

**Homo Deludens –  
Cheating as a Methodological Tool in Digital Games Research**

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*Doubtless the pleasure is as great  
Of being cheated as to cheat*  
– Samuel Butler

*Introduction*

In May 2006, I sent a message to the GAMESNETWORK mailing list, inviting researchers in the field of digital games to participate in a survey about the practice of cheating in games research. Even more interesting than the results themselves were the discussions that were elicited by the survey, first on the mailing list itself, and then on the gamecode.ca blog. What was striking about these discussions was that while most researchers in the field of digital games seemed to be familiar with the practice of cheating, many seemed to be surprised to find that this practice should be considered part of games research.

Cheating in computer games is a common term for a large number of practices that seem to have little in common. One of the most widespread forms of cheating in single-player games is the consultation of game guides, walkthroughs and FAQs, which are produced both by specialised publishers working in close collaboration with the game developers, and by gamers themselves. Another common form of cheating, especially in PC games are the ubiquitous cheat codes found in gaming magazines and on websites such as gamefaqs.com, which often allow gamers to bypass obstacles in their path through the game, and thus to proceed more quickly.

In multi-player games, cheating is closely monitored by the gamer community, server operators and game providers. Here, cheating does not only impinge on the experience of the cheater but on that of other players as well, mostly in a negative way. This is a problem that haunts both competitive online games such as *Counter-Strike* and *Battlefield 1942*, and massively multi-player online games (MMOGs) such as *EverQuest* or *World of Warcraft*. The providers often use sophisticated anti-cheating software, which makes it harder, but not impossible, to cheat. Cheating in multi-player settings is frowned upon by many gamers, and the practice has not received much attention in the academic study of computer games.

It is hardly surprising, then, that one of the first messages in response to my announcements was an admonishment about my choice of words. The term ‘cheating’, it was felt, carried connotations that did not match the research community’s view of itself as a group that adheres to professional and ethical guidelines. While this was not expressed explicitly, it seemed clear that a number of GAMESNETWORK subscribers were keen to disentangle themselves from the negative associations of a term that does not only encompass manipulations in gameplay, but also plagiarism, tax dodging, and infidelity.

However, I was less concerned with the integrity of games researchers, but rather with practices within gaming cultures that enjoy wide currency among gamers, but have been largely ignored by the digital games research community. And apparently I was not alone. Shortly after the first message, a second message arrived which criticised the earlier post to the list, and pointed out that not using the term cheating meant to disregard a part of games

culture that for many gamers is very real. Avoiding the term cheating, the author of this second message seemed to suggest, might just be a way of avoiding the issue.

That cheating is an issue, both in games research and without, was highlighted by the following messages, which tried to address the phenomenon in different ways. There seemed to be a clear tendency, however, to explain cheating as a set of practices that did not really breach game rules. While it can be argued that many practices that are casually referred to as cheating, such as using freely available ‘cheat codes’ and ‘game guides’ does not actually break the rules of the games that they pertain to, it seemed peculiar that it was mostly these practices that were put forth as examples.

One participant in the discussion said that it didn’t feel like cheating to employ cheat codes, highlighting the fact that the experience of cheating is highly subjective, which is also expressed by T.L. Taylor in her study of power gamers (Taylor, 2003). It was also felt that those cheat codes that were supplied by the developers or publishers of games themselves could not be considered cheats, because the authority of making (and breaking) the game rules lay squarely with the game companies themselves. In this case, cheats could even be seen as ways of temporarily adjusting the difficulty level of a game, in order to allow players to proceed in a game when they got stuck.

From a theoretical point of view, a number of participants in the discussions expressed a desire to integrate cheating into the rules of games, possibly by regarding it as a form of handicapping, which is widespread in games that match opponents of different strength against each other. A more sophisticated argument was made for differentiating between different levels of cheats, ranging from widely accepted, and therefore ‘invisible’ forms of cheating such as the use of ‘walkthroughs’ to clearly prohibited behaviour such as doping in professional sports. In this context, the social functions of cheating, such as the establishment of power relations, were emphasised.

Importantly, just as the discussion petered out, one contributor claimed that cheating may well be a more fundamental form of play than playing by the rules. This statement, which is very close to my own theoretical position, seems to signal a position that is diametrically opposed to the one expressed at the beginning of the discussion. Rather than seeing cheating as something that is incompatible with play, which needs to be cleansed of its unsavoury connotations in order to even be considered *sub specie ludi*, and constitutes, as it were, the ‘other’ of play, this later statement seemed to assume that cheating was central to play, and central to our understanding of everything ludic.

As this brief outline shows, cheating raises a number of pertinent issues about games, such as the questions of authorship, textual fluidity, and rule-boundedness. If an ostensibly marginal practice has the power to evoke such deep probing into the theoretical foundations of digital games research, it seems obvious that we need to study cheating if we want to understand play. At the same time, however, cheats can be used in games research to understand how games are constructed, and by what means they can be deconstructed. In other words: cheating should not only be an object but also a method of games research.

I understand the term method in a double sense here. First, in its narrow empirical sense, it can be understood to describe certain practices that are being used to study a phenomenon. In a wider sense, however, methods can be regarded as means of self-reflection, discovery, and critique. It is this second sense that Bruno Latour evokes when he reminds his readers that “‘where to travel’ and ‘what is worth seeing there’ is nothing but a way of saying in plain

English what is usually said under the pompous Greek name of ‘method’ or, even worse, ‘methodology’” (Latour, 2005: 17).

### *Going Native*

As a method, cheating allows us to reflect upon the presuppositions that we bring to games, no matter from which perspective we are studying them. It also enables us to identify blind spots in our research, and thus discover new avenues of inquiry in regard to the phenomena we study. Perhaps even more importantly, taking into account unorthodox forms of play can help us recognise flaws in our theoretical models, which are so often built upon the experience of playing by the rules, rather than breaking the rules.

Nevertheless, there is an undeniable bias against cheating within games culture and in the games research community. Both biases should be taken seriously, since there lies a danger in openly engaging in practices that are publicly eschewed by the vast majority of gamers, although they may condone it in private. As scholars of gaming culture, we cannot risk alienating mainstream gamers, even if fringe practices, and the subcultures that form around them, are often the more appealing objects of research.

Furthermore, game researchers are themselves often gamers, and may have qualms about cheating that do not stem from a fear of compromising one’s professional integrity so much as from being enculturated by and within gaming culture. This issue was raised in the discussion on gamecode.ca that ensued after the debate on the GAMESNETWORK list had fizzled out. As Kelly Boudreau notes in her initial post to the blog, it bears reflection that “being ‘native’ is often seen as a requirement for game studies, while it is usually frowned upon in other fields” (Boudreau, 2006).

In her argument, Boudreau seems to imply that the study of games by means of cheats is not as ‘direct’ an experience as playing the games the way they are ‘meant’ to be played. Comparing the work of the game researcher to that of an anthropologist working within a culture different from her own, she suggests that we can see cheating “as an education from the books and not from the street” (ibid.). While it is certainly true that cheats can help us attain knowledge about a game more quickly than would be possible if we played 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.

As far as the danger of going native is concerned, it should be pointed out that Boudreau seems to assume that games are mostly played without the use of cheats, and that using them in game research clearly sets the researcher apart from standard practices in gaming culture. It is impossible to attain reliable data about how widespread the practice of cheating really is in gaming culture, but anecdotal evidence from gaming magazines, websites, and game-related discussion forums seems to suggest that it is something that every gamer is aware of. Therefore, it may be the case that by playing by the rules, researchers *resist* the temptation of going native.

The discussion on gamecode.ca quickly turned towards the topic of cheats as time savers. In his reply to Boudreau’s post, Dominic Arseneault points out that “someone who has no experience playing FPS’s [first-person shooters] and who uses an invincibility cheat to get through the game cannot truly understand the amount of work normally needed to get there.” This comment exemplifies the instrumental attitude towards cheating that many game researchers share, an attitude which assumes that cheating is a means to an end. However, I

would argue that there is also an aesthetic aspect to cheating, and that it can be engaged in for its own sake (see also Kücklich, forthcoming).

The experiential aspect of cheating, however, is closely intertwined with its ethical aspects. As Sal Humphries asserts in her contribution to the discussion, the insights gained by using cheats are “not more or less valid” than the insights gained from orthodox play, “just different.” So despite all the advantages of cheating in game research, researchers may still face a moral dilemma about whether or not this is a legitimate method, especially when conducting research in multi-player settings.

Obviously, this is a question I cannot answer on my own. Therefore, this paper is primarily intended to spur a debate about the role of cheating in digital game research, which is long overdue despite efforts by scholars such as Espen Aarseth to address the matter. This may be partly due to the moralistic stance many game researchers take vis-à-vis cheating, as exemplified by Aarseth’s statement that “while it is understandable that academics with not too much time on their hands [...] give in to the temptation to zip through a game [...] using the walkthrough, or (even worse) using [...] cheats, it is hard to imagine excellence of research arising from such practices” (Aarseth, 2003).

Like Boudreau, Aarseth regards cheats essentially as time-saving devices, which allow hard-working researchers to “zip through a game,” rather than spending dozens or even hundreds of hours progressing through a game by trial and error. He disregards the fact that cheats may be used to reveal the structure of a game, or add to our understanding of its aesthetic. More importantly, however, he disregards that the way researchers play digital games may vary, depending on whether they are intending to investigate a specific game, an entire genre, or gaming culture in general. But in all these cases, cheating may prove a useful tool to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon that is being studied.

In the following sections, I will attempt to suggest ways in which cheating as a methodology may prove useful in different areas of games research. I will begin with an overview of how cheating can be employed as a method of gaining access to deeper levels of meaning in the analysis of individual games, which draws on my own work on *Deus Ex*. Next, I will take a look at how cheats can contribute to a better understanding on game genres, using a typology first introduced in a paper on literary theory and computer games (Kücklich, 2001). And finally, I will explore what cheats can tell us about gaming cultures, focusing primarily on multi-player and massively multi-player games.

### *Cheating and Game Analysis*

What does it mean to finish a game? Is a game completed when the end credits roll? When one has played through the game on the highest difficulty setting? Or when one has achieved a 100% rating? In contemporary computer games, it seems like there is always more, even after the game has been finished, and so we can never be sure whether we have really seen everything. This poses a methodological problem to games research, which is further confounded by the fluidity of the text resulting from a constant stream of updates, patches and expansion packs.

It almost seems like computer game analysis can only be approached in a manner reminiscent of the six blind men, who in describing an elephant each touch upon a different part of the animal, and thus arrive at radically different conclusions about the nature of the beast. Much of the methodological debates in game studies in the past few years must be attributed to the fact that researchers from different disciplinary fields tend to see different parts of games and

entirely disregard others. Thus, for example, the ‘ludological’ school usually foregrounds game mechanics, while scholars from film and literary studies often focus on narrative structures in games.

Cheating does not only enable us to see different parts of the elephant, as it were, but also to see the parts we are familiar with in a different light, especially when we are already used to seeing a game in a certain way. This applies primarily to single-player games with a fixed or branching story-line, i.e. first-person shooters such as *Halo* or *Half-Life*, role-playing games such as *Neverwinter Nights* or *Knights of the Old Republic*, and adventure games such as *Grim Fandango* or *Broken Sword: The Shadow of the Templars*. I will demonstrate the analytic potential of cheats using the example of *Deus Ex*.

It should be emphasised at this point that I was already intimately familiar with *Deus Ex* when I started experimenting with cheats as a method for game analysis, having played and replayed both the PlayStation2 version and the PC version of the game. If the aim is a ‘deep reading’ of a game, nothing can take the place of engaging with the game in a straightforward manner, and this includes experiencing the frustrations that inevitably arise as the difficulty curve rises. Cheats should only be employed once the researcher has gained an understanding of the game’s mechanics, plots and characters.

While my primary interest in using cheats in *Deus Ex* was spurred by a desire to find means to explore gamespace in a different way than by playing the game, it quickly became apparent that cheating opened up other ways of engaging with the game as well. Beyond the ubiquitous (in first-person shooters at least) ‘fly mode’ and ‘no-clip mode’, the range of cheat codes available for *Deus Ex* presented ways of thinking about the game in new, and unexpected ways. Thus, for example, using cheat codes led to an investigation of self-referentiality, meta-gaming, intertextuality and technicity.

As far as gamespace is concerned, cheating can be a truly eye-opening experience, especially in 3D games, which present an illusion of continuous space to the player. The art of level design in 3D games consists in a careful balancing of freedom of movement with constraints, which subtly guide players along the way they are supposed to take. In *Deus Ex*, there are often multiple ways to achieve a goal, and frequently one of them is much more circuitous than the others, and involves using stealth rather than brute force. Cheating can help to lay bare these gameplay mechanism, and thus facilitates spatial analysis.

My first experiments with the cheat codes in *Deus Ex* often had quite surreal results. One of the codes I used frequently in the beginning, was the so-called ‘spawnmass’ cheat, which allows the player to generate items and characters out of thin air. Thus, ‘spawnmass WeaponAssaultGun 99’ results in a downpour of ninety-nine assault rifles, reminiscent of the ‘Guns, lots of guns’ scene in *The Matrix*. Even more absurdly, ‘spawnmass cat 99’ will give a new meaning to the phrase ‘it’s raining cats and dogs’, especially when used near the pier of Liberty Island – as it turns out, the surface of the water is infinitely flexible, and the cats will keep bouncing up and down indefinitely.

For all its apparent silliness, this way of engaging with the game effectively denaturalises gamespace, and counteracts the manifold representational strategies used to make it appear realistic. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Kücklich, 2004), realism in 3D computer games is not only contingent upon the graphical depiction of scenery, characters, and items, but also upon the realistic behaviour of these entities. A bunch of bouncing cats is a very strong reminder indeed that gamespace is often not quite what it seems.

This is also highlighted by the ‘fly mode’ and ‘no-clip mode’ cheats, which enable the player’s on-screen representation (the so-called ‘avatar’) to take to the air, and walk through walls, respectively. Using these cheats literally 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 player’s narrative thrust but also provide a structure for the events within the game world.

In this way, cheating lays bare one of the most fundamental mechanics of gameplay, the dialectic between exerting control and surrendering to the control of the game. As Salen and Zimmerman (2004) have pointed out, a game’s playability depends to a certain extent to the margin of movement within the structure provided by the game’s rules. But during gameplay, the constraints of gamespace are often perceived as arbitrary limitations on the player’s freedom of movement. However, once gamespace is transcended by the use of cheat codes, it becomes immediately obvious that these constraints provide a structure for meaningful play.

Cheats can also be read as signifiers of the production process of a game, as they are often used by the game’s developers to simplify certain tasks, such as moving quickly to a different level. Thus, they often allow a glimpse into an earlier stage of the game’s evolution. They also emphasise the fluidity of game texts by drawing attention to the fact that the game’s code is in constant flux during production, and might remain so even after publication. Determining when a game ceases to be in development, and becomes a finished product, is almost as difficult as identifying the point at which a game is ‘played out’.

There is also a certain amount of self-referentiality involved in these traces of a game’s *poiesis*. This is particularly evident when the cheat codes themselves contain signifiers that refer not to an entity in the game world but an entity in the real world. Consider the ‘iamwarren’ cheat in *Deus Ex*, which creates an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) field that will deactivate any enemy robots trying to attack to the player’s avatar. Of course, Warren is also the first name of one of the game’s lead designers, Warren Spector. It doesn’t seem too far-fetched to assume that this is a subtle way of asserting authorial control over the game. By using the cheat, and simultaneously invoking its creator’s name, the player affirms the god-like power of Spector within the world of the game.

Other cheats refer, implicitly or explicitly, to other fictional texts rather than the real world. A good example of this is the ‘thereisnospoon’ cheat in *Deus Ex*, which replaces every texture in the game 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. The words “there is no spoon” refer to the dialogue between *The Matrix* protagonist Neo with a boy that he meets in the apartment of the nameless Oracle (Gloria Foster). While there is a strong *Matrix*-like subtext to *Deus Ex*, the intertextual link can only be confirmed by taking recourse to cheats.

Thus, it seems fairly obvious that the use of cheats in the analysis of a game can reveal additional layers of meaning, which would otherwise remain hidden from view. Often, cheating may add only small details to the picture gained by playing and replaying the game, but in some cases these details may prove significant. In some cases, it might even lead to new ways of regarding a game, by opening up perspectives, which are not immediately obvious.

### *Genre-Specific Cheats*

Cheats are a surprisingly stable marker of genre, and can be used by researchers interested in investigating the generic conventions of games. 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 *Space Invaders* scores high on interactivity, but has a comparatively low level of openness.

In adventure games such as *Monkey Island*, which are usually characterised by a rather linear narrative and a focus on puzzles as the main *agens* of retardation, the level of narrativity is often significantly higher than in other types of games, while the levels of interactivity and openness are comparatively low, due to a lack of action-oriented gameplay and a limited range of in-game actions. It is hardly surprising, then, that most adventure game cheats serve primarily to remove 'narrative obstacles', usually by 'foretelling' the game's story in the form of walkthroughs, or by offering direct access to later portions of the game.

Action games typically have a high level of interactivity, but score rather low on narrativity and openness. 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 the best weapons. This usually results in less time spent by the player waiting for her avatar to 'respawn' allowing the player to remain involved in the cybernetic feedback loop of game and player, and to retain a high level of affective immersion.

Simulation games such as *SimCity*, which attempt to model complex processes, often have a high level of openness, while lacking in narrativity and interactivity. The macro-narratives of games like *Civilization* may span millennia, but this has hardly any impact on the gameplay itself because the player is much too busy with the constant micro-management of cities, agriculture, and the military. Often, simulation games are turn-based, or the speed of in-game time can be adjusted, so the level of interactivity is determined by the player. Lack of funds are often the only limit to the level of openness, and therefore it should come as no surprise that many cheats address these limitations by supplying the player with in-game currency.

Role-playing games (RPGs) combine a comparatively high level of openness with narrative progression, and thus the cheats for this genre resemble a mixture of simulation game cheats and adventure game cheats. While the plots of RPGs are mostly linear, side-quests occur frequently, and make the games feel more open. Role-playing game cheats often give the players access to magical items, or allow them to increase their characters' stats, which is equivalent to generic simulation game cheats. But since role-playing games also contain narrative elements, walkthroughs and maps are also important cheating devices.

Strategy games, especially real-time strategy games such as *Command & Conquer*, or *Age of Empires*, combine openness with interactivity. They typically require players to make quick tactical decisions, without forgetting the strategic context within which the action takes place. Strategy game cheats address this dilemma by either giving players access to better weapons, or by allowing them to change the rules of the game as in simulation games. Some titles of the *Command & Conquer* series even come with a rule set file in which values such as the price of buildings can be altered.

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 typical cheats which are to some degree expected by the consumers. 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, 2003). In other words, far from contributing to the ‘corruption’ of games, cheats are part of the definition of game genres. Thus, cheats can provide important clues to the degree to which games are representative of their genre.

### *Cheating and Gaming Culture*

As long as there have been games, there have been rules, and as long as there have been rules, there has been the possibility of breaking them. As Bowyer (1982) notes, “the first recorded example of cheating occurred on or about 2500 BC in the Nile valley [...]. There on the wall of a forty-five-centuries-old burial chamber is a tomb painting that depicts the oldest known con game. [...] When modern con artists do it to separate a sucker from his money, they call it the shell game” (10).

Over the centuries, much ingenuity has been invested into ever more clever ways of cheating. Famously, in 1770 the Mechanical Turk was presented as a mechanical chess playing-machine, when in fact there was a man hidden inside (see Schaffer, 1999). In 1888, P.J. “Lucky Dutchman” Kepplinger invented the eponymous card cheating device, “a contraption of wires, cords, pulleys, an adjustable tube, a metal plate, a hook, a false sleeve cuff, and a hold-out slide” (Bowyer, 1982: 297) that enabled the wearer to exchange cards by crossing or uncrossing his legs.

Today, in the era of computer games, cheating seems to be more widespread than ever. Several magazines such as *Cheats and More* and *PSX Cheats and Codes Hacker* are dedicated entirely to publishing cheat codes for the newest games, and most other gaming magazines have a cheat section. There are also several book series that offer large amounts of cheat codes such as the quarterly *Codes & Cheats* series by Prima Publishing, and the semi-annual *Secret Codes* series by Brady Games. In addition, there are enormous databases of cheat codes on the web, which can be accessed through websites such as *gamefaqs.com*.

However, these publications and websites are primarily focused on cheating in single-player games, which has also been the main focus in this paper so far. Multi-player cheating, by contrast, cannot be approached from a purely aesthetic point of view, as it is the subject of ongoing ethical (Consalvo, 2005a, 2005b; Kimppa & Bissett, 2005), legal (Zetterström, 2005), and economic (Baughman & Levine, 2001; Pritchard, 2000; Yan & Randell, 2005) discourses.

As Consalvo (2005a) points out, gamers differ widely in their attitudes towards cheating, ranging from the ‘purists’ who see “strategy guides, walkthroughs, cheat codes and hacking all as being cheating” to those who consider external devices like game guides as legitimate but “draw the line at cheat codes and hacking.” At the opposite end of the spectrum from the purists are those who define cheating “as only existing in relation to another player.” Apparently, there were no gamers in Consalvo’s sample who condoned any form of cheating, even if it put other players at a disadvantage.

However, the growing literature on ‘grief play’ (Foo, 2004; Foo & Koivisto, 2004; Lin & Sun, 2005; Myers, 2005; Smith, 2004) attests to the fact that this attitude does exist within game culture. Griefing can be defined as „play styles where the player [...] purposefully

engages in activities to disrupt the gaming experience of other players,” the motivation for which stems from a desire “to demonstrate power and superiority over weaker participants” (Foo, 2004). Problematically, it is often “difficult to determine if an act is griefing,” or just a way of playing the game that is regarded as deviant by other players.

This is also highlighted in Wright et al.’s (2002) study of creative player actions in *Counter-Strike*. The authors include exploits which allow ‘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’” (9). ‘Tom Tunnel’ thus functions as a coded message by which one of the remaining team-members is advised as to how he should approach the adversary team.

This brief overview already makes it quite obvious that cheats, hacks, exploits, and griefing are, for better or for worse, an undeniable part of online gaming culture. However, while the ethical questions arising from these practices are increasingly coming to the attention of academics, the legal and economic implications of cheating are still discussed in rather simplistic terms, and solely within disciplinary boundaries. What is required here is an interdisciplinary effort to enable us to see the larger picture.

In his study of cheating from a legal point of view, Zetterström points to legal instruments that can be used to combat cheating such as copyright and trademark law. He takes a very industry-friendly stance, asserting that “creating cheats is a clear violation of the copyright” if the creators of the cheats “alter or adapt the game without the authorization of the rightholder” (35). Furthermore he claims that “creating, spreading and utilizing hacks for a game violate the authors’ moral rights, as the use of hack alters the game play derogatory [sic]” (41), and is contrary to the ‘spirit of the game’.

Citing the case of *Diablo*, which was overrun by cheaters soon after the game went online (see Greenhill, 1997; Kuo, 2001), Zetterström also points to the potential damage to a game’s brand if it gets associated with cheating. Under the WTO’s trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights regulations (TRIPs), it is a violation of trademark law to use a brand name which is not one’s property – but only if it is used “in the course of trade” (Zetterström, 2005, 50). According to him, websites that require users to pay a fee in order to gain access to downloadable content fall under this category, and thus “cheat sites have committed a trademark infringement” (51).

In my opinion, the problem with this view is that it is rooted in the notion of the romantic author, and regards games as original products rather than the highly derivative products they often are. Both in regard to their code-base and to their artwork, games often draw on ideas and concepts in the public domain. And especially in regard to massively-multiplayer games it must be taken into account that a large part of the work involved in actually making the game come alive is done by the players (see Humphreys, 2004).

For researchers doing work on MMOGs, this means that they are implied in the legal, economic and social contexts of the games they play just as everybody else. But researchers need to be aware that there is a danger of naturalising or even romanticising these conditions, especially if they are warned against losing their respect for the game in the name of research excellence. It is easy to see cheating and griefing as simply deviant forms of gameplay. However, we must not forget that there might be a political side to these practices, which are directed against the way these corporate public spaces are governed.

As I have argued elsewhere (Kücklich, forthcoming), under certain circumstances cheats can be said to possess critical potential, even if the critique is not intentional. A similar point is made by Jakobsson and Pargman (Jakobsson & Pargman, 2005) when they argue that cheating punches holes into the technological ‘black box’ of massively multiplayer online games, by exposing instances of “technology not performing as intended.” They maintain that in these cases “a certain ambiguity in the laws that govern the world is visible.”

As researchers, I think our role consists less in being respectful of the technology we are given to play with, but rather to disassemble it, find weaknesses in their mechanisms, and exploit these weaknesses in order to make the black boxes a little more transparent. However, it is hardly my place to prescribe a role for researchers in the field of game studies. As I have stressed before, this can only be a communal effort, and the result will hardly be a role-model but rather a multiplicity of identities and strategies researchers can choose from.

### *Conclusion*

The aim of this paper was to show up ways in which the practice, or rather practices, of cheating can be integrated into the work of games researchers. Apart from the obvious ways, in which cheats can be employed, e.g. as time-savers, it was my intention to demonstrate how cheating can actually add to our understanding of games. To this end, I studied the areas of game analysis, genre, and games culture. In all these examples, I attempted to point to ways in which the practice of cheating can not only make us understand the things we already see, but also enable us to see things that have escaped our attention so far.

In the case of game analysis, this proved to yield satisfactory results. As I was able to demonstrate by using the example of *Deus Ex*, studying and employing the cheats available for the game did not only deepen my understanding of the game, but also opened up new avenues of research. Cheating did not only understand in a different perception of gamespace, but also an awareness of the way that intertextuality and codes of technicity permeate the processes of production and reception.

With respect to genre, cheats emerged as a tool that makes it possible to examine, if you will, the ‘underside’ of the textual weave of games. Although game genres change quickly, and new genres emerge and merge constantly, there seems to be a certain constancy to the cheats that are found in the prototypical genres such as adventure, simulation, and action games. Certainly, new game mechanics will also increase the repertoire of cheats but the basic set is fairly immune to change, and may prove to be more stable than the ever-changing ‘surface’ of games.

Regarding the role of cheating in gaming culture yielded probably the most interesting results, but a more in-depth study of how cheating can be employed in the study of gaming culture would certainly show up even more possibilities. In this brief overview, it was only possible to touch upon a small number of salient points, such as the large number of texts pertaining to cheating, which have not been studied academically, and the ethical, economic and legal issues arising out of cheating in multi-player contexts.

Most importantly, in my view, however, this allowed us to see the political role of cheating, and how deeply it is situated in social and cultural contexts of play. As researchers, we are implicated, if not complicit, in these mechanisms, and the question of whether to use cheats for research purposes thus becomes a question of moral responsibility. Far from being a peripheral area of digital game studies, cheating thus emerged as an important indicator of the maturity of the field.

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