Stasis and Stillness: Moments of Inaction in Games

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Abstract

This paper represents an initiatory investigation into moments of inaction in games. Two types of inaction are defined and discussed: stasis, which is inaction brought on by or through a game's mechanics, and stillness, which is brought on by or through a game's aesthetics. This paper uses gameplay examples from *Until Dawn*, *Mario Party 2*, *Animal Crossing: New Leaf*, and *World of Warcraft* to demonstrate that moments of stasis and stillness can either be designed features of a game that produce a variety of affective experiences, or playful subversions that are injected into a game by the player. Identifying whether moments of stasis and stillness are designed or injected enables these two modes of inaction to be compared and positioned as part of a broader project that interrogates whether play can be a form of critique.

Keywords

Inaction; speed; slowness; mechanics; aesthetics; design; critique; play studies

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Introduction: Interaction Through Inaction

When defining video games as a medium, one often-cited characteristic is the need for interaction. Most video games will not progress unless a player is present to play by entering inputs through button presses, controller tilts, and so on. This is likely why much game studies research has investigated games as they are played. However, not as much has been said about what happens when the rhythm of play is disrupted, either by the player or by the game itself. What follows is an investigation into what can be called moments of inaction in video games, moments in which a player is either unable or chooses not to engage with the game in any way that causes the narrative (such as it may be) to progress.[1] I avoid using the term non-interaction for this discussion because, as has been discussed by Zimmerman (2004) and other theorists,[2] it is difficult to argue that a player can ever not-interact with a game in some capacity.

Moments of inaction, however, can be experienced in any game and occur for a variety of reasons. This paper discusses two forms of inaction which I call stasis and stillness, words that, although similar, each evoke one side of an important dichotomy in game-making and game studies: game code and game feel (Swink, 2008). I define stasis as inaction brought on by or through a game's mechanics. It can be forced on players by the game's developers to achieve a range of effects, or playfully injected by players to subvert the game as it is designed. I define stillness as voluntary inaction brought on by or through a game's aesthetics.[3] It too can be intentionally designed and often is. However, since the aesthetic of stillness is subjective, players can both resist stillness where it exists and inject stillness where it does not in ways that may undercut a game's overall narrative experience.

Though there are other forms of inaction in games,[4] for this initiatory exploration, I limit myself to the concepts of stasis and stillness. Both are of interest to my work because they can either occur as a developer intended, by design, or are brought into the game by players, by what I will call injection.

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[1] Here and throughout this piece, I use the term "narrative" relatively loosely to refer to the series of events that may transpire over the course of playing a game, whether it has an explicit story or not.
[2] I am particularly thinking of Galloway (2006) and Nitsche (2008) although there are certainly others.
[3] I was initially torn between whether to frame stillness as an aesthetic or an affect, but Hunicke et al.'s (2004) sense of aesthetics as "the desirable emotional responses evoked in the player, when she interacts with the game system" suggests that the one term can encapsulate both in a game context (p. 2).
[4] Moments of waiting and the chaining together of moments of deliberate inefficiency one finds in instrumental slow play practices come to mind.

As such, stasis and stillness are worth exploring not only in and of themselves, but also in service of a larger research question which undergirds this piece: can play be a critical act? Critique, here, does not refer to the high-discourse language of critical theory. While I agree that being critical includes being "suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable," academic critique puts the ability to adequately express dissatisfaction in the hands of a privileged few (Horkheimer, 2002/1972, p. 207).

This framing of critique also problematically suggests that it can only be a negative process. And while I admit that the role of critique is "to make reality unacceptable" (Boltanski, 2011, p. 5), this does not prevent the expression of dissatisfaction from becoming a generative process—"a longing, wishful thinking, a desire, and even a dream" (Dunne & Raby, 2013, pp. 34–35). Queer critique, and particularly Muñoz' (2009) assertion that "from a shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality," is of particular relevance here (p. 189). Rather than explicitly stating that something could be better, one can imply a desire for improvement by articulating alternatives, whether through theory or, critically, through action (i.e. play).[5]

The primary focus of this paper is to begin developing a taxonomy for moments of inaction that occur during video game play. By building on the limited discussion of stasis and stillness, I argue for play as a critical act, thereby expanding upon related concepts such as Galloway's (2006) "countergaming," Schleiner's (2017) "ludic mutation," and Dyer-Witherford and de Peuter's (2009) "games of multitude." I ultimately argue that player-injected moments of stillness seem to best capture the spirit of these earlier theoretical play practices.

To do so, I will illustrate the concepts of stasis and stillness by using examples that will be read through the lenses of speed, time, and emotion. These "moments" are shown to be spaces of potentiality for both designers, for whom moments of inaction can evoke particular affective experiences, and for players, for whom stasis and stillness can be injected to critique a game through the act of play itself. That being said, before moving into examples of stasis and stillness, it is necessary to situate my current understanding of speed, time, and emotion both in natural and virtual space.

Velocities at Play

In the proceeding discussion of moments of stasis and stillness in games, it is necessary to consider the implications that speed and slowness have for games and their players. Much of my earlier work

[5] Whereas the action I focus on here is play, for queer scholars, these alternatives are often expressed through the action of embodying a queer subject position, as is the case in Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* (2011). For a helpful connection of his work to game studies, see Ruberg (2017).

discusses speedrunning, the practice of completing a game as quickly as possible without cheating, and how this play practice combines obscure glitches and precise player input into dismantling a game's narrative, among other things (Scully-Blaker, 2014; Scully-Blaker, 2016). Although this paper focuses on stasis and stillness rather than velocity and acceleration, my framework for discussing virtual speed—as informed by the work of Paul Virilio (1986) —still applies:

> At a basic level, movement through a game literally "reveals" new environments or plot points … [and] one measure of how "well" someone interacts with a game is how quickly a player can string together inputs and advance to the game's completion. If one accepts this, then it stands to reason that speed in games is something that players should generally covet. (Scully-Blaker, 2016, p. 51)

By using examples at the level of both hardware (Sega's Blast Processing) and software (in-game timers and rewards for faster completion times), I argue that "simply put, going fast in games is a good thing" with the caveat that there are exceptions (Scully-Blaker, 2016, p. 53). Beyond mechanics that slow even the speedrunner down, some games suggest that the way to play "is, perhaps counter-intuitively, to slow down and enjoy the game world" (Scully-Blaker, 2016, p. 53). If "progress" through a game is traditionally measured by advancing through space, how might we reframe this for a politics of the slow?

Parkins and Craig (2006) suggest that "the very idea of slow living is provocative" and cite examples which range from the slow food movement, the wellness revolution, and Slow Cities in order to consider the numerous ways we might deploy slowness to "promote a position counter to the dominant value-system of 'the times'" (p. 1). As will be shown in my examples of moments of injected stasis and stillness, I believe that this idea of a "radical slowness" is not without merit. I share Parkins and Craig's conviction that "a sense of 'slow time' may interrogate the instrumental forms of social time … and seek to offer an alternative to speed as the only available temporality" (p. 40). Even so, this does not mean that the slow life movement is without oversights.

In asking how we might slow down our lives, nowhere do Parkins and Craig (or the Slow Life movement itself) ask *who* is able to ease the pain of acceleration. If one considers the costs, both financial and temporal, of choosing to live life slowly then the answer becomes clearer.[6] As Sarah Sharma (2014) argues, "these intellectual responses and progressive social movements that respond to the problematic pace of

[6] Here it is important to note that I am referring to slowness as a luxury that one opts into. I believe that slowness can equally be forced upon those in marginalized positions as a hindrance.

life risk reproducing the very social inequalities they rail against" (p. 110). To Sharma, many of the same movements praised by Parkins and Craig as spaces of resistance are the exact opposite and instead represent "the multiple temporalities that underlie the social fabric" which demonstrate that slower "experiences of time are not just the outcome of individual choices," but in fact a privilege of class in the larger democratic, capitalist system (p. 110). In what follows, I wish to invoke both Parkins and Craig's optimism and Sharma's caution since games and even the idea of critique come from their own places of privilege.

Finally, this concern with velocities of play ties to the design concepts of flow and glitch. Flow is a coveted "smoothness of use" in which a user/player becomes "totally absorbed" in the object/game such that "they forget what is around them" (Marcotte, 2018, para. 18). It finds an adversary in Menkman's (2011) concept of the glitch as "a not yet defined break from a procedural flow, fostering critical potential" (p. 27). For Menkman, a glitch "captures the machine revealing itself" (p. 30) in a way that Marcotte (2018) suggests can create "gaps" in which "reflection" can occur (para. 19). By interacting with games at speeds that differ from an assumed norm, players may confront the flow of a game as a form of critique through play itself.[7]

In short, since video games tend to encourage speed by design, slowness and inaction may present an alternative way of being in virtual space. Still, I do not wish to suggest that all slowness is subversive, but instead propose that it is necessary to analyze specific moments of inaction in context. With the theoretical foundations of this paper laid out, I will now elaborate upon the definitions of stasis and stillness.

Stasis

As noted in the introduction, stasis is inaction brought on intentionally by or unintentionally through a game's mechanics: it is any moment in which a game forces the player to stop because of a device that exists outside the game's story. In such cases, one or multiple moments within the game are built around inaction as a mechanical option, but it is important to recall that not all moments of stasis are designed.

As James Newman (2005) and others have observed,[8] it is not uncommon for players to "seek alternative gaming pleasures" (p. 63) within a particular title in an attempt to "extract as much enjoyment and challenge" from the software as possible (p. 62). Such interactions

[7] Though I limit myself to the discussion of video games here, this process becomes particularly important if we apply the glitch-flow relation to everyday life. Menkman (2011) argues that flow "seems natural, but is in fact strictly guided by larger corporations and powers" (p. 30). In so doing, she suggests that there is more at stake to the glitch than mere technological error.

[8] Consider Boluk and Lemieux (2017) or Consalvo (2007), for example.

evoke Suits' (1978/2014) notion of those "triflers," who "recognize rules but not goals" when playing a game (p. 47). In the case of players who inject moments of stasis into a game, one can observe a play practice oriented around a desire to "see what happens" when no inputs are made. Like other instances of trifling, the "alternative gaming pleasure" here is to engage in something game-like rather than playing the game itself (Suits, 1978/2014, p. 46). To clarify this point, I will examine some ways that these moments can occur.[9]

Stasis as Designed

It is well established that "game worlds are totally constructed environments. Everything there was put on the screen for some purpose" (Squire & Jenkins, 2002, para. 2). As such, stasis can be a halting achieved intentionally in a game by those who worked to create it. And while this and more recent work from what might be called a proceduralist school of thought does little to argue for player agency,[10] the "purposed" nature of designed game worlds is important for the discussion to come. That said, a common form of designed stasis which will serve as an example here is the quick time event.

Until Dawn's "Don't Move!" prompt

In Supermassive Games' *Until Dawn* (2015), stasis is deployed to invoke horror movie tropes and generate emotional responses from players as they control a group of teenagers trying to survive a monstrous night. Much of the gameplay is made up of branching narrative paths that correspond to dialogue choices and other decisions that the player makes, but there are also numerous action sequences at which the player can succeed or fail based on their ability to execute set controller inputs within an allotted timeframe. The most notable of these for our purposes is *Until Dawn*'s unique "Don't Move!" prompt (see Figure 1).

[9] I must note that the examples throughout this paper are not meant to be representative of all moments of stasis and stillness in games, nor do all instances of one mechanic or aesthetic choice necessarily bring about a moment of inaction in the way that this paper discusses.
[10] See Flanagan (2009) and Isbister (2016).

Figure 1.The player character (left) hides in the hopes that the figure wielding a flamethrower (right) passes her by.

By reading the PlayStation 4 controller's built-in orientation sensor, the game tracks whether the player is keeping their hands steady for a hidden length of time. If the player jostles the controller too much, they fail the prompt and the narrative proceeds accordingly. *Until Dawn* deploys stasis in a way that establishes an affective, haptic link between the player and the fear that is being felt by the player character. In this way, the stasis caused by the "Don't Move!" prompt is an interruption of the flow state that grounds the player in the narrative through a combination of inaction and affect. Still, players do not need to always be told to not move in games—sometimes curiosity is motivation enough. Sometimes players attempt to playfully inject moments of stasis themselves.

Stasis as Injected

When discussing moments that are "injected" by players, I am working from the understanding that "sometimes, in fact, the force of play is so powerful that it can change the rule structure itself" (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 305). It is less a matter here of what games bring to the player, but rather what the player brings to a game and how certain play practices may undermine even the most meticulously constructed environments.

In general, player-injected stasis can occur whenever the player deliberately stops entering inputs in a way that thwarts the assumptions laid out by a game's mechanics. The motivation for inaction is usually to playfully investigate what happens when the player gives up control in moments that would normally demand it. To elaborate on this point, I will use examples from Nintendo's *Mario Party* 2 (1999).

Luigi wins by doing nothing

In Nintendo's *Mario Party* series, players select from a cast of regulars from the Mario Bros. canon and take part in a boardgame-style battle to collect coins and stars by winning minigames that range from tugs-of-war to pizza-eating contests. Nearly ten years after the release of *Mario Party 2*, a YouTuber known as KlydeStorm uploaded a video called "Mario Party 2: Luigi wins by doing absolutely nothing" (2009). In the video, KlydeStorm plays a selection of minigames in which, as the title suggests, the player-controlled character (Luigi) wins against three "easy" level AI opponents without any button inputs being made. In the video, the AI players seemingly act at random, in one instance throwing themselves off a mountaintop with no interference from the player character (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.The victory screen for the Bumper Balls minigame. Luigi started in this spot and did not move while the AI-controlled opponents still managed to lose.

By playing in this way and sharing the video on YouTube, KlydeStorm broadcasted an instance of player-injected stasis to the masses. Their play reveals that the easy AI in *Mario Party 2* is not necessarily programmed to pose any challenge to the player and that in certain contexts, one does not even need to play in order to succeed. This video gained enough notoriety that others subsequently released videos for later *Mario Party* games, as well as games from the *Super Smash Bros* and *Mario Kart* series.[11] These player-injected moments of stasis are clearly not without their entertainment value.

Though there are many other minigames in *Mario Party 2* where inaction is not a path to victory, KlydeStorm's video still reveals certain assumptions and oversights made during *Mario Party 2*'s design. Any affective content that one may find in designed stasis is clearly absent here and in its place one finds humour and an implication that the designers may have taken the term "easy" too far. Although this video is intended for entertainment purposes, it evokes Menkman's (2011) characterization of glitches as "a not yet defined break from a procedural flow, fostering a critical potential" (p. 27). At play here is an interruption of a process that simultaneously reveals the inner workings of that process.

This, then, is what I mean by a "moment of stasis." Operating at the level of a game's mechanics, stasis can be considered as both a designed feature that produces one or more effects on players by

[11] For examples, see YTSunny (2015), Omega Tyrant (2015), or Nintendo Unity (2017).

forcing them to stop, and as something that can be injected into a game by players to "see what happens" when no inputs are made at a given time. Moments of injected stasis seem to dispense with affect and instead potentially present a critique of certain design assumptions made by game developers. Even so, the fact that many moments of injected stasis are positioned as satiating trivial curiosity rather than as active interrogations of the medium may undermine their perceived contribution to critical discourse. In the forthcoming discussion of moments of stillness, however, the tension between critique and curiosity may be better resolved.

Stillness

Recalling the introduction, stillness is inaction brought on by or through a game's aesthetics. Like moments of stasis, these instances of aesthetic inaction can be intentionally designed, but players can also inject stillness into games in ways that undercut the overall narrative experience. Even so, when compared to stasis, it is much more common that stillness is designed (or at least designed towards) since games often seek to produce both emotional and ludic responses from players through a slowed, if not halted, sense of time and space (Isbister, 2016). Unlike stasis, which actively impacts a player's sense of agency, stillness is comprised of minute details which suggest how one might interact with a virtual world. But virtual stillness, like similar moments in everyday life, is not without its privilege.

In speaking of the different temporalities that individuals of different privilege inhabit, Sharma (2014) gives the example of "express" fitness classes for office workers who "would trade their lunch breaks for yoga" (p. 81). She is particularly struck by the rhetoric of the instructor in one such class—"full of aphorisms about the speed of the world 'out there'"—as opposed to the decelerated time and space of the mat where one takes pause to practice a form of bodily reverence, a characterization that is mirrored in moments of stillness (Sharma, 2014, p. 82).

If we consider video games as a space for leisure or indeed safe ways to experience reality in the face of the "out there" that is everyday life, the aesthetic of stillness can become central to an understanding of not just a slow play aesthetic, but of the affective temporalities of a disproportionately moneyed society (Crawford, 1982, p. 15). Whether on the mat or on one's couch, experiences of stillness are only available to those with the money and, more importantly, the time to have such experiences.[12] It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the best

[12] This is a claim that I wish to introduce here, but that likely merits its own paper. The connections between games, leisure, time, and capital are central to my larger research interests.

examples of a game that promotes moments of stillness is also one deeply invested in slowness, time, and capital.

Stillness as Designed

When considering game studies' treatment of Nintendo's *Animal Crossing* series (2001–2020), few have been as vocal as Ian Bogost. He has devoted multiple pages to the "animal village simulator," discussing a tension between what he calls "consumption and naturalism," the juxtaposition of a rural, small-town life, with the capitalist rhythm of work and debt (Bogost, 2013, para. 1). Indeed, the core plot of each game in the series revolves around slowly developing one's house or even the town itself through substantial investments of both time and the in-game currency. And while we will later see that this diagnosis does not effectively consider the range of possible in-game actions, Bogost's "naturalism" is helpful here for signposting one of the major ways that games in the series produce stillness.

Walk, don't run to Nook's Junction

Animal Crossing titles are perhaps the only non-stealth examples of games in which the consequences of running can outweigh the benefits. The game is designed such that play is seldom a race against the clock. Other than getting somewhere slightly faster and managing one's own (im)patience, there is no reason to run in *Animal Crossing* games; however, there are several deterrents to doing so, including the risk of trampling flowers or scaring away valuable fish and insects. Meanwhile, players are rewarded for careful exploration of their bucolic town, whether that consists of learning the mannerisms of their fellow villagers or shaking trees to get fruits or pocket change.

In this sense, *Animal Crossing* games are arguably designed to encourage stillness. Since these mechanics never force the player into inaction, they do not create stasis, but the player's fraught relationship with running and the game's rural setting and narrative work to suggest a flow imbued with stillness to the player. A key distinction emerges here between stasis and stillness: one cannot so much design *for* stillness as they can design *towards* it. The second that a game forces the player to stop and admire the scenery, perhaps in a cutscene, a moment of stasis is created regardless of whether it also encourages the player to relish in the game feel. Stillness, then, is a far more subjective experience than stasis.

In the given example, at no point is a player forced to walk in *Animal Crossing* games, nor are they ever forced to stop and wait for very long. Instead, the tone set by these games encourages players to find spaces within the virtual world where their avatar *may* stop, and a moment of stillness *can* occur.

Animal Crossing's invitation to stillness

While moments of stillness can be found in all the mainline *Animal Crossing* games, the following example comes from *Animal Crossing: New Leaf* (Nintendo, 2012). In *New Leaf*, players can visit the town's Main Street, where various shops are located. At one end of the road, there is a bench placed at the edge of a cliff that overlooks the ocean. The player can, if they wish, sit on the bench and wait for nothing in particular. The camera may pan up slightly to show off the sky and a street lamp may ignite as the in-game clock detects the arrival of the evening, but the bench serves no in-game purpose other than offering a place to sit and listen to the lapping waves (see Figure 3).

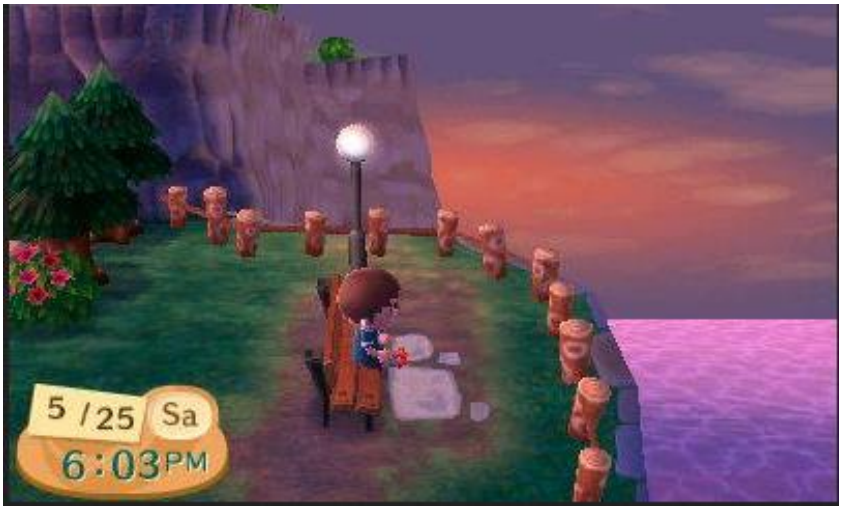

Figure 3. The player sits on the bench in question, admiring the ocean as a sunset occurs in the background.

While this simple affordance is easy to miss and may, in fact, lean towards being more of an "Easter egg" than a full-fledged mechanic, the developers still took the time to program this into the game. For all that the *Animal Crossing* series seems to embody the capitalist ethic of hard work and paying one's debts, there is clearly something else at play here. Even though players could be paying off their debt, collecting more bugs and fish for the museum, or even performing the emotional labour of befriending villagers, they can instead find respite in an unlikely moment of stillness.

While the two specific examples presented here do involve mechanics of sorts (consequences for running and being able to sit on certain objects), a player could just as easily experience stillness in *New Leaf* by standing in a similar spot in their village and allowing the game to idle so that they can better take in the scenery. Simply standing in place is likely how stillness is most commonly experienced across all video games since, as we have seen, such feelings cannot be explicitly designed *for* so much as designed *towards*. If stasis is a stop sign, then stillness is a rest stop along the side of the road.

While the *Animal Crossing* series has been a valuable example since so many design choices were made that orient the game *towards* stillness, I will now show that such moments can occur in any game if a player's subjective perception of the game world coaxes them into inaction.

Stillness as Injected

In the most basic sense, a moment of stillness can be considered injected when the aesthetic content of a player's interaction with a virtual world orients that play towards what we might consider rest and inaction. In other words, one can inject moments of stillness into any game, but it requires, at the very least, a certain amount of effort on the player's part. In our continuing analogy, Sharma's (2014) yoga student may practice in a studio with little effort, but with the right frame of mind, they may also find stillness at a busy intersection or a demolition derby. Given the subjectivity involved in experiences of stillness, a universal example is not possible. Instead, I will discuss one case that I believe exemplifies both a substantial investment of time and an injection of stillness into a virtual space that was not built to account for such a commitment.

World of Warcraft's neutral party

World of Warcraft (Blizzard, 2004; hereafter *WoW*) is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game about completing quests and slaying beasts, and yet several players have garnered attention by reaching the in-game level cap without killing a single enemy. In supplanting the game's suggested way of playing with their own, these players must spend far more time to achieve this goal than those who play in a more normative way. In some cases, this can fundamentally alter how the game treats the player, as is the case with Doubleagent, the Pandaren Shaman.

The Pandaren were a later addition to *WoW* whose unique features included starting the game on their own special island as a neutral party rather than as part of either of the two warring in-universe factions, the Alliance and the Horde. By playing peacefully and not completing the requisite quests, Doubleagent was never prompted to choose a faction, nor were they ever able to leave the Pandaren homeworld—their character is forever a neutral party. Over the course of years, Doubleagent relied on the game's herbalism system which "grants a small amount of experience every time an herb is gathered" to reach the level cap all while still remaining in the first area of the game (Bogos, 2013, para. 5). As a direct result of this, they were locked out of many basic gameplay features including dungeons or player versus player combat (Bogos, 2013, para. 3). Unlike other *WoW* pacifists, the specific context in which Doubleagent chose to play peacefully rendered them partially invisible to the game's underlying logics due to assumptions made on the part of developers as to how the game would/should be played.

Without speaking to Doubleagent, I cannot know their motivation for playing in this way. One can certainly argue that rather than the pursuit of stillness, this playstyle more closely resembles an instrumentalized form of "seeing what happens." Perhaps Doubleagent is one of Taylor's (2006) "power gamers" who wishes to demonstrate their mastery over the game world by deliberately picking inefficient means to reach the level cap (p. 67).[13] Even so, I believe that it is both feasible and worthwhile to read Doubleagent's actions as a generation of stillness where little of it was to be found. While their initial impulse may have been to "see what happens" if they tried to exist as a pacifist in a world of *War*craft, at some point in the process, this curiosity was sated and yet clearly the desire to continue playing this way was not. As such, I argue that Doubleagent's play expresses the potential for alternate modes of play to become something more than a desire to push against the boundaries of a game's rules "for the lulz."

Conclusion: The Slow Road to Critique

The question I am left with is the following: is this potential for boundary pushing the ability to critique a game through the act of play itself? Simply repeating Parkins and Craig's (2006) assertion that "the very idea of slow living is provocative" (p. 1) is not a satisfactory answer here. Stasis and stillness have been my focus because they are moments in which a game's flow is interrupted and its underlying logics and assumptions are revealed.

But why does critique through play matter? The answer returns me to the beginning of this paper and the medium-specific qualities of games. Generally speaking, critical art commentary is achieved either outside of the artistic context (whether through a high-discourse essay or a two-word Tweet) or through the creation of another work of art that is in conversation with the earlier piece. But in the case of games, engagement with an artwork in its own context can also be achieved through play.

My underlying hypothesis in this piece and in my research at large is that players can play with games in ways that they cannot while interacting with films or illustrations. Like using art to critique art itself, I would like to frame this unique space of games and play as another form of artistic interaction—a critique through the act of play itself. This question is vital for the broader game studies project of situating games as objects that both contain and dispense the received wisdom of the dominant culture.

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[13] Core to my research is the insistence that play, no matter how apparently subversive, must always reckon with the meritocratic logics of toxic masculinity that undergird game culture at large (see Paul, 2018). This tension is also discussed by Ruberg (2019) in the context of velocity and acceleration and the question of whether speedrunning is legible as a queer play practice, and I believe that it is worth noting in the context of stasis and stillness as well.

I have defined and discussed stasis and stillness as two forms of inaction that are rooted in a game's mechanics and aesthetics respectively. I have shown that both can either be intentionally designed into a game or injected by player innovation. The moments where players inject either stasis or stillness into a game often emerge out of a playful curiosity to "see what happens" when they deviate from a game's intended narrative flow, although this may not always be the case. Despite the difficulty of ascribing motivations to player practices, there may be more at play than simple curiosity in at least some of these moments of inaction, particularly in the case of injected stillness. My contention is that this playing against the boundaries of a game's rules is a form of critique through the act of play itself, and determining the extent to which that is true and how that maps onto the broader academic understanding of criticality is one of my goals as my research into speed, capital, and (playful) labour continues.

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