

Set DeusEx.JCDentonMale bCheatsEnabled True –  
Cheating as a Way to Enhance Player Experience in *Deus Ex*

Julian Kücklich  
University of Ulster  
julian@kuecklich.de

**Abstract**

Cheating is a widespread practice in digital game play. However, the majority of ‘official’ cheat codes, i.e. those sanctioned by the games’ publishers, are for single-player games. The reason for this is obvious: in multiplayer games, cheating creates conflict, and a lot of effort goes into preventing players from cheating. In single-player games, on the other hand, players who use cheat codes are cheating no-one but themselves. Cheating in single-player games allows us to study the practice of ‘manipulative play’ outside of the moral context that the term ‘cheating’ suggests. Instead, it enables us to approach cheating as an aesthetic phenomenon. Cheats have the power to radically alter players’ experiences of a game, and we can regard them as aesthetic strategies aimed at extending the spectrum of experiences offered by digital games. Using *Deus Ex* as an example, this paper will formulate a theory of cheating in single-player games, borrowing from the terminology of semiotics, systems theory, and literary theory. Furthermore, it will attempt to classify cheats into different categories in order to facilitate future inquiries into the phenomenon of cheating.

**1. Introduction**

Everybody who plays video games knows how widespread the practice of ‘cheating’ is. You read about it in video game magazines, in fan forums, and on websites like *IGN* or *Moby Games*. Game shops try to sell you glossy game guides and dedicated cheating hardware along with the games. You can’t even search for information on a game on Google without being offered cheat codes, frequently even within the first ten hits. Despite the fact that we don’t have any reliable statistical data about the prevalence of cheating, it seems obvious that cheating is an integral part of gaming culture.

We know, however, that the providers of online games spend considerable amounts of money on the prevention of cheating. Quoting game designer Ralph Koster, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004) estimate that "tracking down cheaters and hackers can occupy approximately half of all the resources spent on maintaining and improving an online game" (280). And we know that cheating generates enough revenue to make it a profitable business for publishing houses like Brady Games and Prima. *GameFAQs*, one of the most renowned cheating websites, is visited by “900,000 unique gamers [...] each day,” according to its owner, CNET Networks (2006).

However, there is hardly any research on the practice of cheating in video games, although even game researchers admit that they cheat when they are playing for research purposes. A survey among game researchers that I conducted in May 2006 found that 48 percent of the respondents consult game guides or walkthroughs regularly, and only 33 percent never use cheat codes to increase health or resources. Cheating seems to be one of those things that everybody does, and nobody talks about. In this paper I argue that we need to start talking about cheating if we want to understand the range of experiences that video games have to offer.

The practice of cheating in single-player games is especially interesting in this context, because it allows us to study the practice of ‘manipulative play’ outside of the moral context that the term ‘cheating’ suggests. Instead, it enables us to approach cheating as an aesthetic phenomenon. Rune Klevjer has pointed out that “the gaming experience [...] characteristically is an aesthetics of control.” An aesthetics of digital games must therefore take into account the ‘illegal’ modes of enhancing or diminishing the player’s control. Similar

to the way video recorders have changed the experience of watching films by giving the viewer more control over the viewing process, cheats can radically alter the experience of playing a game.

Part of the problem in talking about the practice of cheating is that we do not have a terminology for the various practices of cheating yet. It isn't even entirely clear what should be considered cheating, and what is simply an extension of gameplay. Consider walkthroughs, which supply players with step-by-step instructions on how to progress in a game. A typical walkthrough may tell a player how to solve a puzzle, how to defeat a 'boss', or how to find her way through a maze. Clearly, this gives the player an advantage that players without access to a walkthrough don't have. However, this does not have any impact on anybody else, so we could say that she is cheating no-one but herself.

In the popular discourse about cheating, those that do not condone these practices often make reference to the game designer's intention. A case in point is an article by Jeremiah Kaufman (2000) on *adventurecollective.com*, in which he asserts that "the creators of the game [*Maniac Mansion*] have put a lot of time and effort into the puzzles and want people to enjoy discovering the solutions, not race through the creation with a hint book in left hand and a mouse in the right hand (or vice versa)." It would be easy to dismiss this as a case of falling prey to the Intentional Fallacy (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946), but Kaufman actually makes an important point by raising the issue of replayability. As he points out:

Adventure games are a special breed of game, in that figuring them out is most of the fun. In a game of another genre such as *Quake*, for example, a person can easily cheat to see the end, but afterwards that person can play the game from beginning to end without cheating, accepting the challenge that the game creates. That, however, is impossible with an adventure game. Once the only puzzles which belong to an adventure game are part of your physical memory there is no way to forget them. In other words, the game is ruined beyond repair.

One of the first differentiations we have to make when we talk about cheating is between different kinds of obstacles that cheats can help the player in overcoming. A puzzle that requires the player to combine certain items in a particular way, a type common in adventure games such as *Maniac Mansion* (Lucasfilm Games, 1987), is indeed 'ruined' once the player knows the solution. An action game such as *Quake* (id Software, 1996), on the other hand, will not cease to be challenging because the player uses a cheat code that makes her invincible or supplies her with unlimited ammunition. This is because the 'solution' to the kind of obstacles that a game like *Quake* confronts the player with, is not based on knowledge but on skill.

Whether using walkthroughs is considered cheating or not may be dependent on the game genre, and the intensity of use. Playing an adventure game like *Maniac Mansion* 'with a hint book in left hand and a mouse in the right hand' would entirely defeat the purpose of the game, and may be considered a form of cheating. In action games such as *Quake*, the actual challenge lies in overcoming the opponents the game pits against the player, so the use of a walkthrough may be considered legitimate. This attitude is summed up by South African game blogger Rooi Willie (2006) when he writes: "there's a time to use cheats or walkthroughs, and a time not to."

This draws attention to the fact that there are no hard and fast rules about what constitutes cheating and what doesn't. Rather, cheating is socially constructed in the discourses about games. This is also true for the academic discourse about games. Consider the following statement by Espen Aarseth (2003): "While it is understandable that academics with not too

much time on their hands find it difficult to spend the hundreds of hours necessary to master a game, and therefore give in to the temptation to zip through a game [...] using the walkthrough, or (even worse) using the no-clipping or god-mode cheats, it is hard to imagine excellence of research arising from such practices. Where is the respect for the game? And, more importantly, how is the flavor of the game kept intact?”

This moralistic statement betrays a naïve belief in the game designer as a romantic author with absolute control over her creation, which is remarkably similar to the way the designer’s intention is used as a point of reference in the popular discourse about games. Of course an important part of socialisation through games consists of the inculcation of cultural values of fairness, and for that reason nobody can be blamed for feeling that cheating is somehow inherently wrong, even when it takes place largely outside the social arena, as is the case with single-player games.

However, this attitude makes it hard to make sense of a fascinating aspect of gaming culture, and it taints even practices that are called cheating but do not actually tamper with the rules of the game. For example, in Germany, graphic depiction of violence is usually removed from foreign games prior to their publication in order to appease the rating board, but the gore can be restored by changing the game’s locale settings. In a similar way, many cheats for games like *Grand Theft Auto* simply modify certain parameters of the game world, turning pedestrians into berserkers, or cars into flying machines.

In fact, cheats seem to have only one thing in common: they change the way players experience the game. They do so either by literally changing the look and feel of the game environment and the objects therein, or by increasing the strength and abilities of the players’ avatars. A working definition of cheats should therefore be based on their ability to change a player’s perception of the game-world, rather than their manipulative or even destructive qualities. Such a definition serves not only as a safeguard for a value-neutral assessment of the subject at hand, but also enables us to distinguish different types of cheats by the ways in which they change the players’ experience of the game.

In the following sections I will use the example of *Deus Ex* (Ion Storm, 2001) to demonstrate the many different ways in which cheats can change the experience of playing video games. In doing so, I will build on a classification of cheats I have developed elsewhere (Kücklich, forthcoming), and suggest new ways of approaching cheats theoretically. In the process, I will make use of terminology borrowed from semiotics, systems theory, and literary theory. This transdisciplinary approach will allow us to understand the complex phenomenon that is cheating in single-player games.

## **2. Cheating in Deus Ex**

*Deus Ex* provides a good example for an inquiry into the nature of cheating in video games because it spans a number of genres and playing styles. Visually, the game is a first-person shooter like *Quake* or *Halo* (Bungie, 2001), and this also informs large parts of the game play. During play, the protagonist, JC Denton, is repeatedly thrown into situations where he must defend himself against attackers, and often the easiest way of doing so is by eliminating them. However, the game usually offers an alternative to the use of brute force, and this often takes the form of using stealth to avoid opponents, similar to the way stealth is used as a game mechanic in games like *Thief* (Looking Glass, 1998) or *Splinter Cell* (Ubisoft Montreal Studios, 2003).

Additionally, the game incorporates elements of adventure and role-playing games. Similar to adventure games such as *Maniac Mansion*, the game requires the player to solve puzzles from time to time, although they are usually not as hard as those found in actual adventure games. The game also borrows elements from role-playing games like *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (Bethesda Softworks, 2003), allowing the player to customize the protagonist to a certain degree, and to upgrade his abilities at regular intervals. Importantly, the game also requires the player to use the resources supplied by the game – money, health, and bio-power – economically, a feature often found in strategy games.

It is also worth pointing out that *Deus Ex* has been published both for the PC and for the Sony PlayStation 2. The latter version, which is often referred to as *Deus Ex: The Conspiracy* (the title of the American re-issue) differs substantially from the PC version, in terms of interface design, map size and graphics. Importantly, the two versions also differ considerably in terms of the type and variety of cheats available.

Since consoles are essentially a ‘closed’ technology, and do not allow players to tamper with game files directly, the number of cheats for console games is usually much smaller. This is also the case in *Deus Ex*. The mode of input is also remarkably different in the two versions. While the PC version relies on the standard input mode of a command line interface, the PlayStation 2 version requires the player to push buttons in a specific sequence to activate bring up a cheat menu that allows the player to choose attributes such as ‘full health’, ‘full energy’ or full ammo’.

### **2.1. Generic Cheats**

Genre is one of the categories by which we can differentiate cheats, thus the generic heterogeneity of *Deus Ex* should be reflected in the cheats available for the game. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Kücklich, 2001), computer game genres can be mapped onto a triangular matrix, according to their specific levels of narrativity, interactivity, and openness. In this model, the term interactivity refers to the frequency of the players’ physical interaction with the game, while openness refers to the range of actions the players can choose from. Thus, a fast-paced action game like *Quake* scores high on interactivity, but has a comparatively low level of openness. This model can serve here as an auxiliary theoretical construction which enables us to discuss game genres in rather simple terms.

Fast-paced action games, including arcade games, first-person shooters, beat-'em-ups and sports simulation games typically have a high level of interactivity, but score rather low on narrativity and openness. ‘Action adventures’ such as *Tomb Raider* (Core Design, 1996) usually oscillate between fast-paced action sequences, exploration, and non-interactive cut-scenes responsible for narrative progression. Typical cheats for action games increase the games’ interactivity by making the players’ avatars invulnerable, supplying them with an infinite amount of ammunition, or giving them access to all the available weapons.

In *Deus Ex*, all of these cheats are present. The game features a ‘god mode’, a standard feature of many first-person shooters that makes the avatar invulnerable to enemy attacks. This cheat has been a staple of the genre since the early 1990s, when it was implemented in the games of id Software such as *Doom* (id Software, 1993) and *Quake*. Typically it is activated by typing ‘god’ or ‘iamgod’ into the console, a command line interface that is either part of the standard interface, or must be activated by unlocking the game’s cheat mode. In *Deus Ex*, this is achieved by pressing ‘T’ (for ‘talk’) during the game, and typing the following:

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Set DeusEx.JCDentonMale bCheatsEnabled True
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There are some cheats that can be used without activating the cheat mode, a feature that is called, somewhat paradoxically, “non-cheat console cheats” on *GameFAQs*, but the large majority of cheats need to have the cheat mode enabled. It is important to note that all these things are generic features of first-person shooters, and are to a certain degree, part of the genre’s definition. It would definitely raise eyebrows among gamers if cheat consoles, and god mode cheats were to be discontinued. For *Deus Ex*, this also allows the game to establish its lineage, as the conventional activation of god mode by typing ‘god’ into the console links the game to its predecessors.

The standard ammunition and weapon cheats are also present. Typing ‘allammo’ into the console refills the player’s ammunition supply. Any weapon, ammunition type, or item can also be created in any desired quantity by using the ‘summon’ or ‘spawnmass’ commands. For example, typing ‘spawnmass WeaponAssaultGun 99’ creates 99 assault rifles. It is also possible to instantly refill JC Denton’s health meter by typing ‘allhealth’. Combined, these cheats enable the player to defeat any opponent in the game.

Other classic cheats in *Deus Ex*, which are commonly found in first-person shooters, include invisibility, fly mode, and ‘no-clipping’ mode, which enables the avatar to walk through walls. Since action games typically require their players to perform rather repetitive tasks, much effort is spent on designing attractive settings (arenas, dungeons, racing courses, etc.) for the actual gameplay. Often, these settings must be ‘unlocked’ by winning a predetermined number of matches or performing a similar feat. Cheats offer a convenient way to circumvent these arbitrary restrictions.

The next set of cheats is borrowed from role-playing games. Role-playing games combine a comparatively high level of openness with narrative progression. If we regard action, adventure and simulation games as genre prototypes, role-playing games and strategy games can be seen as hybrid genres. Therefore, the types of cheats that can be found in these game genres are often a mixture of the cheats found in genre prototypes. Role-playing game cheats, for example, often give the players access to magical items, or allow them to increase their characters’ stats, in addition to walkthroughs and maps that allow for accelerated narrative progression.

As we have already seen that any item can be created in *Deus Ex* by using ‘spawnmass’, it is no longer necessary to dwell on the availability of ‘magical’ items. Since the game is not set in a fantasy world, but in a sci-fi setting, there is no magic per se, but JC Denton is frequently given so-called ‘bio-mods’ which can be integrated in the avatar’s body, due to his cyborg nature. Bio-mods give the avatar ‘magical’ powers, such as invisibility, the ability to breathe under water, etc., and the canisters containing the mods can be created just like any other item in the game.

Similar to the ‘allhealth’ and ‘allenergy’ commands, there is also an ‘allskillpoints’ command, which allows the player to boost JC’s skills to the maximum, removing the need to pursue the character’s development further. This is comparable to typical role-playing game cheats such as ‘setlevel’ in *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, which enables the player to set the level of a character. The rather small number of cheats to do with the role-playing elements of the game corresponds to the relative insignificance of these gameplay elements in *Deus Ex*.

In adventure games such as *Monkey Island* (Lucasfilm Games, 1990), the level of narrativity is significantly higher than in other types of games, while the levels of interactivity and

openness are comparatively low. Therefore, most adventure game cheats serve to remove ‘narrative obstacles’, either by ‘foretelling’ the game's story (walkthroughs), or by offering instant access to higher levels. Interestingly, ‘novelizations’ of adventure games such as Chris Ratcliff's *Sam and Max Hit the Road* (Lucasfilm Games, 1993) can serve as cheating devices, but have aesthetic value independent of the games themselves.

*Deus Ex* has inspired a number of fans to write walkthroughs for the game, but walkthroughs differ considerably from genre to genre. The fact that *Deus Ex* is inspired to a certain extent by adventure games is mirrored in the fact that the FAQs for the game often include detailed instructions for solving the game’s puzzles. It is taken for granted that the player will possess at least a basic level of first-person shooter skills, which will allow her to deal with the game’s opponents, although occasionally a walkthrough will contain warnings like the following: “Be careful; these guys have machine guns AND rockets and strafe meaner than any Quake player I know” (Novakouski, 2002).

On the other hand, walkthroughs usually give detailed solutions for even the simplest puzzles, presumably in an attempt to be as exhaustive as possible. A good example is the following instruction from Novakouski’s walkthrough for *Deus Ex*: “On the wall to your right (in the water) is a door that when opened reveals a valve that will turn off the steam ahead to your right.” It is hardly conceivable that a player that enjoys games like *Deus Ex* will not check the water for hidden doors or objects, but the economy of cheating that walkthroughs are part of dictates that even the minutest details are included.

It is worth noting that the authors of walkthroughs operate within a kind of gift economy, in which the relative value of their products is determined by user votes or a similar system of evaluation. The authors usually do not receive financial remuneration (although websites like *mogelpower.de* have begun to offer monetary rewards for cheats and walkthroughs), but the gain in symbolic capital achieved by creating a popular walkthrough is considerable. Walkthroughs are usually very austere, created with only ASCII characters and no text formatting or images. The only way of embellishing these documents is therefore to add as much detail about the games as possible, in order to make them stand out.

While this general overview of genre-specific cheats is necessarily an oversimplification, and does not take into account differences within genres, it draws attention to the fact that each genre has a set of prototypical cheats which are to some degree expected by the game community. In other words, far from contributing to the ‘corruption’ of games, cheats are part of the definition of game genres.

This holds especially true for highly formalized genres such as the first-person shooter, in which a game can be regarded incomplete if it does not feature a certain set of generic cheats such as those for invulnerability or teleportation. As game producer Gordon Walton points out in regard to *The Sims Online*: “If you leave a cheat long enough, it becomes part of the culture of the game” (quoted in Wayner).

## **2.2. Non-Generic Cheats**

In addition to the cheats already mentioned, there are a number of cheats for *Deus Ex* that cannot be classified by genre. This is significant insofar as we can understand games, with their strong generic conventions, as composed of a basic structure of genre characteristics, which is complemented by a number of traits that are individual, and make the game stand out in comparison to other games. This can also be understood as a reflection of the way games are produced and distributed.

As Kline *et al.* (2003) point out, games are a high-risk product, and generic formulae can be regarded as a way to control risk, insofar as it is often assumed that consumers will rather stick to the ‘tried and true’ than to buy an innovative but potentially flawed product. Nevertheless, developers and publishers will have to make sure that the game has a unique selling point (USP) that makes it easy for customers to differentiate the game from competitors’ products. All of this is achieved by producing games that are generically conservative, but innovative in the way they handle elements such as graphics or sound. This ‘80-20 rule’ seems to be reflected in a game’s cheats as well.

### **2.2.1. Self-referentiality**

One interesting way how cheats can transcend generic conventions is self-referentiality. From the list of cheats for *Deus Ex*, one stands out specifically in this respect: by typing ‘iamwarren’, the player can activate an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) field that will deactivate enemy robots trying to attack to the player’s avatar. The way this cheat is activated is significant insofar as Warren is the first name of one of the lead designers of *Deus Ex*, Warren Spector.

The cheat thus functions as a way of establishing auctorial authority, but at the same time it is a complex signifier of self-aggrandization and self-mockery. Clearly, ‘iamwarren’ echoes ‘iamgod’, one of the traditional formulas for invoking the god mode in first-person shooter games, and this is consistent with Spector’s power over the world of *Deus Ex*<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, this power is put under erasure by the very cheat with which it is evoked, because it makes obvious that anyone can assume this power, by assuming the name of the game’s creator.

This seems especially apposite in the case of *Deus Ex*, because Spector has repeatedly expressed his delight that players have found ways of playing the game that was not intended by its designers. One oft-cited example of this kind of emergent gameplay is ‘proximity mine climbing’, an in-game practice that allows the avatar to scale walls by attaching a proximity mine to it, and jumping on top of it, and repeating this process until he has reached the top.

While this way of playing the game allowed players to shortcut through carefully designed maps, it also is an indicator of player creativity that asserts itself even in games that are extensively playtested to prevent such occurrences from happening. This kind of creativity challenges the control the designers exert over the game, and can be seen as a way for players to assume their share of auctorial control.

### **2.2.2. Cheats and exploits**

Proximity mine climbing supplies an interesting borderline example for what constitutes cheating and what does not. On the one hand, one could argue that this practice is not cheating because it does not break the rules of the game. On the contrary: proximity mine climbing is only possible because the rules of the game explicitly define these mines as objects that a game character can stand on top of. On the other hand, the practice allows players to bypass substantial parts of the game, and could therefore be seen as not in accordance with the rules.

Theoretically, it should be possible to decide whether proximity mine climbing constitutes cheating by using the differentiation between operational, constitutive, and implicit rules that

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<sup>1</sup> This conjecture is not as far-fetched as it may sound. A hidden “Behind the Curtains” menu in *Deus Ex* allows the player to read quotes from team members, which were collected during the production of the game. A quote ascribed to Warren [Spector] reads: “Poof! I am God.”

Salen and Zimmerman (2004) suggest, but the practice seems to cut across these categories. Proximity mine climbing is at once a breach of the game's constitutive rules, which make certain behaviours possible and others impossible, and a breach of its operational rules, insofar as there is no indication that taking shortcuts is a legitimate strategy in *Deus Ex*. However, the implicit rules of first-person shooters, as can be gleaned from player discussion boards and similar forums, tend to regard such practices as legitimate, as the following post from a discussion of a similar practice on *PlanetDeusEx* shows:

I don't see exploiting quirks [sic] in the game as cheating since anyone can do it without having to make any changes to the game. If the ability is there, but not intended by the dev[eloper]s, and anyone can do it once they find out, is it cheating? Exploiting maybe, but not cheating. (Lo Vaquero, 2004)

The distinction between cheats and so-called 'exploits' is often found in the popular discourse about games. Exploits are usually defined as bugs or loopholes in the game design that players can use to their advantage. Wright *et al.* describe one such exploit in the game *Counter-Strike* (Lê *et al.*, 2000) that allows 'dead' team-members to communicate with the living: "[A] fellow CT [counter-terrorist] member who is 'dead' [...] uses the vote command to place the following vote, 'vote Tom Tunnel.' The server issues an automatic response, 'Sorry, DeadEar, Tom Tunnel was not found on this server'" (Wright *et al.*, 2002). In this example, 'Tom Tunnel' is a coded message by which a remaining team-member is advised about the way to approach the adversary team. This behaviour is subsumed under the heading of 'creative player actions' along with game features such as game talk, map creation and 'sprays'.

### 2.2.3. Meta-gaming

But outright cheating can also be creative. In *Deus Ex*, players are given the opportunity to assume authorial control to a much greater extent than suggested by the example of the 'iamwarren' cheat. Typing 'legend' into the console brings up an entire menu of options for players to experiment with. This menu includes an option to load a map, enabling the player to move around freely in the world of *Deus Ex* without using the cumbersome 'open <level name>' cheat, a 'jukebox' that plays the music from all the *Deus Ex* levels, and a number of debugging features such as 'Add/View Dump' and 'Invoke/Show Class'.

The "Behind the Curtains" menu also contains the "Edit Flags" command, which allows players to tamper with the game state by changing the value of certain parameters. This feature has inspired a sort of meta-game, the goal of which is to find out whether the game's storyline can be altered by killing (or resurrecting) certain key characters. A thread on the *Through the Looking Glass* forums begins by describing how a character that was assumed to be invincible can be killed early on in the game:

On the training mission, at the last section where you have to cross the canal. If you put on cheas [sic] you can walk into the control room with Jaime and Bob Page. Once in this room you can freely Kill Bob Page, But not Jaimie [sic]. Using the Legend cheat shows a flag appear named something like BobPage\_dead set to true. (SJamieson, 2002)

A user identified by the handle 'ferret' (2002) than takes up the challenge, and describes his efforts to systematically remove a number of key characters. After killing off Sam Carter, Jaime Reyes, Paul Denton, and Joseph Manderley in the first mission, he concludes that "it's now impossible to finish this mission without summoning me some new characters." Therefore he uses a cheat to go to the next level, and is surprised to "see Anna running towards you for a fraction of a second [sic], until the game realises she's dead."

After a while, this leads to such grave errors in the internal game logic, that the game crashes, and the experiment is aborted. One could conclude that the meta-game is a failure, especially since the story up to that point progresses entirely the same way as it does normally, except for the absence of the characters that have been killed. However, this conclusion would disregard the pleasure that the contributors to the “Killing Bob Page” thread experienced while playing *Deus Ex* in this highly unorthodox way, which is repeatedly signalled by comments such as ‘interesting’ or ‘intriguing’ in regard to ferret’s findings.

#### **2.2.4. Intertextuality**

As Vitas (2001) points out, *Deus Ex* is a game that is full of intertextual references. As he explains, “the use of an ‘ICE-breaker’ is more than a nod in the direction of Gibson’s *Neuromancer*; the mention of a lunar mass-driver accident sounds like something out of Robert Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*; the presence of a character named Morpheus [...] seems to suggest the Wachowski brothers’ *Matrix*; and finally, there are also some mysterious men in black who look and behave, well, like *Men in Black*” (186). And he does not even mention the allusions to canonical texts ranging from the Icarus myth to the Bible, and from Sun Tzu’s *Art of War* to Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologicae*.

The intertextual dimension of *Deus Ex* is also reflected in the cheats available for the game. We have already mentioned the generic cheats that evoke other game texts like *Doom* and *Quake*, but these are merely weak allusions. A more concrete example for an intertextual cheat is the ‘Matrix’ cheat, which is activated by going to the credits screen, and typing ‘thereisnospoon’. This will result in a radically different visual experience, since all the textures in the game will be replaced by glowing green characters scrolling in front of a black background, a style strongly associated with the visual style of the *Matrix* film trilogy.

Again, the way the cheat is activated is significant. First of all, the words “there is no spoon” refer to the dialogue between *Matrix* protagonist Neo with a boy that he meets in the apartment of the nameless Oracle (Gloria Foster). “There is no spoon” has since become a sort of clichéd shorthand for pop Buddhism on the internet and elsewhere, and is often used to suggest that physical reality is merely a reflection of the mind. It is also significant that the cheat is activated by typing ‘blindly’ with only auditory cues as to the efficacy of one’s actions, because it is reminiscent of the way hackers are revered as almost mythical figures with magic powers in both *The Matrix* and *Deus Ex*.

A similarly complex intertextual network is evoked by the ‘tantalus’ cheat, which enables the player to instantly kill any character or monster that is targeted by her avatar. The name of this cheat ostensibly refers to the Tantalus myth, which is an association that is not entirely out of place, considering that the Tantalus myth is often regarded as a variant of the Prometheus myth, and *Deus Ex* has a strong Promethean subtext. However, the actual reference seems to be to the *Star Trek* episode “Mirror, Mirror” (1967), in which a ‘Tantalus field’ is used “to monitor and eliminate enemies from existence with the touch of a button” (“Tantalus field”, 2006).

#### **2.2.5. Codes of technicity**

Another category of cheats warrants our attention because it refers directly to the materiality of the computer, and thus foregrounds the machine-ness of computer game play. *Deus Ex* can be regarded as a game that self-reflexively exhibits the way it entrains the user in a process of “becoming-machine” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) by a number of intra- and extratextual devices, such as the use of the central metaphor of the cyborg. While *Deus Ex* is not the first game to feature a cyborg protagonist, it is certainly a game in which the cyborg identity of the

central character plays a much more important role than it does in most other games. The cyborg metaphor also explains why JC is able to use the bio-modifications he picks up along his way through the game world to change certain aspects of his physique.

The cyborg identity of the protagonist also functions as a marker of the user's technicity. As Dovey and Kennedy (2006) point out, the "connection between human subjectivity and our use of technology has come into even sharper focus as the machinery of computing has been woven ever more closely into the fabric of our everyday lives" (15-16). Their definition of technicity builds on Tomas' (2000) definition of the term as "the social regeneration of ethnic identity under the influence of cyborg-governed processes of *technological* differentiation in marginal late-capitalist creolized technocultures" (175-176, emphasis in original).

While Tomas is writing about the dystopian future depicted in William Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy, Dovey and Kennedy (2006) maintain that "this notion of technical virtuosity, of a particular easy adoption of and facility with technology, is a fundamental aspect of the contemporary ideal subject within the technosphere." But technicity is more than just a facility with technology, it is a concept that encapsulates "the connections between an identity based on certain types of attitude, practices, preferences [...] and the importance of technology as a critical aspect of the construction of that identity" (17).

*Deus Ex* foregrounds this facility with and dependency on technology, for example by enveloping the user in the double economy of 'health' and 'bio-power' but also by making the bio-modifications a central gameplay element. In regard to the plot the question to what extent identity is determined by technology is also central, as it emerges that the protagonist is an experimental prototype of a biotech-augmented human created by the secret US government agency Majestic 12. Crucially, this is also reflected in the kinds of cheats that are available for the game.

The player can accelerate the process of cyborgisation by using the 'allaugs' cheat, and as already mentioned he can gain possession of an augmentation not available through regular gameplay, the Tantalus device. More importantly, however, there are cheats that allow the player to exert control over the way she relates to the technological apparatus of the game by changing the way the avatar relates to his virtual environment. Most significantly, the 'fly' and 'ghost' cheats remove arbitrary restrictions to the movement of the avatar. While this is similar to the way that 'proximity mine climbing' allows player to shortcut through a level, these cheats have the added advantage of exposing the way the technology of the game.

The 'fly' cheat removes the condition that the avatar can only travel upwards if he is using mechanical means such as stairs, an elevator or a helicopter, while the 'ghost' cheat turns off the process called 'clipping', which determines whether an object in the game world is visible (and accessible) to the viewer. Turning 'clipping' off thus renders walls permeable. This might seem trivial since to an outside observer it may appear obvious that these restrictions are not 'natural' but simply arbitrary conventions imposed on the game world by its designers. However, employing the 'fly' or 'ghost' cheat after having played the game for a while is a truly eye-opening experience due to the fact that the artificial 'gravity' and 'boundedness' of the game world becomes naturalised during gameplay.

Only when the avatar floats over the game world does it become clear that the architecture of the game functions as a means of control to which the player submits, albeit joyfully. The freedom of choice *Deus Ex* offers is one of the main reasons why the game is so highly regarded by critics and players alike, but at the same time it is important to keep in mind that

this expansion of the possibility space of the game is, as Slocombe (2005) argues, “fundamentally an illusion of choice.” As he points out in regard to the *Deus Ex* sequel *Invisible War* (Ion Storm, 2003), “player interactions are [...] determined by the ‘rules’ of the game and are never truly interactive.” In other words: “Just as the player plays the game, so too the game ‘plays’ the player” (46).

This double structure of control (where the player controls the game, while submitting to its control at the same time) is exactly what is revealed by these cheats. Importantly, this allows us to see that the playability of the game is dependent on this control structure as well. The extent of the player’s control over the game when she uses these cheats is paramount to the control the game exerts over the player, so the game ceases to be a structure for meaningful play.

Quite literally, using the ‘ghost’ cheat removes the solid ground from under the avatar’s feet, by rendering every solid structure in the game permeable, including the floor. This makes the experience of playing the game in this way a quite unsettling experience, and the player is reminded how the “topological constraints” (Aarseth, 1997) of gamespace are not just impeding the narrative thrust but also provide a structure for the events within the game world.

### **3. Discussion**

As the analysis of the cheats available for *Deus Ex* shows, cheating can radically alter the player’s experience of the game world. Cheats can speed up narrative progression, change the perception of game space, and enhance the player’s agency in the game world. One way of approaching cheats theoretically, then, is to look systematically at the way they influence the experience of such basic categories as time, space and subjectivity.

As Fuller and Jenkins (1995), as well as Lev Manovich (2001) point out, narration becomes ‘spatialized’ in adventure games, i.e. narrative progression is mapped onto the three-dimensional space of the game-world. From this point of view, speeding up narrative progression can be regarded as a condensation of space. Therefore, certain types of cheats can be understood as effecting a change in the way players perceive gamespace.

In regard to their potential to change the experience of space, it makes sense to consider cheats in terms of means that can be used to overcome the topological constraints of the game. After all, the pleasure of any game depends on a balance between its rules and the freedom these rules leave the player for unconstrained interaction. From the player’s perspective, playing can be regarded as a dynamic process that oscillates between a maximum and a minimum level of constraint.

Once the game process goes beyond either one of these thresholds, it deteriorates into a state of over-codification or a state of contingency, both of which leave the player at a loss for what to do. ‘Being stuck’ in an adventure game can be regarded as an instance of over-codification, since there are more conditions for narrative progression than the player is able to meet. Cheats can solve this dilemma by decreasing the perceived level of constraint in the game, thus setting the playing process in motion again.

Another type of cheats changes the players’ perception of game-time. Indeed, the continuous interaction (without the avatar’s intermittent ‘death’ and ‘respawnment’) made possible by the ‘god mode’ of many first-person shooters is bound to change the perception of time radically – from striated time to smooth time, to borrow a spatial metaphor. Since time is such a crucial

factor in most action games, the cheats found in this genre are essentially time-savers: For example, cheats that unlock the different areas in which the game's action takes place have a similar effect of reducing the time that would otherwise be spent playing towards this goal.

Cheats that increase the range of options available to the player can be said to change her perception of the relation between the subject and object of play. As Donald Winnicott (1965) has pointed out, children learn to differentiate between their selves and the outside world through transitional objects, which are often toys. In digital games, players have the unique opportunity to reset the parameters of that rather stable sense of agency that has been developed by the end of childhood, and cheats that allow them to change the level of openness enhance these possibilities of experimentation even further.

This last point warrants some elaboration. The discussion of 'identification' in video games has often revolved around the impossibility of 'fleshing out' player characters, because this seems to make them less suitable as a conduit of the player's agency. The most successful video game characters seem to be those that do not have much of a personality, such as the nameless protagonist of *Doom*, who merely functions as a 'placeholder' for the player in the game world. *Deus Ex* is particularly interesting in this respect, because it offers the player different ways of playing JC, covering the entire spectrum from gung-ho warrior to cautious assassin.

This may increase the sense of agency that the player has in regard to the game world, but as we have already seen, much of this freedom is an illusion that the game creates by presenting the player with a range of options which appear to correspond to meaningful choices. But as the futile attempts to change the plot of *Deus Ex* described by participants in the *Through the Looking Glass* forum demonstrate, the plot of the game cannot be changed even when key characters in the game are removed. The subjectivity of the player can thus be seen to derive from her subjection to the control of the game.

Control thus emerges as a central concept in the theorisation of cheats. If we regard video games as governed by an 'aesthetics of control', cheats are not only a means to influence the equilibrium of control between game and player, but also a way of studying how different control mechanisms interact with each other. Cheating is thus not only a worthy object of study, but also a method of studying games. It is a practice that allows us to upset the balance of control that makes games playable, and learn more about the internal mechanisms of games.

However, our discussion of the cheats available for *Deus Ex* has also drawn attention to the fact that even cheating in single-player games is not entirely removed from the social, political and economic contexts in which gaming takes place. On the contrary: cheating highlights the way auctorial control is simultaneously asserted and subverted in games; it draws attention to the way game rules are socially constructed rather than being built into games; and it points towards the political implications of gameplay by demonstrating how ideology becomes enmeshed into gamespace.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Importantly, this overview of the cheats available for *Deus Ex* suggests that cheating allows the players to engage playfully with the control mechanisms they are subjected to. While it is undeniable that part of the pleasure of playing video games stems from submitting to their control, while at the same time exerting control over the game, this is also a powerful ideological apparatus that must be approached critically. Therefore, cheating should not be

treated as a shameful practice unworthy of serious games research, but as a way of building up critical media literacy.

This is, of course, also a political argument. As anybody who plays games is aware, the public discourse about games is still informed by moral panics about violent content, sexual and racial stereotyping, and a general focus on the ‘effects’ of games, rather than the way gamers engage with them. While much cheating is certainly unreflected, and serves only to play games more effectively, thus in effect reinforcing their ideological messages, we have also seen examples of how cheating can be used to engage with games in a more critical fashion.

The theoretical importance of cheating thus can be seen to reside in the fact that it allows us to approach games in a way that avoids both the glorification and the demonisation of games by emphasising the different ways they can be played. An ideologically dubious game such as *America’s Army* can be played in a way that foregrounds the inner contradictions of its ideology, and thus become the catalyst for critical thinking. But even a game like *Deus Ex*, which arguably encourages a critical engagement with the text, and avoids reductive us-vs.-them scenarios, can be played in a way that disregards these distinctions, and simply reinforces a certain world-view.

An approach that takes the possibilities of ‘illegal’ manipulation of the game into account is therefore not only able to regard games in terms of their cultural, social and political embeddedness, but also in terms of their mutability. Just as cheating can be seen to de-centre the text of video games, an awareness of this mutability appears to foreground the fluidity of games, and the subject positions that they offer to players. This is perhaps the most significant way in which cheats can alter the experience of playing a game.

But that doesn’t mean that the other ways in which cheating can change our perception of game space, game time, and our own agency in the game world are not important. The various ways in which the player is able to engage with the text through cheats all contribute to a deeper understanding of how video games work, and why they remain a source of fascination, even when their secrets have been exposed. Thus, cheating can be seen as a way of extending gameplay to another level.

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