks and markets intersect to create hybrid and emerging social network markets' (p.405). In these any perception of 'corporate servitude' does not suitably acknowledge the value of the pleasure of production. Players are 'quite competent and canny participants' (p.401), aware of the intrinsic value of their output within the system, which they give freely. They expand saying that '...these formations can be seen as emerging markets consisting of new collectives that do not fit comfortably with our current understandings of work and labor relations' (p.407) and that the lack of financial reward may actually motivate production instead of inhibiting it. Whether the player engages in playbour from a perspective of complicity or exploitation, their output undoubtedly adds value to the game experience and community.

Yet the accusations of exploitation don't end at neo-Marxist readings of power relations; they can similarly be levied upon the individuals engaging in playbour and creating content. While they value the creative processes central to playbour, they also value the cachet of pop-culture texts, and the pleasures that their intertextual invocation and recognition elicits. These players engage in highly sophisticated imaginative bricolage, the result of a postmodern production/consumption culture where the appropriation of texts for their own ends is considered acceptable, irrespective of copyright ownership. This 'textual poaching' can be seen as an issue of imagined ownership: 'Once characters are inserted into popular discourse … they become the property of the fans who fantasize about them, not the copyright holders who merchandize them' (Jenkins, 1988, p.476). These players are seen as being transgressors, exploiting the creative tools to engage with copyrighted texts they have no authority to do so. The developers are forced to intervene and protect the intellectual property and copyrights that the players are engaging with.

As profit-making institutions, developers must respond to financial prerogatives and have a different set of values to players. The developer values commerce and the stability of the videogame construct through the prohibition of behaviour that deviates from that of the implied player (and legal frameworks). Developers are forced to censor, to delete and to chastise – echoing the repressive authority exerted by pre-industrial governments. This occurs irrespective of the implicit rules of the community, irrespective of any socially derived sense of value or postmodern attitudes regarding interaction with texts. In the eyes of the unintentionally transgressive player the developer's actions are tyrannical. This is illustrated by the following quote taken from the *LittleBigPlanet* forum, following the developer-led deletion of an unintentionally transgressive player level known as the *Azure Palace* (Rocktave, 2008). 'Imagine spending hours on something, putting it out there, getting feedback, LOVING the experience, then getting it yanked right out from under you without adequate explanation… It's like they truly do not care one iota that their customers are angry about this and want answers' (Rocktave, 2008). Interestingly in this case the level was reinstated following intervention by a number of videogame journalists. However, the way that the events were reported captured the sense of confusion and marginalization felt within the game community (Good, 2008).

Counterplay and Marginalization

The actions that developers are obliged to take are often perceived by the player as examples of marginalization. For example copyright protectionism may be seen as 'a material barrier against the spirit of free-play' (Jordan, 2007, p.709). Against this perceived marginalization or inequality the audience demonstrate a strong urge to transgress. 'Given a toe-hold into mass media, the public seems to take great pleasure in its ability to negate its normal operating procedures' (Jenkins, 2006, p.277). The issue is partly that historically there has been a sense of wide scale patronisation and marginalization of audiences by media gatekeepers at their points of intersection, e.g. through selective editing, censorship, or infantilization of content. We are so used to this popular concept of publisher/broadcaster as exploiter that

we have a tendency to decide that this is the case when presented with any evidence that satisfies this reading – we perceive intervention as preservation of the status quo and marginalization.

Within the context of the one-way broadcast medium, this marginalization has little consequence (the marginalized have little say, bar choosing not to consume), but in any form of participatory media, where the audience has some degree of autonomy, the repercussions are significant. Modern technologies have increased the opportunity for audiences to participate, without diminishing the barely ensconced sense of marginalization, nor the urge to transgress. This manifests itself as various instances of explicit and confrontational transgression, the range of which are dictated by the medium.

In addition to the inequalities highlighted by Terranova and Postigo, contradictions appear between the game's promotional rhetoric and the practical realities of its consumption. We are familiar with the disparity between promotional hype and delivered product; this has become a key dynamic of mass media consumption, but in *Game 3.0* the product isn't finished until it has been populated for some time and the strains placed upon infrastructure are known (even beta-testing will not highlight everything). Often the developer is obliged to intervene at this point to preserve the viability of a game – the upgrading of networking technologies, moderating content, banning of accounts – and the potential disparity between the initial rhetoric and the final article is enormous.

The discrepancy can be seen with Will Wright's *Spore* (2008). Prior to release the lead designer, Alex Hutchinson, was reported to say that puerile content would be tolerated (described as 'penis car', 'vagina house' and 'penistown') and that players would be able to filter inappropriate player-generated content from their game instances (Totilo, 2008). However, immediately following the game's release, players found that explicit content (as was possible within the context of the creation tools) was removed, and, additionally, players were threatened with having their accounts banned and that their actions violated Electronic Arts' Terms of Service (Decker, 2008).

While developers are protected from the liability of copyright law infringement conducted by their customers as part of the 'safe harbour' clause of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (*DMCA*), this assumes that the developer 'acts expeditiously to remove, or disable access to, the material' and 'does not receive a financial benefit directly attributable to the infringing activity' (Chilling Effects Clearinghouse, 2009). The necessity to retain this legal protection (which could be questioned if the price of the game or subscription considered a financial benefit) ensures that punitive measures are rigorous and severe. However, the scale of production negates any meaningful moderation system that preserves the swiftness of distribution that players demand. Brian Jarrad, community lead at Bungie Entertainment, described the scale of production as 'overwhelming' and 'literally impossible to sift through' (Edge, 2008, p.10) although the panoptic nature of the closed systems means that it is only a matter of time before infraction is observed and punished. Within this context the link between the economic protection of *Game 3.0* and the rise of the transgressive player become clear:

- the developer is obliged to marginalize in order to protect economic interests,
- as a result players perceive that power relations are unequal,
- anomie is generated through the disparity between sanctioned activities and player goals, and
- players transgress in spite of, or even as a result of, the perceived marginalization.

It is perhaps the notion that each stakeholder values different aspects of *Game 3.0* and must protect them accordingly that constitutes the tragedy of *Game 3.0*. The player values creative freedom, sovereignty and free use of cultural texts, while the developer is obliged to protect the community, commercial prerogatives and legal frameworks of the institutional context such as intellectual property law. This dual reading of value can be seen to motivate both parties to embrace *Game 3.0*, but it is also this, which leads them into opposition.

Esther MacCallum-Stewart (2007) discusses the impact of similar perceptions of inequality (specifically within the context of self-governance) within Linden Lab's *Second Life* (2003-2013). While players are encouraged to self-govern, the very existence of developers (with 'divine authority') who intervene against perceived transgression irrespective of player consensus, makes any sense of sovereignty meaningless. The political process seems like a charade and the only means of asserting agency is to transgress in protest. *Second Life* becomes 'an anarchistic state where players are often profoundly unhappy with their lot, but have little ability to change it' (MacCallum-Stewart, 2007 p.201). Like Bataille's sovereignty found in the generation of loss, MacCallum-Stewart's examples illustrate the transgressive's power to negate in opposition to the institutions power to marginalize. This seems like the end of the story for transgression within *Game 3.0* – that the player and developer imagine different rights, have contrasting motivations and values, and that the process of testing this imbalance is likely to continue certainly through the life of this generation of networked games.

Despite this, the transgressive has demonstrated unpredictability and imaginative resourcefulness in order to negate the panoptic gaze of the closed *Game 3.0* system. While player-generated content is available for scrutiny and response once it is added to the database central to *Game 3.0* releases, transgressors are increasingly circumnavigating this in preference for external distribution methods such as YouTube. While this apparently makes no sense in terms of the game – other players in the games cannot encounter the content – it makes complete sense in terms of transgression. The transgressor does not value the goals or the methods used in a game; therefore to take game content out of its context is as legitimate as bringing extraneous content into the game. The transgressive act still holds power and momentum – it still damages the game through association and negation. Cory Ondrejka acknowledges this dynamic within MMOs, suggesting that 'draconian approaches …simply move the protest onto forums, blogs, and the web' (Ondrejka, 2005, p.16). This external distribution has even created a new form of meta-game centred on transgression, where the game is to play cat-and-mouse with the various institutions fearful of indecency and violation of copyright law. The creation and distribution of transgressive content becomes a game, with versions being hosted on different sites and distributed in different ways. Through consciously responding

to and evading the panoptic nature of the networked game environment, this type of emergent transgression sits outside of the immediate control of the developer and its related institutional structures, as a result it represents an unpredictable and powerfully fluid ideological activity.

Conclusion

A chapter such as this is prone to appear to present transgression as the prime driving force of play, for all of the cultural and economic significance that this article asserts transgressive content appears to be in the minority. While no empirical data is within the public domain (to the knowledge of the author) that indicates the scale of the activity other related data may offer some early indication. Chek Yang Foo and Elina Koivisto (2004a, p.1) summarize Patricia Pizer's observation of griefing, suggesting that '3 percent of players grief', while Smith (2006, p.199), hypothesising a 'rational player model', observes that 'non-rational behaviour' was seen in 2.3 per cent of game rounds. While neither griefing nor irrational behaviour sufficiently do justice to the broad range of transgression, these figures may offer a useful indication as a starting point. While the use of this data is contentious, if we were to extrapolate the figures it would present transgression on a scale that warrants attention; 25,000 transgressive *LittleBigPlanet* levels, 2,500,000 transgressive *Spore* creations, 30,000 transgression-prone players on *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* (henceforth *MW*) daily.

Game 3.0 presents a flawed rhetoric of imaginative creative freedom, that playbour and the ambiguous nature of perceived transgression contradict with a sense of marginalization and inequality, which in turn may motivate intentional transgression. In doing so *Game 3.0* has elevated the status of transgression within games as activities of significant social importance and power – exploring the dialectics of the imaginary as it relates to self-governance, agency, power, value and ownership in contemporary videogame culture.

REFLECTION ONE: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF INCENDIARY UGC

Reflecting on the counterplay rhetorics of UGC is somewhat problematic – or at least in relation to the content explored within the preceding chapter. Broadly summarised the UGC chapter, which should be viewed as a pilot study, centres around the following concept: that despite the promise of creative freedom, legal obligations and copyright protectionism requires developers and game operators to instigate repressive sanctions upon player activity in their games. This creates the perception of marginalisation and corporate interference that in turn may motivate counterplay. It invokes the idea of the capitalist hijacking of a gamespace or text and its alignment with commerce instead of play, implying that power relationships between developers and players only become truly articulated when there is the need for sanction, intervention or reprimand. This suggests that videogames are structures whose necessary inequality naturally leads to counterplay, willing resistance, inadvertent offence, and the development of emergent strategies.

The problem of such a reading of UGC is that this is largely based on a projected rhetoric – it is a purely etic approach – and is not based on discussion with the producers of UGC, but on the analysis of the objects themselves. While there is evidence of the sense of marginalisation caused by preventative interventions from developers and game operators e.g. Rocktave's *Azure Palace*, this frustration and irritation should not necessarily be interpreted as resistance or opposition. Instead the anger is more akin to chagrin – the result of having been caught doing something judged as wrong. This is the extent to which a dialogue between producers and developers exists, and while it might in some cases lead to the production of further incendiary UGC it is much more likely to lead to a player simply rejecting the game and leaving – biopolitical exodus.

When thinking about my attempt to frame UGC as resistance (the attempts to alter power-relations and alter the authority of rule by introducing chaos), one must consider how marginalised an individual is within the system. What is meant by this is the extent to which an individual is trapped or sufficiently invested within the space to feel restricted by marginalisation. If they feel little bond or have scant investment, the logical response would be to stop playing the game (Hardt and Negri's exodus p.67). Therefore resistance only works if a player is sufficiently committed to the space that there is no viable alternative but to yield to the imposition of power and simultaneously feel that the hegemonic means or response are not suitable.

From such a perspective it might be reasonable to suggest that there are relatively few games that exert sufficient hold over a player *and then alter the state of affairs sufficiently to create a sense of marginalisation* to warrant resistance – aside from those where the alterations undermine significant temporal, financial or social investment (MMO's and games with long-term investment are therefore most likely to be perceived in this manner). Hence examples such as the Anshe-Chung *Second Life* 'flying penis protests' (Figure 4) which responded to the devaluation of residents' land, or the Gnome Warrior *WOW* protest (bottom right Figure 3 p.81) that opposed a feared 'nerfing' of the warrior class. Unless one is tied to the game due to this investment of money, time, or social relations, or alternatively deeply angered by an aspect of the game, a *perceived inequality*, it is difficult to view the creation of seditious or incendiary content as overt resistance.

Figure 4 - Anshe Chung *Second Life* 'flying penis protest'.

Instead the kinds of UGC explored within this chapter largely express a different valence – that of misplaced ownership and use as opposed to overt resistance – it is a mix of appropriation and the carnivalesque. The using of the gamespace and its mechanisms in ways that are both unanticipated and inappropriate, intended to entertain or to spread chaos, but not alter power-relations. The difference here being that the individual or groups who produce the seditious content, the Nazi-car, or 9/11 *LittleBigPlanet* level do so with an awareness of the offense that they will cause. But, this is not reliant upon an explicitly resistant motive, instead it is perhaps more aligned with appropriation, carnivalesque and grief-play. The production of insulting, abrasive and absurd content resonates with *ritual laughter*, or a less universal manifestation of grief-play.

What this is lacking, which is evident in later sections, is the qualifying voice of the participants. By focusing analysis upon objectified counterplay artefacts I was able to see examples of counterplay, but was not able to understand their context(s) of production, or interrogate their producers. Therefore I was as much guessing and projecting intent and motivation as conventional players and the orthodoxy might. The difference being that I was prioritising the notion of marginalisation due to the inequalities inherent in anomie. This very clearly articulates another issue encountered when studying counterplay (aside from actually not being able to observe the event or the counterplay performance). Unless one is implicitly aware of processes invoked and understands the culture of production the analysis may simply be a tautological projection of ideology. In order to understand the events and the acts is therefore vital to engage with production and the producers.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONFESSIONS OF A GRIEFER

From User Generated Content to Trolling

If UGC is understood as the transgressive act *objectified into* a game item, video, image etc. within a context of fan productivity, and participatory culture, where it is commonplace to document, annotate and create derivative works along the lines of Jenkins' lovemarks, what differentiates incendiary UGC is that it is an object that retains some of the transgressive power of the original act. It shocks, offends, or elicits a response in the viewer when first seen. In contrast there are forms of counterplay that are never objectified directly. They are rarely documented or take form, and instead resonate purely around the act, an example of which is grief-play. Unlike grief-play, cheats, glitches, or hacks are frequently documented in order to allow replication. Grief play can be considered more 'natural' and is flexible, violating social etiquette rather than the particular structures and rules of the game. However, grief-play is often reliant on game structures for its capacity to oppose and antagonise.

As shown in the literature review, grief-play and killer behaviour have been explored in particular by Foo and Koivisto, Bartle, and Malaby among others. Yet these texts tend to approach grief-play as a problem that must be managed, a hegemonic formalist approach, instead of attempting to open up discourse with griefers or understand their activities from a less pejorative stance. Understandably, due to its sensitive nature and negative connotations, it is relatively difficult to find griefers who self-identify their practices as actually grief, and who are prepared to discuss their behaviour. Fortunately in early 2012, having discussed my research with gamers extensively as I continued to play on *XBL* over the duration of the study, I was contacted by one of my previous team-mates (who we will call Ocelot), who was willing to talk about his experiences as a griefer. While the representativeness of this information is questionable – this is based upon one individual's experiences – it still offers potential contextualising insight into counterplay. Crucially it allowed me to begin to explore motivations and meanings from a counterplayers' perspective.

I interviewed Ocelot on three occasions over Skype. In his introduction he said that he had become a 'renowned griefer' on the PlayStation 3 European *Metal Gear Online* (2008) (henceforth *MGO*) servers, and was viewed as an accomplice of Psycho Mantis (name altered), an individual with a reputation of being an arch-griefer.

> …I'm renowned as a Team Killer [TK]... an arrogant, annoying, person and I often got referred to as [Psycho Mantis'] right-hand man or his dog…

Shortly before Ocelot contacted me, the developer, Konami had announced that they intended to close the *MGO* servers in June 2012, the game's fourth anniversary. According to Ocelot, this announcement had resulted in an explosion of grief-play and counterplay, which in turn had reminded him about my project and made him think of contacting me. Ocelot had already developed a predilection for grief-play within *MGO,* however, it became a more frequent mode of play following Konami's announcement that they were abandoning the game and turning off the online servers. As a result Ocelot argued that there was the perception that Konami were no longer interested in policing *MGO* in its final months, and therefore grief-play presented little risk of penalty. There was a perception that the authority of rule was now gone – *MGO*'s servers now offered a truly ambiguous space that Ocelot was happy to utilise for non-normative play.

It should be stressed that understanding that the game was facing impending closure simply altered the likelihood of engaging with grief-play instead of motivating it entirely – Ocelot had previously engaged in grief-play even when the game was new, it was just that at that point the normative game experience held an attraction and that there was still the threat of retribution and penalty. Ocelot was keen to stress that he also played the game conventionally, but that over time grief-play became predominant.

> I play normally too, although I do have alts and I use one alt specifically to do well on, I use other characters to troll and grief. …if the opportunity arises I'd troll …there's something about *MGO* that works for me for trolling. It was just really fun. And I was really gutted when I heard that it was closing, because its, you can pick it up and go in there and everyone knows your name because you're universally hated…

Ocelot and other griefers, such as Psycho Mantis, utilised this environment as a space for team-killing, attacking their allies *in addition to* their opponents, which due to the specific design of *MGO* was a catalyst for grief-play power-imposition and harassment.

> ...I'm not a troll by nature I don't sit on 4chan or go on YouTube and spam, it's just that this was so fun, some of the reactions you got were so intense, the big threats that you got were just funny.

The age of the game and the decreasing player numbers created a curiously close-knit community, with so few players on the multiplayer servers the matchmaking system was forced to group players together that had large differentials in their experience and level. The same issue of scarcity of players also effectively circumvented the automated anti-grief countermeasures built into the game that would disconnect a player from a game when a set number of TKs had been reached. While Ocelot and Psycho Mantis were occasionally ejected on account of these countermeasures, they were often placed back into the very same games on reconnection on account of the matchmaking algorithms and the lack of viable matches.

> …if you went back to automatch because there were so few people playing you'd end up straight back in the same game up against the same opponents, and we'd be like – we're back!.

This structure enabled grief play to manifest as *harassment* (slurs, intentional spamming, spatial intrusion, and event disruption), and *power imposition* (newbie killing), where the aim was to TK players and then abuse them in their defeated and prostrate state (an extended form of teabaggin') and then go on to win the match. According to Ocelot, this was so spectacular that it was replicated and became a new expert strategy.

> We'd just ruin the game ...It actually became more fun to kill the limit of people that you're allowed to on your team and THEN go on to win the game. Meaning more points and a higher level …once this starts it becomes a way to play, and a way that is best when you manage to get someone who's uninitiated into the game.

Those uninitiated with the game, finding themselves at the brunt of Ocelot and other griefers experienced long periods of inactivity as a result of griefing:

> ...you stun people, they're stuck on the floor and have to wait maybe two minutes before they wake up during which time you can run around them just writing stuff and they can't reply, so you can tell that they're just getting really annoyed.

The act of griefing became a process of power imposition and harassment, preventing the other player from doing what they wished but utilising this to deliver a diatribe to the victim. The griefers stunned the players and then ridiculed them over the text-channel for two minutes – in many cases the players would be stunned again immediately on recovery – partly as a result of the differential between the skill, equipment and mastery of the griefer, and they would be trapped in this state while being tea-bagged and verbally abused.

Laddish Culture

This example of griefing, as amusing or uncomfortable as reading it may seem, correlates with the kind of activities understood as bullying more generally – the stronger child pinning another down in the playground, the offensive monologue enforced with the threat of violence (as opposed to in this case as a result of the design of the game). This was something that Ocelot recognised, '...some of the stuff said and done was irresponsible in terms of …choice of words and the fact that you're openly bullying people almost'. However, while not attempting to apologise for the viciousness of the behaviour, he contextualised it with what he saw as a broader 'laddish culture' which resonates to some degree with Jenkins' notions of masculine play. According to Ocelot

> ...it's like a typical laddish culture where just being rude to each other can just bring you really funny, funny things – but I guess that it wasn't interpreted as that especially by a lot of the foreign people who don't understand the flow of English.

The rules of the *laddish* culture deviated significantly from those of the gamespace, and the grief play could be seen as a merging of the two (gamespace and laddish culture). Ocelot suggested that he saw laddish culture across the gamut of digitally mediated and partially anonymous platforms – such as social media and Web 2.0 in particular:

> …the second you go on anything that isn't standard Facebook or YouTube, people just love for some reason bringing in racist comments or whatever and I've used plenty but not in a 4chan way where I'm saying really bad words, more like people would say – loads of English 'tea and scones', telling Spanish people to 'have a siesta', I'd never do it in real life but it does feel different on there. I can understand the way that it starts – they enjoy it so much that they lose perspective. But the moment you get in there it's everywhere – and the proper rules and policies are in complete question. Nobody is playing by the rules.

In 'Complete freedom of movement: video games as gendered play spaces' (1998) Henry Jenkins explores some of the gender affiliations of gamespace, and touches upon the adolescent masculine mode of videogame culture (and one would assume other digital spaces such as those on the web), which appears to resonate with some of what Ocelot says about laddish culture. Jenkins channels E. Anthony Rotundo's notion of boy culture, which is seen as a 'semi-autonomous' play space that defines itself in distinction to the motherly values of the homely feminine playspace. The home, according to Rotundo, was the women's sphere that '…offered kindness, morality, nurture, and a gentle spirit, [in contrast] the boys' world countered with energy, self-assertion, noise, and a frequent resort to violence, [and] …willingness to inflict pain…' (Rotundo in Jenkins, 1995). Jenkins argues that Rotundo's core claims about nineteenth-century boy culture hold true for the 'video game culture of contemporary boyhood' (Jenkins, 1995). The vicious fun that Ocelot articulates may be a manifestation of boy culture – an intrinsic aspect of masculine play that can occur in spaces of relative autonomy – such as those where there is rule-based ambiguity, or some sense that identity and culpability is obscured by the use of alter-egos or the simple distance of technology. In addition the laddish culture appears to embrace the universal hostility of the carnival ritual laughter, abusing any that enter the space.

Of Abuse and Opportunism

As a result of the prodigy of abuse – of ritual laughter – Ocelot questioned whether the rules really exist due to their repeat inversion and symbolic transgression. The rules appeared to be an idle threat and meant nothing, the transgression had exposed them as a sham. This is not to suggest that the grief-play was actively done in spite of the rules, although it is inevitable that the acts took on some of their charge

through violating general social conventions such as etiquette and politeness – that while these are encoded into the *TOS* and rules of the game the exist more universally outside. Instead the violations created a new reality that superseded the encoded rules of the game. The perception of the lack of rules, or the widespread rejection of their authority is significant. This appears to create the ambiguous vacuum that was filled in this instance with laddish culture and ritual laughter.

> I don't think anyone had the rationale to read the *TOS* and say – lets go against that – so there's no, I'm confident that there's no evidence of rebellion against them. It was just fun …it came naturally.

The perception of lax enforcement questions the authority of the rule and allows for counterplay. In addition to this difficult balance, Ocelot raised the notion of differentiation and the desire for individuality.

> It was a game at first but then it became a space. You can only differentiate by uniform – the things that you buy for your character, but then to get notoriety and individuality you have to behave differently – it's like a missing feature from the game.

Ocelot argued that the ability to be an individual (as opposed to a subject or player function) was poorly accommodated within *MGO*, therefore he adopted a role as a griefer as an alternate way of creating an identity. This offers confusing concentric layers of anonymity and identity – the griefer would not act in similarly offensive ways in *real life*, one assumes because of the possible repercussions, but relies on the anonymity and distance afforded by the game. Yet despite this anonymity he also wished to have a reputation, status and to be recognised. Ocelot adopted grief play as a way of creating and maintaining these. It is as if Ocelot is taking on an alter ego, like a super-villain, and enjoying the immediate pleasures of transgression and vicarious pleasures of seeing the development of a reputation associated with the griefing alter-ego.

> Because of its extreme lack of policing – we managed to get a name for ourselves and as a clan, where people would know if any of us turned up the game it was going to got that way – we were going to fuck it up.

Ocelot was conscious of the impact of his actions on other players feeling '*...sympathy to a small degree*', due to the protracted periods of inactivity that TKing caused.

> When *MGO* got less popular it took 6-7 minutes for the matchmaking to put you in a game [and] ...in the mode I played you only get one life. If you were killed you'd have to watch the other players for five minutes.

Ocelot's TKing forced the victim to sit prostrate for five minutes or attempt to join another game, resulting in a delay of six or seven minutes – at which point there was a strong likelihood that they would be returned to the same match with Ocelot and Psycho Mantis. The only logical outcomes for the victim are to

learn to come to terms with the TKing, or to leave the game altogether. To play by the asserted rules of the TKing bullies, or to leave the space entirely.

> ...I do feel to a degree a bit harsh to the extent that how annoying it was ...you find yourself flicking over to the TV for five minutes then flicking back try again.

Despite acknowledging the frustrating impact of grief-play Ocelot was ambivalent about his victims, they were simply *unlucky* to be placed arbitrarily against (or alongside) him. Ocelot said that he couldn't logically justify his actions entirely, that they were motivated by fun, and egged-on by the observation that some of his victims adopted the same practices that '...took away any element of guilt'.

> …if they were legitimately nice people trying to play the game, and weren't just bad at that game in the way that it ended up being played, if they were nice they'd be – look please stop, and then they wouldn't do it again, they wouldn't try to get you back, but a lot of them turned it into a new game – it became a great accomplishment to get one of us – and in doing so I think that they were complicit. They'd be like ha, ha, ha, ha, you're my slave …and so I went with it. ...I know it was grief, they know it was grief, but there was an understanding – you know.

Recognition and retaliation became legitimisation and motivation for more griefing. In contrast those who left the game or those who pleaded for mercy (and therefore acknowledged the superiority of the Ocelot) were no longer targets. In this aspect the grief-play takes on another valence – the TKing became about asserting authority and mastery within a gamespace. Yet Ocelot's griefing experiences were not all unilateral, there were occasions that his approach and assertion of authority was trumped and opposed. Sometimes Ocelot was griefed by others, sometimes his targets were able to reciprocate, and in one instance this was done in such an escalatory fashion that Ocelot was taken aback.

> I was winding one guy up online – I said something along the lines of 'you're terrible, worship me' over and over and over again on the text chat, and he's written something along the lines of 'you think you're better than me watch this' – and my *PS3* turned off and made a weird noise like a dial-up modem …I got back on and messaged him in the game and was like WOW, what did you just do? Because I was quite scared and I thought everything that comes with it, he must have used an IP address and I knew I was at threat, so I sucked up to him and pretended to be in awe because I wanted to find out what he'd done.

It transpired that the player had utilised a Distributed Denial of Service (*DDoS*) application known as *Kane and Abel* to identify and then flood Ocelot's IP address (a crime in the UK punishable with up to six months imprisonment under the *1990 Computer Misuse Act*). Whether or not this would have resulted in the *PS3* behaving in the manner described as opposed to simply losing its connection is unclear and may well be embellishment, but even so this serves to illustrate a perceived hierarchy of potential forms of grief play as seen as Ocelot continued.

Ocelot admitted being interested in the use of technology to assist with his griefing and to have previously used lag switches for these purposes in the past, however he found them unwieldy and was fearful of the implications of misuse and therefore did not continue to use them.

> To be honest with you I'm more interested in the hacking and lag switching, but because I'm not very good at it I go more for the trolling and grief play …I'd love to be able to, you need to be really versed – once you start messing around you don't know what you're doing you could get in trouble.

Despite this Ocelot saw griefing and trolling as a positive experience that in addition to being legitimised through replication was partly motivated through a reaction against what he saw as the false 'kinship' projected by the game.

> It's odd, I sort of feel that it's partially motivated through …what I find more annoying than people being rude or abusive to me is that kind of kinship everyone feels – if you're all playing a game together there's a given that you're all enjoying it – otherwise you'd do something else – cheesy people on there write line after line of shite like good luck, good shot and it fills up the screen. It's false and unnecessary and works against the message of the game. I mean we're taking turns to kill each other wearing stupid Santa hats – it's competitive and impersonal by design.

The assertion of a dominant and antagonistic approach countered the false kinship that Ocelot saw, and underlined the competitive nature of the game. While this approach is one-sided and oppositional, he assured me that he'd not have a problem with being routinely griefed but I find that difficult to believe considering his annoyance with the false kinship he encountered. Despite this he developed further the notion of an agonistic, or unilaterally oppositional gamespace.

> why isn't there a game where you could just be a complete ass to others? It would be fun, but everybody's too concerned about the people who cry in games instead of getting on with it and that's part of the fun of griefing and trolling. It's like we're treated as kids …we have to play nice or not at all and I just don't want to do that.

Ocelot was glad of the existence of MGO in this guise for its ability to create identity and reputation, to embrace the laddish culture and ritual laughter that he saw everywhere but felt was in contrast to the false kinship that he saw online. Whether these were used as intentional post-act justifications or whether they constituted legitimate motivations is impossible to ascertain, even so this still offers some perspective on the pleasures and meanings attributed to grief-play counterplay by a protagonist.

REFLECTION TWO: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF GRIEF-PLAY

The preceding chapter on grief-play offers some insight into the rhetorics of counterplay that the chapter on UGC was unable to due to its entirely etic approach. It captured a specific image, a mode of play, which focuses upon the imposition of power on others, and a reduction of contingency but not its complete disavowal – players still had the potential to overpower the griefer (albeit in limited scope).

From the perception of the orthodoxy, the griefing practices discussed on *MGO* resonate with the rhetoric of pathogen: they are acts that hold the potential to damage the played experience to the extent that victims and observers may abandon the game altogether. Griefing therefore does hold the potential to damage the commercial viability of the game. This notion of *cost* – the cost of the griefing act appears of significance to the protagonist. What the griefing prevents the victim from doing or accessing, the time that it costs them, and ultimately the net cost of the griefing is important. In the case of the *MGO* griefing discussed here it is largely dependent on the awareness that the player is given little choice if they wish to continue to play. They are forced to sit and read the abuse for five minutes, or alternatively they must reset and wait six minutes to reconnect. The cost to the victim is (at least) five minutes of play. It is this that has effectively been taken from them and it is this that creates the imbalance of power-relations that the griefer appreciates, when the frustrations that are bound up in this erupt then the griefer finds this even more enjoyable.

This view of time as capital, or a recognition of the value of leisure / freedom, then allows grief-play to be contextualised with other forms of transgression. It becomes akin to a theft of a commodity, a theft of freedom, a theft of agency. Each of these aspects have a value – time as free-time, and the cost attributed with the purchase of a game that offers freedoms and meritocracy as part of its entrance fee. While the pathogenic reading of grief-play accentuates the illogical, antagonistic and antisocial, the rhetorics of transgression offer a more graduated way of framing the acts. This is perhaps best illustrated by contemplating the remaining five rhetorics in sequence:

Resistance: on the basis of Ocelot's testimony the grief-play acts that he engages with are not explicitly conducted in opposition to a mandate or rule – he does mention an aversion towards the behaviour of others, *the false kinship*, and the sense that many of the other players were bad or hypocritical – but this is a retrospective justification for his actions on the basis of behaviour. It is therefore reasonable to view the justification in the face of the bad/hypocritical/inauthentic kin as a mark of distinction and therefore

largely related to the formation of identity. Returning to the notion of resistance, it appears that Ocelot's actions were facilitated by the perceived dereliction of game-operators, and the creation of an ambiguous space that was in effect lawless. Ocelot was not resistant to any aspect of this new state of affairs, but instead was exploiting and utilising the vacuum of power to assert his own authority and rhetoric. This instance of grief-play, encouraged by the sense of the retraction of the power of the authorities, is *dependent* upon stasis and actively discourages the outcome of resistance.

Mastery: the grief-play on *MGO* demonstrates and communicates a strong bond with notions of mastery. It is entirely determinant on the design of the game rules and structure, notably (referring to Fogg's types of persuasion) the omission of punitive *conditioning* around TKing i.e. not *penalising the player for TKing*, but only *rewarding the player for killing an opponent*. TKing, outside of that automatically detected and managed by the anti-cheating routines, becomes invisible to the system and is an activity that can be conducted without penalty, or conventional in-game reward. If a player is not interested by the game-reward then the TKing can be conducted at zero cost. When this is placed into the context of the desertion of the game by operators, knowing that the TKing will not be subject to surveillance by other than those in the match, the griefing act becomes even more viable.

The griefer utilises and asserts mastery of the space and its processes in the (assumed) absence of the supreme authority of a game-operator. This, in turn, is used to become the master to the players' slave. The grief-play becomes an expression of the new power that the griefer possesses and the various ways that this mastery can be used to dominate. While Malaby's discussions of the loss of contingency in griefing frame it as a utilitarian process – as having an incremental benefit – placed within the context of an expression of mastery, this is not necessarily the case. The griefer may simply be content to articulate their mastery of the space and the players who now reside within their dominion. This new power is asserted in impositions and expressions of dominance: the intrusion upon the play of others, their physical restriction within the gamespace, the acts of degradation such as teabaggin', the emphasis of supremacy through repetition, and, the language used throughout. Ocelot repeatedly uses terms that highlight inequality and the roles of master/slave, even explicitly stating 'ha, ha, ha, ha, you're my slave', and 'you're terrible, worship me'. The perceived vacuum of power has facilitated the griefer in adopting the dominant role – better than the player on every level.

Identity: the grief-play acts explored here appeared to be significantly orientated towards the formation of identity and to a degree aspects of subcultural membership. Ocelot stressed that his actions enabled him and a *clan* of others to '*get a name for ourselves*'. In his introductory correspondence he described the way that he was 'referred to' and perceived, and even explicitly stated that the griefing was in part a process of identity creation in the face of what he saw as a lack of opportunities for characterisation (aside from wearing Santa hats or crocodile faces in the game). Therefore his actions were conducted in *distinction* to the normative forms of play, such as the groups that he denigrated as bad-players, hypocrites and fake kin. This distinction defined him as a griefer, but also as a member of a small group, a clan, of equally orientated individuals. The suggestion is not that the need for differentiation and distinction motivated the

act of griefing, but that the way that it offered an alternate mode of behaviour was an additional attraction to the implicit pleasures of being offensive. The identity of griefer, especially one that is well-known, is something limited to very few individuals – it can therefore be understood as a particularly compelling mark of distinction and recognition.

Creativity: The grief-play acts was temporary, leading to little output. None of the events were documented, however it did represent a limited appropriation of the game space. In this instance the textual abuse and imposition represented an emergent or novel use for the space, but it is interesting to see that the grief-play acts were made more insulting or imposing through the griefer *still winning the match*. In many senses despite the normative violation the grief-play act explored here is a rather compliant use of the space – *the game was still played*, the majority of lusory means were adopted, but they utilized all available opportunities. The griefer might be considered as deploying a highly creative approach to reaching the pre-lusory goals, but Ocelot's admissions of the prevailing pleasure of the player responses undermines this reading, the creativity is deployed in order to elicit outrage and frustration from the players, and to therefore assert and communicate the mastery of the griefer.

Carnival: While it is tempting to immediately link grief-play with the carnivalesque on account of the chaos that it brings into the gamespace, this cannot be substantiated following reflection on the basis that the grief-play is neither unilaterally hostile, nor does it invite others to do the same. While the observation of grief-play might motivate some to copy it themselves, Ocelot was opposed to this practice seeing it as another mark of player hypocrisy. While some might be able to grief alongside Ocelot and his clan, it appeared preferable if the players remained as frustrated and ideally vocal victims.

Summary: the image captured here is of an act that appears primarily concerned with the *generation of identity* through the *appropriation of gamespace that demonstrates mastery*. In the absence of overseers grief-play becomes a highly efficient and even less easily countered way of expressing mastery and dominance over other players, and asserting ownership of the space. While the act holds some pleasure it is the response of the victim and the perception of other players that appears more significant. The griefer does not wish others to join-in – this would erode the distinctiveness of his activity and his identity, nor for the system to change – this would potentially invalidate his ability to grief, nor to be freed – the restrictions of the game are the very tools that he uses to trap his quarry.

An interesting additional perspective relates to the discussion of hacking and lag-switch tools, and Ocelot's acknowledgement that 'you need to be really versed' to use them safely – despite appearing as a master, Ocelot is conscious of his place in a hierarchy and actions within a wider context. The grief-play only became prevalent after the announcement of the closure of *MGO*. He did not use hacking tools because of a lack of skill and concern, and in this aspect the grief-play becomes more valence. It is an intentional and conscious decision to act in this manner under these circumstances, and not to venture beyond. This is therefore a mode – a carefully chosen type of asocial artistic expression rather than a type, and simply a strategy or approach utilised because of the affordances of the game rules and gamespace. The griefer saw

an opportunity, saw a vacuum and filled it – yet they were careful to only do so within the safe scope that they had identified.

CHAPTER SIX: GLITCHING COMMUNITIES

An Invitation to Glitch

As I neared the completion of the UGC section I received an email from one of the gamers that I had previously played *CoD* and *Battlefield Bad Company* 2 (Digital Illusions, 2010) with (and had explained my project when in lobbies and out-of-game screens). His email offered to introduce me to a *glitching* group known as chaoticPERFECTION, who he felt would be particularly prepared to assist with my research. The email presented chaoticPERFECTION as '…a very famous glitching clan on Xbox live, they find ranges of glitches and just love f***ing the hell out of the bugs in the code'. While I had occasionally encountered glitching upon multiplayer games such as *CoD* and *Battlefield*, and had made use of glitches myself in single player games, such as *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2006) duplication glitch (see Figure 63 on p.144, and Aarseth, 2007 more generally), I had little understanding of how glitches were identified, or the structures and communities that coalesced around these counterplay forms– instead I had viewed them as isolated acts.

Glitching can be broadly understood as a type of play in which, instead of observing the game rules and goals, the aim is to find, document, share, and ultimately exploit weaknesses in the game code. The glitcher is preoccupied with the exposure and utilization of any inconsistencies, contradictions and flaws within the digital ecosystem. Unlike illicit modding or hacking, practices explored later, glitching is conducted with the commercial game *as is* – the software and hardware is *almost always* unmodified and therefore the glitch should be repeatable on any commercial game system. Glitchers demonstrate extreme understanding and awareness of the gamespace and its processes, exposing flaws that have been missed by Quality Assurance teams (henceforth QA) and other institutional checks. These exploits or glitches are used to entertain and for more instrumental competitive advantage, at the same time building the reputation of the glitchers and clans that they may be members of.

Glitchers – those who willingly identify and align with this counterplay style, or those that have been labelled as such by the normalizing gaze of the playerbase, are often seen moving beyond the sanctioned play spaces of the games, floating in the air, protruding from walls, becoming invulnerable, invisible or engaging and interacting with the gamespace in ways that mark them as *other*. The problem is that there is

no easy way of distinguishing between those that *use* and those that *identify* glitches – for the observer they are one and the same.

Glitchers are generally considered deviant and illegitimate player groups and their presence is often treated with hostility by players and developers alike. This is not unwarranted as their behaviour or outcome of their exploits has the potential to significantly damage the equilibrium of a game, through radically altering the balance and equality of a competitive multiplayer FPS, by introducing large numbers of high-value items within an MMO economic system, or simply by allowing pragmatic dominant strategies within a game.

As a result the player base, developers and game operators are vigilant for examples of glitching that manifest themselves on the multiplayer aspects of videogame releases, particularly during the months immediately following their release when functionality and stability are commercially crucial. In comparison single-player glitches, due to their reduced visibility and impact on other players, receive far less attention and are often never patched unless they are particularly severe in their repercussions or occur randomly during normal play. Developers encourage players to report any glitching that they encounter, which, if substantiated, are negated by the release of mandatory software patches, warnings to any perpetrators, and the occasional high profile invalidation of player accounts through the swinging of the 'banhammer'. These are the ways in which the game ecosystem polices glitching– through intelligence gathering, counter-insurgency work, the expulsion of violators, and jubilant reporting of the victory to the player base.

The following section consists of the findings of a range of explorations into the practice and culture of glitching that were made possibly as a result of ethnographic and participant observation upon the glitching communities via the chaoticPERFECTION glitching team, the mapMonkeys forum (now defunct), and the communities and practices that they afforded me entrance to. The following section consists of four chapters that trace the practice and meanings of glitching and attempt to place them in a social and cultural context: an exploration of glitching communities; of glitching as a process; a typology of glitches; and an exploration of glitcher motivations.

Approaching Glitching Communities

I click on the glitch video on the chaoticPERFECTION YouTube channel, it opens with a slick animation introducing the team: 'BRINGING YOU GLITCHES AND TRICKS WITH VOICE AND TEXT TUTORIALS… chaoticPERFECTION' (chaoticPERFECTION, 2011), and then it acknowledges the glitcher who found and documented the glitch – XNickncsxcP – before fading to black.

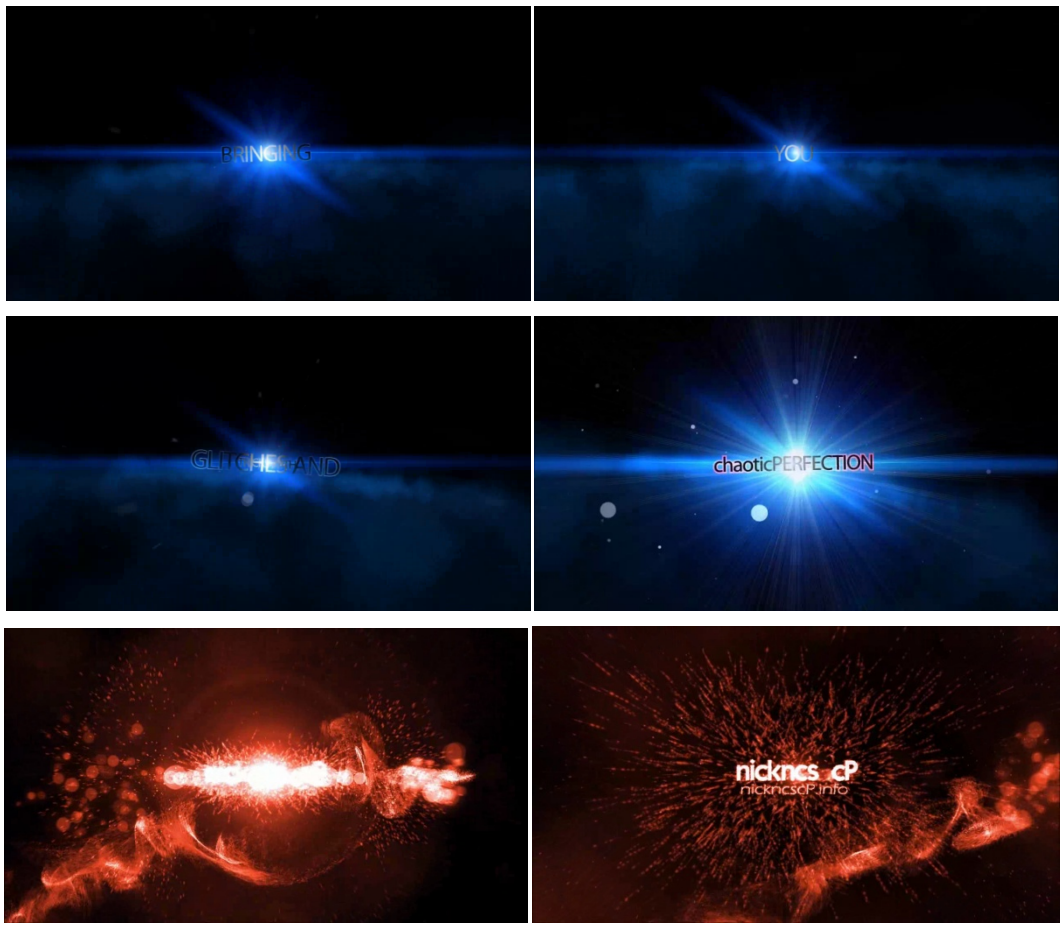

Figure 5 - A chaoticPERFECTION glitch video introduction sequence.

The opening drum beats and melody of Noah And The Whale's *L.I.F.E.G.O.E.S.O.N* (2011) strikes up, the *Duke Nukem Forever* (3D Realms, 2011) loading screen is displayed briefly and as the lyrics begin we watch as Duke drives his monster truck through a Midwestern desert highway (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - Glitching *Duke Nukem Forever,* approaching the glitch.

As Charlie Fink begins to sing about Lisa the Rock n' Roll survivor, the Monster Truck smashes into a rock face and abruptly flips up and over it instead of being stopped. The player leaves the conventionally playable game area and enters the strangely rendered space beyond the boundaries of the game (Figure 7).

Figure 7 - Glitching *Duke Nukem Forever*, challenging and defeating the game barrier.

As the video continues the area outside the level is explored further, the player walks up to and begins to shoot at a piece of scenery, drawing the viewer's attention to it – on closer inspection the scenery appears to have 'Fake Background' clearly written on it (Figure 8, left panel). The player continues to explore, focusing on interesting or striking imagery. Eventually the music begins to fade and the video dissolves to black and finishes.

Figure 8 - Glitching *Duke Nukem Forever,* the 'fake background' panel, and exploring beyond the map.

An Instructive Glitch Video

'Hey mapMonkeys, it's your boy Sewerwaste here… on Dome you're going to come to this part of the map… (Figure 9)

Figure 9 - Glitching *BLOPs*, identifying the glitch location.

…you're going to do this kind of strafe-jump up there… then you've got to jump around the corner and crouch at the same time… (Figure 10).

Figure 10 - Glitching *BLOPs*, articulating glitch technique and specifics.

…I recommend being on default button layout because you've got to crouch immediately after… once you're up here you can just hang about, climb all over the dome… stand on those little red bars… it's a good spot for infection if you guys play that… (Figure 11) (mapMonkeys, 2011).

Figure 11 - Glitching *BLOPs*, articulating outcomes and uses.

These two glitch videos offer insight into some of the range of contemporary glitcher outputs. The first, produced by chaoticPERFECTION, is a sophisticated and professional looking sequence that carefully encapsulates the glitch with motion-graphics, fair-use copyright statements, soundtracks and branding. While the second, produced by Sewerwaste, a prominent mapMonkeys member concisely explains what to do and where.

The chaoticPERFECTION glitch, devised for the single-player *Duke Nukem Forever* campaign, is of no competitive advantage, but instead allows the glitcher to explore the materiality of the gamespace – for example seeing the curious fake background texture – and as a corollary to learn something about the game's construction. The chaoticPERFECTION glitcher acts as something between a tour-guide and archaeologist, digging into digital terrain and showing the viewer the fascinating constructions and beauty beneath. By contrast the mapMonkeys glitch prioritizes the game itself, presenting a method of accessing a specific location on a multiplayer map which has competitive advantage. This may be conducted like the chaoticPERFECTION glitch, to explore, but as it takes place on a multiplayer environment, it constitutes an unexpected vantage point with strategic advantage.

Both of these videos were uploaded onto YouTube as public listings, available to all. In November 2012, eighteen months after the chaoticPERFECTION video was first uploaded it has been viewed just over 1,000, in comparison, the MapMonkeys glitch has received over 120,000 views in just over a year. The difference in views may be attributed to the popularity of the games and the utility of the glitch in question,

with Duke Nukem generally regarded as a poor game that generated low sales figures. In contrast *CoD MW3* is one of the most popular and best-selling releases on the *Xbox 360* platform and has a large and dedicated multiplayer following even to this day. The first glitch allows a player to *explore*, while the second allows them to explore *and* offers an advantage in multiplayer games, it offers a way to partially *dominate* the opposition. For the majority of viewers, perhaps the *CoD* glitch is simply the better or the two.

When considered in relation to the other counterplay activities explored so far, glitching is a hybrid productive form. It creates artefacts and is therefore objectified, fan productivity, but also refers to an act and enables and invites others to replicate. As a practice it is heavily reliant on video sharing websites for documentation, articulation and distribution, and therefore a prevalent activity from 2006 onwards with the release of YouTube as a platform. Both chaoticPERFECTION and mapMonkeys were formed as glitching entities in 2006, but represent divergent social structures. ChaoticPERFECTION is a glitching *team* that focuses upon the creation of high-end releases by verified team members, 'as a form of education and entertainment' (xRyan350xcP, 2011). While mapMonkeys evolved from a community approach to glitching that enabled members to submit, catalogue, and share their own glitches, becoming 'one of the very few places you could actually find glitches on the internet' (Rezzzo, 2011). ChaoticPERFECTION's primary remit differs to that of mapMonkeys, seeking to engage with the widest possible audience – *whether glitchers or members of the public*, while mapMonkeys was steadfastly *by glitchers for glitchers*. ChaoticPERFECTION primarily utilized YouTube and social media tools to host and publicize their glitches, while mapMonkeys initially developed their own website, platform and database to allow glitchers to share their output, eventually replaced by YouTube delivery in early 2012 after six years of use.

> We also wanted to have our own database and have the videos be very organized so it's easy for people to find. …by having our own site hosting all the glitches, you won't see a video of the same glitch twice. (Rezzzo, 2011)

A Glitching Community - mapMonkeys

> mapMonkeys are a community of gamers who have become infatuated with discovering and sharing glitches, exploits, tricks, and strategies found in the video games they play. (Rezzzo, 2011)

mapMonkeys (www.mapmonkeys.com) can be considered a glitching *community site*, differing from chaoticPERFECTION in the sense that it is not a team with a *managed identity* producing specific branded releases, but instead is a place for glitchers to meet, converse, and share expertise. The mapMonkeys site had three core elements: the archive of videos, the forum where members post comments and discuss, and the instant messaging 'chat' system, which is invoked privately in a pop-up window on screen, or though public chat on the main site.

The 3,500 glitching videos available on the site (as of August 2011) acted as the main attraction for new memberships, accessible only after registration, offering in-depth instructions through video tutorials, supplemented with text and often voiceovers. Initially, some videos – those which were deemed particularly powerful or attractive – were restricted for premium members who paid a monthly or annual subscription.

I first joined the MapMonkeys community site in June 2011, roughly nine months before its content began to be moved onto YouTube. At this point mapMonkeys.com hosted more than 3,500 glitching videos, and supported a community of more than 130,000 members, 1,600 of which were 'premium' paid-for subscriptions who were the only members able to upload content onto the servers. The member information implies that just over one percent of the members were active glitch-producers that supported a much larger community wishing to view and utilise the glitches. However, there appeared to be a small active population of around 200-300 regular and active contributors who tended to interact via the forum area and group real-time chats. During the time I spent on mapMonkeys the video-posting frequency was particularly low – something that the members paid special attention to –at around four per week. This was partly as a result of being the seasonal glitching lull. Glitching is subject to the same annual release cycle as normative play: without any new games being released there is little to glitch. September through to February were viewed as the core glitch-season, and the glitches produced outside of this point were largely for game DLC or in response to game patches and other security countermeasures. What this lack of posts also betrayed was the gradual fracturing of the original mapMonkeys community and the transition from community site to YouTube distribution.

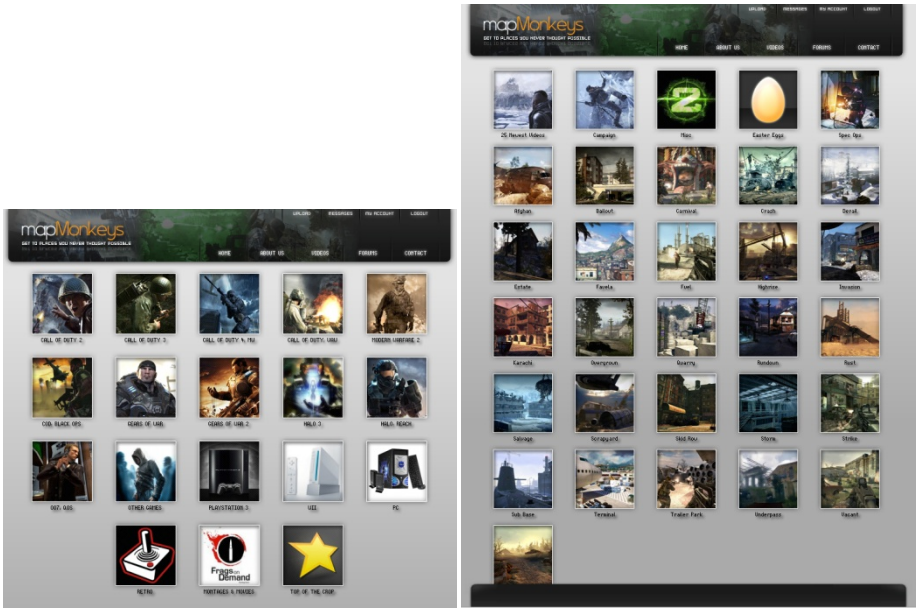

Figure 12 - The mapMonkeys website, game categories and map categories.

The mapMonkeys video archive section was carefully organised by the title of the game for major releases (left, Figure 12) and then subcategorised by the game map on which it took place (right, Figure 12). Each video contained attribution of both discovery (upload) and the performers who contributed to its documentation, alongside a description and comments box in which viewers would update the status of the glitch (Figure 13). Comments would often include congratulations or evaluation of the glitch by others,

announcing that it had been patched, some contesting the originality and ownership of the glitch, or those that offer modifications to the technique.

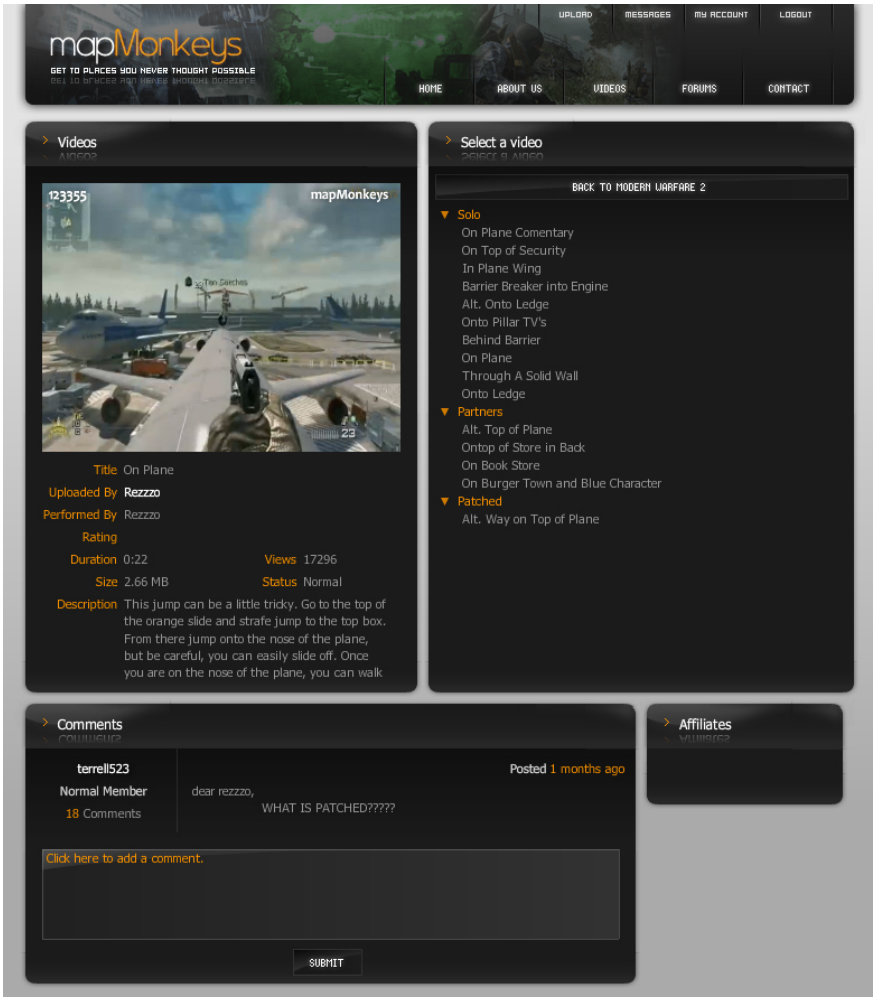

Figure 13 - The mapMonkeys website, glitch video page with attribution and comments fields.

In addition the glitches were further categorised by type – such as whether they could be conducted individually, what specific game mode they were conducted on or whether they had been invalidated through software updates (right side, Figure 13). Videos ranged in duration, but typically lasted between twenty to sixty seconds, and took the generic form of Sewerwaste's *MW3* example (p.104).

In May 2012 the mapMonkeys website was deleted and YouTube became its sole deployment platform. In doing so it lost some of the close-knit nature of a membership-only community and the relative anonymity and security of discussion. However, its move to YouTube also increased its visibility enormously, even if this was at the expense of dedicated registered community. On the YouTube channel views and those commenting appear largely transitory, but the level of interaction is increased. As of the 31st October 2012, the mapMonkeys YouTube channel had over 45,000 subscribers, and hosted 93 videos, which have been viewed over 19 million times. By contrast, the mapMonkeysDB channel, which contains 1,365 of the glitch videos that had previously been hosted on mapMonkeys.com, has only generated thirteen subscribers and 5,500 video views (of which a significant proportion can be attributed to my research). MapMonkeys (at

least in its community site form) supported a cacophony of voices and contributions of varying utility and quality of production, but it was one of the places that enabled the creation and organisation of glitching as a player activity. It was a community that facilitated and documented glitching. While the move to YouTube alters this relationship, and in particular its relationship with the public, it may have done so at the expense of the fostering of community, however, many of the original mapMonkeys members felt that the move to YouTube had come at a natural transition and used it as a point to separate from glitching as an activity. As a typically male and adolescent activity many of the members had spent six years with glitching as an activity, many that I spoke with were now studying in Higher Education, or had the pressures of careers and young families. Often they would laugh about not having glitched (or even played games) for months, yet remained on mapMonkeys for the community and friendships that it facilitated and represented.

A Glitching Team - chaoticPERFECTION

In contrast to mapMonkeys, chaoticPERFECTION utilised YouTube to distribute their work, but this had created different affordances, interactions and difficulties than those experienced by mapMonkeys. Their insistence on including copyrighted music in their glitching videos without prior permission had resulted in their YouTube channel being subject to repeated copyright claims, leading to three previous accounts being banned entirely. This was seen as a major point of frustration, damaging the visibility of chaoticPERFECTION and undermining their considerable efforts:

> All of the videos, fans and views were lost including the 12,554 subscribers we earned over the years as well. Our reputation went with the channel and we became unknown overnight. So we decided to count our losses and get back up on our feet with another channel which we recently lost, although there is word that YouTube has looked over our channel and has removed the problems on it. (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

The videos were reinstated in late 2011 but this discontinuity undermined the maintenance of a subscription base and made it difficult to reach the widest audience possible as on reinstatement all of their subscriptions had been reset. The current chaoticPERFECTION YouTube channel[2], active since May 2010, hosts 200 videos, has 2,500 subscribers and has generated 900,000 views. As a result of the copyright claims against them, each video now clearly includes copyright information within its comments field and more often than not within the video itself, asserting a fair-use copyright disclaimer. Like the mapMonkeys videos, the most popular videos on chaoticPERFECTION's channel are those that relate to competitive multiplayer glitches and 'triple A' titles, such as the *Gears of War* and *Battlefield* franchises.

[2] http://www.YouTube.com/user/chaoticPERFECTl0N

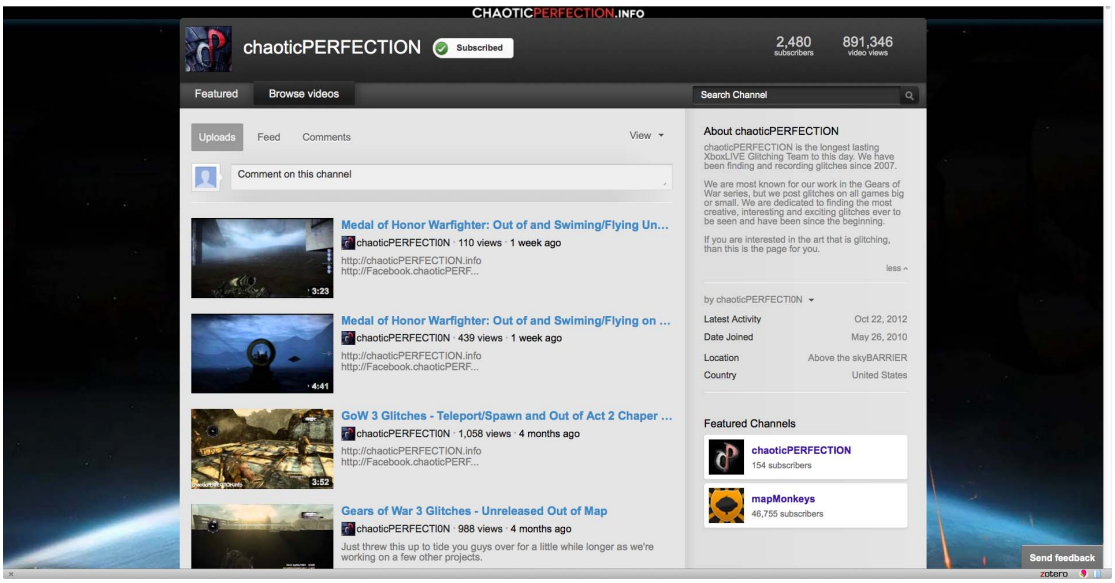

Figure 14 - The chaoticPERFECTION YouTube channel page.

ChaoticPERFECTION consists of a small team of five glitchers, distributed throughout North America and Europe. Despite this geographic distribution, chaoticPERFECTION consistently release a number of glitches for almost every major game release, often uploading a series of glitches within the first week of a title's release. Their videos tend to share the same production values and style as seen in the *Duke Nukem Forever* video. Their videos are longer than those found on mapMonkeys, lasting three-four minutes, and develop the distinct identities of members of the team with voice-over styles and differentiated animated introduction videos. There are occasionally interactions with audience members through the comments fields on the videos, and often recognition of other glitching teams and community members in the voiceover 'shout-outs' at the end of the video, but these interactions are restrained and infrequent. An equivalent would be to think about chaoticPERFECTION team members as radio hosts, there is a consistency and continuity across the channel, but each member has their own style and identity which is embraced in the glitches they produce.

CHAPTER SEVEN: GLITCHING PRACTICE

Glitchers and the Public

Despite the popularity of utilitarian and multiplayer glitches in particular with players, *glitchers* feel the need to document, share, and archive less utilitarian glitches. This partially exposes the difference between two groups (defined by glitchers) – *glitchers* identify and document glitches, while the public only utilise the glitches. The distinction between the two is nebulous and indeterminate to the observer. They both appear to be glitchers and this is what they are referred to as, but it is clearer to those engaged in the identification of glitching: identification becomes the mark of distinction used by glitchers to differentiate themselves from the inauthentic public mode of consumption. Yet the identification of glitches, like other transgressive acts, is intentionally done out-of-sight and is something that has received little critical attention from within academic circles. The popular understanding of a glitcher is somebody who utilises glitches, often damaging the balance and play experience of a game.

While I had made use of glitches myself, as a member of the public, I lacked any notion of how glitches were actually identified. I did not know what processes enabled somebody to repeatedly find exploits that QA teams had missed. For me, videogames are sophisticated entertainment products with so many opportunities for interaction and layers of complexity that the chance of encountering a glitch, let alone being able to reliably duplicate one must – at least in the eyes of a neophyte like myself, be an almost impossible occurrence.

How does a glitcher discover *that specific point* on a map is susceptible to *that particular vulnerability*? Do they systematically test every surface and interaction for each weakness? As we shall see the most honest answer is: pretty much, yes.

Each glitcher that I asked about the process, both on mapMonkeys.com and in correspondence with chaoticPERFECTION, were either unwilling or unable to *articulate* the process in detail. Responses and discussion was generally unclear, offering allusions of an approach, but not specifics that I could build understanding from. Responses were typified by the following:

> I think, hmmm can I get up there? I use rockets… and partners …and spend hours doing it. It's trial and error my friend… (Skynet)

> …If we aren't working in pairs of two we normally work in groups of six or seven all in one party, some working and others observing and vice versa. It's the best way to get things done. ...We Tag Teamed for weeks, everyday we would get on working on something, we threw out ideas and messed around until we found this really cool glitch... (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

While these responses suggested something of the approach, timescales and orientation it frustratingly said little about how glitching occurred. Fortunately, following extensive correspondence with chaoticPERFECTION, during which I repeatedly explained that I didn't fully grasp how glitching took place, I was eventually invited to join some of the team on a 'mammoth glitching session' of the *Rezurrection* DLC package for *BLOPs*. Building upon the franchise's popular 'Nazi Zombie' mode, *Rezurrection* relocates to a cold-war *moon-base*, where, taking the role of Richard Nixon, Robert McNamara, John F Kennedy or Fidel Castro, players must cooperate to survive successive waves of Nazi zombies. I was asked to join members of chaoticPERFECTION as an active-observer, able to observe the processes involved, while contributing to the identification of new glitches.

Considering Game Barriers

Before I was to join the glitching session, which was to focused upon the idea of overcoming the barriers of the gamespace – the boundaries and walls that restrict the player – I was given a short description of the different barriers that a glitcher saw. In addition to the conventional game barrier which opposed movement within a 3D space, there were others that corralled the player in different ways and required different approaches and opportunities:

1. Permeable barrier – a barrier that is generally invisible and does not resist the progression of a game object in any direction. It may be used to mark progress into an area or trigger events. *I was told to watch for signs of crossing a barrier and what processes they appeared to cause*;
2. Semi-permeable barrier – a barrier that restricts progress in one direction but not another. It is commonly used to drive linear progression in a game map. *I was told to note where these occurred*;
3. Death Barrier – a barrier that destroys a game element on contact (such as an avatar, projectile, or object). These generally surround a game maps in order to preserve system resources by preventing the rendering and calculations associated with elements outside of the game space. If a player touches a death barrier they are usually respawned immediately within the play area of the map. *I was told that these should be avoided at all costs, especially in the Rezurrection game mode. In other glitching sessions these were approached looking for ways that they could be bridged or mapped in relation to other static objects*;

4. Timed Death Barrier – a barrier that works in the same manner as a death barrier but in which the element is destroyed after a set duration. This is frequently combined with an on-screen notification and is used to encourage players to return to the conventional play area. *I was told to avoid these, but was assured that in many games the timed death barrier was psychological instead of limiting – many could be passed through and exited before the time ran out, but there was simply no way of determining this without experimentation.*

While this represented the smallest of pointers in order to prevent me from undermining the session and to allow me some idea of terminology, it offers some insight into the diagnostic approach that glitchers adopt.

Figure 15 - Glitching *CoD Rezurrection*, herding a zombie to create a safe 'beachhead'.

I was told to download the DLC immediately upon its release in the UK and to wait on *XBL* for other members of chaoticPERFECTION to join and begin glitching. On meeting with the chaoticPERFECTION members online the specific nature of the game soon provided a role for me to contribute: assisting with the creation of a safe 'beachhead' to enable glitching – I was to become the *zombie herder*. In a match of *CoD* zombies players must dispatch the undead which spawn in waves, once a specific number have been spawned a stronger boss zombie enters the arena and no more weaker zombies are spawned. If the remaining weak zombies within a wave are destroyed a new wave starts and scores of enemies invade the space.

It became my responsibility to lure the final *weak* zombie away from those herding the boss zombie into the required location. I had to remain close enough to the zombie to maintain its attention, leading it to locations that it would find difficult to navigate, such as staircases or areas littered with boxes, once the zombie was here I would sprint back to observe and help with the glitching.

Through discussion it was agreed that the boss zombie might become instrumental in glitching on account of it exploding when destroyed, sending players in its vicinity flying high into the air on account of the reduced gravity. It was hoped that this process could be utilised to overcome the barriers that surrounded the playable area and allow the glitcher to get 'out of map' (OOM) – a highly desirable glitch. In order to do this it was essential that four states were managed:

1. that no new zombies entered the stage and interfered with proceedings;
2. that no player was killed;
3. that nobody killed the final weak zombie of the wave; and
4. that nobody killed the exploding boss zombie until it was in *just the right place* to conduct the glitch.

Glitching Technique

The luring process was slow and inexact and therefore it was easier if only one player herded the boss or runt – the others would stay well clear of its sphere of detection, spending the time exploring the map and testing it for evidence of weakness until called back to observe and participate in the boss zombie glitch. While away the glitchers moved around the game space exploring potential lines of exploit, constantly communicating and reporting to their peers. They (we) looked for anything that immediately appeared anomalous or out of place – inconsistently shaped scenery or objects, different kinds of walls, barriers, floors, handrails and other objects that might offer a foothold, and places where the player felt something odd happen – such as their avatar 'sticking' or catching while moving. As a result of these techniques three anomalies were detected even before we first tested the boss zombie hypothesis: a death barrier marked by an open cliff-side in an exterior portion of the map (left, Figure 16); a point at which the player model appeared to get 'stuck' upon the level scenery, giving the impression of a pirouetting astronaut (right, Figure 16); and lastly an exterior staircase flanked by a teasingly low boundary wall (Figure 17).

Figure 16 - Glitching *CoD Rezurrection*, observing a death barrier and a sticky anomaly.

Figure 17 - Glitching *CoD Rezurrection*, identifying the target wall and herding the 'boss zombie'.

Following this process of investigation the boss zombie had spawned (right, Figure 17), taking the form of an 'astronaut zombie', using the gamertag of a randomly selected member of the players' friend list – in this instance 'BootlessDwarf'. It was decided that this boss zombie would be lured onto the stairs, at which point it would be killed and the resulting explosion would send the glitchers soaring over the game barrier and onto a 'ledge' or send the player OOM.

Through careful manoeuvring the zombies were separated and the boss zombie lured onto the steps and detonated (Figure 18). The resulting explosion launched the players into the air, but at the wrong angle. One slammed into the doorway in front of me, and ended up wedged into the corner of the walkway, while the other arced gently over the bottom steps and brushed against the wall, too low to confirm whether an invisible barrier exists above the wall or not. This process had taken perhaps twenty minutes and five restarts of the map to prepare, as each any of the four states mentioned earlier were violated, through confusion, miscommunication or misfortune, we had to restart.

Figure 18 - Glitching *CoD Rezurrection*, testing the glitch.

Undeterred, we continued this process – on one occasion the glitch we were investigating was conducted almost perfectly, with the glitcher sailing high above the visible wall (Figure 19). Unfortunately it transpired

that an invisible barrier *did exist* beyond it and *that particular location* was not susceptible to *that glitch* under *those circumstances*. Another location was selected and we repeated the process.

When this glitch became tiresome, we each interrogated the space independently looking for other anomalies that could be explored later. We *jumped against* barriers, *rubbed against* walls, constantly calling for others to observe and offer advice as we repeated the potential proto-glitch. After we had done this for around fifteen minutes, we returned to the boss zombie plan in a different location. We persisted in this mode for around three hours, at which point I had to leave the session.

While this glitching session was largely unsuccessful, it offered insight into the techniques and processes utilised when glitching multiplayer spaces. It is based upon hypothesis generation, repetition, observation, and perseverance, all of which is done within a social and highly communicative environment. While we were challenging the boundaries of the gamespace, I was assured that the same process applied to other types of glitch, such as those based upon movement, animation, or usage. In addition to this example I was fortunate to be invited to participate in other glitching sessions by chaoticPERFECTION and members of mapMonkeys both within a diagnostic capacity (as with this *Rezurrection* example) and a documenting capacity – creating the glitch video artefact.

Figure 19 - Glitching *CoD Rezurrection*, a successful test exposing no latent exploit.

A Successful Glitch

While our *Rezurrection* glitching session was unsuccessful, other glitchers found success by using a similar hypotheses to ours. xF1NALK1LLAx deployed the same strategy in a *different location* and found a ledge and a spot (a strategically useful foothold) that would be categorised as a dominant or complete strategy under Juul's typology (2002). This glitch was uploaded onto YouTube on the 26th August, only three days after the DLC had been released (Figure 20) (xFINALKILLAx, 2011).

Figure 20 - Glitching *CoD Rezurrection*, xFINALKILLAx's successful glitch.

This process can be seen in Figure 20, firstly a boss zombie is lured to the required location. The boss is killed and the resulting explosion sends the players into the air. One player manages to get caught on the edge of a wall strut, from which they are able to attack the zombies without fear of retaliation. Later within the same tutorial video a new technique is presented. Instead of using the conventional boss-explosion process, it is discovered that performing a running jump, and laying 'prone' whilst in the air (a *dolphin dive*), he is able to reach the ledge directly. This illustrates the progressive and iterative nature of glitching – that even within a single video a strategy is developed and then improved upon, offering progressively more sophisticated and refined ways of navigating and manipulating the space.

These two examples highlight a general process shared by many glitches:

1. The identification of a safe 'beachhead' in which the game settings are adjusted or managed to create an environment conducive to glitching;
2. The development of focused and coherent hypothesises that are systematically tested and developed;
3. Open communication and reporting between glitchers within the game and in extended groups, a kind of community knowledge that maintained across glitch sessions with different practitioners;
4. A systematic process of documentation and distribution, focused on notions of originality, attribution and ownership, which in turn can be seen as establishing a broader set of community knowledge.

Documenting a Glitch

Following the *Rezurrection* session I was invited to glitch Epic Games' *Bulletstorm* (2011), *Gears of War 3* (2011), and then later to assist with the recording and documentation of a glitch for the new DLC for THQ's *Homefront* (2011). The *Homefront* glitch recording session offered some insight into the process of documenting a glitch for 'education and entertainment'. As with the *Rezurrection* session, I was instructed to get onto *XBL* and wait for the team to amass. This was to be a three-person video, with xRyan350xcP, xNickncsxcP, and myself. xNickncsxcP joined early and we spent time casually playing the multiplayer game and discussing its merits while waiting for xRyan350xcP, who was going record the glitch. When xRyan350xcP joined we created a private multiplayer match and Ryan led us through the glitch.

This glitch allowed players to get OOM and was reliant on the multiple occupancy vehicles that can be used in *Homefront*'s multiplayer game and the specific rules that surround spawning and re-entering a match. If a teammate is in a vehicle it is possible to spawn directly into a vacant seat in the vehicle. This spawn mechanism can be repurposed to effectively reset and overcome the timed barrier countdown that gives the player five seconds to return to the gamespace or be respawned. On conducting the glitch the counter remains at zero without respawning the vehicle's occupant, who can then freely explore the space beyond the map – or alternatively attack their foes who are still within.

Unlike the *Rezurrection* glitch which was experimental, recording was the process of performance. As previously we each had specific roles, but these were even more rigid in this session – xRyan350xcP was the recorder, his point of view was the camera, being captured via his personal video recorder (PVR). xNickncsxcP and I were the actors. We were instructed where to stand, where to move to, and significant time was taken ensuring that the video was framed correctly and that the composition was aesthetically pleasing. The glitch video would eventually consist of two elements: the voice tutorial during which xRyan350xcP detailed how to conduct the glitch as xNickncsxcP and I performed it; and a montage section, where the spectacle of the glitch and its potential is emphasised.

Both of these sections were to be recorded in this glitching session. We then rehearsed the glitch and then we did two full takes. As previously, where we made errors of timing or location we would restart from an appropriate point – xRyan350xcP in effect directed the proceedings taking note of locations and movement to ensure continuity. The initial tutorial run through took approximately 40 minutes, at which point xRyan350xcP went off-line to record the voice-over and edit the introduction section. While this was being done, xNickncsxcP and I were tasked with identifying interesting or spectacular points on the map made accessible through the glitch, to be used in the montage.

After just over an hour xRyan350xcP returned and we conducted the montage elements. In this section the recorder had to perform the glitch in order to document its outcome and enter the space beyond the boundaries. xNickncsxcP and I took it in turn to perform the glitch with xRyan350xcP, visiting the areas we had identified, such as where we had found the extreme edge of the game map – which we naturally

parked the vehicle on and leapt off to see what was underneath (Figure 22)! After less than an hour of recording montage content it was decided that we had enough material and we ended the glitching session. By this point it was the early morning and I went to sleep, when I awoke and checked YouTube the finished video had been uploaded (Figure 21).

Figure 21 - Glitching *Homefront*, conducting the glitch (from final recording).

Figure 22 - Glitching *Homefront*, exploring the gamespace (from final recording).

Identifying a Glitch

Following my experiences of glitching with chaoticPERFECTION, mapMonkeys and others, I decided to replicate the process and attempt to glitch the single-player element of EA games' *Battlefield 3* (Danger Close, 2011). I purchased the game on release (28th October 2011) and began testing the boundaries by rubbing against and working upon the walls and game barriers, and where possible racing into the timed-death barriers on open maps. Over the course of three days, glitching solely for perhaps four hours each day, I identified three OOM glitches. However it transpired that all bar one had already been identified by other glitchers, but under circumstances that raise wider issues of consumption and appropriation – such as videogame piracy and the use of modified consoles.

The first glitch I identified – an 'up and over' OOM which uses objects to leap over a boundary, where I vaulted onto a refuse skip, jumped over a barrier wall adjacent to it and into the space beyond and outside of the map – was almost identical to one already uploaded. Another glitcher had simply beaten me to it with the only difference being that theirs had used a running jump, mine a vault over a bin.

The second glitch was more interesting in relation to glitching practices – I found that on one map, following an earthquake that spectacularly and cinematically deformed its structure, I was able to simply walk up some rubble, jump onto a garage roof and by running across it exit the conventional gamespace.

Having not found any evidence of the glitch online I repeated it and recorded it using my PVR, I then announced my discovery to the glitchers I had been corresponding with and on the mapMonkeys channel. I uploaded a copy of the video as reference and invited comments from the community. Almost immediately I received a message: *'I uploaded it on a different account on October 22 (URL), keep trying LOL'*. I followed the included URL and the glitch *had* been documented as the glitcher stated (Figure 23), however 22nd October was three days *before* the North American release date, and six days before I was able to obtain the game. The glitcher either had access to pre-release game discs, or was using a modified console (*JTAG*) that was able to play illegally shared game rips, of which the *Battlefield 3* file had been leaked in mid October.

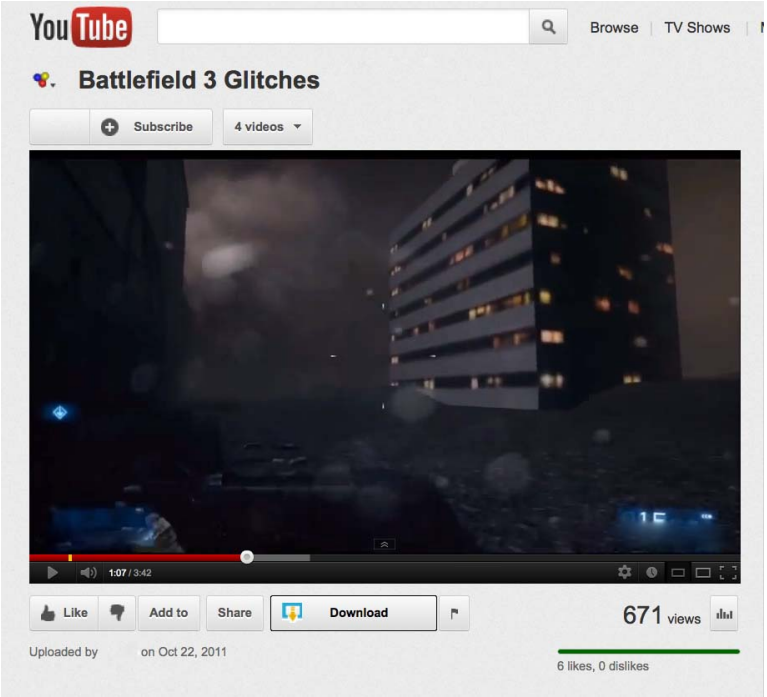

Figure 23 - Glitching *Battlefield 3*, the glitcher's pre-release video.

It became apparent that the use of *JTAG*s and other modifications was a highly contentious issue within glitching circles, and that many felt that glitching *from release date* was an important aspect of the equality of glitching. That even when glitching had the capacity to create dominant or complete strategies there was its own internal logic and sense of fairness.

Many glitchers expressed that they were opposed to the use of alternate technologies – such as lag-switches, although this was not a complete consensus. Others were prepared to use game ISOs and *JTAG* / *RGH* consoles in order to identify glitches (on single-player games) before glitchers who respected the release date were able to. However it is important not to assume that multiplayer glitches are not subject to the use of piracy and game rips – as while modified consoles cannot connect to *XBL* without invalidation, and gamers seen on pre-release games by Microsoft are subject to various sanctions. Those who obtain ISOs can often glitch the multiplayer modes on a local or private-match i.e. explore the multiplayer space without being online and subject to the panopticism that it entails.

This illustrates that while it is tempting to regard glitchers in the collective, as one group of individuals, they each negotiate their own interactions with the texts, their own mode of technicity. Therefore glitching is driven by a range of motivations, of which in some cases the act of being identified as first to find a glitch subordinates dominates ways of interacting and consuming the games. Perhaps a useful distinction is between the type of game glitched. In multiplayer games there is a natural tendency for it to be viewed as negativity due to the normalising gaze of other players, but in single-player modes it takes on the notion of exploration, after all, without another player to beat where is the negativity of domination. The issue with the single-player glitch is therefore the extent that it undermines the rhetoric or the intended experience of the game, or as some glitchers suggested 'sour-grapes on the part of the dev'.

The final glitch that I identified was as simple as taking an abrupt right-hand turn and vaulting over (yet another) refuse skip, and dashing through the timed-death barrier until no longer within its restrictive boundaries – and therefore OOM (Figure 24). I found the process mesmerising, I would play the single-player game at a snail's pace, clearing a section of level of enemies then testing all of its edges. In some instances I would get stuck and have to restart that section, but the eventual satisfaction of discovering a glitch (that had not been found by somebody else) was euphoric – if only because of the long period of time spent without finding a glitch. While I am not claiming that it is a particularly novel or important glitching itself, what it demonstrates is the point at which I understood enough about glitching to conduct it myself.

Figure 24 - Glitching *Battlefield 3*, my 'original' OOM glitch.

My understanding of the glitching process only really extended to the identification of boundary related glitches, and from my experience of previously using duplication glitches on *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*, and by looking at the range of videos on mapMonkeys and chaoticPERFECTION I was conscious that there are many other manifestations of glitching. I therefore began to use the video databases as a way of attempting to sketch out the scope of glitches and to offer an indication of their type, interrelations, and the status or meaning conferred to them in glitching communities.

CHAPTER EIGHT: A TYPOLOGY OF GLITCHES

Order and Chaos

For those unfamiliar with the practice of glitching, even a cursory look at the range of glitches available, such as those on mapMonkeys, chaoticPERFECTION, or on YouTube more generally, is likely to appear as a bewildering, apparently random diversity. Glitches are after all unexpected interactions and outcomes of *code,* they are not fundamentally illogical, they are simply the result of code that has been written in error, or that interacts with other functions in unanticipated ways, or goes beyond the functional capabilities of the hardware. As a result there is infinite scope for what a glitch may do and what form it may take, or that all of the scope for kinds of software is shared by the range of kinds of glitch possible. Videogames, and certainly the popular commercial releases found on home consoles, are not free expressions of the potential of software code and hardware mechanisms, but are hostage to the various restrictions of generic conventions. Their scope is restricted by the models that define the expected form of the games and by the specific capabilities and range of interactions (such as input types) by the hardware product and its application framework.

Videogames therefore have similarities of operation, context, form, and rhetoric, between platforms and releases within the same genre that offer structure and coherence for the consumer, but while these patterns resonate through and influence the manifestations of correct or normal play, they also provide the contexts and potential for glitches.

As a result the kinds of games explored by glitchers on the *Xbox 360* platform, predominantly action-orientated first-person and third-person military shooters, offer a distinct range of glitches on account of the affordances, focus and operations of the genre. These games prioritise the exploration and navigation of simulated 3D space, looking, aiming and attacking, and the limited management of finite resources (such as ammunition or health) that entails. It is therefore rational that glitches also tend to work upon these lines of activity, the practices that the code simulates and models, but also the very practices that enable a player to progress within the game (i.e. the lusory means and pre-lusory goal). While there are inevitably some 'wildcard' glitches that are the unpredictable outcome of the potential of code most fall along the lines of the affordances of the games that they are conducted on.

As a result, this awareness enables the observer to begin to make sense of the prodigy of glitches seen on glitching databases. Glitches on the mapMonkeys and chaoticPERFECTION databases focus on the following aspects of videogame interaction: the way that the game environment looks; the way that the gamespace is defined; the way that the player looks around the space; the way that the player navigates the space; the potency of the player; the way that in-game objects and items are interacted with, consumed, accumulated or destroyed; the way that the game logic behaves; and the rules that restrict access and setup. While on closer inspection it is evident that these categories cover the majority of potential interactions upon an action orientated console game, it offers the beginnings of a framework that applied order over the apparent chaos.

Glitches are protean in their nature in the sense that many of them can be viewed simultaneously as a method (a tool for uncovering additional glitches, or that is combined in sequence to reach an outcome), or an outcome (the final situated purpose of the glitch, such as accessing a specific point or augmenting the damage of a weapon). This dual-reading makes a categorisation problematic and presents significant challenge when first attempting to make sense of glitches as a neophyte. As I became increasingly familiar with glitches this apparent issue abated and I have indicated a glitch's potential as outcome, method, or both within the following typology of glitches.

The following *typology of glitches* is built upon sustained interaction with glitching communities and textual analysis of extensive glitching archives - in excess of 3,500 individual glitching videos. It is meant to offer insight into the vocabulary of glitching and the various ways in which glitches enable the transformation of the experience of space, game, and time within a videogame environment. It is not implied that this represents a comprehensive overview of glitching, but that it is offers a preliminary sketching out of the boundaries based upon the body of data and interactions available.

Glitches can be recursive in the sense that the use of one can expose further exploitable vulnerabilities in the videogame environment. In addition to this expansive, unpredictably looping outcome, glitching may variously enable: the exploration of game structure and causality; access to advantageous locations within a gamespace; a deconstruction of the intended sequence of player experience; domination or circumvention of game elements; domination of other players; more efficient interactions with the conventional game; and the creation of new games. These outcomes align with and extend Kücklich's three *purposes of cheating* (2008): *speed up narrative progression*; *increase frequency of interaction*; and *enhance the range of player options*, and acknowledges that a game is a system *not* just a fiction.

Advantage and Visibility, A Glitch Continuum

The 3,500 or more glitches observed on mapMonkeys and chaoticPERFECTION therefore can be categorised along the following glitch types as seen in Table 11. In addition to the type of glitch, i.e. whether

it is navigational, visual, or potency enhancing, glitches can be further differentiated by their perception within the player population: the extent to which they are visible or observable; and the amount of advantage, or deviation from the anticipated order of the game that they entail. While not entirely consistent, this way of mapping out glitches offers some insight into how a glitch is understood, the response that it elicits, and accommodates a range of different subtypes or glitch examples. Those which offer high levels of advantage and visibility are most likely to be regarded as 'game-breakers', and therefore treated with disdain by players and game operators, necessitating security updates and sanctions upon perpetrators, while conferring significant status upon the glitcher(s) who identify it. By contrast, glitches that offer low levels of advantage and visibility are likely to be viewed as trivial diversions, of little interest to the public and of limited significance within glitching communities.

The visibility continuum reflects the extent to which the glitch is perceived or seen by conventional players. It expresses the visibility of the glitch from low, effectively invisible glitches, through to highly conspicuous and evident glitches. The advantage continuum expresses the extent to which the glitch alters or interrupts the conventional function of the gamespace and forces players to alter their behaviour. A broad definition of the differences between levels of glitch visibility and advantage can be found below in Table 9 and Table 10.

Glitch Visibility	
Value	Characteristics
Low	The glitch is rarely detected and/or identified as anomalous activity by the playerbase / game operators. It may or may not have directly observable characteristics, but these will be of a minor nature. The glitch may be so difficult to conduct, or restricted to highly specific circumstances, that it is rarely witnessed or identified in any aspects or instances of gameplay.
Medium	The glitch is occasionally detected and/or identified as anomalous activity by the playerbase / game operators. It has observable characteristics but it may be relatively difficult to conduct or restricted to limiting circumstances that it is visible in a minority of aspects or instances of gameplay.
High	The glitch is frequently detected and/or identified as anomalous activity by the playerbase / game operators. It has observable characteristics that may be conspicuous in their manifestation. The glitch may be relatively easy to perform and / or unrestricted in its invocation and therefore seen in many aspects or instances of gameplay.

Table 9 - Glitch visibility category definitions.

Glitch Advantage	
Value	Characteristics
Low	The glitch is perceived to have little or no impact upon the core functions of

	gameplay, the game continues as normal for almost all players. It may influence peripheral game functions but this does not confer any competitive advantage or force others to adjust their play.
Medium	The glitch is perceived to impact upon the functions of gameplay, but the impact upon core functions is limited, it can still be played conventionally by most players, but the experience may be altered for some. It may offer competitive advantage, but players are able to limit and / or neutralise the impact of the advantage by altering their behaviour.
High	The glitch is perceived to impact significantly upon the core functions of gameplay, and the game cannot be played in its conventional manner by most of players. It offers competitive advantage that is difficult or impossible to neutralise and forces players to alter their behaviour to attempt to escape its impact.

Table 10 - Glitch advantage category definitions.

Those glitches that are highly visible but have limited or minor advantage, such as those that can be easily conducted and countered, are likely to be regarded as alternate strategies, or undisclosed functions available to the player. While those which confer a significant advantage but are difficult enough to perform or can only be done in limited circumstances are viewed as glitches. These definitions also have bearing upon the ways that their protagonist is perceived by the normal playerbase.

Game-breakers mark a temporary descent into chaos, and are conducted by a large proportion of the population, not simply glitchers, but those juvenile, mischievous, bored or intrigued that are able to conduct them. While all who conduct game-breakers are likely to be treated with censure the high visibility of the act means that many will be reconciled back into the playerbase, it will be configured as an act of poor judgment instead of identity. Glitches are instrumental in forming identity. Their power to subvert combined with the small number of protagonists enable it to be used as a point of distinction against a group i.e. glitchers who are treated with widespread derision. Strategies are viewed as alternate, but semi-legitimate play styles. They are odd, but not necessarily perceived as oppositional. Instead they are viewed as the mark of different or deviant groups, such as expert players or power-gamers. They are the practices of those who care about the game too much. Finally novelty glitches are rarely perceived by the playerbase, and when they are the lack of advantage and visibility makes them about the game as opposed to any protagonist, they have no bearing upon identity, and may be of scant interest to players more generally (see Table 11 below).

It should be stressed that this typology of glitches is not presented as a comprehensive model, nor as offering an authoritative description of the scope of glitching, but it is hoped that it still has scholarly merit due to its wider aim. It is instead offered as a discursive model to allow us to better understand the form and nature of the glitches encountered during this study, and to offer a structure from which the glitches encountered can be discussed and contextualized as a coherent practice, as opposed to being viewed as isolated and seemingly random outcomes of code.

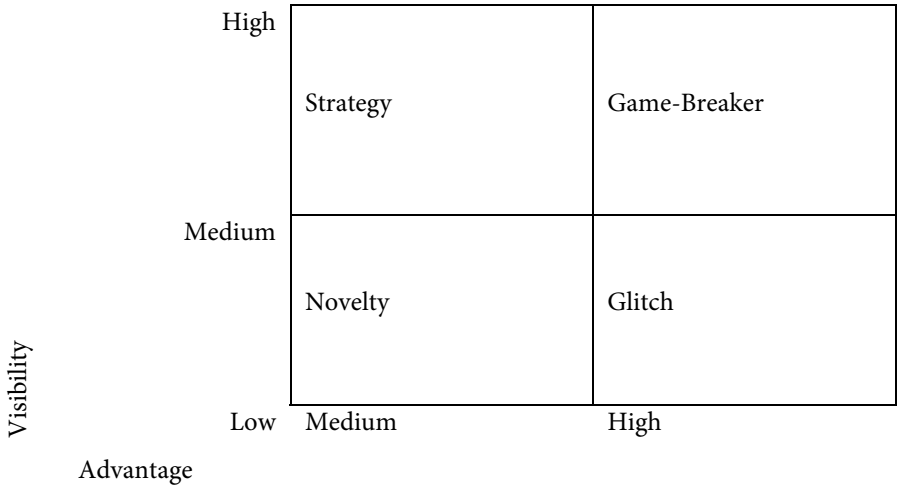

Table 11 - Glitch Advantage and Visibility and correlating glitch types.

The 3,500+ glitches encountered while conducting this research can be placed within the categories in Table 12, with subcategories of each type and a description.

A Glitch Typology

Graphical Glitches			Glitches that identify or instigate errors in the way that the game is visually presented – how the game looks.
Glitch Type	Method	Outcome	
Texture	No	Yes	The identification or instigation of anomalous textures upon 3D models e.g. the *Call of Duty: 3 (CoD3)* 'day glow dresser glitch' (Figure 25 p. 131).
Model	No	Yes	The identification or instigation of anomalous or corrupt 3D model object data e.g. *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010) 'Cougar-man glitch' (Figure 26 p.131) and 'Donkey-woman glitch' (Figure 27 p.131).
Consistency	No	Yes	The identification or instigation of situations where objects within the gamespace do not function in a consistent manner, this is characterised by certain objects behaving differently to others e.g. the *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (*BLOPs)* 'Apple Glitch' (Figure 28 p.132).
Render	Yes	Yes	The identification or instigation of instances where objects, processes, or players are not consistently rendered within the game engine e.g. the *MW2* 'Shattered glass glitch' (Figure 29 p.132), or the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* 'Car slide (Figure 30 p.132).
Animation	Yes	Yes	The identification or instigation of alterations to the player model that can then be animated through player input or game routines e.g. the *Dead Space* (Redwood Shores Studio, 2008) 'Dead Walk glitch' (Figure 31 p.133), or the *BLOPs* 'Zombie walk glitch' (Figure 32 p.133).
Navigation Glitches			Glitches that instigate changes to the way that the player is able to move around the space – how movement feels.
Glitch Type	Method	Outcome	
Speed Glitches	Yes	Yes	The instigation of alterations to the players' movement characteristics (predominantly speed) e.g. the *MW2* 'Sprint glitch'

			(Figure 33 p.133).
Up and Over	Yes	Yes	The identification and articulation of a route of player movement (such as jumps) that enables them to circumvent an obstacle, such as a barrier e.g. the *Hard Reset* (Flying Wild Hog, 2011) (PC) 'Up and under' glitch (Figure 34 p.134).
Object Assisted Navigation	Yes	Yes	Where placeable or movable objects are utilised to alter the conventional way of navigating a space, such as through creating platforms to reach previously inaccessible points e.g. the *MW2* 'Stepping stone glitch' (Figure 35 p.134).
Animation Jumps	Yes	Yes	Where animations or functions are combined in order to alter characteristics of a jump, such as the distance travelled or size of the player model in-jump e.g. the *Gears of War 2* 'Kung-Fu Flip' (Figure 36 p.134).
Launcher	Yes	Yes	Where explosive force is used to add momentum to, or propel the player around the game environment, as seen in a rocket jump e.g. the *Rage* (iD Software, 2011) 'Skydiver glitch' (Figure 37 p.135).
Alts	No	Yes	Alternative ways of accessing or reaching points on a game map that may give the glitcher the advantage of speed or unpredictability. Alts may take the form of a simple route across conventional gamespace elements traced and articulated to a specific destination, or may be the product of a number of other glitch techniques, such as animation jumps, ledges and elevators e.g. the *BLOPs* 'Truck jump alt' (Figure 38 p.134).
Spot	Yes	Yes	The identification of locations within the game that hold particular tactical advantage such as those which overlook large sections of a map and/or offer protection from multiple directions. These may be accessed by glitches, or considered glitches or errors of design in their own right e.g. the *MW2* 'High-rise Crane Spot' (Figure 39 p.135).
Secret Room	No	Yes	The identification of methods to access a previously inaccessible *enclosed* space on a game map in which players can congregate. Some secret rooms may allow the glitcher to continue to attack while within e.g. the *MW* 'Oil-tank secret room' (Figure 40 p.136).
Barrier Glitches			Glitches that instigate changes to the way that the gamespace is defined and configured – the boundaries and scope of the gamespace.
Glitch Type	Method	Outcome	
Ledge	Yes	Yes	The identification of a protrusion that is of sufficient size to allow the player to navigate across, however this is likely to be done with some difficulty and the ledge may be invisible e.g. a *CoD*3 ledge (Figure 41 p.135). If the ledge is of significant (subjective) size it is sometimes referred to as a barrier.
Barrier Breach	No	Yes	Where the player is able to partially break through the restriction of a game boundary, generally in a specific location, pushing beyond its conventional limit of restriction. These are further differentiated by what is able to breach the barrier: object barrier breach, player barrier breach e.g. the *BLOPs* 'Minigun placement object barrier breach' (Figure 42 p.136), and the *BLOPs* 'Rock face player barrier breach' (Figure 43 p.137).
Elevator	Yes	Yes	Where the overlapping of game objects with the player model exerts a linear upward force upon the player. They raise into the air until they end the conflict or are killed by a death-barrier e.g. *CoD*3 'Co-op elevator' (Figure 44 p.137).
Barrier Breaker	Yes	Yes	Where the player is able to entirely break through the restriction

			of a game barrier, unlike an up and over glitch the barrier breaker overcomes the barrier through opposition. These glitches may be differentiated by additional factors: co-op barrier breaker, object assisted barrier breaker, timed-barrier breaker e.g. the *W@W* 'Roundhouse rub' (Figure 45 p.138).
Out of Map	No	Yes	The location/state that a glitcher is in when they have overcome or circumvented the boundaries and barriers that define a game level. It is differentiated from a secret room in its expansive nature. The gamespace can often be entirely circled and in many instances the player is still able to attack those within the map e.g. the *Battlefield 3* 'Marketplace OOM' (Figure 46 p.138), or the competitive use of the *W@W* 'Roundhouse Rub'
Sequence Breaker	No	Yes	Where players are able to alter the sequence by which the game contents are accessible an interacted with e.g. the *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008) 'Pentagon glitch' (Figure 47 p.138).
Process Glitches			Glitches that instigate or utilise vulnerabilities caused by processes and functions of the game system and application framework – the processes that allow the game to be executed.
Glitch Type	Method	Outcome	
Loader/Deloader	Yes	No	Where the game environment exposes exploitable vulnerabilities at the point at which another section is loaded into system memory (Loader), or by working back to a lower resolution deloaded segment of game level. Typically Loaders would consist of glitches caused by items being spawned directly onto a player at a specific location, while Deloaders expose barrier and navigational glitches e.g. the *Battlefield 3* 'Trackback glitch' (Figure 48 p.139).
Lag State	Yes	No	Where a glitch is conducted by impairing the operational capabilities of the system such as through flooding it with requests or intentionally placing load upon the processor. This is indicated by a reduction of game frame-rate, pauses, or latency in the game operation at which points security is often optimised or checks performed slowly enough to overcome e.g. the *BLOPs* membership control glitch type example: 'Gun game access glitch' (Figure 58 p.142).
Halt State	Yes	No	Where a glitch stops or pauses game process until the player resolves the conflict or the system is reset e.g. the *MW* 'Freeze glitch' (Figure 49 p.139).
Logic Glitches			Glitches that exploit the logic of the game – exposing anomalies in the system or by predicting causality.
Glitch Type	Method	Outcome	
Reward Differential	No	Yes	Where an exploitable differential in the value of an item / object in a game is identified, allowing economic / trade models to be subverted. This is often the product of the magnification of relatively small differentials caused by the number of items traded and the location between trades measured in play-time e.g. the *Rage* 'Viper rocket trade glitch' (Figure 50 p.140)
Reward Loop	No	Yes	Where it is identified that an in-game reward can be collected indefinitely, or exploited to repeatedly reward, subverting the relevant system such as experience points e.g. the *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011) 'Infinite speech skill glitch' (Figure 51 p.140), or the *BLOPs* 'Flag runner glitch' (Figure 52 p.140).

AI Domination	No	Yes	Where AI elements, such as computer-controlled enemies or game mode rules are so well understood that they can be predicted and exploited e.g. the *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* 'bucket head felony glitch' (Figure 53 p.141), or the *BLOPs* 'Zombie redirection glitch' (Figure 54 p.141), or the *MW* 'Spawn camping glitch' (Figure 55 p.141).
Handicap Removal	No	Yes	Where it is possible to ascertain the causality and effects of code routines that are applied to handicap the player, by doing so the player is able to cancel or negate elements of handicap e.g. *CoD* series 'Quickshot glitch' (Figure 56 p.142), or the *CoD* series 'Reload cancel strategy' (Figure 57 p.142).
Membership Control	Yes	Yes	Where the glitch allows players to alter or circumvent the rules that restrict entry into game modes / game setup. This form of outcome enables players to enter restricted game modes with alternate functionality or enables collusion and management of team membership e.g. the *BLOPs* 'Gun game access glitch' (Figure 58 p.142).
Affordance Glitches			Glitches that alter the capabilities of the player within the game directly. These are the most powerful, unpredictable and versatile glitches generally coming out of the combination and interruption of game routines – exposing anomalies in the system or by predicting causality.
Glitch Type	Method	Outcome	
Combination	Yes	No	Where multiple player inputs cause game processes to overlap and interrupt (but not induce lag) that are used to present unanticipated or unexpected outcomes – this is the primary process used in affordance glitches.
No-Clip	No	Yes	Where players are able to pass through walls and surfaces without restriction, in addition they may no-longer be restricted by other movement impediments such as gravity e.g. the *Red Dead Redemption* 'Stagecoach glitch' (Figure 59 p.143).
Weapon glitch	No	Yes	Where a combination glitch alters the power of the weapons that the player uses e.g. the infamous *MW2* 'Javelin glitch' (Figure 60 p.143).
God Mode	No	Yes	Where the player is invulnerable to enemy attacks and other sources of damage. The glitcher in God mode is occasionally vulnerable to certain types of damage, such as those coded into death barriers on contact. It is frequently combined with the no-clip function e.g. the *Gears of War 2* 'Hammer of dawn invincibility glitch' (Figure 61 p.143).
Duplication	No	Yes	Where players are able to make multiple copies of game items. As a result of repetition with successively valuable or potent items they have the capacity to rapidly undermine economic and item systems through exponential inflation e.g. the *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* (2011) 'Mannequin dupe' (Figure 62 p.144), or the *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* (2006) 'Arrow dupe' (Figure 63 p.144).
Multiple Use	No	Yes	Where a combination glitch allows an item or object to be used or interacted with multiple times e.g. the *MW2* 'Multiple use care package' (Figure 64 p.144).

Table 12 - A typology of action-orientated glitches.

Graphical Glitches

Texture Glitches

*CoD*3 day-glow dresser glitch (Figure 25): A specific game element is detected as anomalous: a piece of furniture on a level is bright purple as opposed to wood grain texture.

Figure 25 - Graphical glitch, texture anomaly.

Model Glitches

Red Dead Redemption's Cougar-man glitch (Figure 26): the player is attacked by an erroneous pioneer/cougar model and texture hybrid.

Figure 26 - Graphical glitch, model glitch (Cougar Man).

The *Red Dead Redemption* Donkey-woman glitch (Figure 27): the player rides around the US/Mexico border on a steed that blends the face of a stallion with the body of a Mexican woman.

Figure 27 - Graphical glitch, model glitch (Donkey Woman).

Consistency Glitches

The *BLOPs* Apple Glitch (Figure 28): where it was discovered that while the majority of minor objects were deformable and had physics characteristics, one object – an apple – did not. This was reported with mock solemnity within the games press as the first 'game-breaking' glitch for the game

Figure 28 - Graphical glitch, consistency (Apple Glitch).

Render Glitches

The *MW2* Shattered glass glitch (Figure 29): where the obstruction caused by the deployment of smoke grenades can be negated by viewing through shattered (but not broken) glass.

Figure 29 - Graphical glitch, render glitch (Shattered Glass).

The *MW* Car slide glitch (Figure 30): where running and crawling against a burnt-out car incorrectly renders the player location in the screens of opponents.

Figure 30 - Graphical glitch, render glitch (Car Slide).

Animation Glitches

The *Dead Space* Dead Walk glitch (Figure 31): where an in-engine video sequence is triggered moments after instigating a slow, but bloody death animation.

Figure 31 - Visual glitch, animation triggering glitch (Dead Walk).

The *BLOPs* Zombie walk glitch (Figure 32): where the player is able to prevent the equipped weapon model (a rocket launcher) from being animated, while retaining the associated characteristics (lumbering gait, slow movement). The player then appears to walk like a zombie.

Figure 32 - Visual glitch, animation triggering (Zombie Walk).

Navigational Glitches

Speed Glitches

The *MW2* Sprint glitch (Figure 33): where priming a smoke grenade, but not releasing it, allows the player to sprint indefinitely. In addition to the benefits of increased speed in turn this enables greater momentum on jumps.

Figure 33 - Navigation glitch, speed glitch (Sprint).

Up-and-Over Glitches

The *Hard Reset* (PC) Up and Over glitch (Figure 34): where the play jumps onto a pipe that is included in a level as an interesting piece of scenery, they crawl along it, jump down onto a ladder (which breaks their fall and prevents death) and climb down, now outside of the conventional map (OOM).

Figure 34 - Navigation glitch, up and over.

Object Assisted Navigation Glitches

The *MW2* Stepping stone glitch (Figure 35): where the player places multiple care-packages to act as stepping stones across a death barrier

Figure 35 - Navigation glitch, object assisted navigation (Stepping-Stone).

Animation Jumps

The *Gears of War 2* Kung-Fu Flip (Figure 36): in which the player chains a series of animations together in sequence which combines their outcomes, allowing the player to leap upwards and backwards onto obstacles. The game does not conventionally allow jumping of any sort.

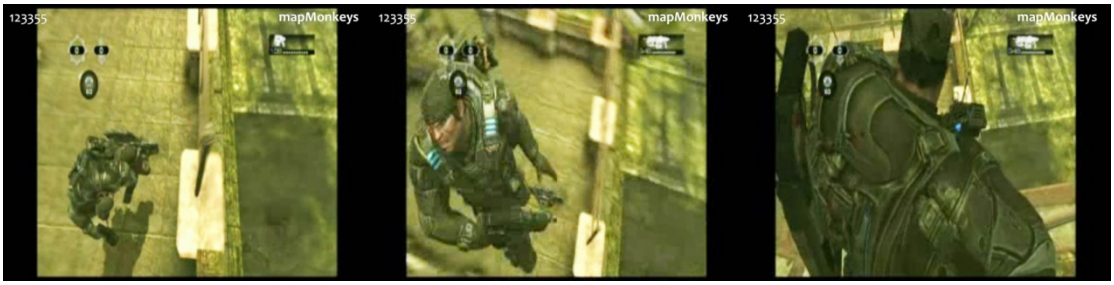

Figure 36 - Navigation glitch, animation jump (Kung Fu Flip).

Launchers

The *Rage* Skydiver glitch (Figure 37): where the player magnifies the force of an explosive device that is placed beneath the vehicle the player is standing on and then detonated. The player flies into the sky and outside of the level.

Figure 37 - Navigation glitch, launcher (*Rage* Launcher).

Alts

The *BLOPs* Truck jump alt (Figure 38): where the player learns to jump upon the wheel arch of a stationary truck, onto its bonnet and then leap onto the corner-edge of a tactically advantageous building. The glitcher is able to literally jump in through the open window and surprise any foes that may be there.

Figure 38 - Navigation glitch, alts (Truck Jump).

Spots

The *MW2* High-Rise Crane Spot (Figure 39): where the player leaps off the map on the roof of a building, lands on some hoisted pipes and is able to climb to the tip of a crane. It is an excellent sniping position.

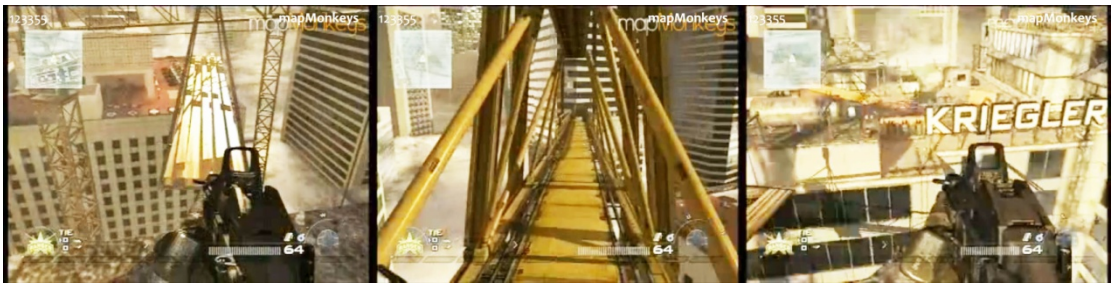

Figure 39 - Navigation glitch, spots (High-Rise Crane).

Secret Rooms

The *MW* Oil-tank secret room (Figure 40): where players make use of a range of navigation glitches, in order to get onto a wall. They walk along the edge of a barrier and then leap down into an oil-tank, sustaining damage but surviving. Once in the tank they are able to see out and attack, but not be seen by others.

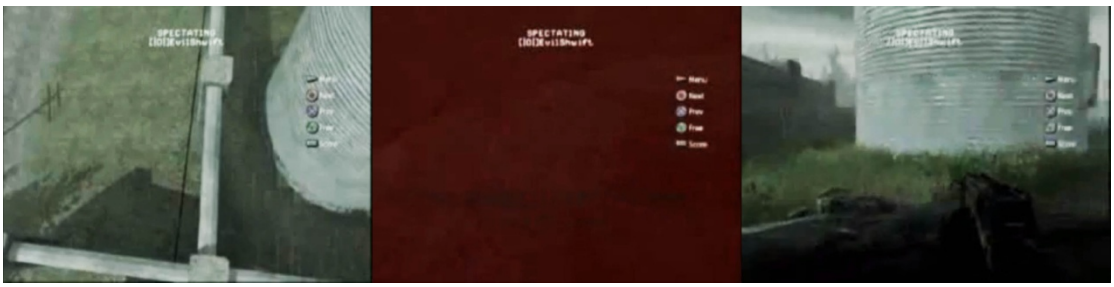

Figure 40 - Navigation glitch, secret room (Oil-Tank).

Barrier Glitches

Ledges

The *CoD3* ledge (Figure 41): the player falls from an open window but immediately pushes against the building wall. They land upon a ledge that allows them to carefully work their way around the building (and then they are able to jump onto another roof).

Figure 41 - Barrier glitch, ledge (*CoD3* Ledge).

Barrier Breaches

The *BLOPs* Minigun placement object barrier breach (Figure 42): where the player is able to place an automatic Minigun weapon beyond the barrier that defines an oil-tank, and therefore within it. The weapon is still able to track and attack opponents but is obscured from their view by the oil-tank.

Figure 42 - Barrier glitch, object barrier breach (Minigun Placement).

The *BLOPs* Rock face player barrier breach (Figure 43): the player is able to crouch and push against a section of rock face, by doing so they breach the barrier partially and in doing so are able to see into and attack foes within a normally safe tunnel area beneath the map.

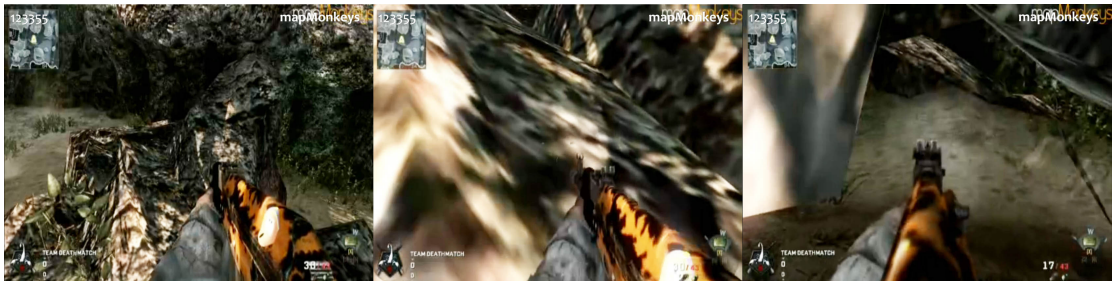

Figure 43 - Barrier glitch, player barrier breach (Rockface).

Elevators

The *CoD*3 Co-op elevator (Figure 44): where multiple players congregate and huddle together while pushing against a wall creating multiple points of overlap. When these cannot be resolved the game attempts to move the players away from each other in the same direction simultaneously – and they rise into the air. This glitch allows further navigation and exploration, where players decide to move apart once they have reached a desired height to access a ledge or other similar object.

Figure 44 - Barrier glitch, elevator (Co-Op Elevator).

Barrier Breakers

The *W@W* Roundhouse rub (Figure 45): in this solo barrier breaker the player repeatedly moves backwards and forwards while crouching against a specific section of barrier (a warehouse door), eventually the player pushes through the wall and falls under the map where they can explore or attack their opponents still within the map.

Figure 45 - Barrier glitch, barrier breaker (Roundhouse Rub).

Out of Maps

The *Battlefield 3* Marketplace OOM (Figure 46): where the player uses an animation jump to access a marketplace stall roof, and then leaps over a barrier into the sparse environment beyond.

Figure 46 - Barrier glitch, out of map (Marketplace OOM).

Sequence Breakers

The *Fallout 3* Pentagon Glitch (Figure 47): where the player is able to make use of a barrier breaker, passing through a pile of rubble until they enter the citadel (ruined Pentagon building) from beyond the gamespace where the boundary walls offer no resistance to movement originating from that direction. The player is able to circumvent the locked and guarded main gates and obtain power armour training immediately upon beginning their game instead of waiting until roughly halfway through the 40hr+ story arc.

Figure 47 - Barrier glitch (Pentagon Glitch).

Process Glitches

Loader/Deloaders

The *Battlefield 3* Trackback glitch (Figure 48): where the player advances to a game checkpoint, doors are flung open and the player is urged to advance. Instead of complying the glitcher retreats to a previously completed, and deloaded area, they quickly vault over a wall and overcome the boundary. If the glitcher had attempted the same manoeuvre in the loaded map iteration the dimensions of the timed death barrier surrounding the wall would be larger and this would respawn the player.

Figure 48 - Process glitch, loader / deloader (*Battlefield 3*).

Halt States

The *MW* Freeze glitch (Figure 49): where the player inserts an invalid ASCII character into a customisable class name but waits until the game has begun before attempting to use the text, the validity of which is tested by the system software (the application framework) as opposed to the game software. When the invalidity is detected by the application framework it halts the game functions related to the player – the player freezes. This is used, when combined with weapon 'splashback' and careful counting out of damage and healing, as a way of creating controllable launchers, and to become temporarily invulnerable.

Figure 49 - Process glitch, halt state (Freeze).

Logic Glitches

Reward Differentials

The *Rage* Viper Rocket Trade glitch (Figure 50): where the player identifies a differential between items sold by two adjacent traders that have large replenishing stocks, and that the player is able to carry a large

stock of. This allows a rapid accumulation of profit and the most powerful weapons and items are now available and trivial to the player.

Figure 50 - Logic glitch, reward differential (Viper Rocket Trade).

Reward Loops

The *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* Infinite Speech Skill glitch (Figure 51): where it is discovered that a line of discussion with a barman that confers a small increase in 'speech skill' experience points, is immediately available to be instigated (with its reward) after it has just been done.

Figure 51 - Logic glitch, reward loop (Infinite Speech Skill).

The *BLOPs* Flag Runner glitch (Figure 52): where by waiting in a specific location in a game mode the player obtains perpetually increasing experience points (see +165000 by the final image).

Figure 52 - Logic glitch, reward loop (Flag Runner).

AI Domination

The *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* Bucket Felony glitch (Figure 53): where it is discovered that the detection of crime by NPCs is dependent on their line of sight, they do not have any ability to respond to the placement of an object – such as a bucker – over their heads however. Once the bucket is on an NPC's head their shop can be robbed and/or their spouse murdered without fear of retribution.

Figure 53 - Logic glitch, AI domination (Bucket Felony).

The *BLOPs* Zombie Redirection glitch (Figure 54): where by standing in a specific location the computer controlled zombie horde will always congregate at a specific point before becoming stuck. The player can wait and (re)kill as many zombies as they wish without having to move or aim.

Figure 54 - Logic glitch, AI domination (Zombie Redirection).

The *MW* Spawn Camping glitch (Figure 55): where the points that enemy players are spawned at is determined by the comparative location of members of the player's team. When this is understood they ensure that they do not trigger a change in spawn location and continue to attack their opponents from a distance who emerge from predictable locations.

Figure 55 - Logic glitch, AI supremacy (Spawn Camping).

Handicap Removal

The *CoD* series Quickshot glitch (Figure 56): where the player ascertains that there are two separate inaccuracy routines applied when using a weapon: one when shooting from the hip, the other when using the scope. There is a transition between the two routines when swapping between each state during which the weapon is aimed exactly at the centre of the screen – the relevant inaccuracy routine has not yet begun. By lining up an enemy and then timing a shot at the point of transition the player is able to perform a high accuracy shot without having to use the scope to aim. Using this method snipers now sprint around the weapon performing accurate one-hit-kills.

Figure 56 - Logic glitch, handicap removal (Quickshot).

The *CoD* series Reload Cancel strategy (Figure 57): where the player identifies that a weapon has replenished its ammunition supply before the reload animation has completed. They wait until the relevant point in the animation and then momentarily sprint forward, cancelling the animation, and allowing them to attack before a player who had waited for the animation to complete would be able to.

Figure 57 - Logic glitch, process interruption (Reload Cancel).

Membership Control

The *BLOPs* Gun Game Access glitch (Figure 58): where a lag state is invoked by repeatedly swapping between game options on the multiplayer menu. After repeated challenge and cancellation the system becomes slow and the glitcher is able to gain access to the restricted Gun-game mode, seconds after they have entered its lobby their party of friends automatically joins them – overcoming the restriction in place to avoid collusion.

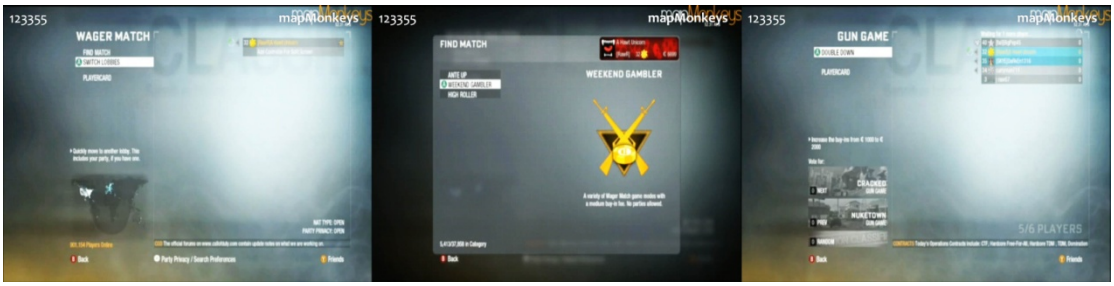

Figure 58 - Logic glitch, membership control (Gun Game Access).

Affordance Glitches

No-Clip Glitches

The *Red Dead Redemption* Stagecoach glitch (Figure 59): where the player combines a number of animations and interactions related to entering a stagecoach in a multiplayer match while obstructed that

forces the player up and out of the map. Once conducted the player is no longer restricted by any barriers within the game allowing unrivalled exploration and the creation of fascinating visual juxtapositions.

Figure 59 - Affordance glitch, no-clip (Stagecoach).

Weapon Glitches

The *MW2* Javelin glitch (Figure 60): where the player equips a certain loadout of weaponry, they prime a C4 explosive charge but do not release it and immediately swap to a powerful rocket launcher. On death the C4 explodes and is combined with the massive area-of effect blast of the Javelin missile, killing all opponents in range irrespective of whether in cover. This glitch subverts the very core processes of the game.

Figure 60 - Affordance glitch, weapon combination (Javelin).

God Mode

The *Gears of War 2* Hammer of Dawn invincibility glitch (Figure 61): where the player invokes the God mode through utilising a complex sequence of input and player state combinations, being nearly killed, then partially revived. Note that the player can be seen walking through the first area of effect weapon blast (far left), the second blast kills all other players, including teammates, but the player is unharmed – the gore belongs to the others.

Figure 61 - Affordance glitch, God mode (Hammer of Dawn).

Duplication

The *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* Mannequin Dupe (Figure 62): where the player places a piece of apparel on a mannequin in their house, they quickly remove the item, sprint out the house and on return the item is still on the mannequin and in their inventory.

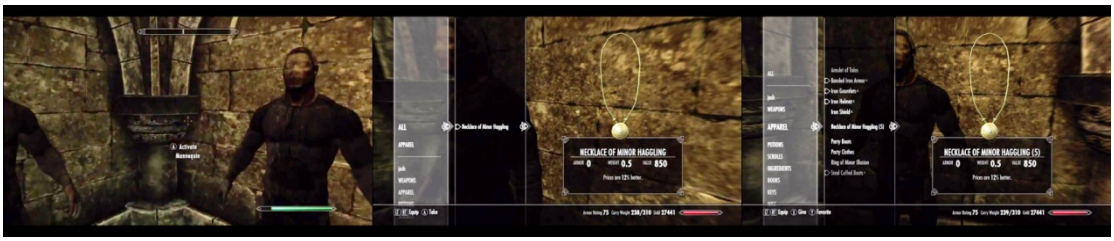

Figure 62 - Affordance glitch, duplication (Mannequin Dupe).

The *Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* Arrow Dupe (Figure 63): where the player equips the item that they wish to duplicate, notches and draws an arrow in a bow and upon release does a quick series of button presses. The equipped item duplicates (128 times) and the object models flower out in front of the player, cascading onto the floor.

Figure 63 - Affordance glitch, duplication (Arrow Dupe).

Multiple Use Glitches

The *MW2* Care Package (Figure 64): where the player primes a care-package request marker grenade and throws it just as they use a contextual animation allowing them to step onto a small barrier on the game map. The grenade is never counted as having been used, but the care-package is flown into the level as requested.

Figure 64 - Affordance glitch, multiple use (Care Package).

Glitching Purposes

In addition to the glitches as methods/outcomes detailed in the typology of glitches offered in Table 12, it is possible to make a general observation about the more abstract purposes of the deployment of these glitches. These can be thought of as the benefit offered by the glitch – what it enables the glitcher to do with the game that they were unable to do previously and are detailed in Table 13, below.

Purpose	Description	Associated glitch types
Exploration	Where glitches enable the ability to explore and interact with the videogame text at a deeper level. It can be considered an outcome motivated by wishing to understand and experience as much of the game space as possible. It extends from the aesthetic appreciation of the spectacle of a glitched game environment to an awareness of the actual construction of game levels. Glitchers who are motivated by this kind of attitude approach the game environment as detectives, archaeologists, or media historians – performing close critical readings, slowly working through concentric layers of the game paying close attention to the appearance and feel of the spaces. In doing so they develop an increasingly intimate understanding of the game, and become 'closer' to the game – it may become an act of seduction and obsession.	Graphical glitches, Navigation glitches, and Barrier glitches.
Productivity	Where glitches enable the re-use of a game environment for purposes other than those set out by the game, such as the development of new game modes and the creation of machinima. This glitching purpose makes use of glitches that alter the appearance or available interactions with the space, presenting new vistas and game objects that can be used to create player productivity, or facilitate new kinds of game e.g. the *BLOPs* 'Zombie walk glitch' (Figure 32 p.133) that offers new player models, or the *CoD* series 'Mike Myers' glitch game modes (see p.149), which make extensive use of secret-room glitches.	Graphical glitches, Navigational glitches, and Barrier glitches.
Renegotiation	Where glitches are used to alter the range and nature of interactions with the game, but in a way that recognises and aligns with some of the pre-lusory goals. The glitches allow the player to access a game element that may be unavailable to them at that point in the game or as a result of the requirement of temporal investment or skill. These kind of glitches align closely with the notion of cheating and frequently occur on single-player games where the capacity to perceive inequality is largely removed e.g. the *Fallout 3* 'Pentagon glitch' sequence breaker (Figure 47 p.138), reward differential glitches such as the *Rage* 'Viper rocket trade glitch' (Figure 50 p.140), and reward loops such as the *Skyrim* 'Infinite speech skill glitch' (Figure 51 p.140).	Navigational glitches, Barrier glitches, Logic glitches and Affordance glitches.
Domination	Where glitches are used to explicitly alter the balance of multiplayer play in the favour of the glitcher. This may manifest itself as: indirect domination such as the deployment of more efficient means than others e.g. the use of speed glitches to access key locations before team-mates, which would align with Foo and Koivisto's notion of greed	Barrier glitches, Process glitches, Logic glitches, Affordance glitches

	play; or more explicitly, such as with the use of OOMs to attack players without being seen or the deployment of weapon glitches that make the glitcher powerful e.g. competitive use of the *W@W* 'Roundhouse rub' (Figure 45 p.138), the *MW2* 'Javelin glitch' (Figure 60 p.143), or *Gears of War 2* 'Hammer of dawn invincibility glitch' (Figure 61 p.143).	

Table 13 - The purpose of a glitch.

CHAPTER NINE: GLITCHER MOTIVATIONS

The Pleasures of Glitching

Following my experiences glitching with others and conducting glitches myself I became interested by the motivations and reasons for glitching. Why were some players willing to spend such lengths of time interacting with a text to identify a small number of glitches that then would likely be patched and removed from the game a few weeks later? What pleasures and purposes might be attributed to this – and as a corollary how might these inform the rhetorics that justified and rationalised these subjectively counterplay acts.

I began to ask glitchers about their attitudes and motivations towards glitching, this section explores their responses in detail and exposes the wider contexts of glitching and the relationship(s) that are exposed in relation to game production and consumption. Rezzzo, the leader of mapMonkeys was of the opinion that there are two types of glitch user - 'those who do it for fun and enjoyment, and those who do it to gain unfair advantage over other players' (2011).

> There are two main reasons why people glitch, …to show off and brag about how cool they are when and if they find something', [while others] '…enjoy doing the unintentional, they find a satisfaction in launching above the map more than they do staying inside the boundaries that the developers intend them to do. (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

This reputational aspect of xRyan350xcP's comment resonated with the perspectives of many other glitchers who I spoke with – it appeared that, certainly within the *dedicated or professional* glitching communities, glitchers appeared to be playing a metagame in which the chief goal was to identify, claim and distribute an exploit *before others*. The act of discovering a glitch and use of it, while enjoyable in itself is contextualised by this reputational aspect. For some the status associated with a glitch's recognition and reception within glitching, public and games development communities appeared another, sometimes primary, motivation.

Other glitchers described the process of glitching a new release as a 'scavenger hunt', with each glitcher working to identify, document, and distribute it to benefit from the 'shock value of everyone's reaction' (Rezzzo, 2011). The pleasures are therefore (for many), not restricted to the implicit joy of conducting a

glitch, but the response it elicits when presented to others. Their responses will offer varying meaning to the glitch – dependent on the observer's ideological perspective and the visibility and the advantage that it confers. Curiously many glitchers felt happy with any recognition – negative or positive – attributed to the recognition of a 'good glitch' by fellow glitchers, as a terrible exploit by those fearful of the impact to the conventional game, or, as we shall see shortly, even the point at which a developer instigates a software security patch to remove the glitch.

While glitchers approach a glitch with an additional perspective of how difficult a glitch may have been to identify, e.g. combination glitch such as a no-clip glitch (Figure 59) is likely to be regarded as more sophisticated and evasive than a barrier breaker (Figure 45), they too, like members of the public and developers primarily rationalised along the axis of visibility and advantage. The interaction of the severity or significance, and the eventual visibility of a glitch in turn defines the type of response it elicits and the status given to the glitcher. The more visible a glitch the more people became aware of it, and the greater the advantage the greater the status attributed to those who found it. For teams like chaoticPERFECTION this appeared a primary driver for their mode of production:

> ...if I found a single big glitch, something crazy like a "No Clip (GOD Mode)" that would spread around the world while giving me a big rep boost. …So the biggest things are glitch credit, reputation and coming off as professional to the public. (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

Glitches have their own hierarchy of authenticity and significance, a good glitch is measured by different criteria according to an individual's predilections but it may be determined by the utility (or 'universality') of the glitch and the advantages that they confer:

> If your intentions are to exploit it in an online match then it's probably considered good depending on how much of an advantage it gives you to other players. If your intentions are just for fun then it is seen good depending on how universal it is and where it gets you to. If it gets you on a high roof or out of a map, then it's most likely seen as good, but if it just gets you on a small shed or in a small tree, then it's not seen to be as good. (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

Authentic Glitchers and Sub-Whores

These dynamics express the motivations for finding glitches – that the glitcher engages with an enjoyable act in which they feel that they are doing something *novel* and *authentic*. In turn by documenting and distributing the glitch they gain status and reputation within glitching circles, have their techniques adopted by the public, and one assumes become more visible to the developers. This process however can be subverted and manipulated in inauthentic manners:

Some glitchers were critical of a reputation-orientated approach, labelling it as 'sub whoring' – where glitchers create content in an attempt to drive subscriptions on their YouTube channels in the hope of generating advertising revenue. Glitchers who made excessive references to their YouTube channels in forums such as mapMonkeys, who claimed ownership of previously identified glitches, or whose glitch videos were deemed lacking in content were dismissed and ridiculed. *Sub whoring* is regarded as an inauthentic practice, but so too were any behaviours perceived to violate notions of *credit*, *reputation* and *professionalism*. *Credit* can be understood as correctly attributing ownership to glitches and not claiming the glitches of others (or if necessary having documentary evidence of ownership, such as YouTube date stamps). *Reputation* is conferred by consistently identifying high-quality glitches, measured as how useful or novel they are. Glitches that confer competitive advantage generate the most reputation. *Professionalism* is concerned with presenting an outward face of organisation and reliability, such as through the creation of a team, clan, or larger social body, and behaving in a way that doesn't undermine the perception of a professional glitcher.

Identified glitches do not (necessarily) sit in isolation within the glitcher communities. They are made to be verified through repetition and adoption, and in doing so are utilised, often by groups other than the glitcher communities that discover them. This raises the issue of glitch misuse by the public – the hegemonic normative playerbase, and the moral and ethical perspectives on glitching.

Yet, much like Consalvo's observation of cheating practice (2007), the boundary between the two types is diffuse, 'I must admit it is sometimes fun to go into online lobbies and glitch to see people's reactions, which by doing that I am glitching to gain advantage over other players, but I'm not using it to boost my Kill / Death ratio or to get higher on the leader boards, I'm doing it for pure enjoyment' (Rezzzo, 2011). Yet we should remember that as the *intent* of the act is almost impossible to ascertain – and for those against Rezzzo it would likely feel like grief-play. To the observer Rezzzo would have been glitching for competitive advantage, glitching in order to progress, while *his* primary motivation was an experience of the glitch, glitching to glitch.

When glitches are adopted by the public they become part of the repertoire of play, providing they do not challenge the game too strongly. In multiplayer games they are often patched with relative haste and removed from the game, especially if they are visible and confer advantage. Examples of glitches that are retained are those regarded as strategies or novelties: rocket-jumping and the *Gears of War* series 'Kung Fu Flip', found by the founder of chaoticPERFECTION, xJediPiMPx, 'that glitch was used by everyone as a new form of getting to certain places faster. If there was a flight of stairs, you could choose to take the time to walk up the stairs or to flip up in the air and land upstairs faster…it became a part of the game as a new feature (xRyan350xcP, 2011).

Other glitches are used to offer new play types or modes, becoming part of the gaming repertoire, such as the 'Mike Myers' and 'Secret Room' games for the *CoD* franchise. Rezzzo explains how each of these work:

> "Michael Myers" is where one player can only use his knife to kill everyone on the other team. The other team can't shoot at him, can only run away and jump to places, which most people jump in glitches since they usually require some skill to get into. Other games developed around glitches usually pertain to what the glitch is, like if you find a secret room then the game is usually one team has to be in the secret room protecting one of the players, and the other team's job is to infiltrate the room and kill the player being protected. (Rezzzo, 2011)

The adoption as player repertoire and alternate game modes can be considered the benign utilisation of glitches, however glitchers were well aware of the radical nature of those glitches that were both powerful and visible and therefore incurred the wrath of the developers. As a result some glitchers entertained withholding 'game-breaking' glitches from release, and the general public. The 'Javelin glitch' on *MW2* (Figure 60 p.143), was highly conspicuous, easy to conduct, immensely powerful and is therefore a prime example of a game-breaker.

Of Javelins and Game-Breakers

The Javelin glitch was first posted on YouTube on November 29th 2009, news of it spread quickly and it was replicated by players within the game almost immediately. It was then further clarified by glitchers, including mapMonkeys. The mapMonkeys Javelin glitch video, posted two days after its discovery has been viewed in excess of 1.3 million times, interestingly the original video has less than 350,000 (Figure 65).

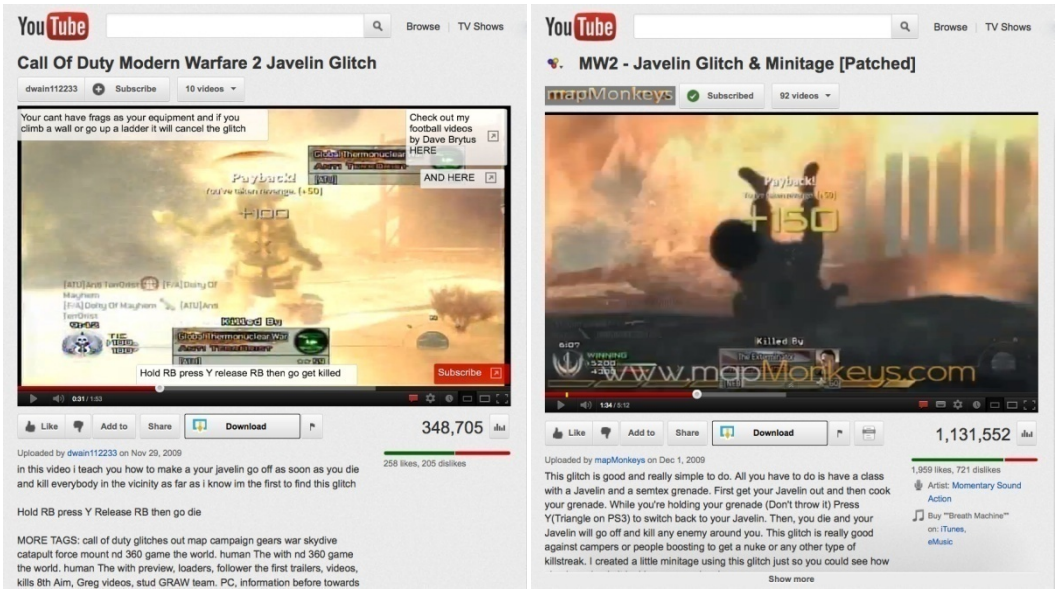

Figure 65 - Javelin glitches, dwain112233's video and the mapMonkeys alternate.

The Javelin glitch disrupted the normal operation of the majority of public matches within hours of its documentation, and Activision were put under pressure from a vocal and irritated playerbase. There was

the perception that the game was unplayable in its conventional sense all the while that the exploit was available.

> I LITERALLY cannot go into a single game without at least one person using it. …I used it at the beginning of yesterday back when I was like the only one using it - showed it to my friend, it gave us a lot of laughs. I know, I know, I helped to perpetuate the bullshit in this game [it's] …Impossible to enjoy any match of MP anymore. (Metal Ninja Cake, 2009)

The glitch necessitated a mandatory security update which was deployed on the 10th December 2009, with an announcement from *XBL*'s Director of Programming, Larry Hryb. The glitch was removed and play returned to normal. This process would have cost Activison a significant sum, in addition the cost of coding a patch each alteration to a game deployed via an *XBL* update patch costs $40,000 as a result of the testing and delivery charges enforced by Microsoft (Stuart, 2012). While this is a small fee for a franchise as commercially successful as *CoD,* it still stresses the direct financial implications of glitching. Following the appearance of the exploit, in an attempt to enforce rule and placate players after its patching, Microsoft and Activision began to develop and more strongly articulate their policy on glitching, and retrospectively banned those that had glitched *CoD* multiplayer games

Rezzzo, one of the glitchers who had contributed to the adoption of the glitch (his version of the glitch video had been viewed in excess of a million times) acknowledged that '…sometimes sharing these glitches can be very destructive to the game… It was fun to do but it ruined the game for some' (2011). Yet Rezzzo did not see the release of the glitch as a negative or damaging act and felt no culpability, instead he viewed the sharing of the glitch technique as *a service to the game developers* who he regarded as core members of the glitching audience. The developers were members of *the public*. This was an apparently counterintuitive perspective shared by the majority of glitchers that I spoke with, that in turn exposes some of the motivations for glitching. Any response from the developers, such as patching a glitch, was seen as recognition of glitching handiwork and a tacit challenge to attempt to discover further exploits. Glitchers therefore saw themselves as being engaged in a *symbolic dialogue* with developers and system holders through their interactions with the games and their systems. By releasing a game-breaker the glitcher pointed out a major flaw in the game that is then recognised and responded to by the developer. This symbolic dialogue motivated releases, while the openness with which the glitch was shared removed any sense of negativity of opposition. To document and share a glitch is simply an act of sharing information. It is the (over)use of information that constituted a negative act.

> ...if a game developer asks me how to do it, I don't try to hide it from them. I'm perfectly willing to show them how to do a glitch so they can be patched. That's how other glitches are eventually found, if big glitches weren't patched, then no one would be going out and looking for other newer glitches. (Rezzzo, 2011)

Other situations opposed this benign sharing of information, such as the instances where glitchers identified exploits and flaws within beta releases, or early game-demos, but withheld sharing them in anticipation of the eventual game release. If the exploits were available in the final commercial version they would be adopted by more members of the public, become more visible and attribute more status.

Other glitchers were more circumspect about the relationship with game-breakers:

> I do my best not to release glitches that have the potential to be Game Breakers because they will absolutely be abused without question, thus ruining the game for others and making the company that made the game lose money by paying people to patch. …I hate it when I try and play the game for real in public or ranked matches and see a glitch that I found being used as an advantage to somebody else. (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

xRyan350xcP suggested that despite the positive impact of releasing a game-breaker, in terms of visibility and reputation, chaoticPERFECTION had decided to withhold a number of major glitches in the past, or had presented them in a way that would reduce their exploitation by the public. This can be seen in the following example from the *Gears of War 3* beta (2011) (Figure 66).

During the three-week beta period the chaoticPERFECTION team identified a number of major glitches and attempted to contact Epic Games to no avail. They then uploaded a video onto YouTube for the attention of Epic titled *Gears of War 3 Beta Glitches - Can't Reach Ya (Message 2 EPIC GAMES)*. The video presented a glitch that enabled the player to walk in the air and become invulnerable, initiated when downed (a state that the player is placed in when wounded, before death). The video's introductory voice-over presented the video as assistance for Epic, but also as warning to members of the public considering utilising the glitches. It takes on a curious ambiguous tone, the viewer is neither clear whether the glitch is framed as oppositional to the game or to glitchers.

> This is actually us trying to get a message out to Epic Games…we don't want what's gonna happen now to happen in the finalised game, also Epic released a notice saying that if you're caught glitching in a match in the beta that you'll be banned and all the retail unlocks that you've earned will be taken away… this is just a fair warning to those thinking of abusing the information that you're going receive. (chaoticPERFECTION, 2011)

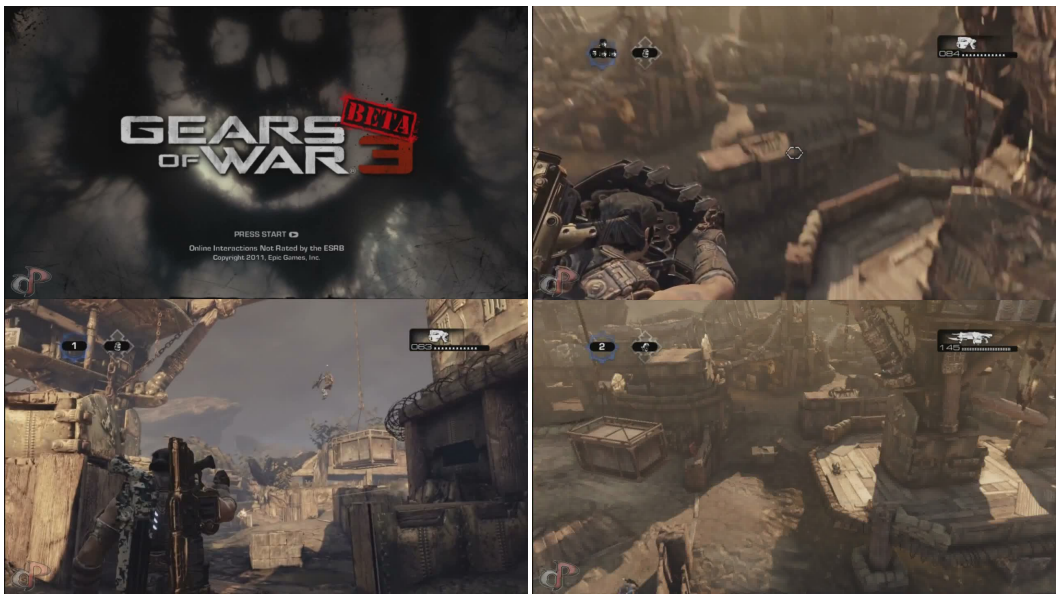

Figure 66 - chaoticPERFECTION's glitch video for *Gears of War 3*.

Unlike conventional chaoticPERFECTION releases, there are no instructions indicating how to conduct the glitch, but a relatively accustomed *Gears* player, and certainly anyone that had used chaoticPERFECTION glitches in the past, would likely be able to repeat the process with a little trial and error. This implied that chaoticPERFECTION were working in collaboration with Epic, but also placed them in strange relation to the developer's position on glitching: were they anticipating that they would have their accounts banned? Were they assuming that their openness would be treated generously? Unfortunately for chaoticPERFECTION despite their attempts at placating Epic Games all of the players visible in the video had their gamertags invalidated on *Gears of War 3*'s commercial release date, irrespective of withholding or obscuring the means to glitch they were still treated as glitchers.

While the size of chaoticPERFECTION enabled them to restrict access to the glitches they discovered, within a larger, more diffuse community such as mapMonkeys it is particularly difficult to maintain secrecy about a glitch or prevent it from being utilised on account of the many community connections, the relative anonymity and negligible accountability. As Rezzzo explains:

> I didn't want the glitches I was finding to get out to the public, but the more I thought about it the more I realized it would eventually be found by someone else, so if I were to post it on the website then there would be proof that I was the first to find a glitch. (Rezzzo, 2011)

Of Glitchers, the Public and Developers

The relationship between glitchers, public and developers, is an interesting one. Glitchers appear to glitch for the implicit enjoyment of the act and the reputation and status that these acts confer, but their actions also have a secondary value. If a glitch is presented to the public and then adopted there is the chance (or at

least the perception) that the glitcher may become recognised by a games developer – a profession that many found enormously desirable. It transpired that for many this was yet another aspect of the motivation to glitch, that glitching was perceived to offer a valuable skill that the developers required on account of the evident fallibility of their QA testing teams:

> …we understand how the testers and developers don't find the stuff we do because they don't look for the stuff in the right way. We work cooperatively while they have solo assigned places and areas and weapons to test... it just isn't flexible enough. I think, given the opportunity to work with the developers for a week or so, especially if they are working on a well known game, would be something any glitcher would accept, whether paid or not. (xRyan350xcP, 2011)

The urge to be recognised and potentially recruited by developers appeared to be part of the motivation to become part of a larger institutionalised glitching team or clan – that this would guarantee the skill and ability of the team members, but also serve as a professional face that could be used when interacting with developers – like a recruitment company of a mercenary corporation. A cadre of professional mapMonkeys glitchers, led by Rezzzo, had already been recruited to do QA testing on *W@W* and *MW2* and were in the process of doing the same for *MW3* while I was part of the mapMonkeys community. Activision were planning to pay for four mapMonkeys glitchers to go to Los Angeles to work from Infinity Ward's offices, there was significant demand from the community to participate – yet as a result it was necessary to instigate a recruitment process to ensure that the spare places went to the most skilful glitchers. This 'try-out' process was a point of significant contention within the mapMonkeys community, but reflected common practice within glitching teams and clans – it can be understood as the *professionalization of glitching*.

While it is entirely possible to glitch individually and to share one's outputs with a community through a site like mapMonkeys or YouTube, becoming part of a team is perceived to facilitate a broader range of interaction with the public and developers alike. In relation to the *MW3* QA testing mapMonkeys members were invited to nominate who they considered the best glitchers, including links to recent glitches that they had identified. This was then used by Rezzzo and mapMonkey (the site's founder) to select the team to visit Infinity Ward. Simultaneously invitations were made for the creation of a new 'professional' mapMonkeys glitching team, with glitchers invited to submit their best glitches for assessment. A week after the submission notices Rezzzo announced:

> Four members of MapMonkeys are being flown out to California on Sunday, July 10th, to test *MW3*, including mapMonkey, IM Budd88, skatebin, and myself! We've been flown out to test other games in the past (Such as *W@W* and *MW2*), but we only had 2 or 3 days to test the game and find glitches, which wasn't nearly enough time. This time, Infinity Ward is keeping us there an entire week so we can find more bugs and glitches than ever before! (Rezzzo, 2011)

This announcement inevitably caused significant consternation over the selection of team members, with some members questioning just how active and prodigious Bud88 and Skatebin were at glitching, the extent to which they were considered 'true glitchers' and the best of mapMonkeys. While this was occurring popular gaming website Computer and VideoGames (CVG) reported that mapMonkeys were going to work on *MW3*, which was then corroborated by Robert Bowling, Infinity Ward's creative strategist:

> …these guys focus specifically on exploits that can potentially be used to an unfair advantage …They're a great addition to an already rigorous QA process that the internal team here at Infinity Ward / Sledgehammer and additionally at Activision have been doing since development began. (Ivan, 2011)

While mapMonkeys' work upon the *CoD* franchise is an illustration of where developers might make use of glitchers' skills, this is a rare occurrence, and even this example is further contextualised by conflicting attitudes and animosity. Despite utilising the mapMonkeys team and publicly complimenting their skills, less than three months later, Robert Bowling began strongly denouncing both the practice of glitching and those who conduct it:

> Any attempt to cheat, hack, or glitch in #*MW3* will not be tolerated. 1600+ bans issued. ...Every ban unique to the level of douchiness of the offense. The greater the douche the greater the length. PermaDouche possible. (Bowling, 2011a, 2011b)

Game Abuse and Douches

With these words Infinity Ward's creative strategist announced that the company was taking a hard stance on responding to cheaters, hackers, and glitchers, and that over '1600 douches (of various levels)' had been banned from the PC, *XBL*, and *PSN* game servers. Bowling was no longer complimenting glitchers but articulating a negative and pejorative attitude. Glitchers are 'douches', whose offensive behaviour is anathema to sanctioned forms of play, as a result they are not just to be ejected and banned matter-of-factly, but the process demands a public company tweet. *MW3*'s banning policy, states that that the company takes 'action on player behavior that violates the spirit of the game' explicitly defining the separate offenses of *glitching*, *hacking*, *cheating*, *boosting*, *offensive behaviour and offensive playertags* (effectively offensive UGC) as 'game abuse', which have a penalty of from 48 hours to 5,000 days of banning from the game systems (Activision, 2011).

To an observer this change in stance is so emphatic – from congratulation to censure – that it feels duplicitous, or exposes a latent distrust of glitching. This is not particularly surprising considering the potential damage to reputation and operation that a glitch may result, but what is therefore curious is that Activision ever thought it prudent to use the mapMonkeys, a self-identifying glitching group, as QA testers. The announcement is contextualised by a spate of glitches being utilised (and perversely some of which

were identified and distributed by mapMonkeys) – once again with the perception of game-breakers intruding onto the game the normative player base needed a sign of action, and the invocation of the rhetoric of pathogen and the isolation of *douchey*-glitchers served to reinforce the boundaries of normative play. An alternate perspective is that mapMonkeys were the first to have broken the truce between the developer and the community by releasing additional glitches – whatever the actual basis what this illustrates is the complex and often contradictory relationships between glitcher and developer. This is perhaps even more clearly displayed when I proposed this duplicity to the mapMonkeys community: they did not recognise it as an issue. Instead, there was consensus that bans were necessary to protect the games that they loved, and that the glitches were being abused by the public, any prior engagement with Infinity Ward was an individual commercial transaction that was unrelated to glitching as fun. It was seen as a professional commercial service. Other glitchers explained that glitching had *always* been a divisive and objectionable activity, especially when abused, and that it was this exploitation by the public, rather than by glitchers that the Activision and Infinity Ward messages were attributed to. From this perspective it is logical and necessary for the developer to intervene aggressively – this is simply seen as part of the oppositional context of glitching – and inevitably it is this that marks its illicit thrill.

What I found curious was the general passivity of glitchers. The majority expressed a deep love or seduction with games as texts 'I myself love the games I glitch in, otherwise I wouldn't be playing them and finding glitches in them' (Rezzzo, 2011). In contrast some admitted to knowing glitchers who held more hostile approaches *to developers* as companies, but interestingly *not the games that they produced*.

> One could love the game and hate the developer. Depending on how the developers react to glitches/glitchers, but also the way that they treat the gaming community …this determines feelings towards the developers. (Rezzzo, 2011)

These are precisely the apparently contradictory approaches explored within the Biopolitical multitude (see Hardt & Negri, 2005), characterised as the self-controlling social body that holds the radical capacity to overthrow and renegotiate the terms and boundaries of control. Other glitchers, who wished to remain anonymous, suggested glitching as a more directly overt and active form of resistant counterplay arguing that 'there are some amongst us who dislike a gaming company so much that we will buy the game just to intentionally break it'. One of the motivations for this resistance was the statement from David Vonderhaar, Treyarch's game designer director, prior to the release of *BLOPs* which once again diminished glitchers in a familiar 'douchey' fashion:

> We are disinterested in making mini-celebrities out of douche-bags. You better think twice before you glitch. You never know who in your game doesn't like glitchers who reports you and saves the game in their File Share and tells us about it. (Vonderhaar in Watts, 2010)

Vonderhaar's statement was interpreted by some as an open challenge and insult to glitchers, who felt sufficiently slighted to motivate retaliation. As a result, I was told 'the company got nailed with hundreds of glitch videos spreading across the internet from campaign glitches to multiplayer glitches and to the famous zombies glitches. They went quiet after that show of force'.

This highlights the ambiguous and tenuous relationship between glitcher, developer and public – the strained relations, respect and deference. Some glitchers feel motivated to intentionally break games as a statement of ill-defined resistance against a developer, while others fought to assist with QA testing on the same franchise. The resistance was not in relation to the limiting nature of the games (Aarseth's 2007 tyranny of the game), nor a rejection of its annual derivative mode of production, but against a perceived slight and diffuse dislike for a corporation (but not its product?). This is most definitely the terrain of postmodern biopower. Others ride rough-shod over the modes of consumption, engaging in practices of piracy and P2P not through a rejection of the economic model, due to a lack of funds, or even in a sense of entitlement, but motivated by the need to obtain the game earlier than others to glitch it first and release the glitches before their peers.

From such a perspective it is understandable that we approach counterplay in a reductive way – it is tempting to simply see it as deviant, negative, trivial, hostile behaviour – a fundamentally 'douchey' activity. Yet, this perspective is at odds with the lived experiences of those engaged in glitching, and, to some degree in the values attributed to it by some developers. Despite the negative perception of their activity, many glitchers still spend their time playing videogames with the sole aim of exposing, documenting and sharing game exploits and glitches. These activities are motivated by an urge to become closer to the game, to discover more about it, to be seen as being an expert, and ultimately to somehow contribute to its production.

Despite this, glitching should be regarded as a legitimate counterplay activity – it works against game rules, contexts and expectations of the player, and is antagonistic towards the intended lusory means and prelusory goals, and roles of authorship and consumption. But, much of its motivation and intent seems anything but counter – *it is seduction*. The game is broken out of love. The developers are resisted out of a love for the product, destructive practices are distributed just to elicit recognition from the thing they love. Once again, contradiction and ambiguity is rife.

REFLECTION THREE: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF GLITCHING

Glitching, much like grief-play easily fits into the rhetorical frame of pathogen. It has the capacity to significantly undermine gameplay, particularly with the widespread introduction of gamebreakers, such as the Javelin glitch. However, while the Javelin is an important example of the radical potential of a glitch, and one that has received significant public attention, this section illustrates that glitching is a practice that offers a far greater range of outputs than gamebreakers. What might be a more balanced way of approaching the acts is that the abuse of glitches, their over-use, is the thing that determines the pathogenic aspect of the glitch. However, the public and developers/publishers are unlikely to be aware of, nor particularly concerned with this scope. The point is that some glitching activity can be significantly damaging to a game. As a creative or cultural practice however, the range of glitching output does become more significant, demanding further study and documentation.

Resistance: despite my efforts I could find little evidence of glitching motivated or conducted as resistance, in order to change a situation or configuration of power-relations. There was some evidence of manifestations of glitching in response to the perceived slight by Treyarch representatives. This was however difficult to substantiate when I subsequently looked through the video record. Instead it appears that glitchers were generally oblivious to the pejorative language and negative way in which they were perceived by the general playerbase, or directly oppositional to that very reading arguing that people, members of the public, were highly receptive to glitchers, although they cared little for who had originally discovered them. Instead of resistance glitching appears an implicitly enjoyable process, a utilisation of the space as opposed to an act invoked to change the order of things.

Mastery: much like grief-play mastery seems to be a significant rhetoric for the glitcher. The process of glitching is one of seeking out the occasions where the game can be temporarily mastered, or the power-structures and causality inverted. Yet outside of the identification of the glitches that allow some degree of mastery the glitcher is hedged in by rules, and often deeply observant of them. This is also illustrated in their deference to the game developers – their preparedness to share and collaborate under the assumption that the inversions that they expose or facilitate will be temporary, and eventually patched. Despite the initial reading that the glitcher becomes the master of the game, this is hard to support. They are so constricted that their activities might best be thought of as temporary diversions, as the exodus of the multitude where activity that does not align with the intended interactions with the game is temporarily enabled. Yet the pleasure of the glitch discovery revolves around the moments where the prevailing order is

suddenly subverted, the testing of thousands of interactions over hours of play that result in an anomalous outcome. What this says to the glitcher is that the authority of the space has shifted on some miniscule level and that the relationship between the dominant and subordinate has altered. This is mastery with a small m, mastery as expertise. In addition, the relationship to game production articulates mastery. The glitcher is more masterful than the QA tester, but they remain deferent to the developer. Instead of claiming superiority to the creators of the game, the majority of glitchers I spoke to articulated a yearning to be viewed as peers, as equivalents, and therefore to enter the industry in some capacity. In these instances the display of mastery therefore takes on the valence of a resume or curriculum vitae. There is an assumption (actually a desire) for the glitches to be patched and for order to be reinstated. This is a recognition that fuels further glitching and reinvigorates the act.

Identity: the glitcher understands the gamespace sufficiently to identify anomalies and then to develop and extend them. In so doing the glitcher asserts technicity that offers both identity and status. They demonstrate expertise within the game that distinguishes them and their available strategies from those of other players (when the glitch is deployed), and other glitchers on account of the new knowledge that others (as yet) do not hold. The demand to demonstrate authentic modes of glitching expertise and to display dominance of the game and other glitchers can be so compelling that some are prepared to subvert the glitching norms, such as through the use of pirated game rip downloads to break release dates. This highlights that for some the implicit pleasures of the glitch are subordinate to the status associated with being first to a glitch. But unlike grief-play, the creation of identity is largely related to the community of glitchers, members of the public who utilise glitches have limited bearing on the reputation of the glitcher and their standing.

The released glitch has an implicit pleasure associated with its discovery, has varying levels of pleasure associated with its utility, and confers status upon the glitcher. From its release it becomes a vicarious pleasure, where the glitcher watches how the glitch performs, mutates, and what impact this eventually has upon the game. Through this process the glitcher is able to develop aspects of identity that some found even more pertinent – the configuration as a professional glitcher, generating subscriptions and income through YouTube, or perhaps leading to recruitment into a team or the ability to enter videogames development in some capacity.

Creativity: glitching is a generative process, glitchers are preoccupied not simply with the identification of glitches but their careful and swift documentation and release. In this sense they use the game-space as a stage or set for which to perform their feats of illogic, such as where like escapologists they pass through seemingly solid walls. They create content from within games, using the game as the bare medium for this creativity. Unlike the UGC creator who imports new ideas and concepts into the gamespace, like digital bricolage, the glitcher uses the function of the game to create work, and as such the act of appropriation or creativity is rather pure and paradoxically deferential to the text. The glitcher merely identifies, documents and shares a peculiarity of the game, allowing the creation of new opportunities and instances. New kinds

of games that expose new pleasures – from the 'Mike Myers' hide-n-seek mode to the anarchic annihilation attributed to the game-breaker, or the free-form exploration of the no-clip.

Carnival: Glitching as an activity appears strongly associated with the concept of the carnivalesque, aside from the identity formation aspects of technicity deployed by those identifying the glitches, their release frequently within public channels has the result of passing the glitch to conventional players, many of whom will inevitably utilise the glitch as they see fit. In this sense the release of a glitch is an egalitarian invitation to misrule, and as the glitch is developed, repurposed and appropriated by other players its ownership becomes within the commons and anonymous. Glitches have the capacity to offer a range of outcomes, from novelty through to the utilitarian domination of a gamebreaker, but they are utilised without restriction. Players use them as they wish against whoever they wish and as such they share the universal antagonism and temporariness of the carnival. The glitch becomes a gift to the baying crowd, who utilise it as they wish.

Conclusion: By spending time with glitchers it appears that there are four core motivating factors to glitching:

1. there is an *implicit pleasure* of proving an hypothesis and of discovery of something new;
2. this is regarded as technicity and informs status within the glitching community. The way in which the players interact with a glitch determines how visible it is which in turn affects the likelihood of developers becoming aware of the glitch (and the glitcher);
3. There are the pleasures of utilisation and/or the value of the outcomes they afford – the deployment of the glitch for exploration, productivity, renegotiation, or domination;
4. The vicarious pleasure of the carnival – seeing others conducting the glitch, its impact on the game and any recognition within the press / from developers.

What is interesting is the extent to which glitchers appear deferent to the game developers and wish to institutionalise and professionalise in order to interact and work in games development. Glitching is seen as a means of entering the industry, or for some is done out of resignation. Unsure or separated from means to enter the videogame industry, they interact with games as if they were already within it. This is seen particularly with the formation of glitching teams and the high-quality videos in chaoticPERFECTION. These discussions of glitching challenge the conventional pathogenic reading of the glitcher as attempting to break the game, instead this breaking of the game is a by-product of the need to share the glitch and the unpredictability that this causes. Instead the glitcher is far more seduced by the game and the industry than first seems, so, by far from a "resistance" type transgression.

CHAPTER TEN: HACKING THE *XBOX 360*

As the previous sections have shown, there are points where griefers and glitchers were utilising modified console hardware and software – such as auto-fire controllers, *Kane and Abel*, lag-switches and modified consoles that could run game ISO rips to break release dates. Initial research that I conducted exploring modded controllers (following my encounters with trigger-fingered opponents in *W@W*) identified a number of websites that focused upon the production and use of modified equipment and served as discussion and distribution points for a range of counterplay forms – grief-play and glitching, but predominantly illicit modding, and hardware hacking. It is these latter two counterplay forms that this section will explore in detail.

The websites can be viewed as two general types: those that predominantly focus upon *hardware hacking*, such as *XboxHacker.org* and *Free60.org*; and those that focus upon the use of hardware hacks to produce illicit *game modifications*, such as *TheTechGame.com*, *NextGenUpdate.com*, and *Se7ensins.com*. While the distinction is not entirely definite – the *XboxHacker.org* forum has threads discussing game modifications, and *NextGenUpdate.com* includes comprehensive instructions on how to perform hardware hacks the motivation ad focus for each category of site is different: the former is preoccupied with the *opening-up of game consoles* as systems, while the latter is concerned with the *opening-up of games* as structures.

On first encountering the game-modification websites I was struck by the range of modifications and extensive tutorials that were available: how to alter controllers (Figure 67), hardware lag-switches that interrupt communication data, software lag-switches, and more extensive console modifications that circumvent the security of an *Xbox* console, known as *JTAG*s .

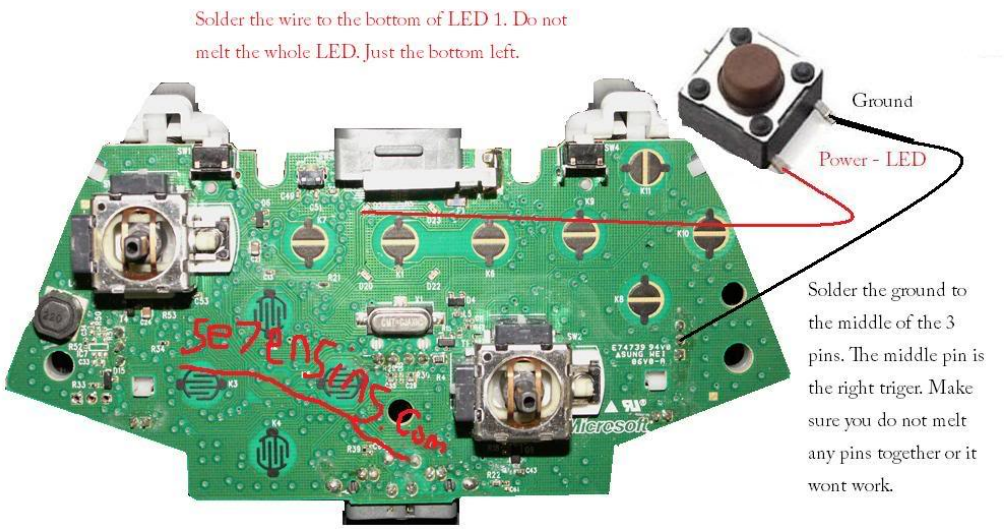

Figure 67 - Modified controller tutorial detail from *Se7ensins.com*.

In comparison to the situated modifications such as auto-fire controllers that offer counterplay opportunities in specific game releases or genres, the *JTAG* / *RGH* / *Flashed Console* hardware hacks, by subverting the security restrictions on the *Xbox 360* consoles enable wide scale alteration, modification, generation and as a result enormous potential for counterplay, and supports a range of practices and communities.

What these modifications and hacks also expose is the existence of an additional commercial enterprise, a black market that supports those wishing to conduct hacks and mods, those wishing to simply obtain a hacked console, and at its most sophisticated and organised apex, *business structures for renting out modified software game spaces for profit*. The modifications and hacks support an ecosystem of illicit trade with significant profit to be made for those meeting the demands of customers, or capitalising on counterplay practices.

I became particularly interested in the context of modifications produced for the *CoD* franchise – a backdrop that runs throughout this body of research – and it was through this lens that the counterplay practices of hackers and modders was exposed to me. This section explores these practices. During my research I interacted with participants at all levels of the modding and hacking community, aside from those producing and/or importing hacking hardware components on an industrial-scale. The following section explores these practices through the following lenses: the origins of *Xbox* hardware hacks, the alteration and modification of game code, such as the creation of modded lobbies, infections, and game mods; the creation of homebrew software, such as *FreeStyleDash* the *Project AC1D* application; and piracy and copyright abuse more generally. These activities are dependent on the use of hacked hardware, such as the *JTAG, RGH, or Flashed Console*.

An Introduction to *Xbox 360* Hacking

Currently there are three core modified *Xbox 360* consoles: the *JTAG*, the *RGH* (Reset Glitch Hack), and the *Flashed Console*. Each of which represents a different technique for the creation of 'open devices' from the closed *Xbox 360*, which is designed solely to be used in the means intended despite essentially being an inexpensive personal computer. The move towards the sale of closed devices by manufacturers, making use of many levels of black-boxing obscurification, and the efforts of hackers to open these systems can be seen as a particular example of contemporary dynamics in consumption and the contestation of ownership and use. Seen within the context of the legal (in the US) act of 'jailbreaking' and *opening* of the Apple iPhone, the modification of *Xbox 360* consoles into *JTAG*s, *RGH*s, and *Flashed Console*s shares the same emotive justifications and compelling arguments about piracy and misuse. The following section will contextualize some of these practices by exploring the background of the three after-market modifications and the practices that they enable. Following this we will explore specific instances of their use on a range of videogames for a number of purposes.

*JTAG*s and *RGH*s are based around the same kind of modification, a circumvention of the security checks that ensure that an *Xbox 360* is executing software from an appropriate Microsoft verified game disc or software source (such as a game demo file downloaded from *XBL*). The core difference between the two systems is that the *JTAG* utilised a small number of rudimentary components soldered onto the *Xbox 360* circuit board to perform, but that when the vulnerabilities that it utilised were removed through hardware manufacturing revisions and mandatory software updates an alternate method of invoking the same hack was necessary. This was eventually created using a 'reset glitch' where small electrical pulses were sent to the *Xbox 360*'s processor. These pulses partially reset the CPU, or rather reset the security processes enabling the hack to be conducted. The *RGH* console, as it became known, was then reliant on the addition of a piece of hardware (called a *Coolrunner* board) that provides the necessary pulses. Both the *JTAG* and *RGH* allow the execution of unsigned code, and therefore simply enable the same versatile functionality through different methods.

By contrast the *Flashed Console* also requires a modification, but this is only to the disc-drive built into the *Xbox 360*. Once modified with an additional component the drive provides a false positive to disc media checks that look for the special markers of a legitimate Microsoft disc. As a result of its lack of versatility, the *Flashed Console* is therefore largely used for videogame piracy, often hidden under the aegis of using legal 'game backups' i.e. copied game discs. While it can facilitate some modification of game data its lack of versatility makes this largely untenable.

In addition to these facilitating technologies, a number of practices related to game alteration and modding have become prevalent within the *Xbox 360* playerbase, both amongst those who conventional retail consoles and those that have access to hacked consoles: *save modding*, *ISO modding*, and *patch modding*.

Save Modding is where a player saves their game progress and player profile onto a USB drive using a conventional console. By then attaching this to a computer running appropriate homebrew modding software such as *Modio* or *Horizon*, the player is able to directly manipulate the settings of their save and profile. Altered game saves are either downloaded directly from modding orientated websites, or software is installed that alters the save on the USB stick in situ. These modified saves are *re-signed* using third-party software, making them appear to originate from the player's console and account, and are then placed back on the system where they are eventually synched with the *XBL* servers. The player may appear to have completed a many game challenges which would confer a large number of gamerscore points to the player (a process known as *Scorewhoring*), unlock avatar items or simply load game saves that contain a large number of items / money / game completion.

Providing that the player does not alter too much too swiftly, and does not appear to have used games before release or outside of their regional availability, it appears difficult for the modification to be detected. Those who are detected may have their player accounts and even consoles temporarily or permanently invalidated. This form of modding does not require a modified console.

ISO Modding relates to modifications made to a disc image, and is reliant on the use of a *Flashed Console*. While for many access to pirated and illegally shared game rips (ISOs) is the sole motivation the use of a flashed *Xbox*, it offers the modder a range of options to edit and subvert the game spaces. Additional system security checks, such as data size checksums, that reside in the non-modified components of the *Flashed Console*, prevent significantly altered code to be executed. However, if the modder is careful to ensure that their alterations remain the same file size as the commercial release's ISO, their modified code can be run and even viewed as being legitimate when the console is attached to *XBL*. This process is referred to as *ISO modding*.

In contrast the *JTAG* and *RGH* consoles are capable of running any correctly compiled software, and therefore represent a radical and versatile opening up of the system. They can be used to execute pirated code from any source, they are able to execute code that has had its contents altered *irrespective of the file size*, and can be used to executed illicit game patches – the *JTAG* and *RGH* therefore facilitate total modification of game code. They are platforms that, in addition to piracy, facilitate extensive videogame modding, and even the ability to execute homebrew software upon the console providing it has been compiled in the appropriate format. It is this execution of homebrew that betrays the origins of the *JTAG* and *RGH* hacks, and offers a way of beginning to approach illicit modding and hacking.

The Historical Origins of *Xbox 360* Hacks

The *Xbox 360* hardware hacks originated from two communities. *XboxHacker.org* (2012), which served as the discussion point and developmental locus for hardware exploits and modifications. *Free60.org* that documented and presented the finalised hacks and modifications. The initial project that led to the

development of the hacks that in turn facilitated the practices I will explore in detail was the working 'towards porting GNU/Linux, BSD, Darwin and related open-source operating systems to the Microsoft *Xbox 360* video game console', essentially attempting to use the *Xbox 360* as an inexpensive Linux computer (Free60.org, 2012). While this aim was achieved with relative ease, the opening of the system that it necessitated enabled other uses for the platform, notably piracy and the creation of illicit or unauthorised game modifications, such as those that altered the interactions and affordances of online multiplayer games. The hacks were initially instigated along the lines of the hands-on imperative and fair use, where infraction was rationalized as a learning process. Simultaneously the sites that supported the Linux project became attractive to those wishing to utilise the hacks for entrepreneurial purposes, as a method of saving money, and as we shall see, making money.

The *Xbox 360* hacks were developed by the communities that successfully produced the 2003 *XBMC* homebrew software for the original *Xbox*, which turned the console into a powerful 'open source (GPL) software media player and entertainment hub' (XBMC, 2003-2012). As the original *Xbox*, like its successor, was a closed device the act of developing the *XBMC* necessitated the opening and deciphering of the console hardware and software, a process extensively documented by Andrew 'Bunnie' Huang in *Hacking the Xbox* (2003). Huang, who was part of the *XBMC* team, argued that the very motivation for developing the *XBMC* was the 'unbreakable monopoly over computer hardware and software' that the closed system represented (2003, p.9). This stance justified the process of deconstruction, architecture deciphering, security circumvention, reverse-engineering, and eventual homebrew development. It was precisely this process that the *Free60.org* and *XboxHacker.org* members were keen to engage with in order to expose any exploitable vulnerabilities that would allow them to open the *Xbox 360* and execute Linux on it.

Following the release of the *Xbox 360*, the *XBMC* team attempted to do this, building upon the expertise obtained with developing for the original *Xbox*, which was facilitated through the creation of the *Free60.org* wiki, and the repurposing of the *XboxHacker.org* forum for the development of *Xbox 360* hacks. The public discussion and development of the exploits that eventually led to the *JTAG*/*RGH* enabled others than those wishing to port Linux to the system to join and utilise the modifications. It is this egalitarian and open nature of the development cycle that enabled their illicit uses.

I spoke with Felix Domke, one of the *XBMC* developers and originator of the *Xbox 360 JTAG* exploit about the relationship between the hacker-ethic approach to hardware modification and those using them for counterplay purposes such as illicit modding, piracy and those explored in the following section.

> …the topics of piracy and cheating were the main reasons why I lost interest in Xbox hacking - I didn't want to work on stuff anymore that's constantly abused (in my eyes) for cheating and piracy. When I worked on the console hacks I've done so far, my true and only focus was homebrew development - replacing as much code as possible with own code. It was not for a better world, it was just because it was fun for me. ...pirates and cheaters… are abusing the "benign"

> hacks for their crap. Except that I have to admit that most hacks are not benign at all, even if they have been made with a good intention. (Domke, 2010)

Domke's questioning of the benign nature of hacks is stark, and resonates throughout the counterplay practices explored so far. The benign nature of the grief-play as game mode, or the benign glitch as developer assistance is questionable. This alludes to the realisation that irrespective of the benign intentions that may be attributed to an act, or the lack of culpability felt as a result of warning others of the risks and implications of misuse, that the apparently justified counterplay act holds an oppositional aspect. That the glitch is shared with the assumption of exploitation, that the game-mode will be used to bully, or that the hack will be repurposed for piracy and chaos. Yet again we encounter duplicity, ambiguity and an agonistic approach.

From King Kong to *JTAG*

In late 2006 *Free60.org* and *XboxHacker.org* members identified that the *Xbox 360* version of *Peter Jackson's King Kong* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2005) game contained an exploitable susceptibility that could enable other applications to be executed from within the game. This was swiftly adopted to execute a recompiled version of Linux known as the *Xenon Linux Loader* (*XELL*), achieving the core aims of *Free60.org* and receiving extensive plaudits from the hacking communities. The *KK* hack (*King Kong*), or *SMC* hack, as it became known represented the first major circumvention of *Xbox 360* security. However, it required the use of a *King Kong* game disc to execute new code. Despite this achieving the core aims of *Free60.org*, there was the need to develop and synthesise the hack into a more stable variant that would not be dependent on a game disc.

Following the publication of the *SMC* hack, Microsoft introduced hardware and software revisions to overcome the vulnerability, patching it by early 2007. The *SMC* hack had proven that memory address-based exploits were viable on the system and indicated ways in which the *Xbox 360* could be modified to re-enable the exploit in future but also potential ways of developing an autonomous loader. Following the system patches, hackers found ways of reintroducing the exploit and performing the hack, such as through downgrading the console firmware. These activities represent the beginning of a hostile relationship between hackers and security professionals, where susceptibilities are identified, exploited, patched, and new forms developed. In many ways it shares much with the processes articulated by glitchers and their relationship with developers: the dialectical process of identification, documentation, abuse, patching, and repetition that forms the development of the relationship between counterplayers and producers.

While those identifying and developing the hacks were focussed upon the deployment of Linux, the creation of new software and the freeing of the *Xbox 360*, there were others keen to utilise the developments to obtain free games and to alter commercial releases. The *JTAG* hack was developed in August 2009 by Tmbinc (Domke), after the *KK* / *SMC* hacks had been invalidated by Microsoft. The *JTAG* replicated the *KK* hack without the need for the *King Kong* disc, and instead relied upon the

reprogramming of hardware components through an interrogation process known as *Joint Test Action Group IEEE 1149.1*, or by its catchier acronym: *JTAG*, which was adopted when giving the hack its name. In addition to reprogramming components, the *JTAG* necessitated some minor hardware modifications, such as the addition of new capacitors onto the circuit board. In doing so the *JTAG* circumvented all of the *Xbox 360* security checks, providing each with a false-positive, on account of the newly programmed chips.

This enabled any appropriately encoded software to be executed on the system, including Linux, altered iterations of game software, illegal rips, and fully-fledged homebrew applications. The new applications coded for the *JTAG* included the file manager / FTP client known as *XeXmenu* (a reference to the *Xbox 360*'s *.XEX* executable file suffix), and *FreeStyleDash* a homebrew *GUI* that closely replicated the *Xbox 360*'s 'Dashboard' operating system. In addition to allowing the user to explore the contents of attached hard-drives, and the execution of *.XEX* files, both of these allowed games to be ripped directly from disc to a hard-drive, and *FreeStyleDash* allowed the *Xbox 360* to be connected to other servers, including those offering a free equivalent of *XBL* for use with modified consoles, and enabling the use of *.DLL* files instrumental in getting modified consoles onto *XBL* through the practices discussed in (p.201).

The *JTAG*, running *XeXmenu*, or *FreeStyleDash* became accessible to users of all levels of technical expertise, allowing them to easily rip, edit, and execute a range of code. As a result the *JTAG* became an enormously popular modification that generated extensive demand. In addition to the levels of demand, the *JTAG* hack had been so well documented through *Free60.org*, and had an active community in *XboxHacker.org* that would offer support to any interested in seeking it, that it was a modification replicable by those who had relatively limited electronics and computing expertise with relative assurance of success.

Despite this there were many who lacked the expertise or the inclination to conduct the hack themselves and some began performing the hack as a commercial service, where consoles were sent to them for *JTAGing*, or speculatively purchased, modified and then sold on to customers.

In addition to this entrepreneurialism, the hacks that followed the *JTAG*, such as the *Flashed Console* and the *RGH*, necessitated the use of bespoke hardware components (microcontrollers, and firmware adapters), on account of Microsoft's escalating security countermeasures. The production of these hacking and modding components in turn allow a wider audience to conduct and utilise the hacks and therefore represent another layer of entrepreneurialism but one on an industrialised scale. These are not the act of commercialisation by entrepreneurial individuals that are prepared to modify equipment for a fee, but the creation of hacking hardware on a literally industrial scale. Companies such as *Team Matrix*, *Team Squirt*, or *Team Xecutor*, who create the '*Coolrunner*' microprocessor that facilitates the *RGH* are key example of this industrial level of commercialisation.

Hacked Console Trade

The process of obtaining an *RGH* / *JTAG* for those without the skills or intentions of conducting the modification themselves is problematic and fraught with the concerns associated with buying any illicit product. Modified consoles are controlled items in the sense that they are automatically removed from action sites such as eBay and through marketplace sources on Amazon or Play.com. Those wishing to purchase a modified console through these sources must search for euphemisms including '*Special* Consoles' and '*Limited Edition* Consoles'. The use of these terms introduces uncertainty and suspicion over the credentials of hacked console purchases and many listings of this kind invite potential buyers to contact the seller before purchasing or simply the ominous instruction of '*not to bid if you don't know what this is*'.

As a result of this ambiguity and uncertainty many of the transactions take place on the trade sections of websites such as *Se7ensins.com*, where hacked consoles are at least openly discussed and not subject to the same level of censure as elsewhere. This enables potential purchases to more clearly ascertain what is *purportedly* up for sale. Yet even in the open marketplace of the modding website, the illicit nature of the item means that few are confident of the guarantee and securities offered by payment systems such as *PayPal*; scams and reneged deals are relatively common, or at least occur so visibly that a buyer will inevitably have to take this risk into account.

As a result modding websites that support transactions between members generally adopt common policies item advertising, requiring sellers to provide photographic evidence of their product or service, including a date and forum username within the image, to ensure that the items actually exist and are not simply copied from elsewhere. In addition restrictions are placed upon *when* users have the authority to post an advert, generally requiring a certain number of posts or another automated marker of community engagement before allowing an advert. In addition, it is common practices for potential purchasers to publicly call upon other members for assurances of the legitimacy of the seller *within the actual for-sale thread*. Occasionally buyers are also subject to the same cross-examination, but on the basis of a payment-before-dispatch policy. This occurs much less frequently. Despite these recommendations and checks, all that those selling are really placing at stake is their reputation *within the community*, balanced against any reasonable likelihood of legal or vigilante retaliation. As a result those intending to scam others are likely to develop and maintain multiple online identities specifically for this purpose and to carefully distance their online personas from their real ones.

When this is contextualised with the cost of the items involved (*RGH* consoles are currently commanding around £150 per unit, while development consoles anything up to £1,000) it is no surprise that there are frequent purchases that never arrive, or that transpire as botched or defective on delivery. Despite these risks there is still considerable demand for hacked consoles, and sites such as these (and local independent videogame shops of the less salubrious nature) are among the only ways of obtaining a hacked console bar performing it yourself. Those that build a reputation as reliable sellers are treated with significant status

within the game modding communities, receive frequent referrals, and are able to command premiums for their handiwork.

Meeting the Demand for Hacked Consoles

While my attempts to make contact with representatives from *Team Xecutor*, *Team Matrix*, and *Team Squirt*, were unsuccessful, I was able to enter into dialogue with a number of individuals who produced *Xbox 360* hacks for profit. While most were only willing to offer limited responses one, who we will call Bob, was not only considered a major hacked console seller on *TheTechGame.com*, but was also prepared to discuss his experiences and perspectives with me.

Bob had started modifying consoles after being asked to fix broken *Xbox 360* consoles by his friends. Being an electronics hobbyist and a Further Education student at a large city college he had aptitude with soldering, access to useful facilities, and potential clients. Using tutorials from *XboxHacker.org* and *Se7ensins.com* to assist with *Xbox 360* repairs (namely reflowing), Bob quickly built a reputation as being able to fix problems including the extensively documented *Xbox 360* hardware fault, the *ring of red*. In addition Bob said that there was demand for refurbished consoles, and, seeing a commercial opportunity, Bob began to purchase broken *Xbox 360*s speculatively and selling them when fixed. This proved lucrative and Bob frequently returned to *Se7ensins.com* and *XboxHacker.org* to learn of other processes (such as the *JTAG* modification) but also as a way of widening his customer base.

One of the broken consoles that he purchased, when repaired '…was on an exploitable dashboard version for the *JTAG* hack', Bob conducted the hack 'with some trial and error' out of curiosity and then found that they commanded significantly higher sums than a standard refurbished console. Whenever viable, Bob conducted the hack, and began to advertise the 'upgrade' as another of his services in addition to console repairs.

Over the course of a year and a half, Bob's *Xbox* modification became professionalized as a shop that existed on single forum posts on *NextGenUpdate.com*, *Se7ensins.com*, and *TheTechGame.com*. As a result of ensuring the quality of his products (partly due to his expertise in electronics), Bob's reputation within the game modding communities as a hardware hacker increased and he is now considered one of the most reputable modders on the scene, producing highly reliable machines that command a premium.

Bob suggested he has performed in excess of 40 *JTAG*/*RGH* hacks, 150 *Flashed Console* updates, and over 100 *Xbox 360* console repairs, making in excess of £3,000 profit from the modding services alone. As demand for his services outstripped supply he is able to vet buyers and has the flexibility to conduct commercial modifications as and when he needs the money. He uses it as a convenient supplementary income.

Bob also spoke of his relationship with the 'modding scene' 'I'm known as a bit of an expert I'd like to say, ...but I try to stay out of online groups' partly, as he sees them as a 'waste of time', an unnecessary distraction from his commercial services. While he was *perceived* as an important member of the scene – *an expert* - he appeared somewhat disinterested and cautious of engaging with the community at any other level than that which supported his income.

The disinterest allowed Bob to detach himself from having to consider the eventual uses of the consoles he hacked, and therefore the legal and ethical issues that this might raise such as copyright circumvention, piracy, and the subversion of commercial game spaces. Bob was clear to separate himself from the process: 'I get paid for *the service* I do on the console and then the customer gets to choose what *they want to do* with *their* newly modified console'. By seeing his actions *as a service* Bob disregards the legal implications of his actions 'I never do anything that involves anything illegal. Just providing a service to modify the console that *you totally own* and it is *down to the customer what they do with it* …it's not a business in my eyes, just a service that responds to demand'.

From Hardware Hacks to Software Mods

I became aware of an example of the use of *JTAG*s for the production of utilitarian software mods coincidentally, during a visit to the *Eurogamer Expo 2010*. I had attended the event one of my then third-year degree students (Frost), who was a semi-professional *CoD* player that viewed his professional 'tournament identity' as entirely separate from his conventional *leisure-playing* one. He had recently been recruited by a reputable European *CoD* clan, and upon joining was instructed that he had to alter his identifying gamertag to reflect his clan membership. Unwilling to rename his existing leisure-profile he created a new gamertag, but this had none of the weapon unlocks or markers of status that he had accumulated over years of play on his other account. What was more problematic was that the weapon unlocks would be essential to play the game at a professional level, while the other markers, such as rewards for skill were necessary in order to present the right impression – emphasising skill and expertise and protecting his reputation and that of the clan. Without both of these elements he believed that he would not have been able to participate fully, would likely have been ridiculed, and brought the clan into disrepute. As a new clan member this would be appropriate and would result in the termination of his probationary period.

Frost told me that having created a new account he paid £25 to immediately access all of the weapons and 'prestige tokens' that he had accumulated on his previous account. This was not facilitated by the developers or by Microsoft, but was conducted by *illicit modders* running 'modded lobbies' on *JTAG* systems for profit. Frost's testimony was a stepping off point for me into the practices of illicit game modding supported by *Xbox 360* hacking. The following section explores the 'modded lobbies' like the ones that Frost had utilised in more detail. It is a body of research that explores the specific uses of modded

software for the *CoD* franchise and beyond, the ways in which developers and hackers / modders respond to one another, and the creative and economic practices that they support.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: MORE BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

An Image of a Modded Lobby

I ignore the insults and posturing challenges coming over the voice chat, instead focusing on where I'll position myself once the game starts. I decide on one of the bunkers that'll give me good visibility over the dusty Afghan battleground. I've got my custom load-out, a holographic scoped assault rifle and a stock of claymore mines that I'll use to cover my back as I look out over the wreckage of the downed transport plane for insurgents. The game starts and I spawn on the south end of the map. I sprint past the Humvees, watching out for potential hiding spots in the wrecked fuselage and instinctively scan the ridge to the north for the silhouette of enemy snipers. Finding nothing I break off into the poppy field, I'm seconds away from the entrance to the bunker… then it all goes wrong. Rockets rain down unexpectedly from the sky and I am killed in a plume of smoke, dust and debris. I spawn somewhere else on the map and again die almost instantaneously. Each of my attempts to escape the rockets fails, but my opponents aren't on the ridge, nor in the wreckage of the plane, they're in none of the usual hotspots. Instead they appear to be flying through the air firing streams of rockets that are conventionally restricted to one or two per spawn. It is clear that the rules of the game have been ruptured, the game has been 'modded'. Despite the frustration and disorientation, I feel compelled to stay in the match even after many of my teammates disconnect. Perhaps after a minute more, a klaxon sounds, a towering mushroom cloud erupts on the edge of the screen, the map is engulfed in flames and the match comes to its grim and jarring conclusion.

Having experienced an event like this, one would normally begin to question the motives: why would somebody do this, what might they gain, what would be the point? Perhaps they simply enjoy ruining other peoples' fun? Perhaps they feel a temporary elevation of power and importance? Perhaps they wish to undermine and break the game? Perhaps they have nothing better to do but to waste other people's time and their own? Yet what if these interpretations are incorrect, what if the transgressive events described above serve an express purpose, but one that is concealed to many who play or study the game?

For those unfamiliar with the *CoD* franchise, or its sixth iteration, *MW2* in particular, I should stress that the match described was atypical. It had been modified without consent of the developers. The modification occurs in direct violation of the game end user license agreement (*EULA*), the consoles' terms of service (*TOS*), and copyright law such as the US 1998 DMCA.

The *XBL* activity chart for the week beginning November 8th 2010 (Hyrb, 2010) lists four iterations of the *CoD* franchise in its top nine slots. Not only is the *CoD* franchise deeply generic, representing the iconic console based FPS, one could argue that it constitutes the definitive XBL experience. Simply put, the *CoD* franchise has consistently entertained greater numbers of players for longer periods of time than other equivalent FPS games. *BLOPs*, generated $1 billion dollars worth of revenue for Activision within six weeks (Fahey, 2010). Up until the release of its sequel it boasted the best opening month of sales for any game in American history, and is already the seventh best selling piece of videogame software (Matthews, 2010). At peak usage on its first day of release, *BLOPs* had 2.9 million simultaneous *Xbox 360* players on its multiplayer mode, in addition to 1.5 million PlayStation 3 players and 55,000 PC players for the same period (Patterson, 2010). In comparison the previous iteration, *MW2*, boasted 2.2 million XBL players on day one (Crecente, 2009).

MW2 'modded lobbies', as described above, are comparatively rare with the vast majority of players never experiencing them first-hand. Yet despite this the modded lobby and its perpetrators have become the practitioners of witchcraft and sorcery of the gaming-culture in which the current generation of FPS games are embedded. The skills that the modder or hacker can unlock, and the underhand play styles they can deploy, have captured the imagination of players who speak of them in contempt, disgust and perhaps a little fear.

If we step back from the initial spectacle and audacity of the modded lobby and consider what purpose it serves apart from that of willed resistance, a web of mutually interdependent relationships are exposed. We discover a ludic ecosystem in which different groups are entertained and supported by the game in different ways depending on their position on a continuum of affinity with the game text and the technologies that surround it. The herbivorous majority of player base consume the text as intended, while a smaller number of predatory players gaze across the digital territory as a space for domination. Simultaneously a small number of entrepreneurial and technically astute poachers seek out ways of fulfilling those predatory desires, through the delivery of digital equivalents of big-game trophies or carefully orchestrated safaris in which they dominate their quarry. Each takes what they wish from the same digital terrain - whether it is financial income, increased status, or the ability to (perhaps illegitimately) claim an alignment with a concept of authentic or correct gameplay, as intended by the game developers.

While the ecosystem metaphor may be too tenuous for some, it offers us a perspective with which to begin to read the apparently anarchic and disruptive event that opened this chapter as a corollary of the ways in which hardware hackers, software modders, and videogame players converge on the FPS as a way of furthering their various needs. Originating from both the developer and player base, the demands to meet the expectations of an idealised notion of what the player should do has led to the development of emergent illicit ecosystems. Rather than being viewed as damaging wanton acts of digital vandalism, signalling a players' antagonism towards the text, I argue that this should be considered antithetically, as unintended indices of the sheer seduction of the FPS genre – as biopolitical marks of plunder - as well as markers of the

steps that players are willing to take to be co-opted and embraced by the cultures that are seen to surround the game. By approaching the modded lobby from this perspective, while still jarring and in clear violation of *EULA* and copyright law, it represents a peculiarity of contemporary videogame culture.

In the contemporary generation of console FPS games, where play is increasingly placed in the biopolitical gaze of multiplayer matches, those perceived as playing in ways that deviate from the implied player model, even if this is simply a lack of ability, are singled out as noobs, or cheats, and are often ostracised by the player community. For these misfits there is little choice but to seek out alternative means of meeting these expectations if they wish to play in any (externally defined) meaningful sense or extract value in a conventional reading of the game; if they simply wish to access the equipment and play options reserved as rewards for players that subscribe to the implied player model.

Returning to Aarseth's tyranny of the game (2007) we can begin to see how the FPS game ecosystem is intolerant to behaviour that deviates from that of the implied player. Those players that are unable or unwilling to dedicate the necessary resources or to play in certain, sanctioned ways are treated with suspicion and contempt by the player body and are persuaded to play correctly, or not play at all. This represents a persuasive and powerful motivational factor to contrition – in order to experience the game, to be accepted by the community of players, in order to access all of the content in the game, and ultimately to have fun one must play in a relatively restrictive manner.

Multiplayer Reputation and Status

Each *CoD* release has included both a single and multiplayer component, however, the fourth release, MW introduced elements of avatar development and persistence unseen within multiplayer FPS gaming. It rewarded players with experience points that unlocked increasingly potent weapons and skills that remained persistent across the matches they played. In addition to the weapons the player unlocks as experience is gained, progress is marked with military rank and medals that are displayed when playing in multiplayer matches, indicating a players' expertise and service record. In the journey from the first rank, Private First Class, through to Commander (level 70), the player accrues all of the weapons and perks in the game, typically taking a player around 60 hours of online play to achieve (Piston Heads, 2010). This focus on long-term goal shifted the temporal focus and social significance of multiplayer gaming from a short blast of competitive fun against immaterial opponents, to a long-term process of accrual in a culture of competition, much more akin to traditional MMO 'grind' mechanics. In addition the user interface, which tracked experience and the medal system that displayed attainment for all to see brought systems of surveillance and self-monitoring unseen within the FPS genre.

When playing the *CoD* franchise online it is common to find yourself being repeatedly killed by opponents using more accurate and powerful weapons that you simply do not have access to, or using weapon attachments or perks (such as moving silently) that are unlocked at far higher rank. It feels that there is a

conspiracy where other, more powerful players collude to kill the comparatively weak and uninitiated, and attempt to prevent the player from gaining access to the equipment and perks that are so effective. During instances of split-second twitch gameplay, such as when you stumble into an opponent around a corner, one learns that there is simply a better combination of weapon, perk and strategy often only available to the most experienced, and that shot-for-shot you will lose. Over time such a model created a schism within the player base – creating a mass of players being dominated by others who, due to the way in which their skills were rewarded, far exceeded the potency and strategic capability of their prey. Despite this apparent inequality it is certainly the case that the persistent unlocks, while creating rhetorics of power and status, have made the multiplayer element increasingly engaging and entertaining. It is a predatory model of social jockeying where one asserts their power on the weaker, while avoiding the more powerful.

Yet even in this model the progress ends, the player that reaches Commander rank has no more weapons, perks or attachments available to unlock. It would be entirely logical for the player then to continue playing using the most effective weapons and strategies, dominating matches ad nauseum or until interest in the game wanes. Equally it would be inevitable that all players would eventually reach Commander rank and that the game would become something different – a different equilibrium would establish itself that no longer focuses upon progression, attainment and status. However, efforts have been made to avoid such stagnation or reinterpretation through the introduction of 'prestige status'. Once a player has reached rank 70 a previously greyed-out menu option becomes selectable, through a clear example of suggestion an on-screen prompts invite players to '[t]rade all your accomplishments for a bit of prestige'… and emphasise that '[p]restige has a price… There's no going back' (Activision, 2009).

By going 'prestige' the players abandon their accumulated weapons, perks and experience points, starting as if new to the game, in exchange for a 'prestige emblem' visible in multiplayer matches. This process can be repeated ten times (up until 10th prestige), with a different and more desirable emblem awarded each time. By going prestige the player indicates their mastery of the multiplayer game to their peers. It becomes an act of asceticism, a rite of passage, where the powerful veteran warrior renounces all accumulations in order to start their battle again. For a group of players so effectively inducted into the persuasive rhetoric of the game (through the application of reduction, tunnelling, suggestion, self-monitoring, surveillance and conditioning) and convinced of a mode of pure-play as defined by the implied player, the suggestion to 'go prestige' takes on a powerful totemic significance. Prestige becomes the mark of legitimate play and therefore indicative of Frasca's good player (2003).

This is reflected in the ways that players refer to prestige on Fora: we are told that it prolongs the game as was intended by the designers, that one becomes a better player and that this is a more authentic way of playing the game. '…Get better playing tougher competition. Play the game the way it was meant' (Yahoo, 2010a). This further exposes the anxieties many players have of being regarded as playing incorrectly, like a 'noob'. 'Kids think you're all 1337 seeing you with a cool rank' (GameSpot, 2009), 'its worth it u unlock new tittles and emblems and you don't look like a noob', 'Show everyone that your not a noob', 'you gain unfathomable honor and respect by prestiging. It is the ultimate sacrifice!' (Yahoo, 2010b). Members of the

community of play mock those who are yet to prestige with similar enthusiasm 'Well, if you're just a little wuss and can't man up, don't do it... If you want to show some balls..go for it', 'Sack up and do it' (Yahoo, 2010).

These isolated examples of player discourse surrounding prestige and *MW2* more specifically provide some indication of the nature and persuasiveness of the social expectation to play in certain, sanctioned ways. For some, prestige has become abstracted from the in-game activity itself, a mark of the right way to play which needn't be authenticated by any observed behaviour. It becomes a trusted measure of inclusion; a marker of subcultural style (Hebdige, 1979). It represents a compelling example of the extent to which players genuinely have become seduced by the game – willing to allow the procedural rhetorics of the game to filter good and bad players, which in turn is used to assert hierarchy and status. While this is a natural and fitting outcome for those who genuinely engage with the game, accruing the experience points as was intended, the 'social goods' or cultural capital at stake such as social inclusion and status are so compelling that many are prepared to seek alternative, and often illegal, methods to meet this need – including the use of modded lobbies. In the following examples, due to the illicit nature of the activities being explored, attempts have been made to anonymise the data where appropriate.

Modded lobbies are reliant on *JTAG* consoles, and manipulated instances of the *CoD* software to give players radically altered affordances and experiences within the game. Modded lobbies allow entire reprogramming of the game code and adjustment of the player experience, from user interface to constitutive rules of the game. However, typically the changes are limited to alteration of strings and integers that control access to items, the number that are available, movement and elements such as experience points. Modded lobbies that have been built to inflate the accumulation of experience points and access to *MW2* prestige are commonly known as '10th prestige' lobbies, or simply 10th lobbies.

Running a Modded Lobby

Modders advertise the availability of 10th lobbies and their respective entrance fees on various auction websites, bulletin boards, and specific gaming forums. At the time of writing access to *MW2* 10th prestige lobbies is available for between $6.99 and $14.99 (eBay.com, 2010), websites, such as those that specifically offer modded lobbies as a service such as 10th*prestige.com* (2010) and *Xbox360xperts.com* (2010) charge higher rates, between $30 and $50. In comparison modder community sites such as *TheTechGame.com* (2010) and their reciprocally linked YouTube accounts present a market price of 10th prestige at around $25.

Other models of gaining access to a modded lobby exist, such as lobby rental services, where players are free to use the modified game however they wish for a set period of time. Lobby rentals can be found for as little as $23 per 30 minutes, or $150 for four hours (2010). Lobby rentals allow the player to adopt the model used by internet hosting resellers, by buying modded lobby access in bulk then selling smaller

portions to other users to make a profit. This shows that the costs involved in accessing a modded lobby fluctuate significantly, largely dependent on the signals that indicate the reputation of the modder and the likelihood of the modded lobby transpiring. As these are illicit acts, a user has little recompense if the modder does not deliver, and as such they undertake significant investigative work before paying to access a 10th prestige lobby.

The anxieties over non-existent lobbies can be seen on the *Xbox360xperts.com* forums' 'shout box', on which customers publicly communicate directly with site administrators (2010). Over the course of 15 minutes on the 4th January 2011, three individuals posted questions to the administrators detailing that they had recently paid for prestige services and were keen to know when the next lobby would be taking place. Interviews with players and individuals within the modding community give some indication of the number of players willing to use a modded lobby, suggested that at peak demand lobbies can generate in excess of £3,000 per active window. The illicit nature of the modded lobby and issues attributed to illicit income make it difficult to qualify this estimation. However, one prominent hardware modder, Bob, felt that this level of income was achievable on prestige lobbies for *MW3* – the 2011 game release:

> ...Making £3,000 a day wouldn't surprise me, as spots on high traffic sites such as TTG [*TheTechGame.com*] and *Se7ensins.com* can lure in many customers when they are noted as 'legit' and 'verified'. E.g. Charging £60 a go for *MW3* prestige lobbies, makes £6000 from 100 people, which is easily reached with a site with 500,000 members and lots of new traffic and clicks every day.

This context was somewhat different to the *MW2* lobbies due to the comparative scarcity of *MW3* lobbies and the premiums that they therefore commanded, but this still illustrates the scale of income potentially within this practice. Bob later admitted to having hosted his own modded lobbies, but he provided them at a much lower cost than others:

> I can tell you too many to really count – although I'd estimate I did about 150. ...Realistically the most I ever charged anyone for a slot in one of my lobbies was £10. I saw that as fair.

Bob didn't specify how many customers he had served, the period of time that they were run over, or his total profits, but it is possible to make a conservative estimate. On the basis that Bob's lobbies were less than one-third full (five out of a maximum of eighteen players), 150 lobbies would have generated £7,500. Once the cost of re-tooling (by purchasing replacement Keyvaults at £50 every ten lobbies) on the basis of Bob's figures the overall profit would be in the area of £6,750. It should be stressed that this is a crude estimation, there is no way that the number of lobbies nor their business can be confirmed, it is simply offered as a way of contextualise the practice.

Yet on this scale Bob saw himself as having merely meddled with modded lobbies, while there are others who approached them from a far more intentional and efficient method. These 'verified sellers' did not

necessarily move into modding through gaming, but saw them as a means of generating profit. These lobby providers appeared to adopt similar operating structures to those of businesses that work on a distributed or commission basis. Bosses facilitated the lobbies but employed subordinates to run them in exchange for free access. In turn the websites that promoted and 'verified' the legitimacy of the lobbies received a proportion of the income while the majority went directly to the boss.

> I always thought the prices the verified sellers chose was really expensive, but after looking behind the scenes it was logical. They were always online and hosted lobbies sometimes all day long ...making a big profit to give a percentage to the site owner, as well as making profit for themselves

Returning to the process of using a modded lobby, having arranged the financial terms and paid them via Paypal or similar, the player is invited into the modded lobby. Whereupon killing an opponent or performing another pre-determined action, such as committing suicide with a grenade, the player is awarded inflated experience points allowing them to reach rank 70 in one match. During the intermission between games the player 'goes prestige' and then repeats the process when it recommences, a maximum of ten times. The player then leaves the lobby (or is booted by the host) carrying the experience points and the relevant prestige icon into all of the subsequent games they play.

The actual process of running a modded lobby requires significant co-ordination, interaction and transaction between hardware hackers, software modders, and players wishing to obtain prestige through subterfuge. This complex relationship is illustrated by considering the process in depth.

The *JTAG* requires electronics skill to produce, and a botched procedure often results in an entirely inoperative console. As a result *JTAG*s are frequently sold to those wishing to create modded lobbies by individual adept hardware hackers, commanding values of around £100 per *JTAG*. The modder then installs the game software (from a legal or illegal source) and then attempts to compile a list of modifications to the code by referring to 'managed code' lists held on websites such as *Se7ensins.com* and the patch making tutorials on the same sites. The managed code list consists of snippets of code and a corresponding explanation of the impact on the *MW2* game environment, including entries for 'Wallhack', 'God Mode', 'Auto Aim', 'Spawn Projectiles', 'Invisibility' - and those related to 10th prestige 'Complete All Challenges without Challenge Progression and Experience' (2010). Once the patch has been applied the hacked *CoD* lobby is ready to be played, however doing so on *XBOX* Live, which is mandatory to accrue experience points, is not without its repercussions.

That a patch applied to a lone *JTAG* console, perhaps in a different continent, has any bearing on other players in a multiplayer match is due to the specific architecture of the *XBL* system. *MW2* games rely upon a hosted match system, whereby the player determined to have the least latency, or who instigates a private match, becomes the host for the match. This host's hardware coordinates the match and synchronises the packets of data for the match. Crucially, this synchronisation includes specific game settings such as weapon damage and the experience conferred for each kill, which, if taken from a modified console are

utterly at odds with those on a conventional public match. In addition, similar modifications can control which console hosts the match, and therefore the rules by which all players are restricted by.

When a player uses a modified console to join *XBL* it is automatically detected as illegitimate, instigating a 3-5 hour long process that bans both gamertag and the console (TheTechGame, 2010). The invalidated *JTAG* does have secondary value as an offline *JTAG*, or as a base system that can be modified further to take on the credentials of an unbanned system through a process known as 'keyvaulting'. However, in relation to modded lobbies the console is only viable for perhaps four hours per investment, during which a modder must recoup the cost of the *JTAG* console or face financial loss.

In addition to the relatively toothless threats of gamertag and console 'permabans' there is the risk of legal challenge. Microsoft make it clear that they '…may take any legal action it deems appropriate against users who violate Microsoft's systems or network security' which appears to have begun to occur (2010). In 2008 Matthew Crippen was accused of violating the *DMCA* on two counts of performing a *JTAG* modification for $60, facing a penalty of up to five years imprisonment for each violation (2009). Fortunately for Crippen the prosecution abandoned the indictment 'based on *fairness* and justice' (Kravets, 2010), not because of innocence but because of the inadmissibility of evidence. It is interesting to consider that while the production of a *JTAG* appears in violation of the *DMCA*, so too would the injection and manipulation of *Xbox 360* software on a *JTAG* required to setup a modded lobby.

We have finally reached the point at which we can return to the example of the modded lobby first introduced in the open paragraphs of this chapter. One begins to ask the question – if a modded lobby is such a contentious and legally precarious event then why would a modder ever take the risk of exposing this to the public? By raising the profile of such behaviour the modder will have increased the likelihood of the biopolitical nature of the player body to demand censure and therefore Microsoft intervening.

Branded Lobbies

If the modder has set up modded lobbies as a serious commercial concern, they will need to replace any invalidated *JTAG*s with functioning equivalents and seek new customers. If conducted effectively repeat trade is relatively unlikely (at least until the next iteration of the *CoD* franchise a year later), and, as a result, the modder must find ways to maximise the visibility and perceived integrity of their services. The offering must remain coherent and distinct across the few sporadic hours that a lobby is operational for, while the proposition must appear sophisticated, authentic, discrete and good value for money. To complicate matters further this must all be done anonymously if the modder is to mitigate against any legal censure or social response. In effect the modder is engaged in the process of the creation of an illicit brand, complete with its own recognizable product name and unique features which are advertised in the various websites, forums and online videos. Instead of 'Colonel Sander's Kentucky Fried Chicken', we encounter 'GODx's Mega GUN Game', 'Team XEX's Mod' and 'Mofos Modz', whose branding are clearly visible in the user

interface design of the mod and serve as the touchstone that allows a potential customer to ascertain a modders' reputation before purchase (Figure 68). These videos are simultaneously used as advertisements, assertions of status within the modding communities, and as way in which the modder tracks and establishes an identity across the disparate and apparently unrelated instances of modded lobbies that appear from time-to-time on *XBL* – the video becomes an advert, a résumé, a business card.

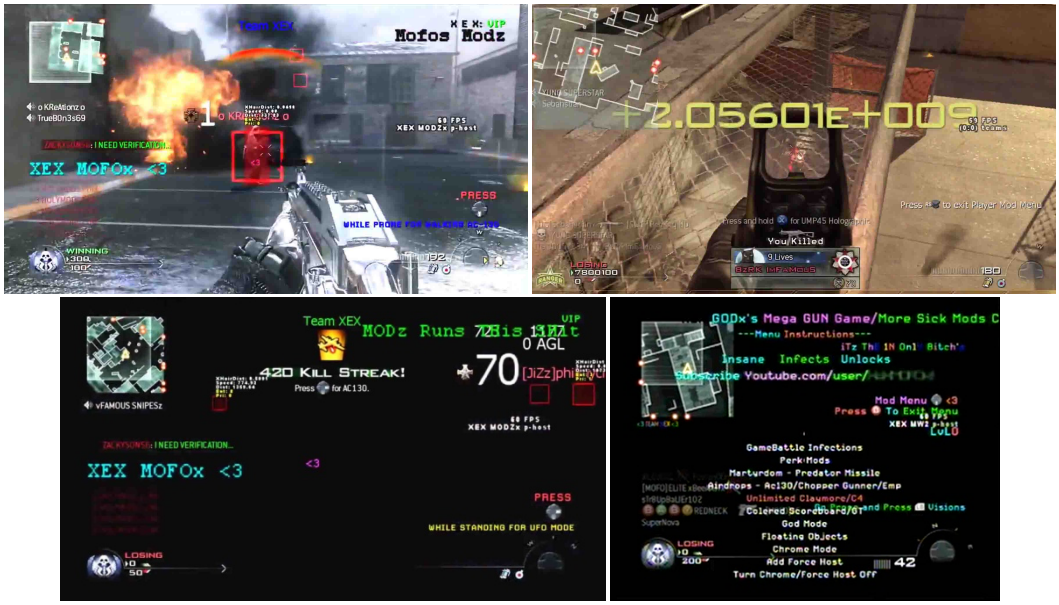

Figure 68 - Modded lobby user interfaces.

What this leads to is a curious replication of advertising and copyright, where modders heavily brand the user interfaces of the lobbies that they create and simultaneously cast aspersions on other modders deemed as inauthentic imposters or competitors. In this regard the very design of the mod becomes crucial to the status within the techno-culture communities of the modder, who, with one eye on the financial implications of their mod and another on their status with the community, simultaneously assists with the accrual of status by players, the raising of their social status within modding communities, and the denigration of other modders that have incurred their ire. The modded lobby becomes a rhetorical device that attempts to persuade players of the merits and idealised features of the right way to mod.

While the modder must record video of the lobby in action as evidence to drive future income they daren't risk implicating any of the customers on their matches. In effect they need to populate a modded lobby with players that the modder has no interest in, has no concern whether or not they receive censure or reprimand from their peers. The modder does this, ideally once a list of paying customers has been exhausted but the *JTAG* and gamertag not yet invalidated, by 'forcing host' and joining general public matches in *MW2*. With this setup unsuspecting players around the world enter the modded lobby and are governed by its rules, which bring us back to the events described in the opening paragraph.

The unsuspecting players who are in the match suddenly find that they and their teammates can fly through the air, shoot missiles for bullets, release unlimited numbers of attack helicopters, and generally

play havoc with the conventional order of the game. Understandably, so seduced by the power now randomly conferred upon them, they experiment and revel in the fleeting omnipotence, all the while playing an unwitting role in a calculated secret marketing campaign. This continues until that *JTAG* is finally banned and the lobby ceases to exist, at which point the modded lobby becomes net-lore, to be vilified or exalted according to the type of audience and their relationship to the tyranny of the game, and the modder becomes incrementally more geek famous.

Approaching Infection Lobbies

In late 2009, a few short weeks after the release of *MW2*, players on the *Xbox 360* and *PlayStation* 3 began experiencing jarring corruptions of its multiplayer game space. Players joining public multiplayer matches found that they suddenly had unlimited ammunition and had no need to reload, which encouraged unconventional ways of playing the game. Instead of deliberate use of cover, an emphasis on well-aimed shots and a conservative approach to ammunition, multiplayer games became spaces riddled with bullets, rockets and grenades in which survival was determined largely by luck rather than judgement.

While the alterations represented a radical subversion of the expected experience of the *CoD* franchise, that many found enjoyable or novel, it also presented a troubling issue. Not all players experienced the altered settings, but those that did found that the settings travelled with them into each subsequent game they entered. The modifications were the equivalent of a conventional software virus that used contact in multiplayer game lobbies and matches as the method of transmission. They quickly became known as 'infection lobbies'. It soon became apparent that infection lobbies were not caused by a latent game bug or glitch, but were the result of player modifications that had been introduced into the closed system between the game consoles and the online game services that they used, such as *XBL* and the PlayStation Network (*PSN*).

Following their first appearance on *MW2* in late 2009 infection lobbies became increasingly common, used to alter a wide range of game settings including those related to rewards and experience, weapon behaviour, movement and match setup. Infection lobbies were then replicated in older iterations of the *CoD* franchise, such as *MW* and *W@W*, which shared the same game engine and infrastructure as *MW2*. Due to their increased visibility and the widespread perception that infection lobbies undermined the fundamental processes of the game Activision instigated a series of mandatory title updates that attempted to minimise the settings that could be altered and ultimately to immunise the system against infection lobbies entirely. While these title updates were generally successful, modders responded with alternate ways of deploying infection lobbies, and in turn this led to additional updates and patching. Eventually Activision released TU7 (title update 7), which effectively prevented *JTAG* lobbies from being hosted and infections (temporarily) became the *only way to mod*.

Infection lobbies can be considered the second generation of illicit modified lobbies. The first generation, known as *JTAG* lobbies, were reliant on connecting *JTAG* consoles *directly to XBL*. In contrast the infection lobby was a method in which a retail console is infected with the modifications by physically connecting it to a *JTAG*. Once the infection has taken hold the retail console can be disconnected from the *JTAG* and connected to *XBL* – as it has not been modified it is not invalidated and the modified settings spread onto the online system. By so doing an unmodified console is used as the undetectable vector to introduce the infection into the closed game system, and the *JTAG* used to instigate the modification is never connected to any services that would result in its invalidation.

By using the infection method modified lobbies could be deployed in public servers and infect hundreds, if not thousands, of players as the settings spread throughout the system. In addition, no longer bound by the necessity for income generation, the infection lobby could be used in more esoteric or creative ways than its previous counterpart.

The purpose of *JTAG* and infection lobbies remain largely the same: they generally offer competitive advantage within the game; introduce new and interesting game modes; or make locked game content available for use – such as weapons, insignia or trophies that may hold cachet or 'gamer capital' within the player community (Consalvo, 2007). However what is also significant about the infection lobby is that its mode of distribution is inherently democratic and expansive, instead of the carefully controlled spaces that the *JTAG* lobby represented due to the financial prerogative, the infection lobby costing next to nothing to deploy could be utilized to spread infections to others in a more freeform manner. As a result those who became infected could pass the settings on to others, and, once this was understood, it allowed illicit modifications to be used in situated and individualistic ways. The infection lobby took the control and operation of illicit modifications from the hands of a relatively small number of entrepreneurs and gave it a wider group of modders who used infection lobbies for a range of purposes. I will now explore the experiences and motivations associated with some of these deployments.

Playing Against the Infected

In August 2011 I was made aware by modder colleagues that *W@W* had of becoming the site of an outbreak infection lobbies following their gradual immunisation on more recent iterations of the *CoD* franchise. On joining my first public multiplayer game I was placed into a game where I was playing against the infected. The conventional user interface had been conspicuously altered and the play experience was radically different to the game I had last played two years previously (Figure 69).

In the middle of the screen a wall of multicoloured text cascaded down each time a game message – such as the death of a teammate – was announced, inviting me to sign up to a forum in order to access the modifications that other players in the match were using:

Sign Up To {URL} For Free Infections HexxR Runz *XBL* Bitches … IGotInfection's•10thFromYouTube.Com/{URL}

Figure 69 - A*W@W* infection lobby.

It appears that all of the opposing team were using a modification that made them invincible and there was nothing that I, nor my teammates, could do to kill them. When the match ended we had not obtained any points or kills – and, had I been interested in maintaining the persistent statistical record that documents my skill, this match would have represented a significant disappointment. Within the *CoD* franchise player statistics and the ratio of player kills to deaths (K/D) in particular are used as ways of ascertaining expertise and status and 'gamer capital'. A good statistical profile betrays a skilled player, as opposed to somebody who has little skill but plays often, and those that have good K/D ratios are frequently invited into games, clans, and treated with greater respect.

Despite its detrimental impact on my player profile, the visual obstruction that the cascading text presented and the subjectively 'unfair' nature of the game I was compelled to continue playing. In the following

match a number of my opponents and teammates had oddly unconventional animated gamertags that indicated that they had become infected, but in this many of them appear to play in an entirely different way. Instead of killing their weak opponents many of the modders flew above the map exploring its periphery. They landed on rooftops, clipped through solid walls, hovered in the air, and even balanced on telegraph poles in the centre of the map (bottom row, Figure 69). These modders appeared to be doing something else in the game space, playing an entirely different game in the map that we shared. Yet, while many were content to explore there were enough that persisted in the one-sided battle, and I was repeatedly killed from afar, picked off even before I was able to locate my quarry.

Out of frustration I found myself intentionally obstructing the modders that ignored me, I got in their way, threw smoke grenades and signal flares in an attempt to break their concentration and provoke a response, even if it meant being killed. I felt frustrated and impotent, yet found pleasure in provoking a response, it felt like a small victory – like I was having some influence in the game that their actions excluded me from. After playing against the infected for around an hour I powered off the system.

Becoming Infected

Unlike the *W@W* public match example above this infection lobby occurred in a private match on *MW* that the player (who we will call Soap) was invited into by an unknown recent player. Private matches are pertinent as they do not contribute to a players' statistical profile due to concerns over exploitation and manipulation. Nothing was said to indicate that the private match had been modified, yet, once it began it was evident that it was a 'speed lobby' variant where every action - aiming, reloading and movement - occurs at an accelerated pace (Figure 70). It was evident that the other players were already familiar with its operation, as betrayed by the strategies that they immediately deployed, equipping grenade launchers and firing projectiles into the open swamp area where most players were spawned.

Figure 70 - A *MW* infection speed lobby.

Soap appeared frustrated by being duped into joining an infection lobby, and for the way that it broke his concentration and represented a deviation from what he had originally been doing – producing videos documenting his expertise:

> I was a bit annoyed at first as my previous few games had boasted some pretty high K/D whilst quickscoping [see Quickshot glitch Figure 56 p. 142] and now I was being bombarded by constant noob tubes [gun-mounted grenades] and RPGs. But once I knew what was going on I did join in for a little while as it is fun just firing under barrel grenades like bullets…

While in the speed lobby he began to alter his strategies and embrace the divergent play style. Instead of the staccato pace of a typical *CoD* game, where a player moves from cover to cover, checking corners and known vantage points, he became focused upon '… finding a good camping spot where I could bombard the map without being reached easily myself'. Yet 'as fun as it was it got boring very quickly' and Soap left the lobby through 'dashboarding', a process where the *Xbox 360* is forced to its operating system front screen, or 'dashboard'. Dashboarding immediately terminates any game processes in memory and disconnects the system from *XBL*, and if done during a multiplayer game any statistics relating to the current match are not synchronized with the servers (this could also be done by powering off the machine but the system restart would take longer to return to the game than dashboarding). While Soap was within a private match that would not impact upon his statistics he still used the only defence that a player has to protect against the negative repercussions of infection – by quickly instigating a system disconnect before data is synchronized. He stated that this was a cautious tactic in case the lobby contained some new function that allowed it to overwrite his profile, and that he did this every time he encountered a game that *he thought might* contain modifications.

Soap said that this occurred quite frequently even if there was no explicit evidence of modding. He appeared to be suspicious of matches, judging their legitimacy on the 'feel' of each individual game – the same process that I found so difficult to grasp when I first began to play *W@W* while looking for examples of counterplay – if it felt wrong he would simply dashboard.

Infection as Fun

Zakhaev is a twenty-year-old British man who considered himself part of a group of active modders that tended to play multiplayer games together. In addition to playing *CoD* at a 'semi-professional' level, approaching the game in dedicated and serious manner and carefully managing his statistical profile, he also deployed and played infection lobbies upon using alternate dummy accounts.

Zakhaev suggested that he and his friends had run 40-50 infection lobbies across *MW* and *MW2*, motivated by what he saw as frustration with the predictability of the multiplayer component:

> Sometimes we just play standard games but once you've got top rank there's pretty much no point playing standard games, you don't get xp [experience points], you're not levelling up, you've got all the titles and emblems. The only reason to play is to boost up your stats.

Instead of editing the game patch code required to deploy an infection lobby, the group downloaded and used infection patches that had been created by others and shared via websites such as *Se7ensins.com* (2007-2012). They saw the appearance of a new patch in a similar way that one might an official game release.

> When a new glitch or mod is released we normally text one another saying that this has just come out. …Everyone is like 'get online'. …as soon as someone finds something new that shouldn't be there the word spreads in like ten minutes and then we're on. (Zakhaev)

The group used the infection lobby deployment process as a way of overcoming the fact that while not all of the group members had access to the requisite hardware and technical expertise to use mods, they still wished to play together and share the experience of modified game types. Once one member of the group had deployed the infection lobby using their *JTAG and* retail console combination they then invited their friends and passed the infection to them, enabling them all to play together. Once Zakhaev and his friends had become infected they then invited other players to join their matches, stressing that there was extensive demand for lobbies.

> …if we send out a message saying we're hosting a lobby people are like 'yeah fine' and then they play with us instead of just leaving straight away. When people just leave it gets annoying. Our modded game types will fill up in seconds, quite a lot of people like playing something different that's not meant to be there.

In order to avoid the damage to their statistics Zakhaev and his friends each held multiple *XBL* accounts that they used for different purposes. They collected promotional *XBL* short-term access scratch-cards that are frequently bundled with new retail releases and also took advantage of seasonal reductions and special offers to build a stock of multiple accounts. These inexpensive, or often free, accounts allowed them to host and play in infection lobbies for with relative anonymity and little personal risk. Yet it transpired that they were not fearful of retribution from Microsoft, which Zakhaev 'didn't see as much of a threat at all', but were concerned of the damage that associating their modding persona with their dedicated gamer profile would have on their reputation within the player community.

Zakhaev described the experience of infection lobbies, such as a 'slow lobby' in which everything runs at a fraction of its normal speed:

> You'd see a rocket launcher coming at you from like 100 metres, but you'd just find it funny – maybe try and jump out of the way – nobody takes it very seriously and in a game mode like that it's purely just for fun. …you can't take it seriously, there's no way you can get good stats on that.

For them infection lobbies offered a refreshing way of extending the game offering, but one that held an additional ambiguous, unserious and anarchic tone. In subsequent correspondence the ambiguous and antagonistic aspects of this anonymity became increasingly apparent. Alongside running matches that were filled with willing (and one assumes anonymous) participants Zakhaev admitted to also running the games on public matches into which unwitting conventional players would be randomly placed. Unless these players dashboarded or disconnected in time their statistical profiles would have been corrupted and subsequent attempts to leave may have resulted in the modification travelling with them as an infection – exacerbating and extending the damage. Zakhaev believed that '…about 60 per cent of people enjoy joining a different lobby and stick around'.

Yet, for the remaining 40 per cent who were unwilling participants the experience may have been significantly problematic, and the cases where players were unable or unaware of how to become freed from infection became a point of amusement for Zakhaev:

> …it keeps annoying them …Sometimes they end up back in the same game anyway and then that's when all the funny messages start – and they're like What are you doing, Leave me alone! …they send you hate mail and rubbish. And I like that, I think it's very enjoyable.

This betrays the alternate use of infection lobbies – one that centres around practices understood as antisocial or asocial – which are much more clearly aligned with notions of griefing or bullying.

Infection as Retribution

Both Soap and Zakhaev articulated the importance of developing and maintaining an impressive statistical record and concerns over game modes that impact negatively upon them. In addition however Zakhaev expressed annoyance that modding had been used to illegitimately inflate statistical profiles, and that this distortion undermined the public recognition that skilled *CoD* players deserved.

> You spend a lot of time …nurturing your account and then it's your pride. …and then on the leader board you're just wiped out by someone who's gone onto a lobby and they've got some stupid K/D with a minus on it and it's obviously not real …You look at their stats and it's clear that they've hacked.

In response to this perceived injustice Zakhaev and his friends used infection lobbies as a direct retribution, damaging and undermining the statistical profiles (and removing the associated unlocks) of those they decided had illegitimately distorted profiles. Players that Zakhaev had encountered and were deemed to used prestige lobbies were invited into public game lobbies under the pretence that they would receive any unlocks that they had yet to accrue. However, the infection lobbies that were deployed were 'derank' variants that stripped a player of experience points and other key profile information when the match data was synchronized with the central servers. This was enabled by simply adding a minus figure to the code

from a 'prestige lobby' patch, or using one of the many derank lobby patches available online under the auspices of enabling players to start their profiles from scratch one more time.

Zakhaev said that he had run five derank lobbies over a two-week period, using new player accounts and an elaborate process where highly decorated accounts were used to convince participants of the legitimacy of lobby. This translated into an estimated fifty or sixty players that were 'punished' in this way, although there was no way of ascertaining what proportion had been able to dashboard before the punishment became permanent. Each of the accounts (aside from the highly decorated account) were abandoned after the derank lobby had taken place, although Zakhaev and his friends ensured that they had firstly read and listened to any communication from those who had been punished. This was seen not only as entertainment, but moral imperative that aimed to re-establish the importance and significance of the conventional core game:

> We did the right thing, but it was a lot of fun too, the messages were just so full on. …people were just screaming, you couldn't make out what they were saying because they were so angry …We wouldn't say anything back most of the time, but sometimes we said we were Microsoft employees that had had enough, saying "this is payback, you've brought this on yourself". While other times we'd just say "you didn't get it properly and you can just start again and do it properly". (Zakhaev)

Thinking About Infections

These four examples detailing different perspectives of infection lobbies highlight not just their varied uses, but a range of apparently contradictory or paradoxical intent – especially seen within Zakhaev's reasoning of extension and protection of the core game. Yet each of these perspectives: playing against the infected; becoming infected; infection as extension; and infection as retribution has a different meaning and resonance.

The experience of playing against the infected was profoundly frustrating – it was nearly impossible to orientate myself within the map, and as a result deaths were frequent and random often without me even seeing my opponent. I still shot at other conventional players when I could and occasionally got kills, but this was the product of luck rather than strategy – these kills felt like hollow victories as it was clear that the infected represented the real opponents. Instead I played in a skulking subordinate manner, conscious of the power imbalance and my inability to rectify it; I ran, I hid, I threw smoke grenades, I swore.

The experience of playing against modders illustrated that the game was unplayable in its conventional manner. Aside from the experience of being constantly and unfairly defeated there was a sense that the modders were playing an alternate metagame that the conventional players were excluded from. Not understanding what they were doing or how it was being done was as frustrating as being defeated. I felt paradoxically both harassed and ignored.

The issue is that irrespective of the intentions of the individual modders, whether they wanted to demonstrate their power, or were simply playing with the space in their own way, the cumulative impact was an experience of victimisation, isolation, and harassment by an inscrutable and what seemed like a coordinated group. Yet the experience was also exciting and novel, and I found just being in radically subverted space had an enjoyable illicit charge. One assumes however, that had I been concerned with my statistical profile the experience would have had a much more negative meaning.

The speed lobby deployed on the private match was egalitarian in the sense that it had no impact upon statistics and that all players were subject to its (mis) rule. Soap did not articulate any intrinsic opposition to the notion of illicit modifications, but was concerned over their potential to undermine statistics and therefore player reputation when deployed in public matches.

> In a private game environment I don't have a problem with them, but when the host player is roaming the public lobbies it gets annoying when all of a sudden the opposite team is invincible, leaping 30ft into the air. (Soap)

For Soap the problems of infection lobbies centred primarily around the ways in which they had the capacity to undermine achievement, and secondarily around issues of openness and fairness. Providing there was an informed choice, and that the lobbies were confined to invite-only matches, he saw little reason for objection.

Despite the negative implications of Zakhaev's public lobbies and the estimated 40 per cent of players who were opposed to them he saw them as improving and adding value to a product that he was deeply seduced by. This is illustrated when challenged about the oppositional or hostile nature of his actions in relation to the canonical text and authority of the designers: 'No, it's not like that at all! Everyone who plays *CoD* would love the people who created it – without them we'd have no game to play. These games are to extend, like an extra DLC that's free for everyone, and it's just different'.

There was even scepticism over the intent of the designers and platform holders, suggesting that on some level that there was tacit approval and that game was meant to be modded: 'They haven't made it any harder for us. The fact that we can actually do this means they've left it there for us to do. We'll find it and we'll change it'. While this smacks of all-to-familiar efforts to rationalize and justify illicit acts, if the sentiment is genuine (and I believe it is) it nevertheless illustrates significant differences of attitude and perception amongst player communities.

Zakhaev's use of infection lobby as retribution exposes the antagonistic and protean nature of the infection lobby and 'bad play' more generally. It may simultaneously be a tiresome articulation of inequality, an egalitarian play extension, a mischievous and damaging trap, and even utilized in extremes as a tool of

retribution. The modification becomes reused as a method of repairing the perceived damage caused by other modifications, and this exposes either a dangerous vigilantism or fitting sense of homeostasis.

What translates out of each of these readings of infection lobbies is the importance placed upon 'gamer capital' as manifested in *CoD* in a comprehensive understanding of the processes associated with the game and a presentation of skill through statistics or unlocks. Being a good player – by the conventional markers of the game - is highly important, so much so to motivate the very black market in illegitimate reputation development, the extensive steps taken to create alternate accounts with which to dabble in modding, and the frustrations felt around those who manipulate and unfairly display the markers of skill. Each of which can be seen to contribute towards the destabilisation of the game itself. As a corollary what also becomes apparent is that for many players (or at least those encountered within this study) modifications represent an expanded part of the game environment and that understanding how to navigate through them with impunity becomes yet another expression of expertise and skill in addition to knowing how to navigate the maps and dominate opponents.

The message is clear: learn to deal with infections, use alternate accounts to experience them or dashboard to prevent them from causing damage when encountered in the wild, or see your reputation within the game community diminish. For those (like me) whose lack of manual dexterity have necessitated an ambivalence towards gaming leader boards and reputation as dedicated gamers, infection lobbies and other illicit modifications take on a genuinely attractive and amusing meaning, but for the many who care deeply for the goals and values designed into a game this is not necessarily the case.

CHAPTER TWELVE: UNREAL MASTERY AND ISO MODDING

Alien Vistas and New Affordances

The YouTube video buffers and a slickly animated logo fills the screen, it rotates left and right, accompanied by a rising orchestral score and powerful drum beats. The screen fades to black and we are presented with a barren alien planet, a familiar space marine (Commander Shepherd) takes up a chunk of the lower left of the screen, but the soundtrack is that of punchy dubstep and debug data is superimposed in the top-left of the user-interface (Figure 71). The player looks left at an architectural feature in the far distance beyond the limits of the playable game environment, raises his weapon as if to shoot at the column… and promptly flies through the air towards it until passing through it.

Figure 71 - Illicitly modded gamespace (*Mass Effect 3*).

The player dives down through the column until under the game map, before stopping, aiming and teleporting to the point instantaneously. The player teleports onto various monolithic pieces of sculpture and promontories within the level before dropping to the ground and sprinting towards their heavily

armed foes in the distance. On entering combat the player shoots an assault rifle that spews a constant stream of projectiles, there is no need to reload, no recoil, and no damage when Shepherd is flanked and lunged at by an robo-insectoid-xenomorph. After demonstrating a range of attacks and strategies: where the player attacks while levitating high above the battlefield; where the game is slowed making progress simple; and another where Commander Shepherd grows perhaps twenty times larger than normal, the video fades to black. We are invited to download the mod file from a link in the video and the music ends.

For those of you unfamiliar with the description, this is a modified instance of *Mass Effect 3* (Bioware, 2012), a hugely popular science fiction action-role-playing-game, in which the player is tasked with saving planet Earth from an alien invasion force. The game is characterised by slow and protracted battles, with players using cover, the unique abilities of their colleagues and tactical orders to carefully progress through the levels. Within *Mass Effect 3* aggressive or hasty approaches are generally met with failure.

The modded video appears to offer a rather radical subversion of the tools and abilities within the game, it makes practically each of the game mechanics obsolete – movement, cover, conservation of bullets – and evidently destroys any narrative flow or sense of progression. It shares the same visual and aural resources but the game feels inherently subverted. It's pace, it's rhythm, it's carefully crafted textual fabric is unpicked.

Other examples of mods on the same YouTube channel present similar subversion and reinvention of the game experience. In a modification of *Homefront*, a rather generic first person shooter (Figure 72) the player leaps into the air and flies around San Francisco's Golden Gate bridge, firing missiles and lobbing an infinite stream of grenades. Then the player exposes the wireframe construction of the simulation, before intercepting the fighter-jet props that scream through the game level, slowing time and riddling them with bullets.

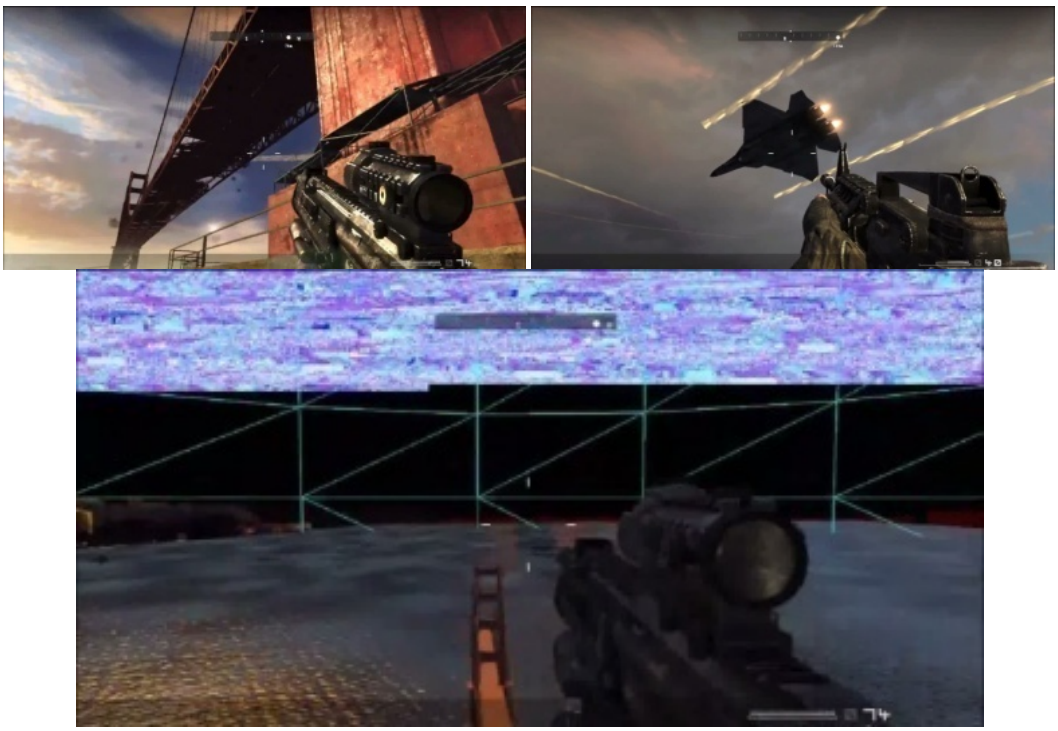

Figure 72 - Illicitly modded gamespace (*Homefront*).

In another mod for *Batman: Arkham City* (Rocksteady Studios, 2011) (Figure 73), a third-person action game, the player experiences the space as a rudimentary flight simulator, levitating high into the air before gliding Batman through the smog that enshrouds Arkham City.

Figure 73 - Illicitly modded gamespace (*Batman: Arkham City*).

While each of the examples above suggest a playful subversion and reappropriation of the game spaces – creating a new game within the contexts of an existing game - the final example, for *Duke Nukem Forever*, doesn't appear to alter the game in any major sense. Instead it takes a videogame space and reappropriates

it as a *greetings card*, replacing the content shown on the many television sets that litter the game with a proclamation of 'Happy Birthday {name removed}' (Figure 74).

Figure 74 - Illicitly modded gamespace (*Duke Nukem Forever*).

For those familiar with the conventional iterations of the modified texts these videos present a resonance, a power, an illicit pleasure – one is struck by the tension that exists between our expectations of the games generic conventions and the specific manifestation that we are witness to. Pleasure comes from the gulf and tension that exists between the *conventional functionality* and that of the *mod* – the pleasure comes from the ways in which the mod plays with and beyond the rules of the game. However, on repeated viewing the spectacular nature of the mod diminishes and so too does its illicit charge, the ways in which it transgresses the conventional become less significant, and instead much like the experiences of glitching one finds yourself speculating over the motivations and practices that underpin the mod. What purpose does it serve, what motivates its production, and how was it done? These are the questions that become apparent.

While each of these mods are the product of one modder a cursory YouTube search of almost any current generation game title and '*Xbox 360* mods' indicates how prevalent these forms of transgressive play appear to be: *Mass Effect* (Bioware, 2007) (11,700 hits); *Gears of War* (2006) (21,2000 hits); *Bioshock* (2k Australia, 2007) (11,800 hits), and *Medal of Honor* (Danger Close, 2010) (12,100 hits). Despite (or perhaps entirely because of) its illicit nature thousands of individuals appear to find the creation and dissemination of console based mods an engaging cultural practice, choosing to play with videogames in this manner.

While some research has already been done exploring some of the significance of PC modding communities and their relationship to intellectual property and notions of resistance, such as the body of work by Hector Postigo (2007, 2008, 2010), and Olli Sotamaa (2007a, 2007b), this has tended to revolve around the cultures that surround the use of sanctioned modding tools. While Postigo and Sotamaa have explored ways in which sanctioned modding tools may be used in illicit ways, such as through the unauthorised recreation of copyrighted content, the practice explored here is different.

Defining Illicit Modifications

In contrast *illicit modders* modify videogame software without the approval of the developers or publishers, and in the absence of official modification tools. Their activity necessitates the use of modified console hardware, the extraction and decompilation of code, its alteration, recompilation, and distribution amongst their peers and audiences. One assumes that due to the illicit and potentially litigious nature of their chosen activity modders are relatively cautious, relying on the use of pseudonyms and alternate personas – yet paradoxically examples of illicit mods and information about how to produce them are widely available on the web. Modders tend to aggregate on a number of websites relating to the practices, and in turn the mods that they produce are often viewed, commented on, and even iteratively developed by their peers. From such a perspective illicit modders can be regarded as constituting a community whose fandom, or predilection is for a specific form of transgressive play. It is not the intention to do the same here, although the closeness to the content and the practitioners may make such a stance untenable, but rather to present a grounded approach to the subject matter. Yet these academic approaches invariably influence the reading of the texts and the modding videos – in so doing there is a risk of overemphasising the extent to which the activity is oppositional or resistant, to perhaps read a hostility towards the texts and institutions that is not there. In so doing it is also possible that we begin to view the modder as politically motivated and as representing an 'authentic' activity in the face of cloying commercialisation.

One may interpret the videos as spectacular and dramatic inversion of the text, but then consider what intentional tactics and stances were employed? We wonder what arch cyberpunk skills were invoked in its creation, we speculate on the expertise and access to the text that facilitated this, and wonder what motives contextualise its deployment?

Perhaps one might adopt de Certeau's (1984) Marxist stance viewing it as an articulation of weak oppositional tactics in the face of strong institutional strategies? We might entertain that it could strike a message against the injustices of the production and consumption system. Is it the product of a disgruntled developer? Are they part of a programming team? Is it oppositional, aimed to destroy and undermine the game?

Fortunately I was able to spend time within the company of modders that produced a number of illicit mods, including those detailed above and was able through discussion to explore some of the motivations

that underpinned their activity. Yet when I spoke of relationships towards the producers and any sense of resistant consumption, even when approached repeatedly from different angles, there was scant recognition. The modders did not view their activity as opposed to the institutional modes of consumption and readership. To be more precise they understood how their activity could be construed as being hostile, but that this was a misinterpretation of their motivations – that modding was the predominant form of *play* that they engaged with but that they also were quite happy to buy and play games in normative manners when they felt that a release justified it.

In addition the interview process and being shown modifications in play challenged the reading of the mods as *spectacular* or dependent on *sophisticated technical understanding*. Instead it highlighted that the modifications were not a radical stepping out of the process of play, but rather a temporary and mundane process of reappropriation.

Developmental Contexts

Videogame development is a highly competitive and financially demanding process. As a result development studios are under pressure consolidate and centralise production wherever possible. One instance of where this efficiency can be achieved is through the use of 'middleware' production tools, such as the *Unreal Engine*, that boast of high levels of 'portability', allowing one set of resources and game code to be compiled for different target hardware platforms. The common resources - 3D models, textures, event scripting, sound and video files can then be co-ordinated and called by a platform specific executable that is compiled and exported directly from the middleware environment. Instead of developing for multiple platforms in tandem using different teams, it is now possible to produce for one 'lead platform' and then localise the game for the specific platform at a later stage. Therefore production costs can be better managed and the profits maximised.

Yet it is this adoption of a limited number of middleware platforms combined with the release of sanctioned mod tools with many multiplatform PC games that has inadvertently facilitated illicit console modification. As the PC modding communities explore and discuss the ways in which code can be altered and new functionality integrated into the releases they have, due to the common code-set presented by the middleware platform, inadvertently indicated how a console modification could be done – if only there was some way of accessing and altering the code on the console system. The real barrier for conducting an illicit mod is that of the console operating system, and the various security checks that prevent unauthorised code to be executed.

Providing that the modder has an appropriately modified console (*JTAG*, *RGH* or flashed) they have already overcome the security measures that would prevent a software mod to be conducted. All that they need to adjust is the code and then the modification is complete. This is facilitated either through the use of an alternate file manager such as *XeXmenu* or *FreeStyleDash* or acquiring a 'ripped' game ISO. This would

be the same process undertaken by an individual wishing to play pirated videogames, the only difference being that the modder wishes to alter the code instead of using it as-is.

Once the user transfers the ISO or the installed files onto their computer they are able to explore and interrogate the structure and its contents. In the case of an *Unreal Engine* game one file (COALESCED.BIN) is the main target of the illicit game modder. It is this file that controls the universal environmental settings of the gamespace, the variables related to much of the navigation and agency, and which player button presses are 'bound' to software routines. Through changing the variables associated with the environment and what functions are attributed to button presses the game is subverted and modified. This alters both the way that the simulation behaves, and also the way in which the player interacts with it.

In the following example the modder binds a reduction of the game environment's gravity to the pressing of the *Xbox* controllers 'a' button. The script is written in such a way that the effects are removed once the button is released.

"xboxtypes_a" , command = "setgravity +900", on release "setgravity -900"

By searching this file for keywords, such as 'worldinfo' that control the universal settings that determine the simulation, and 'playerinput' that controls the routines that are bound to button presses, the modder begins to decipher the code. By seeing what routines are bound to buttons, such as 'jump', 'fireweapon', or 'changeweapon', the modder is able to subsequently search other files for these terms until their variables are located – and modified. Providing that the modder is prepared to spend a little time tracing the links between button binds, routines, the variables that define the routines called, and those that define the game environment, they are able to radically alter the functionality of the game.

Yet, in addition to the game-specific variable settings that the modder alters there are a number of *'exec-functions'* that are part of the *middleware development engine* itself and that can be invoked by the modder. These consist of debugging tools such as 'god' (godmode), 'ghost' (no-clip mode), and 'nextviewmode' (which cycles between game rendering settings), each of which can be re-enabled if necessary and bound to player input – for instance when the *Xbox 360* controller 'back' button is pressed, instead of bringing up the game map it may toggle God mode instead.

A comprehensive list of the exec-functions are distributed by Unreal as guidance to the *Unreal Developers Network*, which is frequented by game developers and modders alike (Epic Games Inc, 2012). Among the hundred-or-so exec functions are 'Teleport', which teleports the player to the surface they are looking at, 'Slomo', which reduces game speed, and 'Loaded', which gives all weapons and full ammunition.

In addition to these variable-based alterations other modifications are possible, such the replacement of object textures or video sequences with alternatives provided by the modder. This is a case of merely

replacing a file while retaining its file name. Again, due to standardisation of software, in this case the widespread use of the *Bink Video* encoding software (Rad Game Tools, 1991-2012), and its free availability for non-commercial use, modders can easily encode and introduce new sources of video into modified games. Providing that the resource files are correctly encoded and named a 'video swap' is simply a case of replacing the conventional files with the new.

Acts of Repetition

At this point it is useful to return to the examples initially explored at the beginning of the article. The *Mass Effect 3* mod largely becomes the product of a number of bound exec-functions, including 'Teleport', 'Loaded', 'Slomo', and 'Ghost', the remainder of the mod is based upon adjusting the specific attributes allocated to each individual weapon. The *Homefront* mod is similar, combining 'Slomo', 'Nextviewmode' (to toggle wireframe view), and an adjustment of 'SetJumpZ' (that controls the height, or Z axis, that a player can reach). The *Batman: Arkham City* mod appears to largely be based upon an adjustment of the gravity settings bound to a button-press (in order to make Batman levitate), and the *Duke Nukem Forever* mod is a simple case of encoding a short piece of video using the Bink codec then swapping the resource files on the disc.

One might reasonably question the significance of this line of critique – it explains how the mods were created, but fails to encapsulate their significance as cultural activities, and that just because something is simple to do it doesn't reduce its potential to alter the previous experience. This is certainly the case – the mods are greater than the sum of their parts BUT the mode of production does impact upon the meaning of the act of modding, even if it does not impact upon the meaning of the mod.

The issue is that by building familiarity with an engine and through repeated game modification patterns and consistencies become evident – multiple mods invoke the same exec-functions (often bound to the same controller buttons) and offer the user the same pleasure – flight, infinite ammo, invulnerability, slow motion. The act of modification becomes generic. As a result it becomes very difficult to read a mod as creative innovation, or even a particular challenge to the game, and is replaced with a rather mundane process of repetition following the shortest process of orientation with the idiosyncrasies of a new software release. Instead of presenting original and innovative ways of playing with and consuming a text, the modification ascribes a predictable set of functions and abilities – the game modification becomes as reductive and predictable as the game it *appears* to rally against. But this is perhaps where the issue originates: are the modders actually rallying against the game? I will explore this very shortly.

Illicit console mods can therefore be considered incredibly rapid things to produce, providing one has the requisite hardware and inclination. This rapidity of production combined with the number of people engaged with the activity alter the significance and pleasure of the mod production. It moves from being a creative act of subversion to a race for status. In terms of the *Mass Effect* 3 mod video the 'exclusivity'

becomes more important than the actual contents of the mod video. To have modded it takes priority over what the mod offers. It shares some of the same pressures exposed in glitchers' scavenger hunts.

> It's definitely a race, me and a few others always try and be the first to release a mod! …I'll keep looking for when an ISO is about to be uploaded, it's normally a week before the first release, and the moment it is I've got to download it and mod it …I spend way more time recording a video that shows off the mod than modding the game itself.

From this response it appears that the act of being the first to have released a mod is a driving point of competition and status initially within the modding community, but then secondarily from within the wider, perhaps less cognizant mod using player base. By looking at the comments on a modded video it is possible to get a sense of the lifespan of a mod video. Initially supportive and receptive comments tend to be made, such as those commenting on or congratulating the modder for their efforts, requesting access to the mod. However, many of the responses that follow appear to be strongly opposed to the activity. Aggressive and oppositional language is frequently used to question and denigrate the activity.

It appears from this line of exploration that the modding was an activity related to a small group of friends and a localised agency, not immediately part of the wider debates relating to consumption and production. Despite the potential interpretation of resistance, it appeared to be a hobby, rather than a statement.

Resistance? Meh.

I asked the modder whether the mods were produced in opposition to the contexts of production and consumption, as a protest against the game, the developers, or the economic model. But, the line of argument, with notions of weak tactics, authenticity of the resistant reader, and the power of the institutional wasn't recognised.

> Games are pretty expensive, but if I want one I'll buy it. I love videogames and play them normally as well as modding them. As for developing them, that'd kind of be my ideal job. …I'd really like to work making games but there aren't any colleges that do it or studios near here and besides, everyone wants to do it.

It was evident that a number of the modders interviewed valued the notion of exploration and illicit access – that the very barriers presented by the rules (both in terms of legal, contractual, and ludic – such as defined play areas or narrative structures) constituted a source of value. 'I can explore what wasn't meant to be explored, what is more playful than that?' When challenged on what wasn't able to be explored the subject was less certain

> …it's the code, I like looking at how they've built the game… but you also get to explore bits of levels that are hidden. Like the secrets and Easter eggs that

> the devs leave in the games. Why do they leave them in the games unless they want people to see it? It doesn't make sense.

Yet the modder was conscious of the potential negative impacts of the mods and how developers regarded them.

> They know exactly who we are and I can tell you they hate what we do. I've had emails and comments from people at Epic complaining about my mods, and videos are always being taken off YouTube, but I just ignore it, it's par for the course.

The reasons were clear, and it was evident that within the modding community there was potential to exploit the modding process, and also to severely damage videogames.

> …sometimes the mods I make are misused. I found one guy trying to sell my mods, but I always include a makers mark buried in the code where nobody can find it. There's not a lot you can do about it though but I told everyone what he was doing and no one will trust anything he does now. …one of my ISO mods was misused and they made the multiplayer of [---] unplayable. Don't get me wrong, the multiplayer was pretty crappy in the first place, and I told people to use the mod fairly but the game was ruined, you couldn't do anything without being up against people using the mods and then the only people playing online were modders. …I felt kind of gutted that it was my mod that people used to do it, but I did tell them…'

Once again this raises a dynamic seen in the grief-play, glitching, and modded lobbies examples. The modder failed to see any direct link between their actions, any damage made to the game, and the economic and legal implications. While at its heart the motivation for modding was evidently not one of hostility, or destruction, nor a lack of funds (the modder had a significant amount of new hardware platforms and game releases) but an ambivalence or neutrality towards the economic context of gaming. If resistant it is a case of passive resistance.

The modder held the belief that they had every right to access the games, their code and their platforms, and appeared to sit somewhere between a hacker 'hands-on-imperative' and a fan-culture ownership of the text. Yet when I presented these ideas to the modder they failed to recognise this distinction, or even the contested space of ownership and access:

> It's a gut feeling, It's just what I do. …I don't share anything that might damage a game, if I do I warn people to use it fairly. When I download an ISO I do it just to mod, that's it. …It's not like it's a lost sale, I wouldn't have bought the game, and if I do play a game I always buy a copy and keep it. …I don't think that Microsoft will come after me. Loads of people do this and nobody gets anything more than a console ban.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE ILLICIT HOMEBREW CODER

A Mainstream Modding Culture

While all of the modification practices in this section are reliant on modding tools or software known as modding frameworks, such as *Modio* and *Horizon*. These are tools that allow users to easily modify the gamesaves, explore hardware devices, or act as alternate operating systems which can be run on the console. These are generally freeware (not open-source) applications that are the cornerstones of game-modding. They make modding, piracy, and the general use of hacked consoles accessible to those with a lower threshold of technical understanding and can therefore be regarded as instrumental in the development of mainstream console modding culture.

In addition to these popular software tools publically released through sites such as *Free60.org* there is a body of less well-known software that has been intentionally restricted by its creators, and is only available to trusted sources and for the right fee. Examples of this kind of software are those which are commercially sensitive or are liable to be abused if they become public knowledge, such as software that would allow hacked consoles to reconnect to *XBL* following the successive Microsoft software and hardware security updates that resulted in the end of conventional *JTAG* modded lobbies. This kind of restricted software represents a further layer of commercial exploitation of *CoD* modding whereby it is entirely controlled by a minority.

What this creates is a small number of privileged hackers and modders who restrict knowledge and access to the processes to those who are trusted and are willing to pay the entrance fees. In the context of *CoD* lobbies which were reinstated by a small cadre of hackers, this allowed them to commercialise on their skills, meeting the demands of the audience but ensuring sufficient scarcity to prevent the deflation of modded lobby fees caused by overabundance, while avoiding the adverse impact of security updates motivated by conspicuous modding. While there were rumours that it was possible to overcome the *XBL* security there was little reliable evidence and there was a perception that it was purely conjecture.

Project Rainbowzzz

On the 9th September 2012 the *Project Rainbowzzz* leak ended any speculation over whether connection to *XBL* on a hacked console was possible. This leak not only confirmed that it *was possible* to do so, but also told users precisely *how to do so*, including links to all of the necessary files – a decompiled software package known as *Project Rainbowzzz*. Up until that point *Project Rainbowzzz* had been a highly restricted development that allowed players to connect to *XBL* without having direct access to the *Project Rainbowzzz* files. Instead they were required to connect their *Xbox 360* a server owned by the *Project Rainbowzzz* developers using the *FreeStyleDash* homebrew application, on connection the server placed the required modifications needed to allow connection to *XBL* directly in the *Xbox 360* system memory and then forwarded the console. Once these credentials had been placed upon the modified machine it would appear to be legitimate and could go onto *XBL*. This model was adopted to prevent the method and its files from being shared with the community and to mitigate against reverse engineering and modification that unrestricted access to the files would allow.

> I present: PROJECT RAINBOWZZZ
> Price: FREE
> ---
> Tired of seeing this stolen, cracked and then passed around to every one and their brother to try to sell something that isn't theirs.
>
> If certain people want to hate...well then don't hate on me. I didn't leak the files to myself. When all these randoms start to get it, then things are out of control. Plus I am not using those leaked files here anyway, just the source code I created from reversing the xex, which was leaked anyways so wtf is the point.

Figure 75 - The *Project Rainbowzzz* leak forum post.

The *Project Rainbowzzz* release allowed players to connect their *JTAG*s and *RGH*s to *XBL* servers, at least until Microsoft released a security patch that altered and strengthened the *XBL* validation challenges less than a week later. It also confirmed the existence of a body of hackers / modders that were technically proficient and willing to withhold developments for commercial gain, who were hacking as a way of generating significant income and deploying it in highly restrictive and monopolistic manner. These hackers held none of the egalitarianism tied in with hacker ethics or the hands-on-imperative. Their work and the way that they had managed to keep the process secret for so long earned them significant income and kudos. In later correspondence Bob, the commercial hardware hacker, called these individuals the 'uber-intelligent top of the Xbox tree'.

The 'uber-intelligent' can be understood as those actively engaged in the production of modding frameworks and other utilitarian homebrew – especially that which clandestinely connected to legitimate sources, such as *XBL*, or the *Microsoft Developer Network*. It does not necessitate that they deploy them for financial profit, just that they can understand and utilise the system – that they have the capabilities and

intent to directly infiltrate systems and produce software. I was able to make contact with one of these 'top of the tree' software producers (not one directly related to *Project Rainbowzzz*) via contacts that I had made through *Se7ensins.com*.

A Software Release – *IHC.DLL*

iHcJames had become known within modding for having produced *IHC.DLL,* a piece of software that enabled modders to reintroduce *infection lobbies* for the *CoD* franchise *after the security patches* deployed by Activision. *IHC.DLL*, still unpatched at the point of writing, enables game settings to be propagated from a *JTAG* or *RGH* console to a retail variant in the same way that an infection lobby works, but instead of utilising the synchronisation of settings that occurs as the match is instigated. *IHC.DLL*, much like *Project Rainbowzzz*, changes the settings on the retail console memory *directly*.

This kind of software represents a shift in complexity when compared with *JTAG* and Infection lobbies – whereas these were reliant on changing the variable settings that were normally *referred to* by the game engine. *IHC.DLL* is software designed to circumvent these systems and alter the settings in memory, irrespective of the security measures placed upon the game through title updates. In turn *IHC.DLL* and other software produced by iHcJames enabled modders to engage in a wide range of alternate forms of play, while also restabilising the commercial models such as XP lobbies that had existed previously.

iHcJames relied on a process of software reverse-engineering in order to conduct his work, using Hex Rays' *IDA* (Interactive Dissassembler), to attempt to make sense of the processes that console software undertakes and the connections that it makes. For iHcJames it was protected developer software, such as 'developer network update disks' and private beta code that were instrumental in building his understanding of the console systems, the security processes that surrounded *XBL* and the Developer Network and therefore enabling him to develop new software and gain illegitimate access. The developer network disk was obtained through a seemingly random torrent upload, one assumes by a discontent developer, iHcJames explains:

> I got hold of a developer network update disk that updates a developer console to a new dashboard (OS version), the ISO was leaked online, ...I reverse engineered it and figured out what it connected to, [including] the different development environments such as XboxLive, [and] Partner net. I then created a piece of software to run on my *JTAG* that connected directly to these and allowed me to look around and see what was there.

From this privileged and unauthorised position iHcJames was able to access developer resources and connect channels used to distribute developmental builds, private beta builds, waypoint stages, review code, or as-yet unreleased DLC. He created a 'brute force' application that searched these sources for available software download packages enabling him to download any that were of particular interest at a later point.

This approach, however, brought iHcJames to the attention of Microsoft, who carefully license and control the credentials and developer console hardware that can legitimately connect to the developer network (and that iHcJames' consoles were purporting to be). Each connection was logged and, much like a *JTAG*, when detected as spurious the console, or rather its unique keyvault was invalidated. iHcJames stated that he had developed an algorithm for generating developer console Keyvaults from IP Addresses – although it should be stressed that if this is the case this would represent a significant security breach, and could generate significant income due to the illicit trade in Keyvaults.

> This is partly how I eventually got into trouble with Microsoft – each time I connected to the dev network it generated a new certificate and it looked like I had 50 or so developer consoles. They must have thought I had an unregistered studio at my house and understandably they wanted to take a look – but these consoles didn't exist, they were just Keyvaults I'd generated.

Soon, after repeatedly connecting to the developer network, iHcJames says that he was visited by representatives from Microsoft and Activision. This visit constituted the beginning of a protracted and ongoing legal 'relationship' between the hacker, the platform holder, the publisher and the developers. The representatives, who iHcJames' believes obtained his address through domain registration information, 'came to see me asking about the developer consoles, and they ended up taking away two of my consoles and a USB drive with my developmental work. They had expected to see more on account of the Keyvaults but that was what they took'.

Up until this point iHcJames was able to use the access to the developer network to access and reverse engineer the commercial code, and, in so doing, to interrogate the game and the platform processes. This enabled him to understand what resources were utilised, what variables were called and ultimately what information controlled the states of the software being played. Once this information was understood, it was relatively simple to develop homebrew software that used the same resources or interacted with the systems by altering the variables being used.

This was the method used to develop *IHC.DLL*, designed to reinstate modded lobbies on *CoD* after the restrictive *title update seven* (TU7). *IHC.DLL* was publicly released (24th March 2012) via *Se7ensins.com* and was quickly adopted and altered by many in the community. It did not adopt any of the protectionism seen later in *Project Rainbowzzz* (iHcJames, 2012).

The release of *IHC.DLL* reinstated the previous paid-for lobby practices as can be seen in the following video, posted onto YouTube by a modder, charging $5 for 30 minutes in a modified lobby. The release of *IHC.DLL* is somewhat curious as it inevitably will have destabilised the equilibrium that had existed where only the highly proficient 'top of the tree' were able to modify lobbies and generate income. As a result, as a release it is likely to have been viewed negatively by some within the most organised and secretive of the modding / hacking community, but positively by other less proficient members of the community intending to mod, who iHcJames viewed as *'leechers'*. Initially the public *IHC.DLL* release seems foolhardy

– why release such a powerful (and valuable) tool to everyone? However, the release makes more sense when you read the announcement post in full, within it iHcJames includes a full explanation of the process by which the software works, and crucially detailed instructions of how the vulnerability could be patched, while it is rather technical it illustrates the intent:

> Hai Infinity Ward
> How you can easily patch this, say bye to activeaction, or if you use it for some file from a zone, check the strlen, doubt it would be long enough for the activeactionception. As this requires a title update, you may be able to fix this with a hot-fix, if you can set dvars at the menu (between each game) or before it adds activeaction to the cmd buffer just clear it. (iHcJames, 2012)

The *IHC.DLL* release adopts the conventional hacker / hands-on-imperative rhetorics, presenting the information to all parties and exposing an identified flaw. It resonates with the practices of the glitcher – such as chaoticPERFECTION video message to Epic games. But like that example it too also retains an ambivalent and protean aspect. It shows that iHcJames understands the processes and has the capability to produce homebrew software. Perhaps more importantly the *IHC.DLL* release can be considered part of a carefully managed promotional campaign leading to the crescendo that is the release of another application – a modding framework known as *Project AC1D*. In addition to the instructions iHcJames states that 'I am working on *Project AC1D* (Yes it will be released soon, be patient - may also be adding *MW2* support)', a teaser statement that alludes to iHcJames' most contentious middleware project, and which ultimately placed him in direct opposition to Microsoft and Activision.

A Modding Framework - Project AC1D

Project AC1D is an *unreleased* intermediary modding framework to be run on a hacked *Xbox* that would allow users to modify almost all aspects of the *MW3* and *MW2* games. Built through the same process of reverse engineering that enabled *IHC.DLL,* it would allow players not simply to alter the game settings as with *JTAG* and Infection lobbies, but even the construction and layout of game maps themselves. *AC1D* was therefore a fully-fledged game modification and generation tool. As iHcJames explained, 'I wanted to produce a *Garry's Mod* for *CoD*', referring to the successful user created modification tool for Valve's Source engine that was subsequently adopted by Valve and sold as a commercial release (2006). It was with the hope that the same might occur with Activision that potentially motivated the development of *Project AC1D*, and in turn coloured the release of *IHC.DLL* and therefore explains the motivation of a public release and the message to the developers, Infinity Ward.

> I make the stuff impressive to show off what I can do in terms of programming and, of course, I love *CoD* …I tried to make a big image out of the modding I did in an attempt to impress studios and jump into a career of game programming / security, but the only thing I have received from Activision and Microsoft are legal issues.

iHcJames had been working on *Project AC1D* for some time prior to the *IHC.DLL* release. On the 22nd February 2012 iHcJames published a teaser release on *Se7ensins.com* inviting members to 'Follow the release countdown @ http://www.iHcJames.com/*AC1D*/' beneath it was a reply post that included a YouTube video link to what appeared to be a *MW3* modified lobby running online – *something that was not possible at the time*. This had been the relatively quiet announcement of *Project AC1D*, which IHcJames' *IHC.DLL* release was drawing attention to now that it was largely completed. In contrast to the developer-aligned announcement of *IHC.DLL* with its patching instructions, the *Project AC1D* holding page (Figure 76) presented a directly confrontational rhetoric, while the branding of the webpage might fool the occasional viewer that they are looking at an official piece of Activision promotional literature, a small link at the bottom right of the page exposes the project's antagonism.

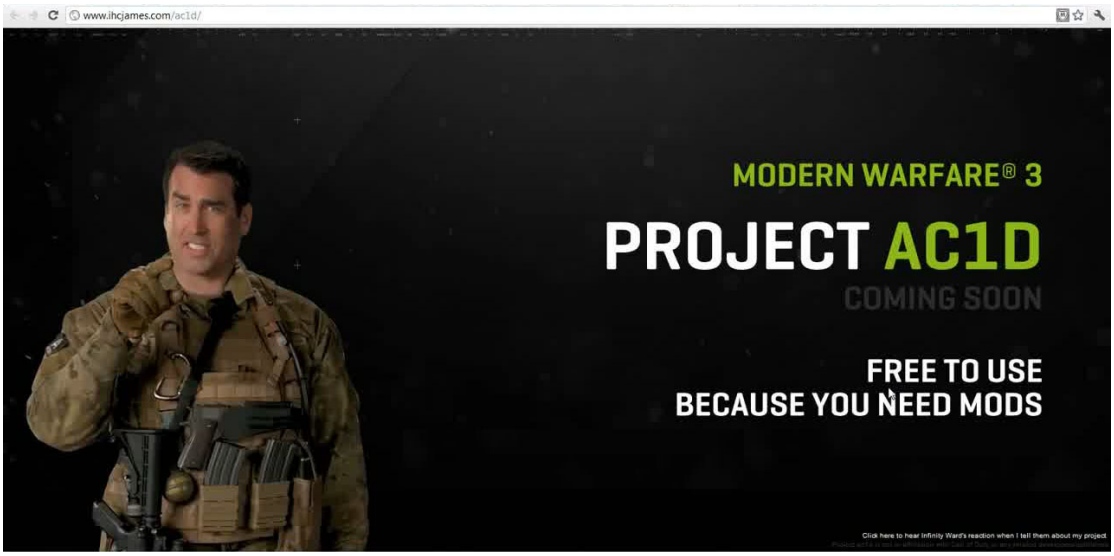

Figure 76 - The *Project AC1D* countdown webpage.

The link invites the viewer to 'Click here to hear Infinity Ward's reaction when I tell them about *Project AC1D*', when clicked the following sequence of text is displayed: 'Walking to the studio, Im gun [sic], NOOOOO GOD, NOOO, PLEASE NO, NO, NOO, NOOOOOOO - RIP Infinity Ward'. *Project AC1D* is betrayed as malign, and not complimentary to the official release in the slightest (or at least according to the way it is positioned by the website), it is openly antagonistic, hostile and incendiary. As a result it can be viewed in the same way as another counterplay homebrew software release like *FreeStyleDash*, which enables direct ripping, or *Kane and Abel*, which attacks the victim with spurious network traffic.

iHcJames had been working on *Project AC1D* for the majority of March 2012, and had alluded with the *IHC.DLL* release that the project was nearing completion. In its current state iHcJames asserted that it enabled: '…access to all of the functionality of the *CoD* script – I could do whatever I wanted to do it allowed me to patch the flags, the entities, aspects of the map, everything, it's because you're editing the memory directly instead of the files'. iHcJames uploaded successive videos charting the progress of *AC1D*, and when its functionality was combined with that of *IHC.DLL*, it would imply that the modification tool would not only offer sophisticated manipulation, but was likely to be able to run online. This would not

simply reinstate the wide-scale modifications seen in *JTAG* lobbies previously, but increase the deviation further as a result of the level-editing capabilities. iHcJames detailed the extent to which the game resources were available for modification through *AC1D*:

> While all of the scenery of the levels were 'baked' [compiled] and therefore couldn't be edited all the other entities, like barrels, and their locations could be – *AC1D* gradient was the name of the editor that I created – it allowed you to move and save the locations of all of those unbaked entities like barrels and cars, but not baked stuff like buildings.

It was this versatility twinned with the antagonistic stance of the holding page that presumably made *Project AC1D* such a comprehensive perceived threat and necessitated an urgent response from Activision:

> ...having these map tools would allow a user to edit any of the maps and save them, and share them, and of course this would mean that DLC maps could easily be distributed. This is perhaps where the major issue with Activision came in if *AC1D gradient* was available they [the player] could share content – and by doing so it'd undermine the money made from DLC.

A Viable Threat

iHcJames had posted a sequence of developmental videos charting the progress of his code. In the first on the 3rd March, at that point *Project AC1D* was codenamed *IronWolf*, consisted of a proof of technology (Figure 77) in which a real-time game map and spurious icon graphics were superimposed upon the standard game interface to show that the software was able to dynamically alter the settings. The map included in the game interface is a more detailed version of the conventional map which can still be seen (faintly) in the top left of the left-hand image.

Figure 77 - The *Project AC1D* proof of concept video.

On the 30thof March iHcJames posted a number of interactive menu tests (Figure 78) and weapon variable tests (Figure 79) which effectively demonstrate that much of the functionality of *Project AC1D* was complete. The first showed real-time modification menus that could be accessed during play, introducing functionality reminiscent of *JTAG* lobbies, such as the player as AC130 attack helicopter (Figure 78 bottom row).

Figure 78 - The *Project AC1D* interactive menu and player status test video.

Other weapon tests accentuated the versatility of the modifications and their potential for spectacle, such as through changing the individual variables of weapons – much like those done by the *Mass Effect* 3 Modder see p.191) not simply more basic alterations such as ammo count, but the sophisticated variables that control a weapon, such as scatter, fire-rate, and range. In the images below (Figure 79), a machine gun fires hundreds of conventionally single-use rockets, creating a torus from the exhaust trails before the rockets radiate out in search of their eventual targets. As there are no other players in the map, the rockets thump down into the ground creating plumes of smoke on impact (Figure 79 bottom left). Other alterations in the video include a shotgun that has its fire-rate increased so dramatically that it spews a trail of sparkling flame (Figure 79 bottom right). Each of these examples illustrate the versatility of *Project AC1D* and the extent to which it represented a shift in the sophistication of the illicit modding tools, bridging the variability of modding within a simple graphical user interface.

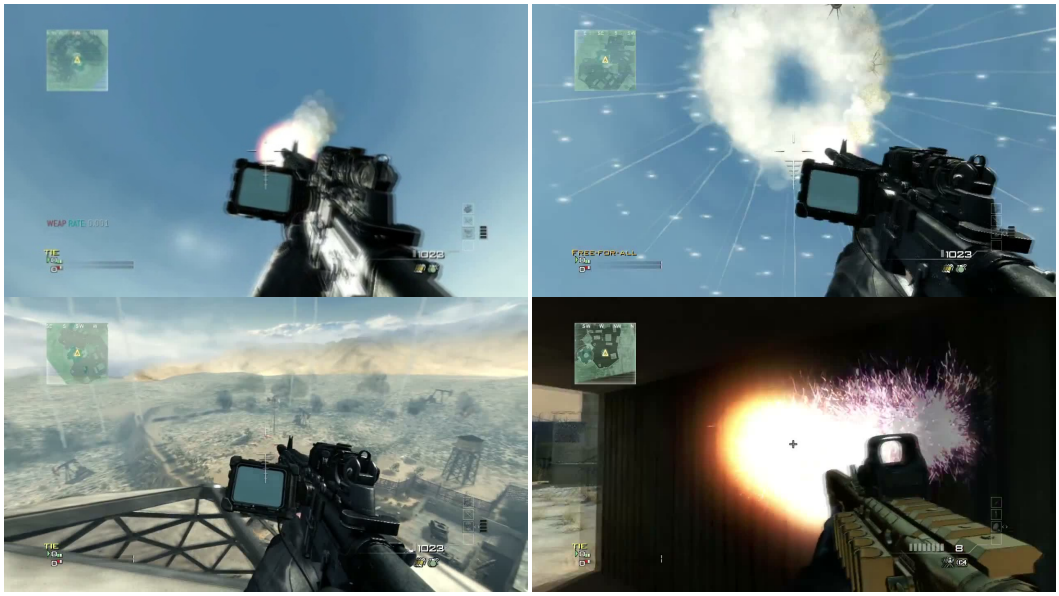

Figure 79 - The *Project AC1D* weapon variable test video.

A Legal Challenge

On the 31st March 2012 iHcJames was visited at his home by an attorney representing Activision who served him with a cease and desist letter for the project:

> We are counsel for Activision Publishing, Inc. ("Activision"). As you know, Activision is the publisher and owner of copyright in the *CoD*® series of computer and video games, including the game *CoD*: *MW*® *3*.
>
> We are writing to discuss your recent activities in connection with the *CoD* modding project known as "*Project AC1D*". Specifically, Activision has learned that you, under the alias "iHcJames," are responsible for creating and developing a modding framework for *MW3* that would permit members of the public to alter and modify elements of the game without the authorization or consent of Activision. We understand that you have been advertising and promoting *Project AC1D* on websites such as www.*Se7ensins.com* and on your own website http://www.iHcJames.com.
>
> We appreciate that you are a fan of the "*CoD*" franchise. However, your activities are unlawful and have the potential to cause serious harm to Activision. Among other things, the creation and release to the public of *Project AC1D* infringes Activision's copyrights and violates Activision's rights under U.S. and international laws prohibiting the circumvention of access-control technology. By your conduct (and specifically by releasing modding tools and instructing others how to use those tools), you also are inducing Activision customers to breach Activision's Terms of Service and End-User License Agreements and are engaged in acts of unfair competition under the laws of the United States and European Union. *Project AC1D* impairs the *MW3* multiplayer experience for other players, and this is something that our client cannot tolerate.
>
> As you know, the "*CoD*" franchise is extremely important to Activision, and Activision cannot allow the appropriation of its intellectual property in this manner. However, in an effort to informally resolve this matter, Activison is prepared to forbear from taking legal action if you will cooperate with Activision. Specifically, you must (1) immediately cease any further activity related to *Project AC1D*, (2) provide Activision with the source code for *Project AC1D*, and (3) provide Activision with all locations at which any *Project AC1D* code or software is stored. Should you refuse to do so, then Activison is prepared to enforce its rights in any manner it deems necessary.

Following the cease and desist iHcJames immediately suspended work on *Project AC1D*, 'I was obviously pretty annoyed at Activision because I put a lot of hard work into this project …and because the stuff that I

do isn't particularly intended to damage or undermine their games – I tried to get this across to them but they wouldn't really listen about that'.

He stated that his intention with *Project AC1D* was to encode '...a feature where if you try and connect a retail it'll kick it – exiting the game' in order to prevent the subversion of conventional multiplayer matches, but this was not made clear from the videos and posts made during its development and is certainly contrary to the tone of the countdown website page. Despite iHcJames' intentions the way in which *Project AC1D* had been presented, with the 'RIP Infinity Ward' caption on the website, conflicted with this apparently benign intent, and had *Project AC1D* been released it would have likely conferred significant damage upon the function of the game, impacting upon its reputation and its popularity with players. It should be stressed that previous iterations of the *CoD* series had been criticised for their extensive modding as a result of *JTAG*, *RGH* and infection lobbies and due to the number of glitchers on the game. As with glitching the visibility of counterplay forms is damaging to the reputation and profitability of the new game – and when so much money can be made from ongoing DLC releases there is a need to protect the sanctity of the gamespace, unlike the *MGO* example (p. 90).

Yet despite this duplicity even in the subsequent discussions with Activison and Microsoft iHcJames was under the impression that the interactions were not entirely negative – 'they asked me for a lot of information and advice, and implied that this might lead to jobs in the future'. Whether this was misapprehension on his part or an intentional strategy to extract information, iHcJames latched onto this aspect. Despite the initial discussions these insinuations of employment came to nothing - 'I heard nothing back from them – and that really annoyed me'.

As a result of the cease and desist *Project AC1D* was necessarily halted, a situation that he summarises as 'you've part-produced it because you think it's cool, you've announced it because you want the reputation and status, but you're in the situation that you can't finish it because people will leech the recognition or you'll get legal hassle'.

Leeching and lack of appropriate recognition appears a core concern for iHcJames when releasing mods and software. Aside from the severity of the legal threat encoded into the cease and desist and subsequent interactions, he was troubled by the idea that others would repurpose his modifications and change them into something he didn't want them to be. However, he felt little compunction over the unauthorised 'bastardisation' of commercial releases. When I challenged iHcJames about this distinction he became less clear in his justifications for *Project AC1D*:

> ...I find it really fun to do something that no-one's really done on the Xbox, and a lot of people would do the technical side of things but a lot of people would just use it for the mods, I mean a lot of people would still like to get to mess around and see what it can do. Scripting's really easy, you can do all things with the basics, but to give such powerful access to everything would just blow it away.

What became curious as I spoke with iHcJames, in addition to the conflicting attitudes regarding the role of author and reader, was the extent to which he demonstrated an conflicted antagonism towards Activison and Microsoft. I believe that he was genuinely captivated and seduced by the videogames and platforms that he explored and altered, and explained that he held a strong desire to work in game development in some capacity. He saw the release of illicit modifications as a way of entering into, and later re-establishing, dialogue with various parties within game development and simultaneously increasing his reputation within the modding communities – much like the *symbolic dialogue* implicit in glitching. 'When I release stuff it is due to the fact that I want to get my name back out and up on their radar'. While iHcJames was initially contacted by the publisher and platform holder due to his creation of new code he then began to find other ways of re-establishing communication, seeing it as a desirable interaction. The following examples, *Terminal* and *uTor Engine,* demonstrate the other ways in which iHcJames' hacking and coding expertise, twinned with sheer bravado, were used to gain attention from not only those involved in the creation and distribution of games but also the games press.

Releasing to Re-Engage – *Terminal DLC*

The *release to re-engage* process found in *Project AC1D* can be seen in a number of relatively high-profile examples, *Terminal* and *uTor Engine*, that both generated significant attention from the modding community, the games press, and the developers and publishers. In the *Terminal* example (Figure 80), iHcJames had used his brute-force application to access an unreleased DLC package for *MW3* that contained a remake of map from *MW2*, based at an airport and known as *Terminal*.

Figure 80 - The *MW3 Terminal* DLC leak video.

Although there had been speculation over the maps existence due to filenames found within a PC game patch, iHcJames' unauthorised acquisition and subsequent video documentation titled '*MW3* Terminal – It's Coming Back!', was the first authoritative evidence of its existence. The leak raised concerns over the integrity of Activison and Microsoft's security systems and created speculation over iHcJames' status – was he a rogue Activision developer, how did he consistently expose and access information? Following the video Activison formally announced that the *Terminal* map was in production and it was positioned as a free gift to the *CoD* community. It was released just over three weeks after iHcJames' leak, on the 17th July 2012. As Activision and Microsoft were already aware of iHcJames' identity they intervened once again, re-

opening communication with the hacker – while they may have seen it as a negative threat of penalty iHcJames saw it as re-engagement, he had suddenly become important to them again.

Releasing to Re-Engage – *uTor Engine*

In early September 2012 iHcJames utilised the same brute-force method to obtain a beta version of the *Call of Duty: Black Ops* 2 (Treyarch Invention, 2012) (*BLOPs2*) multiplayer application and once again released a video. More than two months prior to the games commercial release date, and before the game mode had even been reported within the game press. The video showed the new design features and inclusion of weapons that would have generated significant attention and therefore had potential to generate income or be best utilised if they had been released through a conventional press-release or magazine-exclusivity article. iHcJames' release undermined this capability, and the video generated significant global attention (and subscribers to his YouTube channel) as it was picked up by the games press. However, as with the *IHC.DLL* release iHcJames used the *BLOPs2* video to additionally introduce his new coding project called *uTor Engine*.

The video also retained the antagonism inherent in the *Project AC1D* promotional literature. The video (Figure 81) starts with a *uTor Engine* logo and URL detail followed by the superimposition of an interview with a Treyarch employee talking about the additional security tools built into *BLOPs2* over what transpires to be a recording of a *modified version* of the *BLOPs2* multiplayer mode.

> ...we've been working on our anti-cheat systems, our propriety anti-cheat systems, we really want to protect the integrity of the experience that people have online so we're not only reliant on systems that are already in the world but are… developing and coming up with our own…

Figure 81 - The *uTor Engine* and *BLOPs2* multiplayer leak video.

At this point the game match begins, a dubstep soundtrack drowns out the developer who fades to a full-screen view of the match, and then the modding tools are initiated (Figure 82).

Figure 82 - The *uTor Engine* and *BLOPs2* mods video.

The player immediately invokes recognisable modding functions, levitating into the air, flying upwards and watching other players, they follow one opponent, clipping through walls, before cycling trough a range of available weapons and deploying the characteristic 'finger-guns' popular with modders since *MW JTAG* lobbies.

The video was not simply an extensive leak of multiplayer game content, showing the existence of the new multiplayer perk system and a crossbow weapon, but it also appeared to be showcasing a comprehensive modding framework for *BLOPs2*, a spiritual successor of *Project AC1D*, running on a game that had not even been released.

The video was almost immediately removed from YouTube by Activision on a copyright claim, and the developer submitted a statement to one of the game sites that had first reported the *uTor Engine* video. Activision stressed that 'The video posted is from a development demo build, using developer tools meant for testing. The retail build was never accessed or compromised' (Usher, 2012).

The statement asserted that the video had been built using code from the development demo build, and therefore contained debugging functions, the equivalent of the *Unreal Engine* exec-functions (p.197), that the player was using – as opposed to illicit modifications – and therefore the things that the player was doing would not be possible within the commercial release. iHcJames insists that this was not the case, but that the video relied upon the introduction of new modifications into the game code in the same way as *Project AC1D*.

Hacker Communities?

The development of *IHC.DLL*, the aborted development of *Project AC1D*, *uTor Engine* and the information leaks identified through the developer network illustrate a different order of complexity and understanding in this hacker over the other practices, or rather a different kind of expertise. Griefers gain expertise and mastery of the exploitable inequalities of the game functions, glitchers gain expertise and mastery of the exploitable anomalies of the game, illicit modders build expertise and mastery of the operational functions of the game, while hackers deploy mastery of the hardware-software ecosystem. Hacking illustrates a different type of counterplay enabled by technical proficiency and a feeling of entitlement of access or (initial) disregard for copyright protectionism – the marks of a biopolitical plundering. These appeared to be some of the defining characteristics of the 'top of the Xbox tree', that still resonated to some degree with the other counterplay forms I encountered. I asked iHcJames about the formation of this group.

He didn't believe that there was any *widespread community* of hackers and modders currently, but instead suggested that while once there *had been* a culture of sharing, the development and exploitation of commercial uses of hacking/modding, such as 10th prestige *JTAG* lobbies, had disincentivised this and the community had become fractured. Those that developed the modding methods and processes who had previously seen their work exploited by leeches for profit, altered the dynamic of hacking and their perception of the implicit value of their actions, and this had altered the dynamics of *the scene*. Curiously this is almost precisely the same dynamic that occurred in the transition between the early hacker communities and the rise of the *Californian Ideology* that produced the home computer and videogames industries.

> Back in 2010 people used to release stuff to help each other out… people used to share the methods they'd found, like: ooh look I've spawned a car that you can destroy – but then people used to put all these things into one file and charge for lobbies. And people stopped helping each other, because it was all about making money. People stopped sharing.

The profiteering was problematic for modders, it constituted a theft of reputation, and as a result of its overabundance ultimately made hacking more difficult - increasing the likelihood of aggressive intervention on the part of developers that necessitated new techniques to be developed. Sharing had led to the tragedy of the commons, and as a result hackers and modders became reticent, tending to work independently, or in close-knit groups that stressed secrecy, reliability and reputation. This was illustrated in iHcJames' attitude to other modders:

> I know quite a lot of people but I don't identify with a group or clan – I do almost all of my stuff on my own… I know a lot of underground modders, but I stay away from that. Their idea of modding is just to make loads of money and do lobbies, but I'm not interested in that.

He implied that the majority of commercial services related to *CoD*, such as prestige lobbies, were now under the control of a small cadre of underground modders that outsourced the actual modifications on a percentage fee basis. Instead of running the lobbies and generating income directly in multiple small transactions they simply sold access to the tools necessary for a lump sum - around 10% of all income generated.

> …all that happens is that you connect to their server, it loads an XEX into memory and you boot from that – that's after they verify your credentials, CPU key etc of course. It lets the hoster say 'look what I've made' and advertise the lobbies directly, and both the underground modders and hosters are happy.

Even within the constraints of this system significant income could be generated – in effect what this did was concentrate the income into a small number of modders instead of being shared by any modder with some understanding, a *JTAG* and some Keyvaults. Bob corroborated iHcJames' on what he knew about the business structure:

> ...the very intelligent people …sell slots on their 'online method' and set the prices for the hosters to charge. Now a large percentage was going to the people who developed the online method, and the hosters were seeing about 20-30% in the end, which was easily thousands over the time they hosted. I know someone who hosted lobbies for the first month for those people, and he made like $14,000. From one months work, 3-4 hours a day, 5 nights a week.

iHcJames attributed the release of *Project Rainbowzzz*, which was one of the tools used by an underground modding group, to in-fighting within one hacking/modding teams, revolving around one members' expulsion on accusations of misconduct. He saw it as a mark of the fracturing and secrecy of the hacking and modding community that *Project Rainbowzzz* could be hidden, and subsequently released – it was symptomatic of the fractured and secretive community structures. As retribution the ejected modder obtained the software directly from the team's servers, decompiled it and posted the files onto a number of modding forums. Despite quick patching on Microsoft's part, the released code was sufficient to allow others insight into the processes involved and to potentially modify this to circumvent the subsequent security checks. The release of *Project Rainbowzzz temporarily* subverted this business model until the new security patch prevented the majority from connecting to *XBL*.

iHcJames was adamant that the modding teams were swiftly able to reassert their business, 'There's a newer version [of Rainbowzzz] available that overcomes all of the challenges [that Microsoft introduced], but that's secure and they've tightened up their security enormously'.

While teams worked independently from one another there appeared to be aspects of sharing, where information or *hints* were given but not fully explained – the donor always asserting their authority or mastery. This was the case with iHcJames' own method for connecting a *JTAG* / *RGH* online, 'I found it

independently but was given pointers by other people'. He said that this was one of the advantages of reputation, that files and information are often passed on anonymously – perhaps by those who appreciate his work or members of underground modding teams – and that those able to demonstrate their aptitude were often spontaneously given access to materials that others were not able to – they simply dropped out of the ether.

> The people that really know what they're doing are an insular community. If you know what you're doing you just end up in that group who knows what they're doing. And they sometimes share stuff with each other.

It is not the case of an explicit group, but a sense of equivalence and professionalism based on reputation. One assumes that in the large part, through the maintenance of the boundaries between leechers, the public, and the top of the tree, those in the privileged category are able to limit the distribution of all of the tools that they develop – hence the relatively little known about a tool such as *Project Rainbowzzz* prior to its leak. The fractured community may share information, but it retains the capacity to keep a great deal private. The hands-on imperative has distorted into individual silos of knowledge.

Reputation, access to the diffuse group, and the access to the information that this conferred, was obtained though a number of means: releasing technically astute software or evidence of its expertise; demonstrating knowledge and reliability upon forums; and the signalling of correct markers such as maintaining a professional image across social media and any personal websites. These behaviours 'prove that you're not a leech – someone who'll just download something and put it on your *JTAG*' and therefore was a marker of authentic illicit modder behaviour. iHcJames illustrated an example of this with reference to the inclusion of illicit knowledge hidden in plain view on public forums:

> …what we do is something really funny, like when I had the Halo four encryption key, LETSALLPLAYNICE, in my bio for everyone to read. With it you could decrypt all of the game resources in the private beta build. But in order to do this you needed to have the private beta, have the skills to decompile it and to extract the important information. It was a joke that only a few in the know would understand.

In terms of scale iHcJames thought that there were perhaps a thousand people who 'mod seriously', 'the amount of people that code good stuff is no larger than 100-200 globally, with a lot of them in the US', and in contrast 'if you want to get down to the nitty-gritty assembly stuff there's no more than 20-30 people'.

REFLECTION FOUR: COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS OF MODDING/HACKING

It may be more useful to differentiate between modding and hacking, in this reflection, as the two related practices utilise different sets of skills and approaches which alter their meaning and motivations. Modding within this context refers to the act of altering game content through the utilisation of hacks, by contrast hacking is therefore the process by which the processes are created, discovered or articulated. Hacking is predominantly akin to glitching as the act of identifying glitches, while modding can be conceptually linked to the utilisation and development of glitches. The implication here is not that modders only use and hackers only create, but that each has a predisposition to the relevant mode of production/utilisation.

In terms of both hacking and modding both phenomena can be clearly attributed to the rhetoric of pathogen – they explicitly contravene the limitations of use and, through duplication, or distribution have the capacity to undermine. They are reliant on technologies that are likely to constitute violations of the circumvention aspects of copyright law, while the processes of decompilation, reverse engineering and alteration are likely to violate other aspects of copyright law. They impact upon the experience of the games but also their commercial functions – through the creation and subsequent use of open systems they enable piracy and alteration that undermines the need to purchase new releases.

Resistance: The original motivations for the *Xbox 360* hardware hacks align strongly with a rhetoric of resistance, they were conducted in part in response to the perceived restriction of a potentially powerful and egalitarian product – a low cost personal computer. This is seen with Huang's vocalisation of his objection to the Microsoft monopoly and the subsequent *XBMC* and then later the *Xbox 360 Free60.org* community, whose remit was to open up the system and allow Linux to be ported onto it.

Despite the motivation of the facilitating technologies and processes articulated by Huang in particular, discussion with hackers demonstrates a much less resistant approach. Their actions, such as Domke's development of the *JTAG* hack, appear not to come from an attempt to change, but through a masterful assumption of access and authority – simply engaging with the system and technology as they wish irrespective of restrictions placed on access and interaction.

In relation to *modding* this resistance is inverted, much like the glitching act or grief-play the modded game is dependent on the norm – it is defined in contrast to the normal operation of the game and its structures and attempts to offer an alternate mode of play, not a permanent replacement.

Those using mods, although less-so those conducting them, appeared to be generally aligned with the prelusory goals and attitude of the game, many were highly dedicated players that saw the use of a modded environment as an interesting temporary extension of play. In contrast those producing mods appear to have different focuses, including the generation of income, the spreading of entertaining play modes, and the creation of identity and reputation as seen with the branding of mods and the demand to quickly mod and release like when glitching.

Software development, such as that conducted by iHcJames takes on a hybrid position. It utilises and repurposes the existing text and requires its continuation, but introduces new functionality that has the capacity to alter it for extended periods (or even perpetuity). This can be seen with the unpatched status of *IHC.DLL*, despite the instruction of how to prevent it. Curiously however, while some hardware hackers still aligned with counter-cultural nature of the hacker-ethics the same was not true of modders or software producers – they did not view their actions as in opposition to the games, but instead saw them as semi-legitimate uses. As creative amplifications, not negations.

Mastery: While the hardware hackers that I spoke with were often rather non-assuming, to the extent of not appreciating the negative potential of their actions, or attempting to persuade that the damage was minimal (as seen with Domke's reflection of the benign nature of hacks), within the hacker community the meritocracy ensured that they received status and recognition – and part of this was based on the illicit or malign capacity of the hack or mod. Modders would frequently speculate as to how much a specific modification would alter the equilibrium of play, and the posturing and branding communicated identity. The hacks and mods were conducted in denial of the authority of the copyright holder or of law – modders and hackers would assert that what they were doing was appropriate because they were doing nothing illegal, which is not necessarily true. Others clung onto a mantra of fair-use, explaining that what they were doing was protected under this as an intellectual activity. In the large part modding and hacking simply just took place – the protagonists asserted their authority irrespective of the power of rule and censure. In this regard their attitude is one that resonates with the notion of mastery.

Within the software development context mastery is also important – mastery of the system and an understanding of the processes involved. This is partly dependent on a level of technical expertise, but also an approach – a willingness to actually interact with videogames in a transgressive manner, but also the opportunities, such as accessing the *Xbox 360* development disc ISO. In this example iHcJames uses these techniques and abilities to assert mastery: mastery of the system, mastery of access – which in turn gives preferential information. Unlike the glitchers however this is not an egalitarian mastery – mastery held by equals – but a position where the developers are placed at disadvantage and the hacker takes mastery of the space. Yet paradoxically, for all of iHcJames' assumption of mastery within the gamespace, of doing and taking and interacting, his primary goal is to have the mastery recognised by the system that exists – to enter into dialogue with members of the games industry and to eventually enter it for employment.

Hardware Hackers might well approach the *Xbox 360* from this perspective – changing it from an entertainment device into a personal computer. It fundamentally rejects all of its core affordances – the very notion of player, of consumer becomes irrelevant in relation to the hardware hack – providing it is used for a different purpose. When used to modify a game, or for piracy, it does not reject the restrictions of the game – it exploits and utilises them – it alters, it modifies, it hacks. They adopt practices that avoid capture and are therefore restricted.

Identity: in turn the deployment and use of hacks and mods contains its own aspect of technicity. There are authentic and inauthentic ways of hardware hacking (piracy vs. productivity, botched processes vs. excellence of production, unreliable trader vs. extended aftercare support), modding and software coding (plagiarising code vs. giving props, the speed of release, the spectacularity of the modification). This in turn creates the benchmarks for three separate but overlapping communities: *Hardware hackers*, who generally locate themselves around *XboxHacker.org* and *Free60.org*, and are often critical of the practices of both game modders and to a lesser extent coders (the coders demonstrate understanding of the system that the modders need not). Part of the hardware hacker community has realised the commercial potential for their work – such as through the creation of hacking teams and the industrial production of hacking components e.g. Team Executor's *Coolrunner* boards. Individuals associated with the commercial teams are secretive and distant, with the assumption being that they are pseudonyms of individuals active within the more authentic hacking circles; *Coders*, who appear a diffuse community linked through an understanding of the various skills of their globally-distributed peers, such as iHcJames. This community appears to be becoming further reticent due to the increasing commercial significance of their work and becoming enmeshed within protective and secretive illicit enterprises. These individuals share much of the alignment and approach that hackers demonstrate but focus on the code and systems instead of the hardware - as a result their actions place them in direct line-of-sight of the panoptic security systems. Unlike hardware hackers their activities connect and interrupt; Finally there are *Software Modders* who reside on websites such as *Se7ensins.com* who utilise the techniques developed by the hardware hackers and coders. Their process of distinction is focused upon other modders, and they are frequently critical of the production and content of other mods. Once again there are attempts to commercialise on these through the creation of paid-for access mods, and on a scale that bridges the coder and modder communities in the case of those facilitating more recent mods and connections on the *CoD* series.

These then create a set of identities based upon competence, understanding and their alignment with commercialism – those that display competence are given the most status, as seen with the notion of the 'top of the tree', the ill-defined and secretive individuals that display expertise and exploit it accordingly, for profit or reputation. At a lower level individuals are keen to highlight their identity as a modder, coder, or hacker. This is seen throughout the forums that locate these practices, on the community awards and labels attributed to members, highlighting that to be seen as a hacker, a modder, or a coder confers status and subcultural capital. It informs an identity and offers opportunities for the individual.

Mods have frequent branding, recognition of contribution and are careful to assert authority and identity. Even the function of the lobbies (10th in particular) focus on the communication of hierarchy and identity, to differentiate a player from another – the accumulation of markers of skill, prestige icons etc. that they ultimately may not truly deserve. Paradoxically the widespread use of these mods had the inverse impact – anybody who cared enough about 10th prestige markers had them – there became uniformity of expertise.

Creativity: Within modding and coding communities there is frequent reference to the notion of creativity and extension – the games are viewed as platforms that are then distorted and altered through a playful and illicit process, much like Dovey and Kennedy's observations of early game development (2006, pp. 43-62). Although the tools and processes used are often systematic and limited, as illustrated within the ISO modding chapter, they afford a wide range of outcomes, of which playing the game by its conventional manner is only one. In modding, the process is necessarily systematic and predictable, while the outcomes are not, they are the product of the juxtapositions and contexts, It is produced through a regurgitation and replication of processes devised by others – like the act of compiling a mix-tape. When modders speak of their work they emphasise the creativity of the mod, the enjoyment of altering the game as they wish and then the enjoyment of playing in this altered iteration. The creative takes precedence. Hardware hackers and coders were less emphatic about the process of creativity – they both spoke of the creativity that their productions afforded, but did not necessarily assert their activities as a creative process. Instead they emphasised the understanding and awareness that their practices represented.

Carnival: Hacking, modding and coding resonates with the notion of the carnivalesque. They each represent an invitation to misrule and a challenge of authority supported through extensive documentation and promise of different pleasures and power-relations. The open system of the *JTAG* is capable of doing anything and therefore it is prone to periodic manifestations of chaos and hostility. Despite this capability however the security countermeasures deployed by Microsoft have reduced this universality, although releases such as *IHC.DLL* re-establish it. This has had the impact of shifting the use of mods, hacks, and software into less visible and less connected spheres. As a result the mod/hack loses its communality and becomes fragmented and individualised – outside of occasional flourishes of misrule it becomes used for piracy, revenue generation, and modding practices within the minority. It therefore lacks the universality of the carnival that glitching still retains.

Conclusion: in addition to these rhetorics discussed here what is of particular note is the extent to which hardware hacking, modding, and coding has generated a spontaneous commercial ecosystem – where products and access is made available at a cost. While it is understandable that hardware hacks that allow the circumvention of copyright controls have a monetary value attributable to the savings that a user might make over utilising software piracy, what is perhaps more novel is the extent to which individuals are prepared to pay to access the markers of status within the community and to unlock new modes of play: paying to unlock items, or simply to enter and use a modified game experience. This can ultimately be attributed to the success and persuasiveness of the rhetorical persuasion techniques (see Fogg) seen within contemporary console releases – such as prestige tokens, gamer scores and awards – and it demonstrates

the willingness for players to have their play scrutinised and verified by others (whether misleadingly or not).

Within such a context those conducting commercial mods and prestige services for instance are simply meeting a demand that is not offered by the game developers, and suggests that there is significant demand for radical creative tools within games (allowing far greater customisation and alteration that currently available) but also the compelling nature of being seen to play authentically. Neither of these demands should necessarily be read as opposition or misalignment with the game but a product of its compelling seductiveness – those driving the development and deployment of hacks and modifications are players that wish to experience more, or be seen to be closer aligned. Those profiteering from this demand are merely using the hacks and modifications as untapped sources of revenue.

REFLECTION FIVE: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON COUNTERPLAY RHETORICS

Contexts

The aim of this study was to offer a series of images that expose the manifestations, the cultures of production, and the meanings attributed to counterplay forms, and as a corollary to consider the transgressive rhetorics that contextualise this. This has been done in such a way as to present a range of often contradictory or oppositional readings that misalign with the conventional meaning and purposes attributed to counterplay. In so doing this challenges some of the assumptions of the pleasures of counterplay, and implies ways in which these pleasures could be better managed to mitigate against the damage counterplay acts.

The following key observations emanate from this study:

Observation One: Seduction Instead of Resistance

While scholars such as Flanagan (2009) and Anthropy (2012) present compelling narratives for the critical or oppositional use of games, such as in Schleiner's *Velvet Strike* modification, and Aarseth (2007) frames transgressive play as a temporary reprieve from the tyranny of the game, it appears that within the more general gaming populations these concepts find little recognition. These counterplayers do not appear particularly critical of the games that they are seen to oppose, alter or subvert – they felt no need to resist, nor any particularly strong sense of tyranny and repression. Instead those hacking, pirating, modding, glitching and griefing upon the games expressed a seduction with their form, and occasionally a near deification of those who create them. Their activity resonates much more with the tribal consumer who occasionally decides to plunder rather than the rebel who attacks. Put simply, the rebel would be better served leaving the game or creating their own (as Anthropy advocates) rather than attempting to corrupt an existing one. Perhaps what is most important here however is the subtext – that the seduced care deeply about the games that they are seen to damage, and that as a result punitive sanctions are unlikely to be

fruitful. As I discovered these counterplayers merely dust themselves off and start again, using a new console, a new id, a new project. Instead it would be sensible for the developers and publishers to utilise this seduction further – further embracing the immaterial labour of the biopolitical empire. Many of the counterplayers would willingly embrace the terms of the developer providing that it was perceived as a legitimate recognition, and this in turn leads to the second outcome;

Observation Two: The Demand for Acceptance and Individualisation

An additional observation was the widespread urgency with which griefers, glitchers, modders, and hackers were intent on developing an identity and to receive recognition. This is seen at all levels of play and counterplay and is (for me at least) a rather curious approach to play. For many online game play became a major aspect of socialisation and leisure – it was a predominant way of maintaining friendships and enjoying time away from work/study. Yet the markers within games to create ids, clans, and teams, combined with the functions of *self-monitoring* and *surveillance* (see Fogg, 2003 or Bogost, 2007), such as the *CoD* multiplayer Kill / Death ratios, were becoming compelling marks of status and belonging within this online sphere. Players did not wish to appear lacking both within the context of their peers, and within the wider community – and therefore the idea of having a visible identity and for it to project the right kind of messages is core. In addition to this, players wished to be able to express individuality within the gamespaces, to the extent that this contributed to the deployment of grief-play, and undoubtedly informed the adoption of roles such as hacker, modder, or glitcher. This shows that multiplayer games are not simply spaces for play, as advocates of the magic circle might suggest, but that games are simply additional spaces on which contemporary life occurs. As in ordinary life players wish to be seen as individuals and to be regarded in positive manners. Where the games offer insufficient or inappropriate means to enable this players adopt their own strategies. Yet again this contains nothing oppositional to the games – it is social and contextual.

Observation Three: The Desire for Recognition

Building from observations one and two, which explore the relationship to the game and to other players, many of the counterplayers, particularly glitchers, but also iHcJames expressed a desire for recognition from the developers/publishers that became a prime motivation for counterplay. While their productivity enabled the creation of identity and acceptance from their player peers, what they were primarily looking for was engagement from the developers, and the hope of becoming part of the videogame productive capacity. In the case of chaoticPERFECTION and iHcJames the type of engagement was immaterial – while ideally they would enter into the developers on positive terms, being contacted due to transgressions was preferable to no contact at all. While it is not suggested that this is a particularly common motivation for counterplay it is an interesting one – the counterplayer does so in order to feel the power of the rule,

and feel part of the pleasure of its wielding. Interestingly this returns to the very 'capture of counterplay' defined by De Peuter and Witheford (2005) in their original definition of the term. The attraction of development as a profession is something that was iterated by the vast majority of counterplayers (once again asserting the seduction of the medium), and that counterplay was either seen as a way of getting the attention of the developers leading to employment (chaoticPERFECTION, iHcJames), or that counterplay offered experiences like those that a developer was perceived to have (accessing out-of bounds areas within games, making sense of the operation of hardware and software), or simply the asserting of authority in the absence of the power of the game operator. In each of these cases the idea of the developer is prevalent, and the actions are conducted in relation to that privileged role.

Observation Four: Player Productivity, Access and Entitlement

While at the beginning of this study the notion of *Game 3.0* and the distinction between game production and consumption was evident it appears from my discussions with players and counterplayers that *production is everywhere* – that videogames have moved into a context where players (as fans) will produce, share and inscribe, irrespective of the invitation from the developers or designers. As a result the invitation of games to allow creativity, as much as calls to cease and desist or copyright challenges on YouTube have little basis or significance to these communities. Production is the way of being, it is a common cultural practice, and through it barriers and protections do not resonate. Once again the productivity – whether perceived as oppositional or sympathetic – has little bearing as counterplay. It is a mode of communication that has significance within player populations and (predominantly) youth groups. The regulation of this practice is as logical as the censuring of a telephone call. This player population has little regard for the rules of access and ownership of the gamespaces – while they were conscious of the existence of rules (and laws) none knew of the implications of their actions, nor had actually looked at the terms of service or code of conduct for the systems they inhabited. Instead they refereed to a set of normative social rules – those constructed and maintained by the groups that they identified, and outside of these access and interaction was an entitlement. Counterplayers simply did what they wished with the systems and viewed this capacity to alter, to bend, to break, as pleasures offered by the product – not necessarily missing in the product.

Observation Five: Of Laddish Culture and the Carnival

Finally what became evident from my experiences of the endemic examples of hostility and antagonism within multiplayer games was that videogames frequently offer spaces of carnivalesque – including the laddish culture that Ocelot mentions (see p.92). Within the ambiguous otherness of the spaces almost each individual I spoke with admitted to occasionally behaving in oppositional or counter ways – griefing, conducting glitches, using game-breakers when they became public knowledge, or simply through the

forceful assertion of dominance in games. The universal antagonism was evident it also contained a ritual laughter and a communal aspect – it invites others to laugh, others to emulate, and does so despite of the risk of intervention and sanction.

Summary

What this study ultimately exposes is the widespread seduction of players and counterplayers. Their activities are defined in violation of the rules and expectations of the games but this does not translate into a rejection of the games in their eyes. What becomes apparent are the ways that counterplay acts are not necessarily oppositional in intent, although they are certainly by form. They are not the articulation of transgressive play – not a reaction to the tyranny of the game, but simply an inhabitation and expansion of the gamespace. The biopolitical makes most sense here – the multitude who purchase, inhabit and utilise games are quite happy where they are. They are simply learning how to express themselves and interact with the spaces. They use games as means of self-expression. They are utilising videogames as platforms for socialising, leisure, entertainment and profit – and as such it is my belief that their activities resonate strongest with the rhetorics of identity, mastery, creativity and carnival (but not resistance).

This study repositions counterplay, disputing the reductive rhetoric of pathogen and the celebratory and romantic accounts that position it in conceptual models such as *noble resistance*. Yet, on further reflection of the prevailing rhetorics that appear to resonate – *identity, mastery, creativity, and carnival* – it is possible that other (speculative) patterns exist. By this I mean that it might be useful to question to what extent these rhetorics appear to be affiliated, or particularly associated with videogame play (with its rule structures and perspectives), and to what extent they articulate wider cultural concerns or epistemological frames. To question which might be considered *more* substantive and distilled rhetorics of *counterplay* than others.

It is my growing belief that the wish to present a coherent identity (as expressed through the rhetoric of identity) might more usefully be considered a human social desire: to be regarded as an individual, yet belonging to a group. The rhetorics of identity that are expressed through counterplay may simply represent expressions of that general human need *within* counterplay as opposed to something particularly affiliated *with counterplay*. From a perspective where play becomes recognised as a platform for self-expression it would be logical that human desires, *social goods* (Brummet, 2006, p.7), are the thing that is expressed through play in all of its forms. This would be true of conventional play and equally so within its non-normative equivalents. Counterplay then might simply attempt to say something different about the identity being projected, or present a different perspective on the idea of identity - and thus we return to notions of subculture (Thornton, 1995). While this cyclical observation is interesting it does not necessarily offer any new perspectives for game studies, nor develop our understanding of non-normative practices. Play and counterplay simply say something about identity as identity is a significant cultural motif – it is who we are, or who we are understood as being.

I am tempted to raise a similar challenge against the rhetoric of creativity: that the novel and unpredictable qualities of play, its ability to propose solutions and exist beyond the realms of convention (whether one adopts the concept of the magic circle or not) becomes articulated and described as *creativity*. That creativity becomes an ill-fitting label applied when counterplayers (and players) attempt to describe and normatively justify their actions (but flee from the idea that their behaviour may embrace the transgressive). Creativity is a far more palatable notion within society than that of violation, transgression and rule breaking, let alone antagonism and vindictiveness, yet ultimately, for me, these labels describe interrelated concepts. I fear that the association of counterplay with creativity (which we should remember only received limited recognition within the counterplayers interviewed), might betray the lack of appropriate terminology available for its description and or the pervasive (bio)power of the rhetoric of pathogen – *even influencing the ways that counterplayers rationalise and discuss their actions*.

In other words it might be reasonable to hypothesise that the use of the *rhetoric of creativity* is an attempt to sterilise and diffuse the danger and contagion attributed to the counter, to wash away the pathogenic dirt associated with the concept. Does the deployment of the rhetoric of creativity say anything but present a challenge to the rhetoric of pathogen? Is this why, when explored in detail, there is little evidence for it? That it is a rhetorical foil and little else. From my experiences as a counterplay participant (or perhaps one should be bold and say counterplayer) I can recognise that there were times where *flashes of creativity* became apparent and occasions where the counter / antagonistic *facilitated creative acts*, but for me the pleasures and enjoyment emanated primarily from *the counter* and not particularly *the creative*. The reality was that much of what was done, whether griefing, glitching, hacking or modding, was systematic and repetitive – it might have been creative *at first* when being defined or pioneered, but questionably so when replicated for the umpteenth time. While the creativity diminished over time the pleasure of the counter did not. This leads me to dispute whether the *creative aspect* that was a compelling rhetoric or whether it too expresses something of the social – that it is an apology rather than a compelling motive.

Instead, for me, looking back over the thesis and reflecting on my experiences it is the rhetorics of mastery and carnival that *persistently effervesce* and appear to offer potential avenues for understanding counterplay more generally. It was mastery and the carnival that caused the *smirk of enjoyment* that compelled me to return to counterplay, comparatively absent from identity, or creativity. For some reason mastery and carnival feel like the prevailing and meaningful rhetorics, although it is perhaps difficult to articulate why. Frustratingly (perhaps), this returns us to the central ambiguity of play, and in abstract terms a similar conclusion to that of Sutton-Smith's attempts to characterise play (2001). Sutton-Smith argued that play holds an *adaptive variability*, that its meanings shift and evade any rigid interpretation, leaving the researcher constantly one step away from the meaning, or as he puts it '…a metaphorical mélange, representing the possibility of a truth yet to be discovered' (2001, p. 218). Perhaps a similar mischievous nebulosity is at the core of the counter – that play and counterplay are indistinct (but of course this is one of the major themes that can be traced through this thesis).

Perhaps then it is no surprise then that the rhetorics of mastery and carnival, characterised as *individualistic taking and self-assertion*, and *unilateral communal antagonism* respectively, resonate so very much within the counterplay act. Both of these practices are deeply imbricated with rules and their violation, and the shifting no-mans-land or spiral of transgression that they define. The assertion and taking within the rules is play, the acceptable communal antagonism sportsmanship, but similar practices on the other side of the barrier of acceptability are mastery and carnival. Perhaps the meanings of counterplay cannot be understood other than in terms that embrace transgression – that the pleasures of counterplay exist wholly in the violation? That counterplay is adaptive variability that trespasses into violation. The meaning of counterplay might best exist somewhere within or through the *tingle of transgression*, such as *individually* as in the rhetoric of mastery, or *collectively* in the rhetoric of the carnival.

Counterplay becomes an act or process that facilitates a wide range of outcomes and uses, but tied to the pleasures of these uses – *the exploration, the creation of new experiences, or the domination of others* – is an awareness of countering, of challenging, of violation and the selective and knowing breaking of rule(s). Counterplay becomes counter-behaviour expressed within and through play, that selectively adopts some or none of the normative game rules, and may work on varying levels of across a continuum of individuality or collectivism. Counterplay can oppose all, it may focus on individual outcomes and desires, alternatively it may work on a communal group level – these become the factors that inform the observance and repetition of rhetorics of mastery and the carnival.

From this perspective counterplay becomes apparently awash with ambiguity, if not contradiction, it is not necessarily motivated by or ascribed with any reliable meaning other than its countering through and within play. The counter is not necessarily political or even rational – it is simply behaviour or practices that embrace and are influenced by the pleasures of violation. It is the pleasure of the Übermensch who opposes the restrictive boundaries of conventional behaviour, it is the pleasure of the giddy descent into carnival, or the rush to the head when teabaggin' or illicitly dominating an opponent.

Such a (subjective) line of analysis allows the proposal of one last speculative view of counterplay. An approach that conflates each of these five rhetorics of transgression, *bar creativity*, into a continuum that is articulated through the *scale* or *scope* of allegiance / identification – i.e. whether the counterplay is conducted in reference to the predilection and choice of an individual (mastery), that of a diffuse and temporary group (carnival), a distinct and semi-permanent group (aligning with notions of subculture), or with a macro-level and therefore abstract group or cause (resistance). In this example counterplay can be understood as the act / process, which is subject to different rhetorical frames depending on who recognises the values and pleasures of the act – and in turn how the act is shared with and communicated to those who encounter it. Crucially this way of thinking about counterplay, which resonates with J. Patrick Williams (2011, p.93) work, allows for the reintegration of resistance or resistant counterplay that I feel *should* or *might exist* (quite separately from its romantic interpretation), although certainly on the extreme fringe.

So, what becomes of counterplay – what is the basis of its counter-ness? The counter might best be understood as the mischievous / antagonistic aspect that sits at the heart of counterplay (and in more benign forms also celebrated as the ambiguous heart of play). It is this that drives or colours each of the rhetorics and is seen within the counterplay acts. While the specifics of the counter are indefinite, they are subject to change and may simply be understood as *that which works against*. One might frame the counter as creativity – as a process / function that eradicates stasis and introduces renewal within systems, alternatively the same notion may be described as an attitude of entitlement, a willingness to take or to go beyond. The difference between creativity and entitlement becomes the deployment of a particular persuasive rhetoric – whether the generative aspect of a behaviour is emphasised, or that of its audacious and assertive mastery. These become different ways of describing that which rejects the planned and orthodox and brings about the potential of change.

From this perspective the counter (as willingness to challenge or oppose), the scope of allegiance (whether individual, group or macro), and the overlapping outcomes and affordances (becoming closer to the game, creating new experiences with the game, generating and maintaining identity, relishing the domination of others) each combine to offer the meaning to and of the counterplay act. The observations of seduction, the desire for acceptance and individualisation, the desire for recognition, the sense of entitlement, the call of laddish culture of the carnival, combined with the myriad of player productivity uses each begin to communicate the same ideas, or originate from a common point. Counterplay is therefore a concept that accommodates and embraces both ambiguity and apparent contradiction, it is the pleasure of shifting allegiances and actively playing with and against the rules. Which rules are being challenged at any one time is entirely up to the counterplayer, and it is perhaps this that is the most useful parting glimpse the power and meanings of contemporary videogame counterplay.

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