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Transformative Gameplay Practices: Speedrunning through Hyrule

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Transformative Gameplay Practices: Speedrunning through Hyrule

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Dedication

Dedicated to my father, Ben Hilburn, the first gamer I ever watched.

Abstract

Transformative Gameplay Practices: Speedrunning Through Hyrule

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The term "transformative" gets used in both fan studies and video game studies and gestures toward a creative productivity that goes beyond simply consuming a text. However, despite this shared term, game studies and fan studies remain fairly separate in their respective examination of fans and gamers, in part due to media differences between video games and more traditional media, like television. Bridging the gap between these two fields not only helps to better explain transformative gameplay, but also offers additional insights in how fans consume texts, often looking for new ways to experience the source text. This report examines the transformative gameplay practices found within video game fan communities and provides an overview of their development and spread. It looks at three facets of transformative gameplay, performance, mastery, and education, using the transformative gameplay practices around *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998) as a primary case study.

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Introduction

Upon the game's release in 1998, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* received praise for a compelling story, flawless controls, and, most importantly, the robust amount of content it offered. As Peer Schneider wrote for IGN back at the game's release, "sure, you can probably blast through the title in around 30 hours, but it's easy to see why some gamers are spending in excess of 80 hours to complete the title."[1] Nearly two decades later, dedicated Zelda fans continue to play this particular game. As Schneider mentions, the average player needs about 20-30 hours to reach the end of the game. However, for a small group of fans, beating the game takes them less than 20 minutes, with the current world record sitting at 17 minutes and 9 seconds.[2] Gamers call this practice "speedrunning," a transformative gameplay practice in which the player attempts to beat a game as fast as possible through exploitation of the game's code and masterful execution of gameplay.

Speedrunning is just one of the many ways gamers transform a video game through play, working together in communities and sharing these feats through recorded gameplay in order to extend the enjoyment of beloved video games. Speedrunning thus serves as one example of "transformative gameplay," a type of play that adds additional challenges or rules or changes the way a game is experienced. As such, this study hinges

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[1] Peer Schneider, "The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Review," *IGN*, November 25, 1998, http://www.ign.com/articles/1998/11/26/the-lgend-of-zelda-ocarina-of-time-review.

[2] "Ocarina of Time Leaderboards," *Zelda Speedruns,* accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.zeldaspeedruns.com/oot/.

on this concept of transformativity, a term that appears in both fan studies and game studies. I will explore the various definitions of transformative in detail later in this project, but its overlapping use in both game studies and fan studies points to a key intersection of the two fields. Within fan studies, transformative often centers around the legal connotation of the term, often used by fans and scholars to defend transformative works. The focus on transformative works within fan scholarship highlights the creative labor of fan communities and offers evidence of resistant readings and interpretations of a source text. These transformative works remain emblematic of fandom, especially as fandom continues to grow and thrive in digital spaces.

This report examines the various transformative practices in video games by looking at the intersection between traditional fan transformative works and transformative gameplay. It also provides an overview of the types of transformative gameplay and examines their spread among gaming communities. This study centers on several questions. What exactly constitutes transformative gameplay? What does fan studies bring to our conception of video game players? What might be gained from bridging the gap between fan engagement in traditional media and fan engagement in interactive media?

Transformative gameplay offers an avenue in which to extend the life of a game, similar to how other fan works extend and expand a TV show or a film. Transformative gameplay also becomes a shareable text that passes through gaming communities as recorded gameplay footage. The boom in streamable video game footage through video hosting platforms like YouTube and Twitch helped expand their visibility, although these

texts existed long before that. Though driven by identifiable fannish activity, transformative gameplay often does not get coded as "fan work," but rather a type of specialized gamer activity. "Transformative play" is discussed, but rarely in an overtly fannish context. Kaite Salen and Eric Zimmerman describe transformative play as a force of play so powerful that it changes the structure of the game itself.[3] This concept often gets used in conjunction with studies on "machinima" or machine cinema, stories and videos created using a video game's source engine as the primary means of production, and "modding" or direct graphical or code modifications made to the game by players.[4] Due to the inherent interactivity of video games, these often get overlooked as "fan" activities, but rather as a unique aspect of video game culture at large.

I argue that bridging fan studies and game studies together offers a new set of tools for us to examine engagement with video games. Indeed, many in the video game studies field shy away from the term fan due to cultural baggage or issues with the definition itself.[5] The term "fan" still carries an obsessive or isolated connotation that many in the video game field do not want associated with gamers. The term fan also implies a level of interactivity that many believe is inherent to video games already. While video games offer an inherently active experience for the user, differentiating it from traditional media, gamers still engage in varying levels of activity. The distinction "gamer" often separates itself from the mass of "players," implying a higher level of

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[3] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 305.

[4] For example, see Henry Lowood's use of "transformative play" in "High Performance Play: The Making of Machinima," in *Journal of Media Practice* 7, no. 1 (2006), 19.

[5] See James Newman's discussion of "gamer" in *Playing with Videogames* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 18-19.

engagement with video games, just as "fan" implies a higher level of engagement with a television program or a movie. Thus, this project not only defines and categorizes transformative gameplay, but also engages with fan studies to help expand our understanding of this type of gameplay.

To study this, I focus primarily on one game that spawned various types of transformative play around it. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, one of the most critically acclaimed games in the medium's history[6], developed a devoted fan following that continues to pore over the game to this day along with the other games that followed in the franchise. Years after the game's release in 1998 and subsequent re-releases in 2003 and 2011, fans continue to search for new ways to approach this game, be it through speedrunning, self-imposed challenges, or simply replaying the game for an audience. While it seems limiting, offering no official mod support and being nearly twenty years old, this game actually spawns a lot of transformative gameplay and speaks to the creativity and dedication of fans that continue playing the game. The active community and rich productivity surrounding the game, along with my own familiarity with it, makes *Ocarina of Time* an intriguing test case for transformative gameplay.

In the following section I break down the definitions of both "fan" and "gamer," offering up my own term "fannish gamer" to better position the members of transformative gameplay communities. The section following defines and examines the term "transformative" in both a video game and fan studies context. Finally, I examine

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[6] "Best Video Games of All Time," *Metacritic,* accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.metacritic.com/browse/games/score/metascore/all/all/filtered.

the various transformative gameplay modes surrounding *Ocarina of Time*, specifically

performative events featuring speedruns of the game, the current world record run of the

game, and walkthroughs and tutorials of the game. Beyond the actual gameplay footage

itself, various resources contribute to the collective experience of transformative play,

including fan run wikis, online walkthroughs, and websites dedicated to these specific

practices.

Fans and Gamers: Defining the Fannish Gamer

The concept of "fans" and the concept of "gamers" obviously vary in use depending on the aims of the author. Both fan studies and game studies often position these groups away from a presumed mainstream audience, either through particular transformative practices and community building around a media object or through positioning the medium itself (i.e. video games themselves) as different from a larger mainstream media culture. Along with this, both terms also often imply groups of people who consume and celebrate devalued culture. By examining how scholars have historically situated and labeled both gamers and fans within their writing, I hope to identify trends within both terms and answer why video game scholars often shy away from the label of fan as it applies to gamers.

CONCEPTUALIZING FANDOM

Early conceptions of media fandom, a field emerging in the early 90s, largely derive from scholarship done on television audiences that situates fandom around a cultural object as both productive and resistant. John Fiske describes fandom as selecting "from the repertoire of mass-produced and mass-distributed entertainment, certain performers, narratives or genres and takes them into the culture of a self-selected fraction of the people."[7] He positions fan culture around production, not reception. Henry Jenkins makes a key intervention in the field by drawing on Michel De Certeau and positioning fans as "textual poachers," pushing back against the negative connotation of "fanatic,"

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[7] John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience*, ed. Lisa A Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 30.

instead arguing that fans operate from a position of cultural marginality to mine media culture for their own use.[8] These scholars fit into what Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington conceptualize as first wave fan studies, which largely defines fandom as "a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meanings of the "power bloc" represented by popular media."[9] The key concepts of first wave fan studies center around negotiated or resisted readings of often-devalued cultural objects and participation and productivity within a community.

More recent research explores fandom's growing role in mainstream media consumption, pushing back against the idea of tight knitted communities in segregated realms, instead focusing on fans as dedicated consumer group. As Matt Hills astutely notes, "fans are always already consumers," functioning, in one sense, as "ideal consumers" while also expressing anti commercial beliefs.[10] Along with this theoretical shift, fan scholars begin to focus less on particular audiences and communities, instead focusing on shifts in technology that drives fandom into broader hubs on the Internet, fan/producer relationships, and particular fan practices.

Fan scholars also begin broadening their definition of fandom. Cornel Sandvoss conceives of fandom as any "regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given

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[8] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 24-27.

[9] Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, "Introduction: Why Study Fans?" in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World,* eds. Jonathan Gray et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2.

[10] Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures,* (London: Routledge, 2002), 29.

popular narrative or text"[11] In a similar vain, Mark Duffet defines media fandom as "the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture."[12] These definitions broaden out who qualifies as a fan and asserts that resistant reading and separated communities are not necessarily qualifiers of fandom. Fans then range anywhere from emotionally involved audience member to petty producer, navigating a myriad of social connections and communities in a broader digital landscape.

CONCEPTUALIZING GAMERS

Conceptualizations of video game players do not often focus on a particular subset of gamers, but rather presumes that most gamers engage in gamer culture when playing video games, a medium separate from mainstream media culture. For example, in his book focused on video gamers, Garry Crawford provides an overview of video game culture by outlining various cultural practices and social patterns, stating that the book "focuses specifically on those who play video games, their practices and their culture, as well as the theoretical tools that can be used to understand associated social patterns."[13] While he overviews specific types of gamers within the book, the broad use of "gamer" at the onset implies the term applies to all who play games, framing gamers as wholly unique from other media audiences. Similarly, in his book *Playing with videogames*, James Newman settles on the word gamer as a word specific and useful to videogames

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[11] Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 23.

[12] Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom,* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2.

[13] Garry Crawford, *Video Gamers,* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

that terms like fan, Otaku, or audience do not convey. He shies away from the word 'player' as it "does not imply or exclude play as a performative practice," with gamer being the more comprehensive term when discussing transformative and performative play.[14] Newman clearly sees gamer as an encompassing term rather than a signifier of a sub group among video game players.

Scholars that do look at subsets of gamers tend to do so based on particular gaming practices. Richard Bartle puts forward a taxonomy of gamers based on his experience with online MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), labeling four types of users as achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers.[15] While Bartle's taxonomy marked one of the first attempts to differentiate play styles, it does not label any of these styles as a subset within a player base, but rather as categories of gamer types. In her work on communities in online virtual worlds, T.L. Taylor identifies power gaming as a style of play that focuses on efficiency and instrumental orientation, dynamic goal setting, a commitment to understanding the underlying game systems/structures, and technical and skill proficiency.[16] Taylor's work in particular lays out this idea of power gamer in order to situate this type of gamer among a network of gamers within MMOs to nuance and explore the various practices and identities of this community in particular. Specific transformative practices, like modding (modification of the game's source code), speedrunning, cheating, and hacking often get defined and delineated as needed within

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[14] James Newman, *Playing with Videogames*, (Routledge: New York, 2008),19.

[15] Richard Bartle, "Players who suit MUDs," *Journal of MUD Research* 1 (1996), accessed December 3, 2016, http://mud.co.uk/richard/hcds.htm.

[16] T.L. Taylor, *Play Between Worlds,* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 71-72.

scholarship, though rarely do they fall under one unifying definition of transformative player.

Adrienne Shaw, in her research on gamer identity, astutely notes that, "how people identify as gamers, is a different question from who counts as a gamer."[17] Working against a cultural conception of gaming, Shaw asks fans how they self identify as a gamer in order to get a better understanding of how potentially marginalized gamers navigate the gamer identity. Notably in her study, she points out that "participants saw gaming as something separate from other media" despite arguments of video game culture's normalization by other scholars.[18] While I agree that how gamers position and identify themselves remains just as important, if not more important than how scholars and cultural critics identify them, this paper does not seek to remove or purpose a new term for gamer.

FANNISH GAMER

The move toward the idea of a "fannish gamer" serves as an inroad to discuss transformative play practices that share under explored roots and similarities with fan practices. Moreover, the idea that video games must continue to be examined as wholly unique from other media seems antiquated. Video games no longer qualify as a subcultural medium only select groups play and consume. Games obviously require productivity on the part of their consumers to complete a game, whereas traditional

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[17] Adrienne Shaw. "Do you identify as a gamer? Gender, race, sexuality, and gamer identity" *new media & society* 14 no. 1 (2011), 29.
[18] Ibid., 39.

media, like film and television, arguably require much less interactivity to consume. However, as media industries embrace consumer participation, especially in the video game industry, and the barrier between fan and audience erodes, these media differences should no longer necessarily be barriers to either video game or fan scholars in their explorations of fan productivity within video games.

Thus, the term "fannish gamers" attempts to cover a subset of textual practices within video game communities. These gamers go beyond the productivity set forth by initial gameplay in order to make gameplay more efficient, create educational or creative paratexts, add additional challenges to gameplay for themselves or other gamers, or share their knowledge and experiences with other gamers. Just as fans differ from a larger media audience, so too do fannish gamers differ from a larger group of video game players. Below I break down the idea of fannish gamers through two main concepts: community and productivity. Although largely predicated on the idea of a distinction in productivity, community plays a key role, especially as fannish productivity is rarely isolated to just one gamer.

COMMUNITY

Similar to fan communities, communities of fannish gamers construct meaning together through a variety of sources and means. As Steven Jones notes, "the meanings of video games are constructed and they are collaborative" with those meanings being "functions of the larger grid of possibilities built by groups of developers, players, reviewers, critics, and fans in particular times and places and through specific acts of

gameplay or discourses about games."[19] In his book *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins

highlights the collaborative production and evaluation of knowledge in his discussion on

the spoiling community around *Survivor*, which ultimately tied the community together

in a way to prolong their enjoyment of the program. Jenkins draws on Pierre Levy's

conception of collective intelligence[20] to explain what while members of communities

may shift from one group to another as their interests change, knowledge communities

"are held together through the mutual production and reciprocal exchange of

knowledge."[21] Although this idea of tightly knitted knowledge communities seems

perhaps utopic in nature, the communities surrounding certain games and gaming

practices function on a similar sharing of knowledge and construction of meaning. A

concrete example of this can be found in speedrunning communities that often work

together to construct the most effective routes through a game. Even in a general sense,

through interactions on social media sites like Reddit and Twitter, fannish gamers

construct meaning together.

       Within these gaming communities, the exchange of information often comes in

the form of "gaming capital," as a means of community engagement and signaling

membership. Mia Consalvo proposes the term gaming capital as a reworking of

Bourdieu's cultural capital concept in order "to capture how being a member of game

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[19] Steven Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

[20] Pierre Levy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*) Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Books, 1997).

[21] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 27.

culture is about more than playing games or even playing them well."[22] Gaming capital is

essentially knowledge about specific in game secrets and practices and justifiable

opinions about gaming sites and walkthroughs on the Internet. This exchange of

knowledge and capital functions not only as a type of productivity, but also signifies who

belongs within this fannish gaming cultural community, especially as these communities

broaden out and become less tight knit. Thus, for transformative gameplay, the context

surrounding the gameplay itself proves just as important, with members of a community

often participating even when not playing the game. For example, a fan can have detailed

knowledge of the route taken in a speedrun and the tricks and exploits needed, but may

not directly record and share gameplay footage. Subscribers to YouTube channels and

Twitch streams often comment on gameplay and interact with those playing, often using

gaming capital as a means of engaging in the community.

PRODUCTIVITY

Defining the type and nature of productivity within video games will perhaps

helps us delineate between the productivity *necessary* to complete a game compared to

the fannish productivity more dedicated players engage in. Going back to John Fiske's

conceptions of productivity proves a useful starting point for our purposes. Fiske seeks to

understand popular culture via production, not reception, and highlights three areas of fan

productivity: semiotic productivity, enunciative productivity, and textual productivity.[23]

While arguably all gamers engage in textual productivity simply by playing a game

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[22] Mia Consalvo, *Cheating*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 18.
[23] John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," 37-39.

(though not always circulated among a community) along semiotic productivy (which is meaning making of social identity and social characteristic of all popular culture), fannish gamers also engage in enunciative productivity among loosely networked communities. Their textual productivity often extends beyond the game space, either in the form of recorded gameplay, using game kits to add mods to games, or creating online walkthroughs.

In addition to differentiating between the types of productivity gamers engage in, situating them on a continuum, as Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst do with fans and enthusiasts, might help break away from broad sweeping generalizations about all gamers. Abercrombie and Longhurst argue that "the categories of fan, cultist, and enthusiast can be distinguished from other categories of person which exist at opposite ends of the continuum established so far: the consumer and the petty producer."[24] By situating these categories along a spectrum, they delineate several sub groups of consumers based on what media objects they consume, how they engage with their media object, and how these groups organize themselves.

In a similar vain, I purpose placing "fannish gamer" on a spectrum that spans everyone who plays games.

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[24] Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, "Fans and Enthusiasts," *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, eds. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 164.

Gamer	Fannish Gamer	Professional Gamer
Textually productivity to play and complete game	Shares and elevates textual productivity among a community	Profits off play and textual productivity

Table 1: Gamer Spectrum

Similar to Abercrombie and Longhurst's conception of consumer, the term gamer simply signifies anyone who plays a game. While they might be familiar with gamer fan culture and perhaps even occasionally use walkthroughs and discuss gameplay, they primarily engage games by simply playing through them. On the other end of the spectrum, professional gamers engage with games in an official capacity, either by playing video games professionally or profiting off their production, most often through streaming gameplay. The distinction between professional gamer and fannish gamer felt necessary to make, as fannish gameplay practices often function in more of a gift economy model,[25] similar to traditional fan culture, while gamers themselves also continue to professionalize thanks to the rise of E-sports and the viability of video game streaming on platforms like Twitch and YouTube. It also conceptualizes a path toward professionalization, an increasingly common goal of many gamers.

Finally, fannish gamers make up the center of this spectrum, engaging in fannish productivity around video games that goes beyond the average gamer, yet circulates their productivity in a fannish gift economy. Fannish gamers center on specific games, often long-standing video game franchises, or specific practices, like speedrunning. Gamers often slide between these distinctions, depending on the context or

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[25] Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 74-75.

the game. For example, a fannish gamer might create mods for a particular game, but simply play through another game in their spare time, functioning as a fannish gamer in one instance and a more generalized gamer in another. Though rather simplistic, theorizing gamers on a continuum based on productivity helps distinguish certain types of gamers more broadly and also allows for gamers to slide between these distinctions.

Defining Transformative

Given the various uses of "transformative," it is important that we define the term as it applies to both traditional fan works and video games. The use of transformative in both fan studies and game studies offers key insights into the term and the style of play being examined here. Within fan studies, transformative speaks to how fans change the source material, be it through writing fan fiction about their favorite characters or creating fan videos. This term often gets used as a means of legal justification. It also serves as a means of differentiating transformative fan works from more affirmational fan works, a binary worth exploring in the context of gameplay. Transformative play also appears within game studies as a means of describing gameplay that alters the structure of the game. Ultimately, transformativity signals toward a change in the source material to create new meaning, something true of both the fan studies version of transformativity and the video game studies version.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE FACTOR

In the context of copyright, the transformative factor, the purpose and character of the use of material, serves as one of the four factors when determining fair use.[26] In the Supreme Court case Campbell vs. Acuff-Rose Music, Inc., a precedent for qualifying commercial parody as fair use was established when the rap group 2 Live Crew parodied Roy Orbison's song "Oh, Pretty Woman" without obtaining the song's license. The court ruled in the rap group's favor, citing that the extent of the transformativity of the new

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[26] "Measuring Fair Use: The Four Factors," *Stanford University Libraries*, accessed April 5, 2017, http://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/fair-use/four-factors/.

song made the other three factors less significant in the determination of fair use.[27] According to the definition established by the case, "the enquiry focuses on whether the new work merely supersedes the objects of the original creation, or whether and to what extent it is 'transformative,' altering the original with new expression, meaning, or message."[28] Transformative use essentially means using the original source material in new or unexpected ways. As the result of the case goes on to say, "the more transformative the new work, the less will be the significance of other factors, like commercialism, that may weigh against a finding of fair use."[29] According to the Center for Social Media's code of best practices in fair use for online video, if a work is merely reused without significant change to the context or meaning, then its reuse goes beyond the limits of fair use.[30] Fair use will then not apply when, for example, a copyrighted song is used in its entirety for a newly created video simply because the song evokes a desired mood. Use of music without comment on the song goes beyond the limits of fair use. As such, license and copyright holders remain fairly vigilante about use of their property beyond this limit of fair use.

Fan vidding, the practice of cutting TV shows or movies to songs to invoke new meaning, offers perhaps the clearest example of the transformative defense of fan works, especially as fan videos moved into digital spaces. In his chapter on vidding in *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins details the practice of vidding, noting how fan videos visualize

[27] Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music (92-1292), 510 U.S. 569 (1994).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] "Code of Best Practices for Online Video," *Center for Media and Social Impact*, accessed April 5, 2017, http://www.cmsimpact.org/fair-use/related-materials/codes/code-best-practices-fair-use-online-video.

transforming "borrowed materials" from mass culture into a new text. He notes that the

vidder's primary contribution comes from the imaginative juxtaposition of someone

else's words and images, prefacing that the old meanings (from both the song and

original media text) are not stripped away without struggle.[31] Vids exemplify the new or

additional associations songs gain when juxtaposed with different imagery. Lyrics

amplify, critique, or parody aspects of the original media text and highlight meaningful

images that contribute to the community's understanding of the text. As Jenkins notes,

the "pleasure of the form centers on the fascination in watching familiar images

wrenched free from their previous contexts and assigned alternative meanings."[32] The

productivity and pleasure here thus derives from the transformation of the source

material, similar to transformative play in video games.

The relationship between fans, copyright holders, and hosting platform policies

often proves fraught, hence fan and scholar emphasis on transformativity when

discussing certain types of fan works. Julie Levin Russo notes, "as long as the

infrastructure for video hosting remains prohibitively expensive, not to mention legally

delicate, grassroots producers who wish to participate in the culture of streaming depend

on commercial social media sites for distribution."[33] According to YouTube's policies, a

popular site to post fan videos, copyright owners have the option of taking the following

actions when material matches theirs: muting the audio that matches their music,

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[31] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 224.

[32] Ibid 227.

[33] Julie Leven Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Video in the Age of Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 125.

blocking a whole video from being viewed, monetizing the video by running ads against it, or tracking the video's viewership statistics.[34] Coppa and Tushnet observe, "YouTube's Content ID system goes beyond the DMCA, screening a video before it is posted based on submissions by major studios and labels" and since this system is a purely private one, "there is not even the chance of getting a true fair use determination."[35] Thus, vidders often risk their videos getting taken down when posting on YouTube, forcing them to navigate the system, compromise their vision for the vid, or pick an alternative and potentially more difficult hosting option. The Organization for Transformative Works, a nonprofit organization established by fans in 2007 that focuses on legitimizing and protecting transformative fanworks, highlights the continued importance of these practices within fan communities, hosting an archive for fan fiction, an academic journal dedicated to the study of these works, and providing resources for legal advocacy on behalf of fans.[36] The OTW works to provide ways to combat potentially unwarranted takedowns, with many vidders noting their right to fair use in the video description when posted on public sites.[37] Considering the organization's purpose in legitimizing and championing transformative work, copyright concerns clearly remain a key part of the transformative distinction in fandom.

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[34] "How Content ID works," *YouTube Help*, accessed April 3, 2017, https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2797370.

[35] Francesca Coppa and Rebecca Tushnet, "How to Suppress Women's Remix," *Camera Obscura* 26, no. 2 (2011): 136.

[36] "What We Believe," *Organization for Transformative Works*, accessed March 30, 2017, http://www.transformativeworks.org/what_we_believe/.

[37] "Guide to YouTube Removals," *Fair Use Tube*, accessed March 30, 2017, http://fairusetube.org/guide-to-youtube-removals.

In contrast, video of gameplay often comes under less scrutiny than traditional fan videos. This stems from a key medium difference, in that as an interactive form of media, video games inherently require additive productivity in order to consume the game. Showing off gameplay also serves a clearer promotional function than fan fiction or fan videos as these transformative works often present a resistant reading or reimagining of the text. At its base level, a video game merely consists of static code, often only playable through specific hardware. As Alexander Galloway points out, "without action, games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book."[38] Given this need for action and productivy to experience a game, those in the video game industry expect and encourage interaction with the source text in potentially transformative ways, thus making copyright less of a concern. In his article exploring copyright infringement and tarnishment as it relates to machinima, Mark Methenitis discusses the pros and cons of the current copyright and trademark laws for machinima, noting, for instance, that while trademark tarnishment is a concern, fan involvement might also increase the popularity of a brand.[39] For example, Nintendo encourages those wanting to stream and create video content to sign up for their Nintendo Creators Program, a program that sends the YouTube advertising revenue to Nintendo and in return sends the video maker a share of the revenue.[40] This not only monetarily benefits Nintendo, but also allows them to further

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[38] Alexander Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 2.

[39] Mark Methenitis, "Opportunity and Liability: The Two Sides of Machinima," *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10, no.1 (2011): 82.

[40] "About the Nintendo Creators Program," *Nintendo Creators Program*, accessed April 4, 2017, https://r.ncp.nintendo.net/guide/.

control their brand image. However, his primary concerns come from the potential for

machinima commercialization, not necessarily the current state of fan driven, non-profit

content. He observes that, "thanks in large part to the cooperation of developers,

machinima makers have enjoyed a relatively large degree of freedom on the non-profit

path."[41] While some content does come under scrutiny, especially if the creator becomes

controversial in some ways, video game content receives far less potential for removal

than traditional fan content.

AFFIRMATIONAL VS. TRANSFORMATIONAL

Transformative fan works have long been the subject of fan studies because they

gesture toward a resistant reading of a text and showcase fannish productivity and

creativity. Henry Jenkins posits the idea of "textual poaching," derived from Michel De

Certeau, noting that fans, in a place of cultural marginality, mine media culture for

alternative uses.[42] Jenkins goes onto to describe the number of ways fans blur a

distinction between reading (passively consuming) and writing (productivity) through

intervention and active appropriation in various ways, such as through fan fiction.[43] This

idea of fan resistance suggests a rejection of the passivity and complacency of

consumerism, hence a natural gravitation toward transformative works. Matt Hills

deconstructs the binary between "fan" and "consumer," calling into question the idea that

fans are wholly resistant or complicit. He posits that the opposition between "fan" and

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[41] Mark Methenitis, "Opportunity and Liability," 84.

[42] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 26-27.

[43] Ibid., 155.

"consumer" is not quite as strong as scholars suggest, noting that while fans are in ways an ideal consumer, they also express anti-commercial beliefs.[44] As he suggests The "conventional logic [which has occurred in many theories on fandom], seeking to construct a sustainable opposition between the 'fan' and the 'consumer' falsifies the fan's experience by positioning fan and consumer as separable cultural identities."[45] This idea of resistance comes into play when discussing transformativity, especially in contrast with a more affirmational style of fandom. Paul Booth argues that positioning fandom as either industrial/dominant or fannish/resistant problematized the very discourse used to identify fans in the first place.[46] Fannish work both subverts and supports, even as it offers up potential critiques and challenges to the source. While fans offer resistant readings of texts, they still often qualify as the most dedicated consumers of said texts, which inherently undermines a truly resistant reading.

A popular and relatively recent binary with fan studies situates fan works as either affirmational or transformational in nature. Simply put, transformative in this context means changing the source material for a fannish purpose, fixing a disappointing issue or using the material to illustrate a new point. Conversely, affirmational refers to restating and affirming the source material and established cannon[47]. As such, affirmational fan practices tend to receive sanction from media industries while transformational fan

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[44] Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 29.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Paul Booth, *Playing Fans: Negotiating fandom in the digital age,* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 14.

[47] obsession_inc, "Affirmational vs. Transformational Fandom," *Dreamwidth*, June 1, 2009, http://obsession-inc.dreamwidth.org/82589.html.

practices receive more scrutiny from the media industry, yet tend to receive more attention from fan scholars. This binary often loosely correlates with more male dominated fan actives (affirmational) or more female dominated fan activities (transformational). While dangerous to confine any type of fan practice as simply affirmational or transformational, this binary continues to play out in how scholars approach certain fan works, often overemphasizing the resistive elements of transformational works or underestimating the creativity of affirmational works[48]. Transformational also implies some sort of resistance to the inherent consumerism of being a fan, rejecting the canon in place of something predominantly fan generated. Gameplay serves as a potentially intriguing complication to this divide, especially when discussing resistance to the source material.

Transformative gameplay often hovers between this affirmational and transformative divide, even complicating the common gendered assumptions of affirmational and transformative fan practices. Take, for example, speedrunning, which simultaneously affirms the original source game by exploring and cataloging every aspect within the game in order to exploit it while also changing (in most cases) the objective and in some cases key gameplay mechanics to create an entirely new challenge. Robert Jones argues that machinima and other instances of transformative video game practices diverges from traditional textual poaching on two separate accounts: the lack of

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[48] See Matt Hills' discussion on mimetic fandom for an example
http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/rt/printerFriendly/531/448.

resistance and a difference in control over the means of production.[49] Considering the

source code is given to the gamers, he argues that hardly seems resistive.[50] So although

resistance may not be inherent in the act of creating mods, the potential is made more

available. The means of production also differs in that producers maintain power through

the means of production in traditional media while producers give the means of

production to the players. However, this does not make transformative fan works within

video games are necessarily unique in comparison to traditional fan works, but rather it

points to deconstruction of the affirmational/transformative binary already taking place

within fan studies.

TRANSFORMATIVE PLAY

Play is an inherent part of video games, although play does not necessarily need

to conform to the rules of game. In his seminal work *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan

Huizinga outlines the main characteristics of play and summarizes play as "a free activity

standing quite outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time

absorbing the player intensely and utterly."[51] Salen and Zimmerman offer up a similar

broad definition of play that encompasses the various aspects of play: "play is a free

movement within a more rigid structure."[52] This definition encompasses three categories

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[49] Robert Jones, "From Shooting Monsters to Shooting Movies." *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*. Ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland + Company, Inc. Publishers, 2006), 266-267.

[50] Ibid., 267.

[51] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture,* (New York, NY: Roy Publishers, 1950), 13.

[52] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*, 304.

of play they observe: game play, the play within the formalized interaction of a game, ludic activities, which includes games and non-game playful behavior, and being playful, the broadest category which includes a playful spirit or a playful state of mind.[53] Play can in fact expand and alter a video game into something entirely new.

According to Salen and Zimmerman, "transformative play is a special case of play that occurs when the free movement of play alters the more rigid structure in which it takes shape. The play doesn't just occupy and oppose the interstices of the system, but actually transforms the space as a whole."[54] They argue that transformative play occurs in all three categories of play: Being playful, in which "every instance of play carries with it seeds of transformative play," ludic activity, in which improvised rules change from session to session, and game play, in which rules get adjusted to keep play more challenging and interesting.[55] Several scholars have applied this idea of transformative play to their own work to help explain emergent game forms. For example, James Newman describes "superplay" as the "performance or enactment of gamer-designed and imposed challenges."[56] These gamer-designed challenges go beyond the bounds of "normal play" and create a new experience for the player. A commonly studied example of this is machinima, cinematic productions that use video game graphics and engines. Though discussed in detail later as a form of "performative" play, machinima shows the transformative nature of gameplay by turning a game's objectives into actors and settings

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[53] Ibid., 303.
[54] Ibid., 305.
[55] Ibid., 306.
[56] James Newman, *Playing with Videogames*, 124.

for an entirely new narrative, with the end product not even being a "game." Though often not discussed as such, this strongly resembles fan fiction and other creative fan works that takes elements of a text and puts them in different contexts. Transformative play implies a form of resistance and fan creation, similar to traditional fan works, in that they both make something new out of the source text.

The conception of transformative gameplay within this paper draws from Salen and Zimmerman's definition and looks primarily at the "gameplay" category of play, with various rules being adjusted, although other categories certainly apply. For example, when looking at a "Let's Play" gameplay video, a style of gameplay in which the player commentates over their gameplay and injects their own style, the gamers normally inject a sense of playfulness in their gameplay, keeping an audience in mind. The examination of transformative gameplay in this paper not only looks at the ways play transforms a text, but also the ways in which gamers share and build on these transformative styles. Distinct forms, like "machinima" become a form that gamers use and build upon, adding their own ideas to the shared meta text of the game.

FAN TEXT VS. SOURCE TEXT

While fan studies often works to justify the transformative nature of fan works, such as fan fiction or fan videos, instances of transformative gameplay rarely seem to merit such justification. This begs the question: does altering the game directly at the source material make it inherently more transformative? Certainly differences exist between video games and more traditional media, like television. However, in the context

of fan works, these differences often get overstated due to a privileging of the source text over the fan text. By taking a fan studies approach to transformative gameplay, I argue that privileging the source text not only overlooks how fans conceptualize a text as a whole (i.e. the fan text and various paratexts), but also overlooks the number of ways modders and gamers approach a video game text beyond the source text. The concept of the fan text and the approaches and tools used in transformative fan works serves as a potentially more lucrative way to understand transformative play and video game fandom at large.

In a gender and fan studies conversation hosted by Henry Jenkins, Robert Jones and Louisa Stein debate the differences in machinima and media fan authorship, a debate that primarily centers on the privileging of the fan text or the source text when discussing fan authorship. Jones primarily argues from a technological standpoint, not a cultural one, claiming that machinima differentiates itself through the harnessing of game engines and that the subculture of modding creates entirely new games, essentially.[57] He differentiates interactive media from more traditional media, like film and television, primarily because "the fundamental relationship to the medium is one of the spectatorship which in my mind is a 'more' passive relationship than that of gaming."[58] He essentially argues the perspective that transformative gameplay gives more power and control to the fans than traditional media. Moreover, he notes that traditional media stays intact when fans alter it while fans alter the medium itself with video games. However, Jones perhaps overlooks

[57] Louisa Ellen Stein and Robert Jones, "Machinima vs. Media Fan Authorship," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*. June 6, 2007. http://henryjenkins.org/2007/06/gender_and_fan_studies_round_t.html.
[58] Ibid.

the various ways producers maintain control and limit player participation. This includes patching the game after release, limiting the source code available to the player, and even controlling the copyright of the gameplay content.

On the other side, Louisa Stein argues that fan fiction writing and fan vidding does not necessarily prioritize the source text above the fan text.[59] In her essay on fannish storytelling, Stein defines the fan text as "the combined, flexible whole of the fan imagination (related to but not quire the same as fanon, which carries with it the negative connotation of overused cliché)."[60] She even notes that the tools for fan texts actually share similarity with those tools used for machinima, especially when examining interactive fiction, such as the RPG interfaces found on Live Journal.[61] Their debate breaks down into whether or not to privilege the source text or the fan text when looking and machinima and modding.

Taking an approach that embraces the fannish productivity of gamers might help bridge the divide between video games and traditional fan works. In his article discussing negotiated text integrity between fans of the *Fallout* series and its producers, R.M. Milner fully embraces many of the similarities between fans and gamers, even going so far as to put forth that all gameplay requires fan productivity:

> "Initially here, it is worth noting that fan productivity is *necessary* to even
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> complete a game. No game can be played without active engagement from the

[59] Ibid.

[60] Louisa Ellen Stein, "Fannish Storytelling Through New Media,"in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse. (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland + Company, Inc. Publishers, 2006), 247-248.

[61] Ibid., 251.

player, and many implement choice and consequence elements that make the

experience as unique as the person playing. Moreover, fan productivity outside

of the game world has been historically consequential, as producers have sought

to channel post-release fan productivity into increased shelf-life for their

brand."[62]

Positioning fan productivity as necessary to complete a game implies that all players play

in a fannish way, which is perhaps overstated. However, this position does offer insight

into why game scholars see gaming as unique and separate from other forms of media

consumption. If fans exist as separate from a supposed average viewers because of they

display a deep connection to devalued culture and approach culture through productivity,

than gamers automatically qualify as productive consumers, similar to fans.

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[62] R.M. Milner, "Negotiating Text Integrity," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2010): 727.

Transformative Gameplay Overview

Transformative gameplay consists of the specialized ways gamers play games that produce a kind of productivity beyond the standard productivity of simply playing through the game. It also assumes a community audience, for which the gamer produces. This fannish style of gameplay might seek to transform the source text into something new or simply express a deep knowledge of a game for an interested audience. Transformative gameplay falls generally into three categories: Performative, Mastery, and Educational. These aspects often overlap and no one test case necessarily excludes aspects of the other. However, when looking at transformative gameplay broadly, they serve as useful starting points to look at the purpose behind the various modes of gameplay. Below I examine a primary test case within each category while also touching on other common examples.

PERFORMATIVE

Performative gameplay primarily consists of play with an audience primarily in mind. Common forms include machinima and Let's Plays, forms of recorded or streamed video that play to spectators and seek primarily to entertain. While performative elements might seem more inherent in video games, which require action to execute, the idea of fan performance is not new. Cornel Sandvoss identifies fan performance as "always constituted between text and context by turning the object of consumption into an activity with a given micro field of social and cultural relatives."[63] Performance implies the

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[63] Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*, 44-45.

existence of an audience for fan consumption and a process of interactions between performer and spectators. The idea of conceptualizing fans as performers rather than recipients allows us to explore different avenues for fulfillment via fandom. Performance also implies a transformative/resistive element. As Sandvoss states "performances in fandom are organized in relation, either in accordance or deliberate opposition, to persisting social and cultural conditions."[64]

Runnerguy2489 gained notoriety for his various speedruns of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, especially for categories like 100% (where you beat the game obtaining every item and beat every level).[65] However, his arguably more impressive feat is beating the game blindfolded. In the video examined here[66], he performs the first three dungeons of the game blindfolded for an audience not only present with him, but also thousands streaming along at home during this event. The added challenge of play while blinded (and filming himself as proof), shows a performative element beyond just the diegetic space of the game. While this certainly constitutes as proving mastery over a game, this particular run features him not only executing this difficult style of play, but also explaining his actions as he goes along. He's playing to an audience that might be unfamiliar to the game or his style of play, and since the primary goal of the event centers

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[64] Ibid., 47.

[65] RunnerGuy2489, "Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Speed Run 100% in 5:44:10," YouTube video, 5:44:10, posted by "SpeedDemosArchiveSDA," March 17, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WhoS5CjgkF4.

[66] RunnerGuy2489,"Awesome Games Done Quick 2015 - Part 169 - Zelda: Ocarina of Time (Blindfolded)," YouTube video, 1:44:30, posted by "Games Done Quick," February 5, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhHMW_atNG4.

on entertaining viewers for donations, this particular run exemplifies a primarily performative type of transformativity.

Looking at gameplay through the lens of performance helps us understand how certain fans approach playing video games. Much like a live stage performance, gameplay is never quite the same twice, varying either through randomizations on the game's part or differences in player performance. In essence:

> Gameplay encompasses performance in more than one sense of the word. It encompasses performance as mastery of technology, performance as success in perfecting the skills needed for success in the game, and performance as public exhibition.[67]

Lowood primarily looks at this through the lens of machinima. Machinima utilizes gameplay in order to create an entirely new experience, something wholly unique and often unrelated to the game's actual narrative. For example, in the web series *Red vs. Blue*, the narrative of *Halo* gets ignored in favor of a new narrative involving the misadventures of these two groups of soldiers. This not only functions as an entertaining TV series, but also as a performative mastery of technology, as players must carefully plan their characters movements and actions. Robert Jones characterizes the history of machinima as the history of gamers as "insatiable fans," noting "by repurposing the game

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[67] Henry Lowood, "Playing History with Games: Steps towards Historical Archives of Computer Gaming," (presentation, Electronic Media GroupAnnual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Portland, OR, June 14, 2004): 7.

engine and using it as a means of animation/film production, machinima producers take transformative play to its most extreme level."[68]

In the early days of sharing files, players attempting to share their gameplay relied on first hand gameplay footage to share with others, and only others with the specific software to view it. "Demo" files, which essentially record the movements of a player and plays them back within the game, provided an easy way to share gameplay among players, but only offered the framing of the perspective of the gamer. Unable to see the performer, liveness becomes encoded through performance within the game. The demos essentially put viewers in the shell of the ghosts of players.[69]. Not only did these demos prove a player's skill, they became entertaining artifacts to share among the community, passing along effective styles of play. As Henry Lowood points out, the speed running of games and sharing of demo files marks the origins of what would later come to be known as machinima (machine cinema). Though they started out as high performance players, "they found that the could transform themselves into actors, directors, and even 'cameras' to make these animated movies inexpensively on the same PC used to frag monsters and friends in *Doom* or *Quake*."[70] The birth of machinima as a narrative form thus stems from high performance play, sharing its roots with early speedrunning and suggesting a narrative unique to the player playing in the game.

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[68] Robert Jones, "From Shooting Monsters to Shooting Movies," 277.

[69] Henry Lowood, "High-performance play: The Making of Machinima," *Journal of Media Practice* 7.1 (2006): 31.

[70] Ibid., 26.

Beyond machinima, recorded gameplay often brings in other elements, such as voice over narration, graphical overlays, and even recordings of the player actually playing the game, in order to fully capture the gaming experience. Streams and video captures of gameplay often utilize a sense of multiplicity or hypermediacy to invoke a sense liveness. According to Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, a windowed style interface (see Figure 1) contains multiple representations inside each window, creating a heterogeneous space as they compete for the viewer's attention.[71] The logic of hypermediacy thus "expresses the tension between regarding a visual space as mediated and as a "real" space that lies beyond mediation."[72]

Figure 1: Screen grab of Torje's World Record *Ocarina of Time* run and corresponding Twitch chat, taken 4/4/2017.

With video game streaming, the heterogeneous space established by the player seeks to call attention to both the game being played and the player. The view presented attempts to recreate the sense that you are there with the player. However, the view shown is in

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[71] Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media,* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 32.

[72] Ibid., 41.

many ways very unlike watching someone play a video game on a television, with the viewer able to see gameplay and the performer simultaneously and clearly. As Bolter and Grusin observe, "both new and old media invoke the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy in their efforts to remake themselves and each other."[73] The experience of gameplay therefore happens not only in the diegetic space of the game, but also in the nondiegetic space around the player, who often experience the game in a community of other players. Returning to Figure 1, the streamer places the Twitch chat channel right above the recording of himself, highlighting the community interactions taking place while he plays and inevitably impacting the gameplay taking place.

While we may think of gameplay as just the actions taking place in the diegetic space of the game, this overlooks the many interactions taking place outside of the game space, including community interactions often integral to the experience. In this case, RunnerGuy's impressive blindfolded run took place during Awesome Games Done Quick, a biannual speedrunning marathon that raises several million dollars for charity every year as viewers tune in to the event to watching their favorite games.[74] Emerging primarily from niche speedrunning communities, such as Speed Demos Archive and Quake Done Quick, Awesome Games Done Quick essentially serves as a showcase for the community while also contributing philanthropically to various causes.

While some of the runners at AGDQ profit from streaming video games, many, like RunnerGuy, simply remain fannish gamers, performing simply for a smaller

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[73] Ibid., 5.

[74] "Games Done Quick: Speedrunning Marathons for Charity," *Games Done Quick*, accessed April 3, 2017, https://gamesdonequick.com/.

community. However, a handful of other gamers who focus on performative gameplay do so professionally, blurring the line between "fan" and "pro." According to an Atlantic article written in 2014, "the top five Let's Players collectively have more YouTube subscribers than Peru has people"[75] For example, the popular YouTube gaming duo Gamer Grumps played through *Ocarina of Time* in a Let's Play style, garnering over 2 million views.[76] A gaming channel like Gamer Grumps plays *Ocarina of Time* in mostly intended ways, but adds an improvisational comedy style commentary over the game, in conversation with their YouTube audience. This creates new meaning out of the game through the lens of another player's experience. While debatable whether this constitutes as fan activity or professionalized gaming, its style still emerges out of transformative gameplay.

MASTERY

Mastery within transformative play, a style in which the player primarily seeks to prove some semblance of mastery over the game itself, serves a different purpose than performative gameplay. While more performative styles of play include arguably poor play or play with no goal of "beating" a game, this style of play carries with it an inherent competitiveness and a desire to prove one's self among the community. A popular form

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[75] Christopher Zoia, "This Guy Makes Millions Playing Video Games on YouTube." *The Atlantic*, March 14, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/03/this-guy-makes-millions-playing-video-games-on-youtube/284402/.

[76] Game Grumps, "Zelda Ocarina of Time: Oh That Ganon! - PART 1" YouTube video, 14:42, posted by "Game Grumps," March 9, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3WB0-icpig&list=PLRQGRBgN_EnrmfLkNH5K1KXD3iR1WTb5E&index=1.

of mastery within transformative play that has emerged is speedrunning, beating a game as quickly as possible. This includes also self-imposed challenges that make the game harder and completing a game to 100% completion.

Figure 2: Screen Grab of Torje's World Record *Ocarina of Time* Run, Taken 4/4/2017

On March 23rd, 2017, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* was beaten in 17 minutes and 9 seconds.[77] Normally taking hours to complete, a subset of Zelda fannish gamers work together to complete the game as quickly as possible. In this particular run, the runner (Torje) seeks to get to the end as quickly as possibly, utilizing any glitch or sequence break in order to achieve his goal. Speedrunning a video game, which involves attempting to complete a game in the shortest amount of time, might sound obsessive or isolating, but this overlooks the inherently performative and communal nature of playing video games. Speedrunning emphasizes high performance play, working to add these additional player-made challenges in order to re-create the initial satisfaction of beating a

[77] TorjeAGC, "Ocarina of Time Any% speedrun in 17:09 [World Record]," Twitch video, 28:26, posted by "TorjeAGC," March 23, 2017, https://www.twitch.tv/videos/130682049.

game. However, arguably much of the satisfaction of these additional challenges comes from sharing and performing for a community. Within this community, comprised of both enthusiasts of the initial game and players who enjoy speedrunning as a style of gameplay, new styles of play continue to emerge beyond the expectations of video game developers.

Considering the shared origins of speedrunning and machinima, pulling concepts from machinima scholarship helps conceptualize the performative nature of speedrunning. Speedrunning marks its origins in early PC games such as *Doom* (1993) and *Quake* (1996), as these games allowed players to record and save play throughs as demo files to share with others. Very soon after the *Quake*'s release, gamers began finishing levels as fast as possible and sharing their feats with others to try and beat each other's time.[78] Conceptualizing speedrunning as machinima highlights the overlap in performative and mastery styles of transformative play. For Lowood, machinima transforms gameplay via performance, subversion, spectatorship, modification, and player communities. [79] Speedrunning certainly fits within machinima by Lowood's definition, although it focuses more on performance than subversion, with the performer striving to prove mastery. In deconstructing the game in such a manner, the player becomes a performer, creating an alternative narrative to the gameplay. Instead of venturing through Hyrule on a series of quests, the Link in this speedrun narrative warps straight to the end, fighting the final boss in a matter of minutes. Yet, the tension and

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[78] "History of Quake speed-running," *Speed Demos Archive*, accessed March 30, 2017, http://quake.speeddemosarchive.com/quake/history.txt.
[79] Henry Lowood, "High Performance Play," 25.

challenge of beating the game feels just as gripping, especially among longtime fans of the game. James Newman asks us to think of the group coordinated strategies and techniques as a script, with the player enacting the script in his play through of the game.[80] Much like traditional machinima, which often involves multiple players coordinating to create a new narrative within a pre-rendered game world, speedrunning creates a new narrative through subversion, albeit incorporating the liveness and improvisation of the player during a run.

As Steven Jones notes in his book, "the meanings of video games are constructed and they are collaborative" essentially "functions of the larger grid of possibilities built by groups of developers, players, reviewers, critics, and fans in particular times and places and through specific acts of gameplay or discourses about games"[81]. Speedrunning ultimately functions as a community endeavor, with meaning collaborated on forums and through shared videos. The route Torje uses in his run took years of experimentation to implement, with new short cuts and techniques being discovered regularly in the initial period of discovery. Going back to Henry Jenkins' theorization of knowledge communities, fans of *Ocarina of Time* were brought together initially via online forums to work together to exploit this game and prolong their enjoyment, sharing video files of their performances and working together to push the game to its limits.[82] This highlights the collaborative production and evaluation of knowledge, which ultimately ties a

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[80] James Newman, *Playing with Videogames*, 130.

[81] Steven Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games: Gaming and Textual Strategies*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

[82] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 27.

community together in a way to prolong their enjoyment of the program. Similarly, In the instance of this particular playthrough of Zelda, various other categories of completing the game continue to emerge as a desire to continue playing the game and mastering the game in ever evolving ways. For *Ocarina of Time* this includes racing modes, such as Bingo challenges that pit players against one another in an effort to complete specific tasks the quickest, various categories of speedrunning, including 100%, a glitchless play through, and MST (medals, stones and trials). For most players, simply beating a game proves rewarding enough, but for fan communities, new challenges must keep emerging in order to continue experiencing and enjoying a game.

EDUCATIONAL

Achieving everything in a video game is often no small task, especially in a sprawling action-adventure game like *Ocarina of Time*. Beyond beating the game, players often seek to collect every item within a game, explore the entire world, or complete every additional challenge. While many players enjoy simply playing through with no guidance, walkthroughs offer guidance to those players who might end up stuck in a game or who simply want better tips on how to get past difficult levels. Educational transformative gameplay encompasses walkthroughs, tips and tricks videos, and finding Easter eggs within a video game. This often contains a performative element, but also helps solidify a fan's gaming capital among their community and prove a different type of mastery over the game. In our final case study we look at a fairly straightforward walkthrough of the Nintendo 3DS version of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* that

shows 100% completion of the game, including things not even required to necessarily

beat the game.[83] It serves as an example of educational transformative gameplay where

players strive to play a game with the purpose of educating an audience or community.

Video games have long involved spectatorship, whether crowding around an

arcade machine or sitting on a couch in front of a home console. However, the ability to

record and save gameplay has a shorter history that ties into both the history of video

game paratexts and the history of performative play. In her book exploring cheating in

gameplay, Mia Consalvo outlines the history of guides and walkthroughs, making note of

early instances of visual guidebooks. As early as 1989, guide publishers explored

released VHS tapes describing secret game tricks and tips, though, as Consalvo points

out, "the videotape was never an ideal medium for guides, as it could not be readily

searched and required additional hardware to operate."[84] With the advent of DVDs, this

searchability problem decreased with chapter menus, although the format still never

peaked like official printed guides did. However, these attempts at visual walkthroughs

highlight a key feature of the format: the easy ability to explain and show in game

movement, something printed guides could not as easily convey. Consalvo notes that

dynamic walkthroughs overcome the limitation of simply screenshotting the game and

describing successive movements, noting that "they not only explain what to do, they can

[83] packattack04082, "The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D 100% Walkthrough Part 1 - Intro + Deku Tree," YouTube video, 29:10, posted by "packattack04082," July 11, 2014, "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJHJ5Cvm0qg&index=2&list=PLYpDU5ElRBflpM_wXgCT2Qi5Xj8v7oSTH.

[84] Mia Consalvo, *Cheating,* 59.

also model the action for the player."[85] By the mid 90s, walkthroughs began appearing online, through sites like GameFAQs, being written by fans, not professional writers. Consalvo points out that while the writers spend countless hours producing walkthroughs for no pay, they obtain, if the guide is good enough, gaming capital and recognition.[86] Not only did gamers take to writing free guides for the Internet, with streaming options becoming more viable, especially when YouTube allowed for longer video times and online video walkthroughs became more popular, recorded by both fans and gaming journalists alike.

While official walkthrough guides become less common, fan-created wikis and gameplay guides continue to emerge online. This especially proves true in transformative gameplay communities in which official guides certainly do not offer guides on how to exploit glitches. For example, Zelda Speed Runs offers not only leaderboards for Zelda speedruns, but also guides and how-to videos for certain techniques, such as the extended superslide trick that allows Link to travel very quickly across the map.[87] Fan-driven sites like "Zelda Speed Runs" and "Speed Demos Archive" offer paratextual support to those seeking to exploit a game in various ways while top of keeping track of top players through leaderboards. Drawing on Consalvo's idea of "gaming capital," these fan sites and gaming videos serve as a form of gaming capital among players, either by watching gameplay footage to increase their own knowledge or recording gameplay to gain capital

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[85] Ibid., 60.

[86] Ibid., 179.

[87] "Extended Superslide," *Zelda Speedruns*, last modified January 13, 2014, http://www.zeldaspeedruns.com/oot/tech/extended-superslide.

and credibility within the community. Recording, watching and even commenting on

recorded gameplay gives players gaming capital that allows them to interact and share

experience with other members of the community.

Conclusion

This report has provided an overview of transformative gameplay that draws from both video game studies concepts and traditional fan studies concepts in order to better understand the development and spread of these gameplay modes. This area of overlap lies predominantly in community organization and productivity. Transformative gameplay makes up the specialized ways fans play games that go beyond the standard productivity of gameplay, productivity then shared among a community. Fan studies offers a lens through which to describe the productivity that goes beyond simply consuming a text, a distinction easier to spot in traditional media due to a perceived passivity when normally consuming a text. Bridging this gap between the fields not only helps explain transformative gameplay, but also offers additional insight into how fans consume texts, often looking for new ways to experience the source text.

Videos of gameplay make up an entire genre of online video content emerging on platforms such as Twitch or YouTube, and a profitable one at that. Twitch, the online streaming platform, sold for $970 million to Amazon, primarily due to its 55 million users.[88] In 2015, YouTube launched "YouTube Gaming" in order to compete with Twitch and capitalize on the large library of pre-existing gaming videos on the site.[89] Within this emerging superstructure of gaming content, transformative gameplay and those various forms that emerge from fannish styles of play continues to grow in popularity, not only in

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[88] "Amazon.com to Acquire Twitch," *BuisnessWire,* August 25, 2014, http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20140825005820/en/Amazon.com-Acquire-Twitch#.U_uXibytmS7.

[89] Jake Muncy, "Watch Out, Twitch: YouTube Gaming Just Went Live," *Wired,* August 26, 2015, https://www.wired.com/2015/08/youtube-gaming/.

fan communities, but also among professional video game websites. Polygon, a video game outlet out of Vox, hosts several video game series utilizing fannish styles of transformative play, including game breaking character creations (in a series called "Monster Factory") and peaceful playthroughs of World of Warcraft, among others. Waypoint, *Vice's* video game branch, regularly streams video games and also engages in self imposed challenges, such as playing through *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*, the newest installment in the *Legend of Zelda* franchise, utilizing a new self imposed rule in which the character permanently dies after three in game deaths.[90] Even the gaming industry itself embraces this transformative style of play in many cases, to extend the life of their game. Returning to *Breath of the Wild*, the game offers a completely open world (or "open air") experience, partially inspired by *Zelda* players desire to explore.[91]

This project offers merely an overview of transformative gameplay in a modern context with many other avenues still left to explore. The relationship between game producers and players continues to evolve, with players feeling an increased sense of ownership and productivity within games they play. What challenges in the producer/consumer relationship might arise or how might it evolve in the future? Copyright and trademark concerns in the face of a crowded gameplay video landscape

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[90] Austin Walker and Danielle Riendau, "Can We Beat 'Zelda: Breath of the Wild' With Only 3 Lives?" YouTube video, 2:09:01, posted by "Waypoint," March 30, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuwzJYAARqI&t.

[91] Eiji Aonuma, "The Making Of The Legend Of Zelda: Breath of the Wild: Open Air Concept," *IGN* video, 10:08, March 14, 2017, http://www.ign.com/videos/2017/03/14/the-legend-of-zelda-breath-of-the-wild-official-making-of-series-open-air-concept.

also warrant further exploration. Video game fans also possess the unique ability to professionalize by simply playing the games they love in unique and interesting ways, thanks to the monetization of gameplay videos, and with that comes a myriad of changes to the fannish gameplay landscape. How and why does the gaming industry generally encourage this type of professionalization and fannish engagement over other traditional media industries? Further study of transformative gameplay modes not only helps inform our understanding of gameplay, but also examines how communities respond to and spread these styles of play beyond niche fan communities. While these questions lie outside of the scope of this project, I hope the insight provided into transformative gameplay spurs a further interest in this area of study and that scholars continue to explore the relationship between traditional fandom and video game fandom.

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