

# Paratextual Play: Unlocking the Nature of Making-of Material of Games

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## ABSTRACT

Similar as to how films are accompanied with bonus features and extras on their dvd release, digital games too are sometimes released with supplemental materials which provide insight in the creative development process. Examples of these are behind-the-scenes documentaries, concept art, audio commentaries, and so on. In the study of digital games this material could easily be overlooked or primarily seen as marketing material outside and therefore not part of a game itself. This paper will discuss a shift in the paratextual location and function of making-of material from an external to internal or even integral part of the digital game experience. In some contemporary games, making-of material has become a feature which has a visible presence during play, and at times can only be accessed by unlocking them, which invites players to forms of paratextual play. In these play situations, paratext and text entangle, resulting not just in a potential shaping of the understanding but also of the *playing* of digital games, making them part of players' gaming capital. By engaging with this type of making-of material, players are not just framed as knowledgeable insider in the creative process of game design but also acknowledged expert in terms of gaming prowess, requiring us to rethink how we approach making-of material as paratexts.

## Keywords

Paratext, making-of material, game design, gaming capital, achievements, collecting

## INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon for digital games to include bonus materials and other extras, especially when released in “special edition” or “collector’s edition” forms. Among such extras we can find those with a specific focus on the creative process behind a game – think of behind-the-scenes documentaries, concept art, audio commentaries, original soundtracks, alternate endings, and so on. It might be easy to dismiss such making-of material as uninteresting marketing fluff packaged with games to entice consumers with a favorable attitude towards the game to make a purchase. As film scholar Craigh Hight points out in his work on DVD extras of film, in terms of the content making-of material is often predominantly promotional in nature:

[...] there are no doubts voiced about the creative or (potential) commercial success of the film, no evidence of tensions (creative or otherwise) in its production, little if any exploration of the wider political or economic contexts of its production—in fact, nothing that would disrupt the corporate agenda of the studio that owns the film. (2005, 7)

Nonetheless, such extras have for a long time been a recognizable part of the interactive gaming experience. While not too critical, they provide developers with a voice to show how and why they made certain

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decisions during the production process of creating a game. It is, however seldom discussed *how* this making-of material is integrated within the game experience.

In this paper the aim is to discuss making-of material of digital games in their paratextual capacity. As such, it considers making-of media as what literary theorist Gerard Genette has called ‘thresholds of interpretation’. Paratexts, he explains, are those textual productions accompanying and surrounding a primary narrative object ‘in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption’ (1997, 1). While Genette’s work deals primarily with written texts, the notion of paratexts has been expanded to include other media, from film and television to digital media including games. And as media scholar Jonathan Gray points out, ‘paratextual frames can [...] prove remarkably important for how they assign value to a text, situating it as a product and/or as a work of art’ (2010, 81). When it comes to making-of material present of special editions of films on DVD, film scholar Barbara Klinger points out that a main text gets an “instant built-in and changeable intertextual surround that enters into its meaning and significance for viewers” (2006, 72). In his work, Gray does discuss games in relation to paratexts, but seems them primarily as paratexts for other media (ie. a game adaptation of a film to help promote the film). On their own terms, games of course also have their own paratextual surround.

Since Mia Consalvo introduced the concept of paratexts to game studies in order to understand strategy guides and their function in relation to cheating practices (2007), it has been employed to investigate a wide variety of paratextual object and practices in relation to games, including game guides, online fora, mods and patches, and even in-game player activities, all of which play a significant role in shaping meaning making processes in game culture (for a good overview of research related to games and paratexts, see Carter 2015). All this paratextual material is part of the media ecology in which digital games are produced and consumed. As a result, both text its paratexts constitute how a game is ultimately experienced – to play a game is to play it within its paratextual surround. As Steven E. Jones points out, “[i]t doesn’t matter if any particular player is aware of every aspect of this extended ”game”, it’s a collective and *potential* reality, a transmedia, multidimensional grid of possibilities surrounding any game” (2008, 10, emphasis in original). Here, I add to this body of work by investigating the paratextual nature of making-of material which within game studies has received little attention, drawing from film studies where paratextual analyses of DVDs provide the necessary context to understand how making-of material shapes meaning.

The notion of making-of material as paratextual frames creating or steering the reception and perception of digital games is, however, not the only perspective provided here. It also concerns itself with the specific integration of such material in games, and how this influences meaning making. Since the early nineties, games have been released in special edition packages which include not just the game but also additional material. The Collector’s Editions of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard 2004) and its various expansions, for instance, feature the game on their own discs but also contain a separate DVD with extras, a CD soundtrack, a concept art book, and so on. Since the early 2000s, making-of material of digital games have developed in new directions, from being a purely external objects to becoming an integral part of digital games themselves. They have become something players encounter *during* play and as part *of* play, as well as something to collect and proudly display as a form of gaming capital, a concept Consalvo has introduced to understand the accumulation and dissemination of skill and knowledge in gaming culture (2007). I will argue that in cases where distinctions between text and paratext become difficult to discern, making-of material does not just shape potential readings of a game but also in forms of paratextual play, ultimately impacting the game experience as a whole. The main aim of this paper, then, is to answer the question of how the integration of making-of material *within* games themselves functions in relation to shaping interpretation and steering play.

For Genette, paratextual analysis requires the study of the characteristics of the paratextual message, which are its spatiality (“determining its location”), temporality (“the date of its appearance and, if need be, its

disappearance”), substantiality (“its mode of existence, verbal or other”), pragmatics (“the characteristics of its situation of communication - its sender and addressee”), and functionality (“the functions that its message aims to fulfill”) (1997, 4). As this paper is interested in the collapse of text and paratexts, the spatial characteristics are of immediate importance. Genette provides two additional terms here to signify if a paratextual element is “inserted in the interstices of the text”, which he calls peritexts, or if they are distanced from the main text, which he calls epitexts (1997, 4-5). For Consalvo, whose main interest was in the “paratextual industries” which have formed around games (2007), the focus was primarily on ancillary, external paratext of the epitextual variety like FAQ websites and strategy guides, and this is arguably where most research on paratext within game studies has since focused on. For Carter, such a spatial distinction is often blurred when it comes to contemporary games, calling a “strong adherence to this conceptualization of a spatial relationship between the paratext and designed game is an obscuring hangover from the term’s literary origins” (2015 337). And indeed, making-of material within the same package or even on the same disc and accessible through the same menu as the game itself can be seen as peritextual, while the material itself might at one point have been epitextual as part of a multi-media promotional campaign running well-before the release, with many of the making-of videos already to be found on YouTube.

The distinction between peritextual and epitextual material, as well as the temporal dimensions Genette distinguishes (paratexts appearing before, at the same time, and after a main text), should therefore be read as mostly artificial when it comes to complex multi-media objects like digital games. As Jones remarks, “when it comes to today’s popular media, it’s necessary to treat a print-culture construct such as a paratexts as a helpful but inevitably limited, slippery concept” (2008, 26). Genette’s approach and terminology therefore primarily forms a starting point to situate and define paratextual media in relation to main text, to help account for and understand the role and function of making-of material of games.

The notion of paratextual *play* needs some further discussion too in relation to Genette’s work. The link between the paratextual and play is not necessarily new. In his work on player-created propaganda in *EVE Online* (CCP Games 2003) for instance, Carter recognizes that such propaganda can be seen as a form of paratext that “emerges from within the game *as part of gameplay*” (2015 331, emphasis in original). Here, play itself is seen as paratextual or, as Carter defines these forms of paratexts, epitextual. When it comes to the notion of paratextual play, Carter is primarily concerned with player-created material which, according to Genette, could be seen as “unofficial” in a sense that they cannot be attributed to the developer or publisher of the game.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to paratextual play as is discussed in this paper, the paratexts being played with do not emerge from gameplay, but instead are “official”, a label which “applies to everything that, originating with the author or publisher, appears in the anthomous peritext” (Genette 1997, 10). In other words: it is material specifically and deliberately created and put in place during production to be encountered and indeed played with in-game after release.

As such, in my approach to make sense of making-of material of digital games, I focus primarily on peritextual material – those extras which can be found bundled or integrated with games themselves – and how they shape both meaning and play. I will start, however, with making-of material in its epitextual form as this is also where they historically started to appear. To do so, I will return to Consalvo’s discussion of the paratextual industries through which making-of material of game was first published, and how these paratextual industries are linked to what she calls gaming capital.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF MAKING-OFS**

As Consalvo shows in her work on strategy guides (2007), the paratextual industries of games took form in print magazines appearing in the 80s, with the appearance of strategy tips and hints magazines like *Nintendo Power*. Her argument is that such paratextual material allows for players to enhance their gaming capital, a reworking of Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital (1984). Having gaming capital is not just about *playing* games, Consalvo argues, but “being knowledgeable about game releases and secrets, and passing that

information on to others” (2007, 18). Over time, she notes, print magazines have reconfigured what they consider “proper gaming capital”, from being purely about strategy tips and hints to more emphasis on reviews, industry news and gossip as well as “profiling the development of particular games” (2007, 35). Such making-of profiles usually fall in the category of “previews”, which have become part of the publicity campaign of upcoming titles. As the player base started to age, such profiles also started to look back rather than only ahead, eschewing a marketing agenda for new games to focus on the making-of features of well-known classic games, for instance through interviews with the original designers or programmers. Some contemporary magazines have dedicated pages for such historical profiles, like *EDGE* magazine’s “CREATE” section (with its tagline ‘lifting the lid on the art, science and business of making games’). Others, like *Retro Gamer* magazine, are dedicated almost entirely to an (often nostalgic) trip to the past, showing how classic games were created.

Both promotional materials looking forward to a game’s release, as well as making-of materials looking back to its development have become a recognizable part of the media ecology in which digital games are produced and consumed. As Christopher Walsh and Thomas Apperley point out, it is the accumulation and circulation of such paratextual information about games which furthermore helps shape gaming literacy and gaming capital among players (2009). The more you know about games, the higher your cultural standing. According to Jones, every “serious gamer” knows that the full potential of a game is “most fully realized by the kind of dedicated, meaning-making, community-based players who call themselves fans” (ibid.). It is therefore this group of gaming enthusiasts which can also be recognized as those who attain and display the most gaming capital: the true fans which historically have also been the target audience for the often more expensive special and collector’s editions of games.

While not very common, special and collector’s editions of games started to appear in the early 90s, with the PC platform and its “big box” packaging of games leading the way. Big-budget titles like *The 7th Guest* (Trilobyte 1993) and *Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger* (ORIGIN Systems 1994) received special edition treatments. Here, the making-of material was bundled with the main game within the same package, making them arguably peritextual, but were still separate from the game itself. These were the early days of making-of material of games, with game developers and publishers trying out various forms of paratextual carriers and formats. The *Wing Commander III* “Premier Edition”, for instance, was packaged in a faux 35 mm film container, has one of its “behind-the-scenes” documentaries on a VHS tape, while the game software itself sat on four CD-ROM discs.

A curious example from my own collection is a numbered “limited edition” “Director’s Cut” of *Rise of the Robots* (I have number 009374). This fighting game from 1994, which came out after a long period of hype on its massive budget and supposedly state-of-the-art graphics, has become somewhat infamous for being universally panned by critics and reviled by players. The cardboard package contains not just the game on CD-ROM but also an additional disc with a host of extras and bonus features. These include a making-of story written by a game journalist, a host of short work-in-progress videos, hundreds of stills and “experimental renderings that were done, but never made it to the final game” according to the back of the box. The material is accessible through its own simple MS-DOS based menu on the features disc. While the making-of material is, by today’s standards, surprisingly unfiltered through a marketing department, its function to present the game as potentially more than it might be is clear. As game journalist Ciaran Brennan puts it in his *The Making of Rise of the Robots* behind-the-scenes story on the features disc: “it would be unfair to suggest that the computer and video games business (or, as it’s now being dubbed, the ‘interactive entertainment industry’) has become a heavily formulaic trade ruled by money, suits and spreadsheets” (Brennan 1994). This is not “just” a formulaic game, he suggests, but it’s “interactive entertainment”. The fact that the special edition is called a “Director’s Edition” and features “unseen cutting room floor material” among its extras tries to connect it to film, a medium higher up in the cultural pecking order. They form early examples of “movie envy” in games (Rouse 2000), but by remediating film within game design, but by framing games as film-like in its paratextual material.

Another example of this approach comes from the making-of documentary on the 'Limited CD-Rom Collector's Edition' of *Star Trek: Judgement Rights* (Interplay Entertainment Corp. 1995), in which Leonard 'Spock' Nimoy himself explains:

Not so long ago, one person with the aid of one or two programmers and a creative flair could design, develop, and market the next generation of computer games. In this age of faster computers, more complex programming languages and demands by players for ever-more complicated adventures, this is no longer true. The age of multi-media has arrived, and with it the need for larger budgets, longer development times, and a team of talented individuals in a variety of crafts (1995).

Here, games are presented as multi-media, complex and technologically high-end creations, something escaping the boundaries of the medium towards a higher level in the dominant cultural hierarchies. Whether or not one would agree with that, these kinds of making-of materials aim to add value through a "paratextual veneer of artistry, aura, and authority" (Gray 2010, 115). The point is that the way making-of material *presents* the creative process is not necessarily exemplary of the actual creative process, but has as a result that it helps shape the way its target audience, game aficionados, thinks about games and game development.

Here, we can recognize similarities with the way film fans are targeted by the film industry in their identity as knowledgeable insider to film production. Media scholar Barbara Klinger argues that this notion of the fan as an "insider" in the media industry is a potentially problematic assumption (2006, 72). Making-of material's greatest appeal, she argues, are the revelations about a film's production, the "trick behind appearances":

Let in on industry "secrets" and capable of mastering further enigmas if need be, the viewer enters the world of filmmaking to reside in the privileged position of the director and other production personnel – the puppet masters – who are responsible for such effective illusionism (Klinger 2006, 73)

The reason that the viewers' position is partly illusory has to do with the fact that much of the making-of material is limited to celebratory, promotable facts which mostly functions to highlight and reaffirm Hollywood as a place of marvel (ibid.). Discussing the extras of the *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy Extended Editions (2004), Gray shows how the films are framed as a "Work of Art" (capitals in original), with "the construction of the DVD audience as discerning and requiring art aficionados, cloaking the entire production, text, and consumption in an aura of artistry and excellence" (2010, 103). As we have seen, early special and collector's editions of games already conveyed similar strategies several years before DVDs popularized the notion of special editions for films. We need to keep in mind then, that making-of material, both then and now, is not neutral in its depiction of the creative process. It gives shape to the way we think about games and, having an important function within gaming's media ecology, also gives shape to gaming capital.

While a dedicated investigation of the specific forms of interpretative framing of the process of game design we can recognize in making-of paratexts is interesting in and of itself for reasons mentioned above, the aim of this paper lies not just in the *why* but also in the *how*. While the function of making-of material is often clear, how these paratexts are positioned vis-à-vis the main text in order to get their message across has not yet been discussed here. Again, a good place to start is within the film industry.

## **FROM THE WHY TO THE HOW**

While special editions with additional making-of material existed in the pre-DVD years (on LaserDisc and even VHS), the introduction and rapid consumer uptake of the DVD in the mid to late 90s, coupled with the expanded storage capacity of the discs, saw a rise in supplementary features with home video releases.

Bonus features and extras have become a standard for the home video release of both mainstream and independent films (Hight 2005). Even though the sales of physical releases of films have been in decline due to streaming services, such extras are to some degree expected with not just special but also normal releases of films on DVD and, more recently, blu-ray. For film scholars Brookey and Westerfelhaus, special edition DVDs see paratext and primary text engaging in complex, layered relationships, with viewers being able to easily switch between film and making-of documentary, or to have an audio-commentary by the director running during the film itself. They consider DVDs “perhaps the ultimate example of media-industry synergy, in which the promotion of a media product is collapsed into the product itself”, providing the aforementioned strong interpretative frame (2002, 23). Both Gray and Hight agree with Brookey and Westerfelhaus that such interpretative frames exist, but add that how paratextual material is presented and used in relation to the main text on a DVD nevertheless matters. Gray, for instance, points out that not all audience members will bother watching them at all (2010, 88-89), lessening potential impact. Paratextual location and visibility, then, is key. Hight suggest that simply extending conventional understandings of a preferred reading “ignores fundamental differences in the manner and variety of ways of the ways in which audiences engage with DVDs” (2005, 9). He draws on Manovich’ notion of the database (2001) to understand how the fragmented multimedia content on a DVD fits together. Rather than seeing databases as the opposite of narratives (as Manovich does), Hight argues that “these materials are not accessed through unordered lists but through a carefully designed series of interfaces typically organized into a hierarchy” (2005, 11). In many cases, the materials sit on the same disc as the film itself, with access to the film and the extras located within the same menus. For Hight, an interpretative frame of an object like a DVD release requires a more complex definition, which includes attention not just to the nature of the content of a making-of documentary. It also requires attention to the possible combinations of such making-of media “as part of trajectories, shaped by the disc’s interface, through the DVD’s content”, their relationships with the feature film as central parts of a complex layering of possible readings, and the relationship with other extras featuring “their own combinations of narrative and database forms” (2005, 11).

We can see similar complexities with digital games and their making-of material. During the early years of special editions of games discussed above, extras were in most if not all cases added on separate carriers (additional CD-ROMs, VHS-tapes, printed material, etc.). As said, this separation between text and paratexts within a game package still happens and arguably is most common. Since the early 2000s, however, making-of material has also found its way on the game disc themselves or, even later, became fully integrated within the software due to rise of digital distribution. This makes the notion of trajectories through paratextual material in relation to the main text as discussed by Hight all the more useful.

One of the first games to offer making-of material integrated on the same carrier as the game software is the Nintendo 64 title *Star Wars: Episode I - Battle for Naboo* (Factor 5 2000) which contained design sketches and audio commentary tracks by the development team.<sup>2</sup> A gaming website at the time called the presence of these extras a “homage to DVD bonus materials” (IGN 2001) but it is with this early example that the difference between a film DVD and game featuring on-disc making-of material becomes clear. Players of *Star Wars: Episode I - Battle for Naboo* had no direct access to these audio commentaries. Unlike a film DVD, where having a look at production art or listening to a commentary track is usually a few clicks away by navigating the appropriate menus, these extras were hidden from sight. Only by typing in a secret code in a code input screen would unlock access to these extras – “KOOLSTUF” for the art work, “TALKTOME” for the audio commentary tracks with each level. The codes themselves were distributed among players through the usual paratextual industry channels like gaming magazines and websites. In other words, by being something which needs to be unlocked before being accessible, here making-of material becomes part of the experience of playing games – in this case by requiring a cheat code. In the following examples, the relationship between making-of media and the core game becomes more complex, but also more playful, as the trajectories through which the making-of media can be accessed become a more active part of the game itself.

## PLAYING AUDIO COMMENTARIES

In 2005, Valve Corporation released *Half-Life 2: Lost Coast*, a free, additional level to first-person shooter game *Half-Life 2* (Valve Corporation 2004). Essentially a tech demonstration, the main goal of the release of *Lost Coast* was to show new rendering techniques of the underlying Source software engine. Additionally, and more relevant here, it introduced a new in-game commentary track system which was subsequently featured in all Valve's games afterwards. What sets this audio-commentary system apart from audio-commentaries on film DVDs or older games is not necessarily its content. *Lost Coast*'s commentary features a selection of the company's creative team, led by Valve's managing director Gabe Newell, which elaborate on some of the design choices made during the production of the game. What makes it different is the fact that is not a continuous audio track which is turned on at the beginning of play, or switched on and off from an audio settings menu as seen on DVDs and blu-ray discs. Rather, the possibility to play the audio commentary tracks is presented within the game world itself in the form of floating speech balloons reminiscent of cartoons which are called commentary nodes. These nodes can be found located at points in levels where something worth commenting on is located. The first node encountered in *Lost Coast*, floating right in front of the player's character as soon as the game starts, has Newell explaining how the commentary track system works:

To listen to a commentary node, put your crosshair over the floating commentary symbol and press your use-key. To stop the commentary, put your crosshair over the rotating node and press your use-key again. Some commentary nodes may take control over the game for the purpose of showing something to you (2005).

As it turns out after a few minutes of play, activating commentary nodes even works while in combat.

Audio commentaries of films exist as a peritextual layer, not part of a film's story world but nevertheless extradiegetic as it is listened to while watching a film. As film scholar Voigts-Virchow, who calls audio commentaries "paratracks" in Genetteian fashion, points out, they "tend to focus viewer attention on the presentational process", as such having the potential to demystify the presented world while watching the film unfold (2007, 132). The commentary nodes in Valve games are visible but nonetheless non-diegetic inserts in the game world *itself*, objects to which all in-game characters are oblivious but which visibly exist for the players' eyes only. The player, in control of the main protagonist, sees them and, when activated by pressing the appropriate key, subsequently hears the commentary. As visible but at the same time non-diegetic elements within the game world, commentary nodes do not just focus viewer (or player) attention on the presentational process (by a developer telling you where to look and what to look for<sup>3</sup>), but also have the potential to steer gameplay actions towards them. Even though most commentary nodes are placed on the trajectory most players will follow (like many FPSs, *Half-Life 2: Lost Coast* level design features linear progression), some nodes are positioned in places not all players would automatically move towards in a regular playthrough. Even though the commentary can be activated from afar, players are triggered to try to reach such nodes as they signify that there is something potentially interesting at a node's location. As such, the commentary nodes do not just have the potential to impact a game's interpretation but also the way it is played in terms of spatial navigation, inviting for exploration rather than progress.

Commentary nodes in some later Valve games, like the multi-player first-person shooter title *Team Fortress 2* (2007b), even trigger animated sequences in which the game's characters show how their weapons and other capabilities function while a developer explains them in the commentary.<sup>4</sup> As these commentary nodes are placed in the non-linear spaces of multi-player levels, there is no set order to listen to them – this in contrast with *Lost Coast* where the order of the nodes roughly follow the level's linear progression. To ensure a coherent narrative there is nonetheless a clear trajectory present. Players, when listening to an audio commentary, are offered to move to the next node through the user-interface of the node system. When right-clicking, the player's character is automatically transported to the location of the next node which is seen floating right in front of him. The "Hydro" level, for instance, contains seventeen

commentary nodes which can either be encountered through exploration of the game world or by moving from one node to the other directly through the commentary node interface.

In both the case of *Half-Life 2: Lost Coast* and *Team Fortress 2*, the existence of the paratracks are presented within the game itself as non-diegetic nodes to interact with. While not common, other games than Valve titles present similar systems, like *Tomb Raider Anniversary* (Crystal Dynamics 2007) or, more recently, indie title *Gone Home* (The Fullbright Company 2013). Through their placement in levels, audio commentary nodes offer a trajectory through these levels which steers player attention in a different way than audio alone would have done. Players, after all, do not even have to listen to the tracks but will still understand that something in a node's vicinity might be of interest. The resulting trajectories of interpretation made possible by the presence of nodes makes this making-of material notably different from that of a film DVD.<sup>5</sup> It directs viewing attention while the audio commentaries are playing, but direct playing attention even before the nodes are interacted with.

### **(RE)PLAY TO UNLOCK**

Another significant difference between how film DVDs present their making-of material and how many game releases deal with them has to do with accessibility. As mentioned before, *Star Wars: Episode I - Battle for Naboo* hid its developer commentary from the player: only by knowing the appropriate codes could they be unlocked. In a more conspicuous fashion, many Valve games feature a “developer commentary” menu option already visible when starting up the game. However, when the player clicks on the option, they are presented with a message that the game's chapters (ie. levels) need to be unlocked first before being able to activate the commentary nodes within them. Here, the paratextual material is presented as a reward for progressing through the main text, ie. the game. In both cases, the player needs to earn their access to the making-of material. In the *Battle for Naboo* case, they need to be “in the know” enough to have access to the secret codes, which requires knowledge about gaming culture; its paratextual industry and community in which these codes are dispersed. In the case of the Valve games, access to making-of material is linked to gaming prowess: in order to unlock the commentary nodes in all chapters, players need to be able to finish the entire game successfully. We can find a similar system in place with the recently release collection of games by British developer Rare, bundled and sold as *Rare Replay* (2015). When opening the game, players are presented with a menu option called “Rare Revealed”. This section of the menu contains all making-of material, with featurettes about the developer itself, making-of documentaries of individual games, concept art showcases and, interestingly, a section called “previously unseen” which contains design material from cancelled projects like *Kameo 2*, *Sundown* and *Black Widow*. Players see teaser images of all this content, but are also confronted with a locking system. They need to play the games to receive badges which subsequently unlocks access to the making-of material. If you want to see everything, you need to get playing. And as the package includes thirty games, including games a player might not be interested in, unlocking all material is a daunting task.

In other games, requiring gaming skill and knowledge to unlock making-of material is not just linked to finishing levels or games, but pursuing specific tasks within them. In such cases the paratextual placement presents an even more deliberate strategy to steer play – not just to play them but to play them in specific ways. The first two *Uncharted* action-adventure games by developer Naughty Dog (Naughty Dog 2007, 2009) serve as good examples of such design strategies. In terms of making-of material, the games offer both concept art galleries and various behind-the-scenes documentaries. In the first game, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, all the making-of material is listed as rewards under the menu option “Bonuses”. Without having played the games, the individual items on the list cannot be activated to watch. You can merely see how many art galleries and behind-the-scenes videos you currently do not yet have access to. Unlocking them involves earning medals which in turn are linked to specific goals within the game. These goals can rather general, like finding a certain amount of hidden treasures in the gameworld, or very specific, like killing “five enemies in a row with a single punch, after softening them up with gunfire”. After having



earned the appropriate medal points, rewards are automatically unlocked: the making-of video “Tech Dive – Full Body Animation” for instance requires 90 medal points to unlock.

Putting more explicit emphasis on the player having to earn making-of material through play, in *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*, medal points are replaced with in-game money which can be spent under the menu option “Single-Player Store”. Here, the making-of material costs a total of \$120.000 to unlock, but there are many more rewards to spend money on which are not making-of related, including new gear and weaponry for main character Drake to use, or additional gameplay modes like infinite ammunition or flipping the game world every time Drake is killed. By playing the game, players are bound to achieve at least some of these goals and/or gather money to unlock bonus features. To unlock them *all*, however, requires a player to approach the game in a different way. He/she needs to meticulously comb through levels to find hidden treasures, often with the help of player-created online guides, and needs to engage in combat in a more precise, mindful way, for instance by only killing opponents using headshots or with a certain weapon.

The actual paratextual material does still serve a purpose of displaying the creative effort which went into the development of a game. The “Tech Dive – Full Body Animation” mentioned above, for instance, deals with the relationship between the realism and responsiveness of character animation and the emotional impact the developers aim for. It is, however, not just the content of the making-of material but also its peritextual placement which aims to shape the play experience. By presenting bonus features and extras as visibly present but nonetheless inaccessible in a game’s menu, players are encouraged to engage with the game in such a way as to open up access. Similar as to how DVD extras do not necessarily impact a film’s interpretation as not all viewers might watch them, or as they might read them differently, the presence (or suggestion of presence) of extras in the menus does not guarantee a different play experience. Players are nevertheless constantly reminded of their existence while playing, by finding treasures with no specific diegetic meaning or by seeing popups telling them they have unlocked a medal. Here we see paratextual play in its most substantial form: play being influenced not by watching paratextual material, but merely as a result of its presence and presentation as game goal.

Players, of course, do not *have* to do all the hard work to get access to all the making-of material of these games. In almost all cases, the material has found its way online, for instance through video platforms like YouTube. In some cases, the developer or publisher themselves put it online as promotional material. In most cases, players upload them. Those who do put in all the hard work to unlock all bonus materials earn the appropriate respect and recognition by their peers, forms of gaming capital which remain out of reach for those who just watch it all on YouTube. At least, this might be the perceived impact when making-of material is directly linked to in-game goals. By being visibly present but only unlockable through dedicated play activities, we can see making-of material being part of a game industry phenomenon of “achievements”, which I will turn to next.

## **PARATEXTUAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

Within game culture, achievements can be seen as meta-goals or secondary reward systems which, as Olli Sotamaa explains, “build new levels for the game experience, as they invite players to such activities as metagaming and collection building” (2010, 80). In most games, including the *Uncharted* games mentioned above, making-of material is part of a broader set of unlockable rewards, like badges, unique gear or weaponry or even new play modes. Some of these unlockables are subsequently linked to even larger meta-game achievement systems, like Microsoft’s Xbox Gamerscore and Sony’s Playstation Trophies.

Achievements systems have become an important part of game design, with developers seeing the potential to keep players engaged with their games after a first playthrough. A typical game for the Xbox One console has 1000 achievement points, distributed over a series of achievement goals, which players can earn through dedicated play. The aforementioned *Rare Replay* collection of 30 games even advertises itself on its cover

as containing 10.000 achievement points to collect. Players can show off their prowess in and knowledge about games by collecting as many achievements as possible. In their extensive study of achievement as game design patterns, Juho Hamari and Veikko Eranti even question whether we should see achievements as secondary or optional game experiences by pointing out that for players specifically attempting to unlock all achievements it becomes a game of its own (2011, 3). When making-of material is linked to such achievement systems, it is here where we see paratextual trajectories potentially becoming part of the primary game experience, with gathering all making-of material becoming a goal in and of itself. Unlike with DVDs, *not* having direct access to making-of media is thus sold here as an integral game feature.

In his work on achievements, Sotamaa makes a useful connection to Consalvo's gaming capital, with achievement collections making gaming capital both visible and quantifiable. Using the perspective of collecting as a cultural practice, Sotamaa argues that we could see a connection between a desire between mastering that which is being collected and self-alteration: "in many ways the collector's goal to complete a collection is symbolically about completing the self too" (2010, 77). What and how well you play games says a lot about your gaming capital as a player, and achievement systems support, even forefront it.

It is here where we could draw a connection again with film and the way film fans tend to bolster their identity as a cinephile by gathering and sharing knowledge on every aspect of a film, including its underlying creative process. Taking a more critical stance on the content of making-of material as found on most film DVDs, Klinger argues that rather than providing "exposés" DVDs often treat viewers with uncritical trivia. Fans nevertheless engage passionately with this material. As Klinger argues,

[t]his kind of appeal to viewers suggests that one of the major foundations of fandom—the accumulation and dissemination of the smallest details involved in the production of media objects—is substantially informed (though not wholly determined) by industry discourse. (2006, 77)

I would argue that this process of accumulation and dissemination of details of the creative production of games is visible within game culture as well, and that industry discourse is highly influential in informing this process. The paratextual industries of game magazines and websites with their preview system, as well as the often overly positive content of making-of material we find packaged with games, play a key part in this. Through the types of paratextual play discussed in this paper, however, we find a new dimension of accumulation and dissemination added to this process, with players being asked to play for access to collections of making-of material, subsequently leading to a host of websites where players offer each other tricks and strategies to do so. This is not just a matter of industry discourse shaping players' knowledge and understanding of games as forms of interactive entertainment through making-of material, but also design strategies which shape how this this knowledge and understanding should be earned and, through achievement systems, displayed as cultural capital.

## **CONCLUSION**

While making-of material of games has never become as ubiquitous as with DVDs when it comes to its "special edition" format, over time we have seen making-of material like behind-the-scenes videos, audio commentaries and concept art become an ever more integral part of game design. Where the material used to be on separate carriers within a game's packaging, we can now find them fully integrated into games themselves. In this collapse of text and paratext, making-of media do not just shape our understanding of games, they also draw our immediate attention during play and even steer us into new game goals. While game designers certainly aim for longevity and replayability of their games with such design strategies, it would be problematic to argue that the implementation and use of paratext here only serves commercial purposes. In his book on media paratexts, Gray concludes that paratexts "confound and disturb many of our hierarchies and binaries of what matters and what does not in the media world, especially the longheld notion that marketing and creativity are or could be distinct from one another" (2010, 209). Many of the

more integrated examples of text and paratext discussed throughout this thesis show that a creative take on integrating making-of material can lead to new and challenging forms of play which can subsequently impact the way we think about games and game development beyond the mere accumulation of knowledge.

And indeed, if we look we can also find examples where the use of making-of material in games complicate differences between text and paratext, and marketing and creativity, even more. In a postmodern take on the gaming experience, *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Cafe 2013) for instance has one ending during which you enter a museum which has an exhibition of the game's own creation process, including a scale mockup of the main level design layout, outtakes from the recordings of the game's narrator, concept art framed as paintings and early models of furniture. The museum is something you encounter during regular play and as such never feels as an additional feature or in-game reward. It is a fitting element in a game which plays with game conventions and expectations. Making a distinction between text and paratext even more complex, Nintendo's *Super Mario Maker* (2015) offers a game creation system which could arguably function as a making-of for classic *Super Mario* games. As one reviewer explained it, *Super Mario Maker* "holistically teaches you what goes into making a Mario game, and just how demanding that design process has always been" (McElroy 2015). If we argue that making-of material aims to convey how the creative process of a game actually took form, here we have a game where you can try out the process yourself.

The industry norm regarding making-of material packaged with games nonetheless usually serves a dual function of shaping interpretation and, in its more integrated form, shaping play. In the latter situation, through what I have called paratextual play here, players become both a knowledgeable "insider" (in the creative process) but also acknowledged "expert" (in terms of gaming capital) in a measurable and communicable form. This dual function makes seeing the paratextual qualities of making-of material merely as uninteresting marketing material would underplay their role and function as part of the contemporary gaming experience.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Carter is critical about the distinction between "official" and "unofficial" paratexts in terms of authority though. He argues that "highlighting the manner in which *EVE Online* is produced and played as a sandbox, such a distinction does not serve to diminish but, in the case of some of the propaganda discussed within, to elevate" officious material as key to the way *EVE Online* is played and perceived (2015 314).

<sup>2</sup> Being a Nintendo 64 title, *Star Wars: Episode I - Battle for Naboo* is also notable for being a rare example of a game with making-of materials included on a cartridge rather than CD or DVD rom disc carrier.

<sup>3</sup> Some commentary nodes in *Half-Life 2: Lost Coast* will, when activated, even take away control over the virtual camera away from the player, instead focusing on specific features of the game the developer wants to talk about. Here, play is briefly interrupted.

<sup>4</sup> *Team Fortress II* was initially released as part of *The Orange Box* (Valve Corporation 2007a), a compilation of Valve games which also included *Half-Life 2: Episode One* and *Two* as well as *Portal*. All these games have audio commentary nodes.

<sup>5</sup> There are nevertheless DVDs which do offer visual clues that there is relevant making-of material present at certain points in a film. The DVD release of *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers 1999) for instance has a "Follow the White Rabbit" feature which, when activated beforehand, initiates a small white rabbit image which appears during several scenes. When engaged with the remote control, the film is interrupted by making-of material discussing these scenes.

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