
6.

Interpassivity and the Joy of Delegated Play in Idle Games

Sonia Fizek

Transactions of the Digital Games Research Association

April 2018, Vol 3 No 3, pp 137-163

ISSN 2328-9422

© The text of this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution -- NonCommercial --NonDerivative 2.5 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>).

IMAGES: All images appearing in this work are property of the respective copyright owners, and are not released into the Creative Commons. The respective owners reserve all rights.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the youngest video games genre, the so called idle (incremental) game, also referred to as the passive, self-playing or clicker game, which seems to challenge the current understanding of digital games as systems, based on a human-machine interaction where it is the human who actively engages with the system through meaningful choices. Idle games, on the other hand, tend to play themselves, making the player's participation optional or, in some cases, entirely redundant. Interactivity and agency – qualities extensively theorised with reference

to digital games – are questioned in the context of idling. In this paper the author will investigate the self-contradictory genre through the lens of interpassivity, a concept developed by Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek to describe the aesthetics of delegated enjoyment. This contribution aims at introducing interpassivity to a wider Game Studies community, and offers an alternative perspective to reflect upon digital games in general and self-playing games in particular.

Keywords

idle games, self-playing games, interpassivity, delegated play, interactivity, agency

INTRODUCTION: A VIDEO GAME THAT PLAYS ITSELF?

I am situated in a firelit room. The fire is roaring. The room is hot. The wood piles up, so I stoke the fire to keep it so. A stranger shares the space with me. She can build things. I disregard her for the time being. Soon, a mysterious wanderer arrives with an empty cart and inquires about wood. Shall I give him 100 logs and hope he will reciprocate the gift and come back with more in a distant future? I do not trust strangers, so I turn him away. The fire keeps roaring. The builder says she can make a cart for carrying wood. And so she manufactures it in exchange for 30 logs. The rickety cart will carry more wood from the silent forest surrounding the firelit room. I can gather wood there. So, I gather. The builder assembles a lonely hut. And another one. In no time a tiny village grows, attracting more gatherers. No longer do I have to worry about collecting the wood myself. The hut now stores 271 units of wood, and they keep piling up.

The fire is flickering. The water is boiling. I am out of the game, taking a short break to brew a cup of tea. While away, the log count rises to 3203 and still keeps going up. I come back to a fully stocked, warm room, and a few reported noises breaking out of the storage. The builder has stoked the fire. The gatherers have collected wood. The game has

of the gameplay in the future. As the game unfolds incrementally, more options emerge. Interestingly, idle games seem to have no end – “[t]hey are ongoing, never-ending affairs” (Bogost 2010).

This niche game genre was brought to a wider audience in early 2015 in a Gamasutra article: “The rise of games you (mostly) don’t play” (Parkin 2015). Idle games also gained worldwide recognition among game developers and players alike after Anthony Pecorella’s talk at the Game Developers Conference, titled “Idle Games: The Mechanics and Monetization of Self-Playing Games” (Pecorella 2015).

Two years later, in February of 2017, another sort of self-playing game was featured as part of a local gaming convention in North Carolina. While the gamers and attendees of the event strolled through the venue, gaming, participating in tournaments, “cosplaying”, eating, talking or gazing, *Civilisation 6* (2016) ran in the background: “Throughout the entire day CIV 6 will be playing an all-bot auto-play game located on the show floor (Playthroughgc.com). More recently, in April 2017, Museum of Modern Arts (MoMA PS1) launched *Emissaries* (2017), a series of life simulation works or self-contained ludic ecosystems by Ian Cheng, who describes them as “a videogame that plays itself” (iancheng.com). And finally, David O’Reilly’s *Everything* (2017), a recent project, which, apart from being an open-ended interactive experience and simulation, has a self-playing mode: “*Everything* requires no player input – it will play automatically if left unattended” (everything-game.com).

The above examples depict a recent trend and fascination with games and game modes, which play themselves, or require minimum engagement from the human player, with idle games as the most visible commercialised genre. Self-playing games have left the gaming and academic community puzzled. After all, until now games have been primarily understood as objects to be actively engaged with, conflicts to be resolved, and meaningful actions to be taken (Huizinga 1949/2002; Cailliois 1958/2001; Crawford 1982; Juul 2003; Salen and Zimmerman 2003). Digital games are supposed to be ergodic, requiring a non-trivial

effort from their participants, who in turn need to actively interpret the activity as a game for it to be considered one (Aarseth 1997; Aarseth and Calleja 2015). If anything else, games have been described as inherently interactive (Crawford 1982; Ermi and Mäyrä 2005), and oftentimes in contrast to non-interactive or less interactive media such as films or books, however problematic such oppositions may be. In other words, most digital games, staged in the medium of a computer, could be described as “explicitly participational” (Manovich 2001, 71).

In most digital games, the role of the human player is to actively participate in gameplay, while the role of the machine to enable, sustain, and facilitate play; record its progress and communicate the outcome to the player. In self-playing idle games, the human is a spectator rather than an active player, and the activity of playing is, to a great extent, delegated to the machine. This should not be entirely surprising in light of Alexander Galloway’s definition, according to which digital games are not only the actions of human operators, but equally so, those of machines (Galloway 2006). Even more so, of machines, which do not always act in response to human players, but independently of them in the so-called “ambience acts” of the machine – the moments when the digital game plays itself while waiting for the player to return and continue where they left off (Galloway 2006). Ambience acts happen in some games, for instance *Grand Theft Auto III* (2001), *Final Fantasy X* (2001), which play themselves when the player walks away. However, self-play is not the core of those games and, more importantly, all the changes to the gameworld performed in the player’s absence are of no importance once the gameplay recommences; the machine’s micromovements have no effect. An idle game, on the other hand, is based on, and designed around, the ambience act. The game plays itself and the changes in the gameworld are permanent and significant, whether the human player participates in their execution or not. The only difference lies in the timing – without the human player’s input, the game will progress much slower, but it will not stop.

Galloway's shift of perspective from anthropo- to an "algo-centric" sheds some interesting light on idle games, but their core mechanics of self-executed progression still remains highly problematic. After all, most of self-playing games are designed with a human audience in mind. How, then, are we to understand this ludic paradox? How do we make sense of games that barely require human agency, effort and the execution of meaningful choices, and yet ask for human attention? In other words, what to do with games that we (mostly) don't play?

This paper will address the above questions, mapping out a possible avenue to study the emerging practice of self-play. The research falls within a larger body of work on agency and interactivity in digital games, digital media and virtual worlds. It also addresses the fundamental questions of what constitutes digital games (Aarseth and Calleja 2015) or the so-called "real games" in general (Consalvo and Paul 2013), and self-playing games in particular. Some preliminary studies into idle and zero-player games, as well as automatic play, have been initiated within the game studies community (Björk and Juul 2012; De Paoli 2015; Deterding 2016; Fizek 2017a, 2017b), but the subject belongs to a largely unexplored area. As Alexander King, a game designer, notices in a blog article series devoted to idle games, "[d]espite this proliferation and growing appeal, incremental games remain rarely discussed in games media and criticism" (King 2016).

This study aims to fill that thematic void. In order to do that, I propose to look at idle games through the lens of *interpassivity*, a concept revealing the nature of delegated pleasure, developed first by Robert Pfaller (1996) and later theorised by Slavoj Žižek (1997). Interpassivity sheds a new light onto the peculiarity of self-playing games. I will argue that idling may be understood as delegated pleasure derived from the act of outsourcing gameplay onto the game itself. Idling leads to a momentary escape from the responsibility of active play and, as a result, a disidentification with the player's primary role as an active agent.

I will start this paper with a brief ludic sketch, providing a historical overview of the idle games genre. I will then open the analytical floor with a question focused on the core of idling. This section will be followed by an introduction into the concept of interpassivity, which will then lead to a further discussion on the delegation of play.

THE BIRTH OF AN IDLE GAME

Idle games emerged as a satire of social games and an ironic response to the mechanics of progression in role-playing games based on the so called “levelling-up”, “grinding” or “gold farming” (Nakamura 2013; Nardi and Kow 2010; Zagal and Altizer 2014), repetitive and oftentimes laborious behaviours, which allow players to achieve new levels and thus advance in the game. In idle games, grinding has become a core hyperbolic mechanics, around which the entire gameplay revolves.

The history of idle games allegedly begins in 2002 with *Progress Quest* (2002), an automated game, which cannot be affected by the player’s actions at all, except for “rolling” the character at the initial stages and setting two parameters – race and class (Figure 2). From that moment on, the game plays itself. After delegating the action of play, the player is welcome to enjoy the experience by watching, deriving pleasure from the systemic changes, or knowing that the game keeps unfolding in the background.

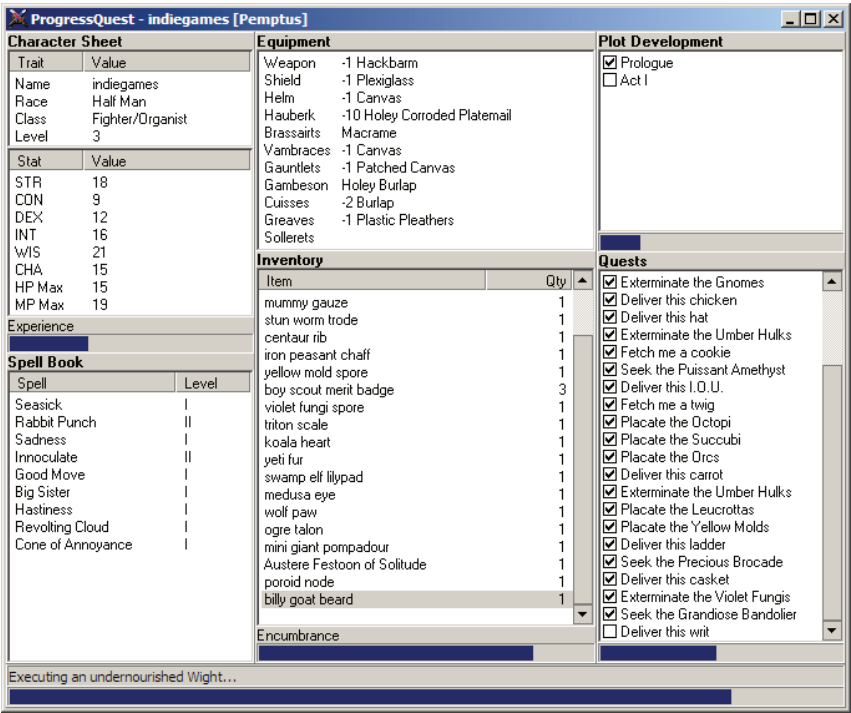


Figure 2: Progress Quest (2002)

One of the most iconic examples of “grinding parodies” is Ian Bogost’s *Cow Clicker* (2010), which was designed as a satire of games such as *FarmVille* (2009), with minimal or no meaningful challenges for players to engage in. *Cow Clicker* “distilled the social game genre down to its essence” (Bogost 2010). Although Bogost designed the game predominantly as a critique of “mindless” social games played on Facebook, it soon turned out that *Cow Clicker* became immensely popular, despite the designer’s early intentions.

Other titles followed, including *Progress Wars* (2010), *Godville* (2010), and *A Dark Room* (2013), amongst many others. One of the most recognisable idle games, which led to the popularisation and commercialisation of the genre, was Julien Thienot’s *Cookie Clicker* (2013). Even CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research)

developed its own educational version called *Particle Clicker* (2014).

The growing appeal of idle games and their wide accessibility lured the gaming industry, which started to monetise the newly emerging genre. Currently, self-playing idle titles are amongst the most popular games on Kongregate, one of the biggest online game portals, which claims to attract tens of millions of players every month. Idle games are also to be found on mobile platforms, such as iOS and Android. Many, like *AdVenture Capitalist* (2015) and *Clicker Heroes* (2014), migrate to Steam, or, even more surprisingly, appear as part of a consoles title offer. *Adventure Capitalist* (2015) is now available on PlayStation 4. Both platforms are usually associated with “real games” rather than free-to-play clicker or social games.

Also, companies producing bigger console titles seem to be shifting their attention towards the idle games genre. One of those is Bandai Namco, a Japanese game developer known for its PlayStation 2 title *Katamari Damacy* (2004). Encouraged by the growing market and appeal of “idlers”, it released its spin-off for mobile platforms – *Tap My Katamari* (2015). The game may be described as an endless runner with a predominant clicker component typical for idle games. While the player is away, the game keeps playing so that the player can return to the gameworld filled with new coins, an in-game currency enabling the purchasing of upgrades and thus advancement in the game.

Perhaps the most intriguing of all the recent examples of self-playing games is *Dreeps* (2016), an RPG-inspired semi-automated mobile “alarm playing game”, which only obliges the player to set the alarm clock for the game’s character to wake up and embark upon a journey. While the player is sitting at their desk at work, the game’s character traverses fictional worlds, slays monsters and “lives” a life of their own. The player may lurk into the game at any time, watching the in-game world and the character progress independently. In the evening, the game is metaphorically and literally put to sleep. The player sets the alarm

clock for the “robot boy” character to wake up the following day and continue the adventures. As the designers themselves state, *Dreeps* is an RPG for those who do not have time for the actual playing:

You can have a look at the adventure on the phone put on your desk while working, during snack time, just enjoy the game at your pace. If you woke up with dreeps, the adventure will automatically continue as long as the robot boy has enough HP, even if you don't open the app. (dreeps.net)

Playing *Dreeps*, one cannot escape the impression that it is the latest ludic incarnation of Tamagotchi, a digital toy created in Japan in the 1990's, with the main difference being that the robot boy does not require constant care and will not die, if unattended to. The constant attention has evolved into an intermittent attention model, in which every in-game and out-of-game moment is literally capitalised upon. The player is rewarded, whether they are actively clicking or delegating their clicks onto the game itself.

Rouguathia (2017) is an interesting recent example of a fully-automated roguelike idle game (Figure 3), whose aesthetics is a reminder of early cellular automata or the so called zero-player games, their most prominent example being *The Game of Life* (1970), designed by John Horton Conway. Conway's game was summoned in order to solve a mathematical problem posed by John von Neumann on machines that could reproduce themselves infinitely. The game is set up by a human in its initial state, from which point on, it does not require any further input and plays on its own. Fully automated idle games, such as the abovementioned *Progress Quest* and *Rouguathia*, emulate this genre in a social play context, displaying the pure mechanics of unfolding the system into a complex web of interrelations.

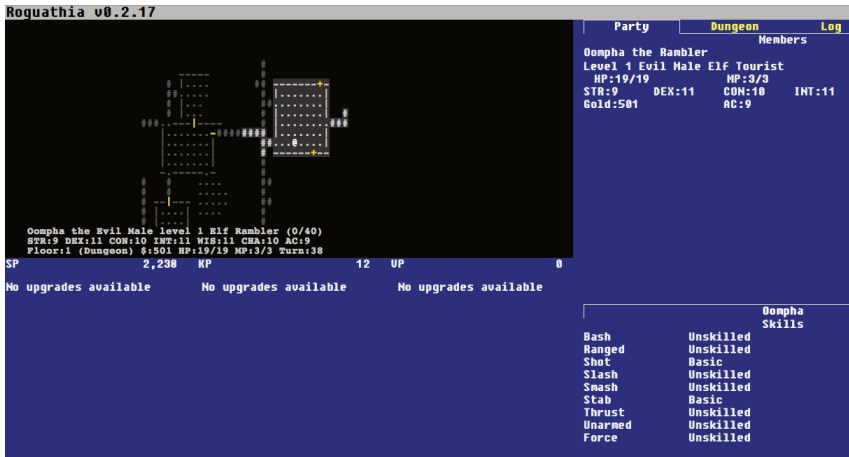


Figure 3: *Roguathia* (2017)

The proliferation and increasing popularity of idle games seem to be pointing towards the normalisation process of the acceptance of the genre by a wider gaming community and what follows, the renegotiation of what counts as a game (Consalvo and DePaul 2013; Deterding 2016). Clearly, idle games have taken a visible place in the gaming landscape and moved from the satirical peripheries into the centre of what constitutes mainstream games. With idle games, the phenomenon of self-play has gained visibility.

TOWARDS THE HEART OF IDLING

But why have such automatic games gained such popularity in the first place? What lies at their heart and how come players so readily externalise gameplay onto self-playing systems? There are numerous paths to follow in order to scrutinize the nature and appeal of self-playing idle games. Some of them include:

- **The economy of attention** through a gameplay model that does not require constant presence from the players and hence treats their attention as a scarce resource;

- **Recurring gratification** by means of rewarding the player, also for the moments of absence from the game;
- **Compulsive gameplay** based on the behavioural model, seen on social platforms that encourage users to regularly check the status of their accounts;
- **Elimination of drudgery** by automating and/or delegating all the laborious and repetitive in-game activities.

The last point is particularly interesting within the context of the analytical discussion led on those pages. It fits the early examples of the genre, which provided a critical commentary on grinding as drudgery in massively multiplayer online role-playing games, where bots and macros have long been utilized to automate parts of the most laborious gameplay (De Paoli 2015). In idle games too, routine activities may be “skipped through delegation” (Bogost 2010). And since the entire gameplay is stripped to those routine play acts, it may be assumed that the enjoyment of the game as such is, to a great extent, delegated to “a technical device” (Pfaller 2017, 19), in this case, to the game’s self-running algorithm.

It may be then the act of delegation of play, usually associated with utter and intense absorption (Huizinga 1938), that lies at the heart of idle games. Idling is a “falsely interactive” (Žižek 1997, 149) manifestation of an otherwise highly interactive practice – the player falls under the illusion of being active, while their true position, as embodied in the fetish of the self-playing idle game, remains passive. If we expand upon the elimination of drudgery argument with Žižek’s distinction between “the Other taking over from the ‘dull’ mechanical aspect of routine duties, and the Other taking over from me, and thus depriving me of, enjoyment” (Žižek 1997, 147), we will end up with idle games, depriving the player of gameplay.

Still, the core question remains unsolved – why are games based entirely on such seeming deprivation of joyous play nevertheless considered fun? In other words, to ask with Roland Barthes, “[h]ow can we take pleasure

in a reported pleasure” (Barthes 1975, 17), in this case, reported by the game’s system? Those crucial questions lead us towards the interpassive quality of idle games, a concept, which opens up an interesting interpretation of the essence and appeal of idling.

INTERPASSIVITY: THE AESTHETICS OF DELEGATED ENJOYMENT

A “little theory” (Pias 2000) of interpassivity was first developed in the 1990s by Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek as an opposition to, and an inverse structure of, the concept of interactivity, prevalent in the contemporary art discourse of that time. While interactivity assumed that the observers must act in order to complete the work of art, interpassivity relieved them, not only from active creating, but also from passive observing – “[t]he artwork would be an artwork that observes itself” (Pfaller 2003). In other words, while the interactive media invite the observer to participate productively in their reception and take over parts of the artistic effort, the interpassive media take the effort of participation away. Thus, media, supplying the very process of their reception, are referred to as interpassive (Pfaller 1996, 71).

According to the logics of interpassivity, pleasure is something experienced passively and it may be passed over to other people or technical devices. As Pfaller explains:

Interpassivity is delegated ‘passivity’ – in the sense of delegated pleasure, or delegated consumption. Interpassive people are those who want to delegate their pleasures or their consumption. Interpassive media are all the agents – machines, people, animals, etc. – to whom interpassive people can delegate their pleasures. (Pfaller 2017, 55)

The prefix -inter is of utmost importance here. Similarly to interactivity, it signifies a transfer. In the case of interactivity, it is activity that is transferred from the product to the consumer (or from the work of art towards the audience). In the case of interpassivity, it is passivity that

is transferred from the consumer to the product (e.g. a work of art that observes itself relieving the audience of this task) (Pfaller 2017, 19).

As a typical example of an interpassive medium, Pfaller and Žižek refer to a video recorder, which watches the films for or instead of the observer while they can devote their time to something else. Other examples illustrating interpassivity include the Tibetan prayer wheel, the Greek chorus in ancient theatre, or canned laughter in American sitcoms (Žižek 1997, 34). In all those cases, the act of praying, the emotional catharsis, or the laughter are delegated onto someone or something else. Canned laughter provides an interesting contemporary media phenomenon, which gives the TV viewer an illusion that the laughter has been outsourced to a fictional audience. Another intriguing instance of interpassivity points towards the behaviour of some intellectuals in libraries when they copy text from a book and, feeling relieved, go home with a sense of satisfaction, as if the photocopier had read the pages instead of them: “They literally play reading by means of the machine” – the machine looks at every page in a linear process (Pfaller 2017, 56).

The examples are numerous, some divided not only in terms of historical periods, but also the type of activity involved. The common denominator lies in the observer, who enjoys through the medium, and may indulge in other activities at the same time. Interpassivity allows one to stay passive through the other:

... to accede to the other the passive aspect (of enjoying), while I can remain actively engaged (I can continue to work in the evening, while the VCR passively enjoys for me...) (Žižek 1997, 149).

The above interpassive situation leads to a crucial question – why does the observer, who chooses to observe (e.g. watch a comedy), find it relieving not to actively watch the film or laugh at it (in the case of canned laughter), but rather enjoy it through a medium of some sort? What follows – “why does the observer experience the relief from their own indulgence as pleasant?” (Pfaller 1996, 71). Or in other words, “[i]s

enjoyment not something which, precisely, cannot be done through the Other?” (Žižek 1997, 147).

In the case of an interpassive medium, the transferal of pleasure may be interpreted as a *jouissance* (mis)perceived as one's own – we think we enjoyed the show or the game, but the Other (e.g. the video recorder, the bot, the automated game system) did it for us or rather instead of us. In an interpassive situation, the subject degrades the other to a pure instrument of their (non)pleasure. Such outsourcing or “extension” (McLuhan 1964) no longer signifies extending the pleasure itself, but leads to a paradoxical situation where pleasure does not need to be experienced at all (Pias 2000). It is lived out by the interpassive medium.

INTERPASSIVE GAMES AND DELEGATED PLAY

The concept of interpassivity, originally introduced within the context of art, has travelled into many other domains, such as media studies, film studies and political science (Feustel, Koppo, Schölzel 2011). It has even arrived in areas as seemingly remote as marketing and business, as an analytical tool used to explain consumption patterns of ethical brands (Walz, Hingston, Andehn 2014). In video games research, interpassivity has remained virtually unnoticed. It has been merely sketched as an analytical possibility to understand the avatar-player surrogate relationship through the Žižekian interpretation of Jacques Lacan (Falkowska 2011; Wilson 2003; Thorne 2016). Pfaller's foundational work has been overlooked altogether.

Digital games, seen as the epitome of interactivity, could not provide a fertile analytical ground for a concept, which questions their very core. With idling, however, we have arrived at a point where interactivity alone does not suffice anymore as a predominant conceptual framework. Idle games, discussed throughout this paper, seem to be the first video game genre to epitomise the delegation of pleasure and embody the interpassive relationship between players and the game.

Games such as the abovementioned *Cookie Clicker* (2013) (Figure 4), *Clicker Heroes* (2014) and *Godville* (2010) do something other than invite the player to an interactive spectacle where their participation is the necessary condition for the game to go on. Play emerges as a substitutive act – the player, represented by the automatic clicker algorithms, may take absence from the game. In the early stages of *Cookie Clicker*, I wilfully delegated the cumbersome task of cookie production to “Cursors” and “Grandmas”. Having earned enough cookie currency, I proceeded to set up “Farms”, “Mines”, “Temples” and “Wizard Towers” to further multiply my cookie realm. Every now and then, I come back to the game in order to unlock further upgrades, check statistics, and browse through my expanding collection of achievements. The random “golden cookie” boost encourages me to come back to the game in order to increase the cookie meter and manually click alongside the automatically proceeding gameplay. The game may slow down without my presence, but it will not come to a halt. I flip between the tabs of the internet browser, constantly going in and out of the game. This intermittent interaction pattern, emerging as a result of delegated play, defines the active moments between automated gameplay sessions. The gameplay is reversed, as if the “load” screen was the actual game and the gameplay a moment to “wind up” or “load” the game.

The lineage of idle games, to a certain degree, can be traced back to the 19th century street barrel organs, played by rotating a handle in a cyclical motion, and thus delegating the actual task of playing the organs to the “programmed” cylinder. The tasks of an idle gamer resemble those performed by barrel grinders. After all, both consist in delegating the otherwise highly absorbing and oftentimes complex activity of play to a machine, which needs to be “ground” from time to time in order to keep playing.

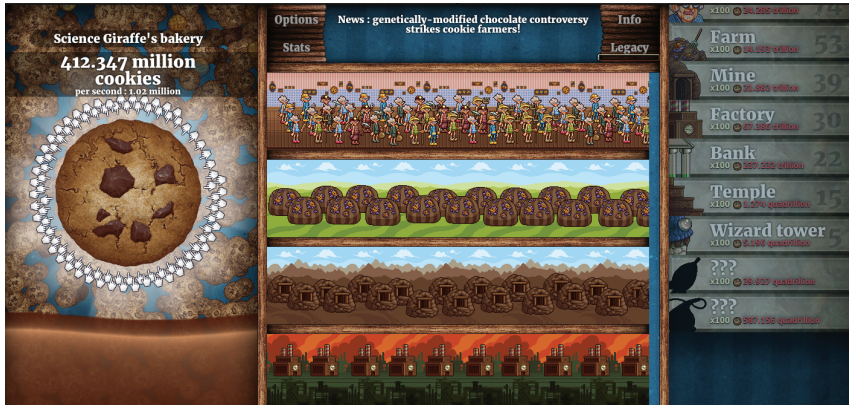


Figure 4: *Cookie Clicker*

In an idle game, the player's agency collapses in a subversive act of play delegation. The player makes an attempt to click themselves away from the responsibility of being the sole agent. Paradoxically, with every delegated click comes an enacted click of the player, and so the agency and non-agency dance in an eternally unfolding embrace. In an idle game, the click – the most basic action that has defined computer use since the invention of the mouse in the 1960s – may no longer be associated solely with agency, activity and freedom. Instead, it becomes a sign of “human tragedy”, of entering the game as a service prison from which one may never escape (Bogost 2010). The click seems to have lost its empowering dimension, if it ever had one. Idling and self-play subvert digital games as entertainment forms, relying on active participants and engaged players. Interpassivity deconstructs interactivity-centred discourse and lays bare the illusory nature of interactivity.

It could be argued that every digital game, to a certain degree, is idle. Idling points towards the phenomenon of automation, originally denoting a machine with a self-contained principle of motion (Truitt 2015, 2). A digital computer is in many ways precisely such a machine. Therefore, most games, staged within the medium of the computer, involve some level of automation, such as calculating gathered props, lost lives, or the player's proximity to an enemy NPC (non-player

character). Unlike board games, where all such computation must be done manually by the human player, in a digital game most of the processes are automated and hidden from the player's view. This type of automation is well known to an average gamer. What is much more mesmerising is the sort of automation projected onto the representational layer of the game, bringing the "aesthetics of agency and control (or the loss of these)" (Giddings 2005) to the forefront. Many examples of idle and self-playing games I have drawn upon in this paper tend to partially or entirely automate those parts of gameplay, which have been, until now, reserved for humans.

CONCLUSIONS: BEYOND INTERACTIVITY

Interpassivity provides a compelling perspective to look at games in general, and self-playing idle games in particular; one which reaches beyond interactivity, a concept that, despite its critique (Aarseth 1997; Manovich 2001), has remained largely unchallenged in the domain of games. As I have mentioned, in philosophy of art, art theory and practice, the seemingly empowering quality of interactivity was questioned and critically evaluated (Pfaller 1996). In Games Studies, the situation has been very different. After all, human-computer interaction is the core quality through which digital games are defined. It is the theories of action and interaction (Kaptelinin and Nardi 2006) that contribute to a grand narrative of our relationship with technology. In video games, the myth of interactivity is oftentimes strongly associated with the dream of freedom, especially in sandbox-type genres where the player is promised to be able to move freely in open worlds and influence their surroundings. As Espen Aarseth noticed as early as 1997, interactivity is "a purely ideological term, projecting an unfocused fantasy rather than a concept of any analytical significance" (Aarseth 1997, 51). Also, Lev Manovich in *Language of New Media* found interactivity to be too broad a concept to be truly useful, if not entirely redundant (Manovich 2001, 71).

And yet, when confronted with such genres as idle or zero-player games, game scholars still seem to be puzzled, mostly because the heart of gameness is no longer defined through the human-computer communication dynamics, which places the human as an active agent in dialogue with technology:

[u]nless players have some agency to affect the outcome of a game and can intentionally exercise it, they are not really ... playing a game. (Björk and Juul 2012)

Interpassivity opens a new interpretative perspective. It provokes questions reaching beyond the seemingly emancipatory dimension of interactive media. Looking at games through the interpassive lens of play delegation may contribute to a deeper understanding of activity, passivity and the role of the player. It untangles many contemporary paradoxes such as zero-player gaming or idling. In idle games, the player assumes a role of a playing subject, but to a large degree escapes the pressure of the actual play, giving up their agency and delegating it to the clicker algorithms. The game still progresses and its progress relies on the human player's decision to externalise the act of play onto a technical device, and thus delegate the pleasure derived from playing the game. Interpassivity sheds a new light on this peculiar practice of play. It seems a particularly fruitful, if not a necessary, contribution to game-related research. Without interpassivity, we cannot fully understand all the facets of the playful communication between the human and the machine, which lies at the core of digital gaming and what follows, idling.

It also opens up many other thematic fields, apart from idling discussed in this paper, which could be understood as instances of delegated play. For example, the usage of bots and macros in MMORPGs or the role of the player in movie games (also called interactive movies) relying mostly on cinematic sequences rather than pure gameplay (e.g. *Heavy Rain*, 2010). An interactive movie may as well be seen as an interpassive game, which consists more in spectating, witnessing and delegating, rather than enacting. From an interpassive perspective, the well-

established and discussed cut-scene may be interpreted as a delegated gameplay component in its own right rather than a mere disruption of an otherwise interactive experience or an embodiment of a visual narrative technique belonging to the previous medium – “an interpassive act ... not only brings back a part of bygone pleasure, but constitutes a new, original one” (Pfaller 2017, 43). Finally, the recent worldwide practice of watching others stream their gameplay at Twitch.tv becomes much clearer when perceived through delegation and interpassivity. Twitch broadcasting defines a ludic pleasure derived from looking over the other player’s shoulder. In all the interpassive examples of games, hands-on actors do not need to be the key figures of agency (Taylor 2012, 183).

I would like to conclude this paper with a playful lyrical commentary, quoting a verse “Aber wir lassen es andere machen” written by a German poet Theodor Fontane and recalled within the context of interpassivity by Robert Pfaller.

But we have others do it instead

A Chinese (200 years ago or more)
 Visited France and went to the ball
 And some asked whether he knew it?
 And others whether he himself would do it?
 “We call it dancing”, replied he nodding his head
 But we have others perform it instead.

And the word still rings a bell
 Remaining for all to retell
 I stare at runs, I glare when others hunt
 But when people turn to me and ask blunt:
 “Why don’t you join? Why stand by side?
 My reply is: “Everything goes with its own tide.
 Chasing luck. All this only but troubles my head,
 I’d rather others did it instead.

Theodor Fontane (1905, author’s own translation)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Markus Rautzenberg for pointing me towards the concept of interpassivity, which helped me form the analytical core for reading idle games. I would also like to extend my thanks to Rembert Hüser and Florian Sprenger for giving me the space to present early stages of this research at Goethe University Frankfurt in front of a stimulating audience. Last but not least, I am thanking Anne Dippel for her endless support and invaluable criticism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aarseth, E. *Cybertext – Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Aarseth, E., and Calleja, 2015. “The Word Game: The ontology of an indefinable object.” In *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games (FDG 2015)*, Pacific Grove, CA, USA, 2015. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6c85/bdd2216a56e296cdc708af0480c4a20cd21c.pdf?_ga=2.77012053.1158569559.1501311498-1466169220.1501311498

Bandai Namco. *Tap My Katamari*. [Android, iOS]. Bandai Namco, 2015.

Barthes, R. *The Pleasures of the Text*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1975.

Björk, S., and Juul, J. “Zero-Player Games Or: What We Talk about When We Talk about Players.” Presented at the 6th *Philosophy of Computer Games Conference*, Madrid, Spain, 2012.

Bogost, I. “Cow Clicker: The making of obsession.” Bogost.com, 2010. http://bogost.com/writing/blog/cow_clicker_1

Caillois, R. *Man, Play and Games*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press. 1958/2001.

CERN. *Particle Clicker*. [Browser, MacOS]. CERN, 2014. Played June, 2017.

Consalvo, M., and Paul, C. A. "Welcome to the discourse of the real: Constituting the boundaries of games and players." In *Proceedings of Foundations of Digital Games (FDG 2013)*, Crete, Greece, 2013: 55-62.

Crawford, C. *The Art of Computer Game Design*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1984.

David O'Reilly. *Everything* [Microsoft Windows, MacOS, PlayStation 4, Linux]. Double Fine Productions, 2017.

DePaolli, S. "Automatic-Play and Player Deskillling in MMORPGs." In *Game Studies* vol. 13, no. 1(2013). http://gamestudies.org/1301/articles/depaoli_automatic_play

Deterding, S. "Progress Wars: Idle Games and the Demarcation of 'Real' Games." Presented at the *Digital Games Research Association and Foundations of Digital Games Conference (DiGRA FDG 2016)*, University of Abertay, Dundee, UK, 2016.

DMA Design. *Grand Theft Auto III*. [PlayStation 2]. Rockstar Games, 2001.

Doublespeak Games. *A Dark Room*. [Browser, MacOS]. Doublespeak Games, 2013. Played May, 2017.

Eric Fredricksen. *Progress Quest*. [Browser, MacOS]. Eric Fredricksen, 2002. Played November, 2016.

Ermi, L., and Mäyrä, F. "Fundamental components of the gameplay experience: Analysing immersion." In *Proceedings of the Digital Games Research Association Conference (DiGRA 2005)*, Vancouver, Canada, 2005: 15-27.

Falkowska, M. "Gry wideo jako medium – podstawowe kategorie badawcze." *Kultura i Historia (Culture and History Journal)*, 2011. http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/2390#_ftnref14

Feustel, R., and Koppo, N., and Schölzel, H., eds. *Wir sind nie aktiv gewesen. Interpassivität zwischen Kunst- und Gesellschaftskritik*. Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos Berlin, 2011.

Firaxis Games. *Civilisation 6*. [OS X]. 2K Games, 2016.

Fizek, S. "Człowiek i algorytm. Ku automatyzacji rozgrywki w grach crowdsourcingowych." Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, *Teksty Drugie (Second Texts Journal)*, no. 2(2017a).

Fizek, S. "Self-Playing Games. Rethinking the State of Digital Play." A paper presented at the Philosophy of Computer Games conference, Kraków, Poland, 28th Nov. – 1st Dec. 2017. (2017b).

Fontane, T. "Aber wir lassen es andere machen." In *Gedichte*. Stuttgart and Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1905.

Galloway, R. A. *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Giddings, S. "Playing with Non-Humans: Digital Games as Techno-Cultural Form. Proceedings of DiGRA 2005 Conference: Changing Views – World in Play. <http://www.digra.org/digital-library/publications/playing-with-non-humans-digital-games-as-techno-cultural-form> [Accessed 14.11.2017]

Godville development team. [Browser, MacOS]. *Godville*, 2010. Played June, 2017.

Hisanori Hiraoka. *Dreeps* [iOS]. Hisanori Hiraoka, 2016. Played April, 2017.

Huizinga, J. *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1949/2002: 74.

Hyper Hippo Productions. *AdVenture Capitalist*. [iOS]. Kongregate, 2015. Played March, 2017.

Ian Bogost. *Cow Clicker* [Facebook]. Ian Bogost, 2010.

Ian Cheng. *Emissaries*. [Twitch.tv, MoMA PS1]. Ian Cheng, MoMA PS1, 2017.

Juul, J. "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness." In *Proceedings of Digital Games Research Conference (DiGRA 2003)*, edited by Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens, Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2003: 30-45.

Kaptelinin, V., and Nardi, A. B. *Acting with Technology. Activity Theory and Interaction Design*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006.

King, A. "Numbers Getting Even Bigger: The Growing Appeal of Incremental Games." *Envato Tuts+*, 2016. <https://gamedevelopment.tutsplus.com/articles/numbers-getting-even-bigger-cms-26854>.

Manovich, L. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001: 71

McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1964/1994.

Nakamura, L. "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft." In *Digital Labour: the Internet as Playground and Factory*, edited by T. Scholz, pp. 187-204. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

Namco. *Katamari Damacy*. [PlayStation 2]. Namco, 2004.

Nardi, B., and Kow, Y. M. "Digital Imaginaries: How we know what (we think) we know about Chinese gold farming." *First Monday. Peer-reviewed Journal of the Internet*, vol. 15, no. 6(2010). <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3035/2566>

Parkin, S. "The rise of games you (mostly) don't play." In *Gamasutra*. http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/237926/The_rise_of_games_you_mostly_dont_play.php

Pecorella, A. "Idle Games: The Mechanics and Monetization of Self-Playing Games." A talk at the Game Developers Conference, San Francisco, 2015. <http://www.gdcvault.com/play/1022065/Idle-Games-The-Mechanics-and>

Pfaller, R. "Figuren der Erleichterung. Interpassivität heute." In *Wir sind nie aktiv gewesen. Interpassivität zwischen Kunst- und Gesellschaftskritik*, edited by R. Feustel, N. Koppo, H. Schölzel, pp. 17-27. Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2011.

Pfaller, R. "Little Gestures of Disappearance. Interpassivity and the Theory of Ritual." *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 16, 2003. <http://www.psychomedia.it/jep/number16/pfaller.htm>

Pfaller, R. "Um Die Ecke Gelacht", *Falter* 41/96, 1996, 71.

Pfaller, R. *Ästhetik der Interpassivität*. Hamburg: Fundus, Philo Fine Arts, 2008.

Pias, C. 2000. "Geniessen Unterstellen. Eine Theorie der Interpassivität." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 2000. <https://www.uni-due.de/~bj0063/texte/interpassiv.html>

Playsaurus. *Clicker Heroes*. [Browser, MacOS]. Playsaurus, 2014. Played June, 2017.

Progress Wars development team. *Progress Wars* [Browser, MacOS]. Progress Wars, 2010. Played July, 2017.

Rouguathia development team. *Rouguathia*. [Browser, MacOS]. Kongregate, 2017. Played March, 2017.

Salen, K., and Zimmerman, E. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003.

Square Product Development Division 1. *Final Fantasy X*. [PlayStation 2]. JP: Square, 2001.

Taylor, T.L. *Raising the Stakes: E-sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. New York: The MIT Press, 2012: 181.

Thorne, S. "Perverse and interpassive gaming: Enjoyment and play in gamespaces." *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* 22 (1), 2016, 106-113. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/pcs.2016.8>

Truitt, E. R. (2015): *Medieval Robots. Mechanism, Magic, Nature and Art*. Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Quantic Dream. *Heavy Rain*. [PlayStation3]. Sony Computer Entertainment, 2010. Played Oct. 2016.

Walz, M., and Hingston, S., and Andehn, M. "The magic of ethical brands: Interpassivity and the thievish joy of delegated consumption." *Ephemera. Theory and Politics in Organisation* 14 (1), 2014. <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/14-1walzhingstonandehn.pdf>

Wilson, L. "Interactivity or Interpassivity: a Question of Agency in Digital Play." https://www.academia.edu/1367070/Interactivity_or_interpassivity_A_question_of_agency_in_digital_play.

Zagal, J. P. and Altizer, R. "Examining 'RPG Elements': Systems of Character Progression." In *Proceedings of Foundations of Digital Games*, Fort Lauderdale, FL, 2014.

Žižek, S. "Will you laugh for me please?" In *In These Times: With Liberty and Justice for All...*, 2003. http://inthesetimes.com/article/88/will_you_laugh_for_me_please.

Žižek, S. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso, 1997.

Zynga. *FarmVille*. [Android, iOS, Adobe Flash, HTML5]. Zynga, 2009.