The Philosophy of Computer Games Conference, Istanbul 2014

Freedom in Games – Between Fear and Boredom

(first draft version)

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Introduction

In *Homo Ludens*, Johann Huizinga (1998) claims famously "the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom" (Huizinga 1998, 8). He explains that play is a "voluntary activity" (Huizinga 1998, 7), it is practiced "during 'free time'" (Huizinga 1998, 8), and it is free from the orders and requirements of everyday life since play occurs in its own time and space (Huizinga 1998, 11). Roger Caillois, despite criticizing Huizinga, describes one of the "basic characteristics" of play as

> "the fact that the player devotes himself spontaneously to the game, of his free will and for his pleasure, each time completely free to choose retreat, silence, meditation, idle solitude, or creative activity" (Caillois 2006, 125).

To play is a choice of the player's "desire" and it serves the function "to find diversion, escape from responsibility and routine" (Caillois 2006, 125). Huizinga and Caillois can be called representatives of the romantic theory of play in that they make play appear as a realm of freedom as opposed to the restrictions of the everyday life.

Probably unintentionally or at least not fully aware of the implications, Caillois also says that "In effect, play is essentially a separate occupation" (Caillois 2006, 125). This implies that a player of a game is just swapping one occupation which is ascribed to everyday life against an occupation which is supposedly different from "ordinary life" or "everyday life" (Huizinga 1998, 19). And since the restrictions of a game are self-imposed, playing a game counts as a free choice of self-imposed restrictions. However, if we are now living in an age which is by some described as a "ludification of culture" (Raessens 2006) then we also have to accept that to play is not something we do outside of our ordinary life but simultaneously a part of it. This means that to play a game while being on the subway is not necessarily a free choice in the sense of the freedom inherent to authenticity (Guignon 2011) since it belongs to a set of possible activities which one does while being on a train such as reading a newspaper, a book, listening to podcasts etc. Hence, we are dealing with the essential paradox of play according to which play is e.g. serious and non-serious at the same time, ordinary and not-ordinary, orderly and disorderly etc. and therefore also free and not-free (e.g. Henricks 2009; Möring 2013).

This suggests that there is reason to doubt that the matter of freedom and games is sufficiently described by the claim that games and/or play are essentially free (see Huizinga 1998; Caillois 2001). Games are only an activity which is free if we accept the idea that playing a computer game is providing the similar restrictions as filling out Excel-sheets at work with the difference that we willingly decide to do so. However, the topic is not sufficiently dealt with if we see

games only in relation to a freedom which considers games as a space free from constraints of everyday life. Games are not only part of the everyday life the distinction of freedom and un-freedom is repeated in games.

The philosopher Eugen Fink holds

> "play is a basic existential phenomenon, just as primordial and autonomous as death, love, work and struggle for power. […] [Play, S.M.] is not bound to these phenomena in a common ultimate purpose. Play, so to speak, confronts them all – it absorbs them by representing them. We play at being serious, we play truth, we play reality, we play work and struggle, we play love and death - and we play even play itself" (Fink 1968, 22).

Essentially Fink says here that play does not only represent the phenomena of death, love, struggle and so on, but that these phenomena are all contained in play. Existential phenomena are repeated in play, as if they were from a world in a world or a life in a life. Similarly computer games are considered a world in a world when being described e.g. as virtual *worlds* or as virtual *environments*. As a world in a world we can assume that phenomena which occur outside of games reoccur in games, too.

Hence, if existential phenomena such as work, struggle, death etc. occur in game then also a sort of freedom must occur in games, too, which differs from the freedom mentioned by approaches which consider games as free compared to the ordinary life.

The goal of this paper is to conceptualize the phenomenon of freedom with*in* computer games. With Fink's general assumption that play is an existential phenomenon I assume games are so, too. This paper can hence be read as a contribution to an existential ludology. I will therefore rely on existential philosophy/phenomenology to conceptualize the freedom at play in games. I hypothesize that in many computer games freedom oscillates between fear and boredom relying on the Heideggerian conceptions of fear, boredom, and freedom and their function within Heidegger's philosophy of Dasein (Heidegger 2008). I will discuss individual game examples to find further evidence for my argument.

In the following I will

1. offer a take on freedom in games can be based on a spatial model underlying theories of freedom
2. show that games exhibit a fear-structure as derived from Heidegger's take on fear which equals the spatial model of freedom,
3. demonstrate that simple game which do not provide much more than a dealing with the fear-structure of games are simulations of liberation and are being played in front of a horizon of such a liberation which never happens. I call this liberation an inauthentic freedom,
4. how boredom can be thought of in games and be a key to achieve authentic freedom which equals a game being played authentically. In order to reach this authenticity the successful dealing with the fear-structure is required.

Freedom as depending on the fear-structure of games

In this first part I will unfold how freedom in games depends on what I call the fear-structure. A common sense notion of freedom as provided by dictionary definitions regards freedom as a spatial constraint. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) describes freedom as

> "The state or fact of being free from servitude, constraint, inhibition, etc.; liberty" (OED Online 2014).

This definition has two problems. Firstly, it partly explains the definiendum with the definens as it describes freedom with the verb "to be free." Secondly, the definition would be pretty utopian if it assumed some sort of absolute freedom as an absence of constraints. Often it is particular constraints which make a particular situation possible in the first place. Let's take Suits definition of a game as an example.

> "[…] to play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favor of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity" (Suits 2005, 34).

Suits defines play as something that happens between permission (means permitted by rules) and prohibition (more efficient means are prohibited). The notion of prohibition carries some negative undertones which sound like a player would be limited in her possible actions and thereby be actually less free than in her ordinary life. However, Suits holds that this prohibition is necessary to make this very game come into being in the first place.

Let us have a look into further dictionary definitions of freedom in order to further determine the limitations provided by games. My thesis is that definitions of freedom consists of a primordial underlying spatial model or spatial concept metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 2003) which resembles what I call the fear-structure and which we can find in many games.

The spatial model of freedom

If we continue looking into the definitions of freedom, the OED offers to see freedom as:

- "The state of being able to act without hindrance or restraint" (OED Online 2014).
- "The fact of not being controlled by or subject to fate; the power of self-determination attributed to the will" (OED Online 2014).
- "Facility or ease in action or activity; absence of encumbrance or hindrance" (OED Online 2014).
- "Exemption from a service, obligation, charge, or duty; the state of being so exempted; an instance of this; an immunity, a privilege" (OED Online 2014).

We can see that freedom is mainly described as the absence of hindrances, restraints, constraints, obligations, duties, charges, control etc. and as "the power of self-determination." Particularly,

notions such as hindrances and constraints have spatial implications as we find them in many computer games. The essence of *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* (Firaxis Games 2012) consists of overcoming hindrances in the game's environment exemplified by detrimental entities such as the different alien invaders in the game. The hindrances and constraints in *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo 1985) are e.g. Goombas and Koopa Troopas.

In the underlying spatial model of freedom the absence of freedom roughly equals the absence of space if we understand freedom as a movement in space that is restricted through a hindrance. If we speak of freedom as a movement in space restricted by a constraint we can think of this constraint as the presence of a counte-force (e.g. Sectoids, Thin Men, Floaters etc. in *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*) which is responsible for the absence of space.

In *Escape from Freedom* also known as *The Fear from Freedom*, Erich Fromm distinguishes between "**freedom from**" (negative freedom) and "**freedom to**" (positive freedom) as two different kinds of freedom. Fromm writes accordingly:

> "freedom has a twofold meaning for modern man: that he has been **freed from traditional authorities and has become an 'individual'**, but that at the same time he has become isolated, powerless, and an instrument of purposes outside himself, alienated from himself and others; furthermore, that this state undermines his self, weakens and frightens him, and makes him ready for submission to new kinds of bondage. **Positive freedom** on the other hand is identical with the full realization of the individual's potentialities, together with his ability to live actively and spontaneously. Freedom has reached a critical point where, driven by the logic of its own dynamism, it threatens to change into its opposite" (Fromm 2001, 232).

If Fromm is speaks of being "freed from" something then uses an underlying spatial model, too, which implies that freedom is a movement away *from* something that hinders or constraints freedom by means of authority or oppression or by being detrimental in some other way. This movement away can happen in time in that an unfree state has simply been *left behind* due to belonging to a previous time period. Yet, it can also happen in space in that the space between a hindrance or a constraint is enlarged either by moving away from the constraint or bypassing it or by eliminating the constraint or hindrance.

The spatial model underlying the idea of "freedom to" then implies a movement towards a state which is not considered detrimental but desirable and regarded as providing less to no hindrances or constraints with regard to reaching a particular goal. Critics say the distinction between freedom from and freedom to is questionable, since

> "in both claims there is a negative element and a positive element: each claim about freedom assumes both that freedom is freedom from something (i.e., preventing conditions) and that it is freedom to do or become something" (Carter 2012).

According to the legal philosopher Gerald MacCallum freedom consists of a triadic structure containing "an agent, certain preventing conditions, and certain doings or becomings of the agent" (Carter 2012). Hence, the freedom from oppression of any kind automatically enables the "freedom to do or become something" that was impossible due the oppression.

In addition freedom seems be only negatively definable by describing that which it is not but from which it derives or that which it requires. It therefore also seems that the more interesting part is not the state of freedom itself but the way to freedom – the liberation.

The liberation – dealing with the fear-structure

In the following I will argue that many computer games imply sort of a liberation if a player manages to deal with the fear-structure of games which is an essential part of the gameplay condition (Leino 2010; 2012).

This view requires thinking of those games which simulate some state of oppression or occupation more or less faithful and in which hindrances or constraints have to be overcome. Such games are *Tetris* (Pajitnov, Gerasimov, and Pavlovsky 1984) in which the player is constantly hindered from clearing all tetrominos; *Pac-Man* (Namco 1980) in which Pac-Man tries to escape the ghosts and eventually the lanbyrhint, *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo 1985) in which Mario tries to free the princess and is repeatedly hindered from doing this. The same goes for *XCOM: Enemy Unknown* which is about the prevention of the occupation of the earth by aliens. Even football contains elements of occupation when we think of time when FC Barcelona was literally occupying the opponents half with its genius tiki-taka football.

This sort of liberation implies to deal with a fundamental fear-structure contained in many existential games. Those are games whose being played can be considered the Dasein of a game and is similarly structured as the Dasein of human beings à la Heidegger (2008). A game is "da" or exists as long as it is being played. This Dasein of a game, however, is often at stake as Gadamer taught us (2004, 106). If the player loses three lives in *Pac-Man*, the game discontinues. If the main avatar, Steve, in *Minecraft* (Mojang 2011) loses all his hearts (which equal life energy) e.g. due to an explosion of a nearby creeper, the game is interrupted. In addition Steve loses all his gear, goods, and loot and is transported back to the last spawn point.

In Heideggerian philosophy of being in the world fear is a central mood of a Dasein in which the world is always already disclosed to it (Heidegger 2008). Fear allows a Dasein to understand an inner-worldly entity as potentially detrimental and threatening. Heidegger's notion of fear is derived from Aristotle's concept of fear and resembles it heavily. As such fear consists of a threefold structure:

> "The fearing as such […] is the mood that lets something matter to us as fearsome" (Dreyfus 1991, 176).
>
> "That which is feared [is] [s]omething specific coming at us, in some specific way, from some specific sector of the environment" (Dreyfus 1991, 176).
>
> "That which is feared for [is] Dasein itself as threatened in some specific respect. This need not be some part of the body. Fear can threaten Dasein's self-interpretation by threatening its projects" (Dreyfus 1991, 176).

Most single-player computer games consist of such a fear-structure in which there is a harmful entity or event threatening the well-being of an entity or a project. The spatial aspect of fear is

that the threatening is near, i.e. it is possible from a current game state that a harmful event takes place soon or that a harmful entity fatally hits an entity which is not supposed to be hit. Usually, the chance of being hit increases the smaller the space between the harmful and threatened entities or projects is.

In *Tetris* the harmful entity is the top gamespace limit and the entity which is not to be hit are the stacked up tetrominoes. In *Pac-Man* we are speaking of ghosts and the Pac-Man avatar. In *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2* (Infinity Ward 2009, CODMW2) those are hostile soldiers or other paramilitary hostile forces and the player avatar. In *The Marriage* (Humble 2006) we cannot so easily speak of harmful entities but rather of detrimental events which can take place. To keep the marriage and as such the game going the player has to avoid harmful events to take place, i.e. the player has to avoid that the squares in the game representing the partners become totally transparent or shrink so much that they become invisible. If this happens the game/the marriage is over.

That which is feared for is in all these cases the continuation of the game. And usually the activity of the player to prevent the fearsome from happening shows that she has understood the situation as fearsome – which is possible through the mood of fear or the fearing as such and through her caring for the Dasein of the game. Clearly, *Minecraft's* Steve being fatally hit by a creeper explosion fulfills the same conditions.

The fear-structure in these games are essential elements of what Olli Leino calls the **gameplay condition**, a concept he derived from Jean-Paul Sartre's human condition (2003):

> "The condition of the player, who by definition desires to play, is characterized by a duality of freedom and responsibility: the game gives her a freedom of choice while simultaneously making her responsible for this freedom by resisting her project of playing" (Leino 2012).

As such one can say that the understanding of the fear-structure is essential to a practical understanding of how to play a game. Yet, it is also essential to the understanding of freedom in games since most games require first and foremost the player to respect this general condition. In other words if a player keeps losing all her lives in *Super Mario* or *Minecraft* she can never choose to do other things in a game than playing the fear-structure.

Following Caillois (see above), a game can become another sort of occupation in that it "occupies" the player who has to negotiate situations of threat most of the time and is unable to take care of other things in the game. Hence, if we take the notion of occupation literally, we can say that a player might have freely chosen to play a computer game against other constraints e.g. of her work life – however, in games such as *Tetris*, *Super Mario Bros.*, *CODMW2*, *Minecraft* etc. the player is accepting other forms of occupation such as a constant threat of the continuation of a game which are sometimes the only thing a player deals with during a game.

In games like *Pac-Man* or *Tetris* the player never really strives for freedom from the ghosts or the gamespace limit. It is clear that *Pac-Man* is unimaginable without the ghosts chasing the player avatar in the first place (see Suits 2005). Also, *Tetris* would lose its "particular nature" which is "the way the field of the game is filled" according to Gadamer (2004, 107) if one could stack the tetrominos as one wishes.

We can speak in some games of particular liberties within the constraints of those games. As such in *Tetris* when erasing four lines of tetrominos at once we can enlarge the play space significantly for some time and do therefore experience less pressure regarding the next falling tetrominos. However, there will be no moment when the tetrominos stop falling. Or the FC Barcelona used to play the ball so quickly and safely that it was even with a strong defense difficult to get the ball from them. Hence, even though they had little space, they managed to use it effectively. Nevertheless, even the FC Barcelona does not play against teams which leave them all the space, and therefore freedom in the world to do whatever they want in a game. This is also why one speaks in football of keeping it tight when a defense is positioned so well that it is especially difficult for an offense to find a gap to get a shot on goal. As such it is difficult to speak of absolute freedom, yet, one might be able to speak of some liberties occurring during gameplay which differ in degree.

Freedom in games like *Pac-Man, Tetris, Super Mario Bros., Call of Duty, XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, etc. is rather the desirable final outcome of the struggle or challenge in a game. In other words freedom is the horizon in front of which a game is played but which itself is hardly ever reached. And if it is reached this freedom cannot be enjoyed within the game since this goal coincides with the ending of the game and results in a freedom from the game. An experience that Billy Mitchell must have had beating Pac-Man in a six hours playthrough while collection all possible points and not losing a single life after he had practiced for 17 years (Mäyrä 2008, 72).

In some games, though, such as *Minecraft* single player survival mode (SM) the fear-structure is only one part, even though essential, of the game and other opportunities to be are possible. The player can deal with a lot more things than keeping the space between enemies, and dangerous canyons and waters as large as possible. Hence, to acknowledge the fear-structure or the essential gameplay condition and negotiating the play space is only the baseline of the player's gameplay experience. This leads to the second part of the paper which is an analysis of freedom in games derived from Heidegger's analysis of boredom and his take on freedom which coincides with being authentic (eigentlich).

Freedom as unfolding between the fear-structure of games and boredom

If we regard the fear-structure on the background of Heidegger's larger project of *Being and Time* we can say that only taking care of the fear-structure in games resemble elements of Heidegger's theory which are related to being inauthentic and which therefore cannot be free.

In Heidegger's philosophy of Dasein a human being is free if it is "authentic" or "eigentlich" and therefore realizing its very own possibilities to be (Guignon 2011, 88). This form of being is particular since it opposes the way humans always already are in the world and this is "inauthentic" or "uneigentlich." Being "inauthentic" means to do what one normally does in such and such situations and is related the They. The They is the anonymous average person and contains the pre-structured ways to be as laid out for instance by cultural conventions. The They serves as a way to reduce complexity and provides a range of possible actions in situation of our everyday life (in the form of "social roles, styles of acting, traits of character" (Guignon 2011, 86)) so that an agent is not required to do extra effort by recognizing such possibilities in the first place. Guigon argues that one cannot really be free when choosing one of the pre-structured

actions of everyday life since such options belong to the They and are actualize by Dasein when being they-self. We are most of the time theyself otherwise we would not manage to deal with the myriad of affordances of everyday life. "Heidegger calls this everyday way of being falling" (Guignon 2011, 86). Although, it might seem at first place that the everyday way of being is an unfree way of being, Guignon suggests that "much of what we do in everyday life […] is simply beyond categorization as 'free' or 'unfree'. […] What we do is simply what we *do*" (Guignon 2011, 85).

In computer games this everyday way of being consists of dealing with the fear-structure – things like jumping over abysses, shooting aliens, shooting the ball away from our goal, killing creepers and restoring our health points etc. If we played *Minecraft* (SM) and would be constantly attacked by creepers which we had to kill in order to prevent the game from discontinuing we would also always be occupied with everyday tasks. The same goes for building shelter and farming as this eventually serves our "health" meter and thereby determines how phenomenologically close a detrimental entity is. This being concerned with the everyday, though, is the basis for having the opportunity to be free (authentic): simply because a dead character without any useful loot cannot do anything in the game at all – it cannot even be inauthentic.

It occurs that freedom is related to being authentic and authenticity can be derived from a distinction from everyday inauthenticity:

> "If being caught up in average everydayness makes our doings unfree (or more precisely, puts them outside the free/unfree distinction altogether) then being authentic should be a condition for our actions being characterizable as free" (Guignon 2011, 87).

Accordingly, it would be useful to figure out how authenticity can come about in games. For this it will be helpful to understand how authenticity relates to freedom, how authenticity is possible and how this occurs in games.

Authenticity is determined by a particular stance we can take towards our actions. As opposed to everyday inauthenticity

> "in authenticity we do stand behind our actions: we own them and can own up to them. These actions are ours, where that means we can more or less wholeheartedly identify with them. Heidegger says that, in authenticity, we are fully 'responsible' […] and not merely held responsible" (Guignon 2011, 87).

I.e. when being inauthentic we can always shuffle off responsibility for our actions to the circumstances or someone else like the They. In freedom we cannot do this. Hence, to Heidegger the free being is the being that is authentic.

Since, freedom is essentially related to authenticity we have to understand how a human being can become authentic on the background of its everyday inauthenticity. Heidegger sees two essential moods – anxiety and boredom – which allow Dasein to

> "escape from its ordinary fleeing into falling and come to find itself as 'individualized' […] Anxiety […] brings Dasein face to face with its 'ownmost potentiality-for-Being –

> that is, its Being-free for the freedom of choosing itself' (SZ 188)" (Heidegger in Guignon 2011, 88).

In anxiety according to Heidegger the world as it appears to a Dasein becomes meaningless altogether. In anxiety a Dasein cannot rely on any pre-structured inauthentic actions to choose from. Hence, in anxiety a Dasein has no other possibilities than being authentic and actualizing its very own possibilities to be. As opposed to the aforementioned fear-structure, the experience of anxiety reveals that there is no particular innerworldly (innerweltlich) object that can be made responsible for a Dasein's anxiety – instead the world as a whole is the object of anxiety. To some the anxiety analysis of Heidegger is difficult to reconstruct simply because the experience of anxiety is a rare phenomenon as Lars Svendson assumes. The experience of boredom on the other hand is easier to grasp. Svendson suspects: "Boredom simply seems to be a more contemporary phenomenon than anxiety" (2005, 116). One could object that anxiety is perhaps not so present due to the myriad of opportunities to lose oneself with in the world (TV, computer games, Facebook, Harry Potter, Escape the Room Games etc.). As Heidegger says "Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping" (Heidegger 1993, 106). However, the same goes for boredom. As long as a Dasein is concerned with its everyday tasks – when it is busy – it is unlikely but still possible that boredom will occur, because boredom is "sleeping", too, most of the time. Svendson writes:

> "we usually combat boredom, and if it 'sleeps' we should be satisfied with that. The reason why Heidegger wants to awaken boredom is that he believes that we are also 'asleep' in our everyday pastimes in our actual life" (Svendsen 2005, 116).

The question now is how boredom can occur in computer games or the gaming experience as a whole potentially including breaks from the game and returning to it in order to allow for authentic gameplay. For this we should have a look at Heidegger's analysis of boredom which he developed in his prominent lecture seminar in 1929-30 in Freiburg entitled "Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude" (see Harman 2007, 84). Heidegger mentions three forms of boredom differing in their degree of profoundness, suitably labelled as levels by Graham Harman (2007, 85–88). Heidegger distinguishes between "'being bored with something' […] and 'boring oneself with something' […]" (Svendsen 2005, 119), both forms of boredom are characterized by a feeling of emptiness.

The former is level one boredom and is exemplified with having to wait for a train for four hours at a provincial train station and the need to "drive away the time. […] In this form of boredom, we are held in limbo to the station while also being left empty through our inability to make use of it. […] it is the *world* that bores us here" (Harman 2007, 86, italics in original).

The latter form of boredom is level two boredom is more difficult to define since there is no "unambiguous" innerworldly (innerweltlich) source of the boredom (Svendsen 2005, 119). The example Heidegger provides is attending a dinner party where the people, food and drinks are nice. Nothing is wrong with any of this. Yet, afterwards one feels "held in limbo and left empty" by it and as such bored (Harman 2007, 87). The emptiness of this sort of boredom does not derive from anybody or anything at the party but it "is the emptiness left by 'our proper self'" (Svendsen 2005, 120).

These two forms can be found in computer games, too. Playing only the pre-structured missions in *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North 2013, *GTA V*) in which we primarily deal with the fear-

structure (e.g. chasing or shooting opponents) can become boring so that a player might look for another past-time activity and start playing car races instead. In this case, however, the player is just substituting one innerworldy activity by another one which could potentially turn out to be meaningless (Svendson relates boredom to "a loss of meaning" (Svendsen 2005, 17) and sort of empty, too. *GTA V* certainly provides a lot of possible past time activities to turn to if other activities become boring. Yet, even to that even to get bored in *GTA V* we need to consider the fear-structure while playing, i.e. we need to take care to not be run over by cars or to be shot in a gang war. Still, this escape from one boring pastime activity to another innerworldly (innerweltlich) pastime activity is no execution of freedom. Such pastime activities are pre-structured activities which are ready-made to choose from. Such are simply things one does.

For the second form of boredom imagine that I have been flying different aircrafts for quite some time in *GTA V* and had a lot of fun with it but afterwards I will realize that this was actually boring. The same can happen when I am constructing the building of the IT University in *Minecraft* (SM). The activity as such can be considered interesting because it serves the higher goal to finish a truly stunning project but in retrospect the activity can appear as boring, tedious and empty, too.

Level three boredom is the most profound boredom: "In the superficial form of boredom, one is left empty by the objects around one, but in profound boredom, one is left empty by everything – even by oneself" (Svendsen 2005, 122). In this case it is neither anything in the world that bores us nor ourself that bores us but we are in a mood which makes us experience everything as boring – as such is "the Boring that bores one" (Svendsen 2005, 122).

Harman tries to compensate the lack of an "illustrating example" by Heidegger (Svendsen 2005, 122) with the example of a walk

> "through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon […]. Nothing is open, and the sidewalks are empty; no possibilities exist for distraction. […] On this Sunday afternoon, beings as a whole [as opposed to individual beings, S.M.] refuse themselves to us. […] We are left in lurch, held in limbo by beings as a whole" (Harman 2007, 87–88).

The problem with this example is that it just illustrates the phenomenon of boredom but being in such a situation will not automatically bare the same profound boredom for everyone. On the contrary walking through a large city on a Sunday afternoon can be a very interesting experience to some. I therefore think this profound form of boredom is better imagined with walking through a lively city in the middle of the week which, however, appears to us like walking through this same city on a Sunday afternoon.

In computer game terms the game *Proteus* which does not feature a gameplay condition (cf. Leino 2013) resembles the empty city on a Sunday afternoon as exemplarily described by Harman and therefore at least as an illustration for what boredom can mean in computer game terms. In *Proteus* the player can walk through a three-dimensional expressionist landscape painting from a first person perspective. As opposed to other computer games the game lacks a gameplay condition or "playability" and should therefore be rather considered interactive art than a computer game according to Olli Leino (2013, 8). Consequently, the game also lacks a fear-structure since there are no incoming threats at any time. This lack of a gameplay condition can be compared to the emptiness that characterizes all forms of boredom in Heidegger. Here, the

emptiness even has to be taken literally in that the landscape is empty of enemies attacking the player-avatar. Being part of the computer game discourse and used to expect repeatedly incoming threats, the player is held in limbo waiting for something to happen while wandering the landscape. In a sense this game exemplifies the inscribed desire for liberation of existential games – providing a play space that is large enough so that a potentially detrimental entity cannot harm and the player can potentially focus on other things to do in a game than just negotiating the play space. The game can also be seen as the nothingness on whose ground most computer games exist and due to which they feature something like a gameplay condition in order to distract from the underlying meaninglessness of the everyday negotiation of the fear-structure and the keeping up of the play space which serves in many cases nothing else than the pure continuation of the game (see *Tetris*, *Pac-Man*, *Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2* etc.). However, since the player cannot do much more in *Proteus* than walk around and advance the seasons from spring until winter when the game ends the player cannot escape to being inauthentic and be concerned with the fear-structure. In a sense in such a situation a player is confronted with her whole being a player of *Proteus* eventually realizing that she can neither inauthentically negotiate the play space nor authentically realize her own opportunities to be a player of *Proteus*. A similar analysis should be valid for games like *Passage* (Rohrer 2007), *Minecraft* single player creative mode (CM), *Gone Home* (The Fulbright Company 2013), and *Dear Esther* (The Chinese Room 2012) and others which all do not feature a gameplay condition and no fear-structure. The CM of *Minecraft* would then have to be considered a simulation of a situation in which a player of the *Minecraft* (SM), the version which features a gameplay condition, is negotiating the play-space without making it an issue but rather doing it along the way.

Distinguishing inauthentic freedom from authentic freedom

Saying that *Proteus* illustrates boredom does not mean that it is a boring experience at least not for everyone. Being critically acclaimed with a Metacritic score of 80%, the game, however, caused a debate about "whether *Proteus* could be defined as a video game, and it was sometimes described as an anti-game" ("Proteus (video game)" 2014).

Certainly, the game is a difficult case in order to determine the possibilities for freedom in games. In a sense a player can be inauthentically free if freedom is understood as a lack of obstacles and hindrances. Still a player cannot be authentically free in terms of realizing her own possibilities to be. Still we can take *Proteus* as an illustration for how deep and profound boredom would be experienced in games like *Minecraft*. In this case the third most profound version of boredom as described by Heidegger would in computer game terms resemble the experience of *Minecraft* as if it were *Proteus* – despite the presence of the myriad of opportunities to do things in *Minecraft* such as searching for all sorts of rare resources such as diamonds, ender pearls, or slime balls. Perhaps, this myriad of possibilities is a reason why players of *Minecraft* constantly get lost during gameplay ending up collecting materials they were not looking for in the first place. In this regard *Minecraft* also provides a myriad of possibilities to be inauthentic in a game.

Yet, I claim that *Minecraft* also holds the possibility to being authentic in a computer game. The problem is that the moment of boredom leading to this authenticity cannot be further determined as the already described moment when *Minecraft* is experienced like *Proteus*. In such a moment the whole experience of being a player of *Minecraft* should appear as "indifferent, in such a way

that we [the player, S.M.] cannot find a foothold anywhere. […] everything collapses into one indifferent whole" (Svendsen 2005, 123). In boredom we become "isolated" from our everyday inauthentic being the game and the game must then appear "uncanny" (Svendsen 2005, 126, 129).

Even if it is difficult to determine moments of the most profound boredom it is possible to determine moments of authenticity and assume that they must have originated in moments of boredom when a Dasein – here the Dasein of the game understood as the cybernetic connection between player and game – makes its own Dasein an issue and when it does not rely on its everyday activities in the game or when the game and its possibilities as a whole get into the focus of a player's attention. Such moments might not even be consciously experienced but they form the basis for when a player starts considering *her* possibilities in *Minecraft*.

For *Minecraft* I see such "radical turns" leading to authentic freedom or the freedom as authenticity in those moments whenever a player is creating objects or situations which have not been thought of before by the designers of *Minecraft* and the gaming community but which demonstrates an understanding of the game and its possibilities beyond the occupation with the standard forms of playing it. Such are for instance piston elevators or slime block elevators (see e.g. http://minecraft.gamepedia.com/Tutorials/Elevators) or building a 16-bit computer (Peckham 2013) which exploit possibilities that the game always already provides but which will have to be disclosed. In order to really speak of authentic freedom in such cases the players would need to operate the game in survival mode. For the sake of efficiency, however, most players use *Minecraft* CM to build such structures in order to suspend the tedious inauthentic operations of mining the right resources, growing and harvesting food, as well as killing monsters. As such they "empty" the game on purpose and expand the play space indefinitely in order to be free to build their own creations. As such even here authenticity and therefore freedom are only simulated.

If one would like to theorize authenticity and freedom with regard to games a bit more it seems that both (freedom and authenticity) rely on some factors in games that Espen Aarseth described in his article "A narrative theory of games" (Aarseth 2012). In this article he characterizes the game-story hybrid as consisting of four different elements world, characters, events, and objects. Accordingly, a game allows for more authenticity if its characters are bots (rather than deep, round and rich characters), if events are not plotted at all but simply (as opposed to fully plotted events), if its world is open (as opposed to inaccessible), and if objects are creatable (as opposed to static and non-interactive) (Aarseth 2012). If this is the case a game is more prone to allow for authentic ways of playing it and therefore for authentic freedom.

Conclusion

In this paper I attempted to theorize freedom in games as emerging between a fundamental fear-structure and boredom. I firstly identified the fear-structure in existential games which simulate some liberation. The freedom in such games derives from the same spatial model underlying accounts of positive freedom (freedom from) and freedom is only the background on which a game is played. But this freedom is never reeached during gameplay since it coincides with the ending of the game. However, I remarked that one can speak of mico-liberations during

gameplay if a player manages to expand the play space a bit more or a bit longer than its usual oscillation.

Analyzing boredom in games relying on Heidegger's analysis of Dasein, I suggested that such games need to provide more possible activities than dealing with the fear-structure of the game. Yet, these games need to feature a gameplay condition which is exemplified by the fear-structure freedom. In order to allow for authentic play and therefore freedom need to allow for a suficient expansion of the play-space and to do things which have not been implemented by the game designers or disovered by other players and become part of the standard gameplay repertoire.

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