Computer Game Modding, Intermediality and Participatory Culture

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Introduction

Artistic freedom. Do what you want.
But just make sure that the money ain't gone.

The Jam, *All Mod Cons*

The lines by Paul Weller captured a moment in time in the late 70's but interestingly they also reveal something of the dynamics of 21st century mod scene. And today, I'm not talking about kids wearing smart suits and riding fancy scooters but gamer-made modifications of computer games that are celebrated as a new medium for artistic innovation and simultaneously successfully used as a marketing strategy for new retail titles. The ways modding[1] phenomenon links together media production and consumption clearly go beyond the simple oppositions of co-optation and resistance. In a larger scale a growing number of literature has lately identified the need for a closer integration of studies of media production and consumption. In obtaining a profound picture of the meanings attached to artefacts and media texts neither processes of production nor forms of consumption should be privileged. (du Gay et. al. 1997, Deacon 2003) In case of contemporary digital media defined as "interactive" and "multilinear", all this sounds somewhat obvious. Take virtual worlds or mobile communication, active users and user communities constantly construct new ways of interpreting, using and manipulating the media environment. In context of computer games the involvement of the player becomes a fundamental feature: the result of the game is not determined beforehand but it is highly dependent on the skills and creativity of the player.

Henry Jenkins compiles the recent changes in new media environment by highlighting the significance of 1) new tools and technologies that enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content, 2) a range of subcultures that promote Do-It-Yourself media production and 3) economic trends encouraging the flow of images, ideas, and narratives across multiple media channels and demanding more active modes of spectatorship. Jenkins suggests that these trends are altering "the way media consumers relate to each other, to media texts, and to media producers". (Jenkins 2003a) Adopting Jenkins's statement as a loose starting point, I hope to avoid an absolute either-or logic. To be able to say something about such a complex phenomenon as user-produced game modifications, it is important to consider modders as neither totally autonomous in their productive actions nor completely vulnerable to the game industry.

My intention in this article is to analyze the forms and meanings of gamer-made designs and especially mods, user-created modifications of popular game titles. In short, mods are gamer-made custom contents for official game titles. Today, popular mods can significantly extend the life span of a game title and particularly successful works of mod community can make the jump from mod to a retail title. Probably the most well known example of this is *Counterstrike*, a team play modification for the game *Half-Life* (Valve Software, 1998). In many cases mods

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[1] In the following the term *modding* refers to the act of developing mods. Likewise, *modder* is the active subject who performs an act of modding.

introduce new features and perspectives that later find their way to official game titles. On the other hand, the marketing of games like BioWare's Neverwinter Nights (2002) already relies heavily on gamer-created content.

One starting point is to treat mods as a form of community-based creative design and contemplate their relation to other forms of gamer-based production. On the other hand mods have become an integrated part of game development and marketing practices and therefore I attempt at least briefly to grasp the corporate culture side view on mods. Close reading of some particular examples of modder production helps to clarify their relation to "official" corporate media texts. I also elaborate the question game modifications pose of the blurring boundaries between gamers and game designers. Finally, I hope my article can produce some general understanding, what mods are all about.

I believe that a detailed analysis of practices among gaming culture is able to uncover some interesting questions related to general transitions in media environment. As Manovich (2002) suggests, by acting as the avant-garde of the culture industry new media industries and cultures can pioneer new types of authorship, new distribution models and new relationships between producers and consumers.

Innovation and creativity among gaming culture

The particularity of games as media texts rests on the fact that they cannot be only read or watched but they must be played. Thus, the creative involvement of the player becomes a fundamental feature of any game. Further, this creative involvement seems to stigmatise gaming cultural activities in a larger scale. In seeking new sources of entertainment, gaming culture has repeatedly generated new human-machine interaction and computer-mediated communication forms.

In his recent article Leslie Haddon (2003) explores innovative use of ICTs and produces a tentative grouping of "the ways in which users can be creative or innovative". I use the categorization here to introduce and evaluate different types of innovation taking place among gamers.

Types of innovation	Examples among gaming culture (discussed below)
Design and re-design of ICTs; improving existing or developing new applications	hardware modding mods, creation of editors
The creation of new practices using ICTs, the creation of content, the establishment of patterns of interaction.	Machinima muds, online gaming
More widespread creative design.	blogs, clan homepages, walkthroughs
New patterns of use, new practices.	sets of practices among gamers, etiquettes and social expectations

Figure 1: Types of innovation (revised from Haddon, 2003, 99)

At the top of figure 1 there is a level of design and re-design Haddon associates with technologically skilled and often enthusiastic users. The most apparent gaming cultural counterpart of this is the act of modding. Console gamers install 'mod chips' to their systems. This programmed micro-controller bypasses the region code system and allows gamers to play imported and backup games. Some gamers also use significant amounts of time and energy on 'case modding' - decorating and altering the semblance of their gaming devices. While this hardware modding has mostly so far been limited to groups of enthusiasts, game content

modifications have been a great success all over the world. The digital nature of games allows them to be manipulated and reprogrammed – also by individual consumers. Players personalize the appearance of their in-game characters by creating models and skins and create new maps and adventures based on existing game titles. For example sport game fans create detailed copies of national and local leagues including player statistics, uniforms and stadiums. Moreover, modders also develop and share new tools and editors that enable production of more sophisticated modifications.

In some cases it becomes hard to draw a line between users and designers that is also very typical of earlier phases in history of computer games (Haddon 2003, 99-100). Turning to the next level in figure 1, innovation need not be merely technological, but it can also consist of introducing new practices and doing new things with technology. One recent example in this category is a phenomenon called Machinima. These computer-generated animations are created by utilizing game engines, the software that generates the virtual 3-D environment for many popular games. Machinima films come in several genres: some films follow a narrative plot while others are mostly experimenting with the modified engine features. Unlike original games or mods, machinima films cannot be played but are supposed to be watched like any other films. Similarly games like The Sims (Maxis, 2000, PC) are no more used only for playing but gamers use them as a medium for producing and distributing content of their own. Such forthcoming titles as the film studio simulation The Movies (Lionhead, 2004) are advertised to equip users with even more sophisticated tools.

The various ways online games are making use of Internet are a good example of practices that exceed the objectives the global information networks were originally intended to fulfill. No more are people playing alone but connect with other gamers via Internet to compete and share experiences. Text-based adventure games called MUDs, short for Multi User Dungeons, originated in the late 70's and introduced communicational patterns today widely used in chats and other real-time online environments. Furthermore, networked multi-player games are very much social in nature and inspire gamers to unite: while role playing games and shooter games give birth to clans, tribes and guilds, sports games are played in local and global teams and leagues. Here we move towards the next level in figure 1.

Gaming hobby often gets its expression also in online forums and personal websites. Gamer groups and individual gamers regularly update thousands of websites to promote the achievements of a particular clan, to share the significant information pieces (patch updates, walkthroughs, strategy guides etc.) and to keep in contact with other gamers. Home pages can clearly offer new forms of visibility but they can also facilitate new contacts.

Finally, some innovation resides not in improving the performance of technology or in creating new forms of gaming, but in groups of gamers creating complex sets of practices and negotiating the meanings around gaming technologies. Managing gaming in everyday life is full of negotiation concerning the suitable time and room. For example parents efforts to regulate children's gaming may involve discussing the rules about use, but also parental decisions about the spatial articulation of gaming appliances. Such attempts surely evoke strategies of resistance, for example, when children gain secret access to games when parents are not present. (ibid., 100-101)

As mentioned earlier, the focus of this article is mostly on understanding modding. Even so, mods are always tied to other forms of gaming cultural innovativeness and therefore it makes sense to contemplate them in relation to each other. In the following I move on and try to throw some light on the historical background of modifications. The chapter starts with an analysis of the meanings and relations of often synonymously used concepts 'hack', 'patch' and 'mod'.

Hacking the patches: towards the definition of 'mod'

One of the definitions for 'hack' found in Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary[2] is "to write computer programs for enjoyment". According to journalist Steven Levy who has studied the early hackers of 60's and 70's a hack is "a project undertaken or a product built not solely to fulfil some constructive goal, but with some wild pleasure taken in mere involvement" (Levy 1984/1994, 23). Hacking is often understood as an action including a high amount of enthusiasm and enjoyment but also 'hacks' – the results of hacking – can be entertaining. In context of this article it is noteworthy that Levy sees the first modern computer game Spacewar! as one of the most significant early hacks.

In contemporary gaming culture 'game hacks' seem to have a bit different resonance. Popular forms of game hacks range from skill hacks that boost the skills of the player character to map hacks that enable player to control the game world more easily. An illustrative example of skill hack is aimbot, used especially in first-person-shooters, that significantly improves the accuracy of aiming. Then again, a programme called wallhack makes all dungeon walls transparent and thus help to locate enemies, monsters and bonuses. Usage of hacks is usually treated as cheating and cheaters normally gain little appreciation among other gamers. Gamers using cheats are often banned from multi-player servers and several anti-cheat websites and projects can be found in the net.

The New Hacker's Dictionary (1994) also reveals another historical meaning of hack as "a quick job that produces what is needed, but not well" (NHD, 216). Here 'hack' comes very near to 'patch' which NHD defines as a "temporary addition to a piece of code, usually as quick-and-dirty remedy to an existing bug or misfeature" (NHD, 320). Often the first version of any software retail title includes bugs that companies later try to fix by offering add-ons. Software industry patch files vary from hardware drivers to security updates and upgrades that add increased features to the program. Today, patches are mostly downloaded from the Internet and many popular programmes actively look for updates and remind users of latest pathces.

In computer gaming context patches are neither only limited to repairing bugs but they can also add new features to the game. Company-made patches can for example be designed to prevent the use of gamer-made cheat codes. Confusingly enough, the term patch is also used to refer to gamer-made alterations and customisations. As Schleiner (1999) writes "[a] patch can range from a simple repair of an error in the original game to elaborate manipulation and customization of graphics, sound, game play, physics, code, architecture or other attributes of the original computer game." The everyday meaning of patch as "a piece of material used to mend or cover a hole or a weak spot" (Merriam-Webster On-line Dictionary) illustrates the duality of patches as objects that 1) hide some parts of the earlier work and 2) produce a new entity with the remaining parts of earlier work. Similarly as in case of cloth patches, the purpose of game patches can vary from concealing a minor incompleteness to highlighting the particularity of the new features.

'Mod' is originally short for 'modify' or 'modification'. The meaning, NHD gives to the term, is very similar to the one of patch. The plural 'mods' is used with reference to bug fixes or minor design changes (NHD, 283). In case of computer games mod is usually used when referring to user-made modification to pre-existing game. As far as I know there is no consensus of the first appearance of the term in this meaning. What is known is that at least patches for first-person-shooter *Quake* (Id Software, 1996, PC) were widely known as mods. Rapidly after that the use of the term has extended to cover various modes of gamer creativity.

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[2] http://www.m-w.com/home.htm

Very different elements of a single game can be modified. Manipulating the library of media files can result new player characters (skins, models) and new audiovisual layouts for objects and environments. Whole levels can be altered and new ones created by changing the content of map files that trigger various events and dictate the spatial architecture of game world. Modifying game engine that controls how graphics are displayed can have significant effects on basic physics of the game. Again, the rules of game can be altered to fix some inconsistencies or to create whole new games. Mods that include more or less changes in all categories described above are often called total conversions.

Theoretically speaking, every little alteration made to the program code of any commercial entertainment software, can be treated as a mod and therefore it is not easy to determine who made the first mod and what was it like. Throughout the history gamers have created new variations of games by altering the existing rule systems. Observing the version of soccer played in the streets and backyards reveals a lot of the resourcefulness of players and the flexibility of rules. The game can be played with a varied number of players and the duration of game can be very flexible, almost any object at hand – be it a tree or a bag – can serve as a goal post, the game can be played without goalkeepers and without throw-ins and corner kicks and still, it makes sense to play the game and even call it soccer. My intention here is not to suggest that rewriting programme code is as uncomplicated as deciding on minor changes in soccer rules but to address the continuum in behaviour attached to games – both digital and non-digital.

The urge to modify existing computer systems and see what happens can be tracked back to first generation hackers. *Spacewar!* (1962), built on minicomputer PDP-1 by MIT students, was partly based on innovative use of earlier program code. The game took advantage of preprogrammed sine-cosine routines and the program called *Expensive Planetarium* capable of creating the realistic star display. Even the controls for the game were hacked of push-buttons used for 1940's telephones. (Levy 1984/1994, 50-69) *Spacewar!* was later ported to different machines and inspired many modifications and successors including the single player arcade hit *Asteroids* (1979).

It's not only the enthusiasm of amateurs that drives the modding phenomenon through. There are also game developers that voluntarily provide documentation and tools for modifiers. Already early 80's games like *Lode Runner* (Broderbund, 1983, C-64) included editors that allowed players to create additional levels. Commodore 64 scene also witnessed such titles as *Boulder Dash Construction Kit* (First Star Software, 1986), a tool set inspired by popular Boulder Dash game series and a generic shooter editor *Shoot-Em-Up Construction Kit* (Sensible Software, 1987).

Still, mod phenomenon as known today mostly originates from the early nineties and is tied to the development of PCs capable of creating three-dimensional graphics and wider access to the Internet. Also particular design decisions were made to support gamer-driven design. Not long after *Wolfenstein 3-D*[3] (Id Software, 1992, PC), one of the first representators of popular first-person shooter genre, was published, modified versions started to appear. One example, that according to David Kushner's true story book *Masters of Doom* inspired the developers at Id software, was a version where the game music had been replaced by theme song from the children's show Barney and the instead of the SS boss character player encountered a smiling purple dinosaur (Kushner 2003, 115-116). In case of Wolfenstein this kind of replacement always required erasing parts of the original code. Once a picture was changed there was no easy way to bring the original back. In the next Id Software game Doom (1993), the media files were intentionally separated from the main program and located in an accessible directory. This reorganizing of game data made it possible to replace sounds and graphics in a nondestructive

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[3] Wolfenstein 3D took it's name and theme from *Castle Wolfenstein*, a game released for many different systems in 1983. Already the early game by Silas S. Warner witnessed a fan-created modification, namely Castle Smurfenstein with Smurfs substituted for the nazi characters of the original.

manner. Id programmer John Carmack also facilitated the amateur designers by uploading the source code for the level-editing and utilities program. In only a matter of weeks, gamers began swapping Doom mods and homebrew editing tools for free on Bulletin Boards and across the Internet. (Ibid., 165-169)

Today, mods seem to appear among almost every imaginable computer game genre. Still, a decade after Id successfully incorporated modding to an inseparable element of their first-person-shooter titles, FPS genre accumulates a significant amount of modding. In the following, I evaluate some earlier attempts to investigate mods and then move on to closely examine some illustrative mod examples.

She's a model and she's looking good

Earlier, the production of modifications has been suggested to follow political photomontages (1920's and 1930's) and scratch video (1970's and 1980's) as a manifestation of "tactical media" (Huhtamo 1999). This line of thought positions mods in clear opposition with the products of corporate media culture and proposes them to be a new way of talking back to, revealing the means of and questioning the truths of mainstream media. Also Scleiner's notion of mods as "hacker art" comes quite close to that of tactical media in emphasizing "patches which hack the culture of the game, interventions that offer an unexpected perversion of the accepted semiotics of game worlds and game play" (Schleiner 1999).

The obvious strength of these approaches lies in their ambition to sketch a historical context for phenomenon so enthusiastically celebrated as something completely new and revolutionary. On the other hand, what they almost completely fail to see is the deeply contradictory nature that computer games hold as popular cultural objects. My personal experience suggests, that a noteworthy share of the game add-ons consists of modest variations of game characters, weaponry and visual appearance of the game environment that barely can be interpreted as highly intellectual resistance of corporate media dynamics. As Stuart Hall (1981) suggests, popular culture is neither wholly corrupt nor wholly authentic but popular reception contains both "progressive elements and stone-age elements." This definition clearly captures something essential from the spirit of gaming culture. Just to give an example, one illustration of gamer creativity are so called "nude patches" that offer gamers some pubertal delight by undressing (often female) game characters. Then again, as noted by Schleiner (1999), early modifications with active female heroines preceded the official release of Tomb Raider and other shooter games with female avatars.

One popular cultural parallel for mod phenomenon could be found in the ways remixing and sampling have altered the electronic music scene.

> Like the hip-hop sampler or reggae dub mixer, the game patch artist manipulates the prefab semiotics of the game engine, a kind of "versioning" that reorganizes along both paradigmatic and syntagmatic axeses. (Schleiner 1999)

Remixing indicates a reworking of a piece of music and it became common soon after the introduction of multi-track mixers that allowed separate manipulation of different elements of a song: vocals, drums, bass line etc. Lately, the term has been applied to other media: visual productions, software, literary texts. Similarly, as earlier mentioned in connection to Doom, the reorganizing of game files and secondly the software packages made available with games enable modders to produce far more sophisticated pieces of work. Sampling – today accomplished with a digital sampler – refers to copying or transferring snippets of a preexisting piece of music to make a new composition. In one sense what sampling has done, is industrializing the practices of montage and collage, central to twentieth century culture. (see Manovich 2002, 5-8) A new tune can be completely composed from samples and the final outcome does not necessarily resemble any of the originals. Similarly, some mods succeed in

altering the features of the original game so effectively that the result is more of a new game than a version of the existing one. Still, connecting modding too tightly to the techniques introduced by avant-garde artists can lead to a limited view that emphasises the ironic and distanced appropriation and pays no attention to the affects and passion attached to games.

It has been addressed from various perspectives that games draw on other media. As Bolter & Grusin point out already the variety of platforms on which computer games are delivered – be it arcade machines, CD-ROM applications, game sites on the Internet or mobile phones suitable for gaming - are themselves multiply remediating artifacts (Bolter & Grusin 2000, 89). Game contents like audiovisual appearance, storyline, characters etc. can be borrowed and combined from multiple sources. Vice versa, game cultural visual motifs are clearly visible in various media from game title inspired feature films to magazine layouts. (for more see Järvinen 2002) Mods, understood as versions of pre-existing games, are right from birth highly complex creatures in terms of referentiality. Also the legacy of earlier forms of fan-based media production implies that mods are likely composed of an opulent and sedimentary web of media cultural elements.

While earlier research approaches on mods clearly indicate that the relationship of game mods and other media texts should be examined more closely, none of these perspectives introduce a clear method. In this point, although I was quite convinced about the reasonability of my starting points, I still wanted to take a little experiment. In order to verify my preunderstanding of game mods as fan-productions that create multiple references to other media texts I examine briefly another mod-related subject, namely construction of player models[4]. In practice, I went through the models designed for shooter game Quake III presented in the popular model website PolyCount[5]. Altogether Polycount has reviewed over 300 gamer-made Quake III models between 2000 and 2003. Additionally, most of the models have a short description that the designer has written to contextualise the character. Anyways, the original objective of my cursory charting was to identify whether the models expressed any apparent references to other media texts and thus could possibly help me to adjust the research questions when later examining the large-scale modifications. Little did I know what an intermedial labyrinth I was about to enter.

Quake III Arena has originally 32 different "bots" – non-player-characters controlled by game AI. One relatively large group of gamer-made models consists of variations of these original characters. This group contains generic demons, robots, cyborgs and fantastical monsters. Beside them contest such gamer-made mythical characters as *Centaur* and *Werewolf* and models like *Sheba* (Biblical queen) and *Medusa* (Greek Mythology) that take their inspiration from ancient texts and beliefs. The origin of a model called *Thor* is already a bit more complicated one since the model description discusses the god of thunder in pre-Christian Northern European mythology, but the appearance of this character clearly refers to the long-running Marvel Comics comic book by the same name.

Familiar movie characters seem quite popular among model makers. A generic gladiator character *Glaudius* is accompanied by *Maximus* from Ridley Scott movie Gladiator. *Alien* character from Alien Resurrection and Terminator endoskeleton *T-800* can potentially join their forces with villains from *Darth Vader* (Star Wars) to *Dr. Evil* (Austin Powers movies). They are challenged by a team of heroes like *Neo* (Matrix) and *Flic* (A Bugs Life) and heroins like *Ripley* (Aliens) and *Barbarella* from the 1968 movie directed by Roger Vadim and starring Jane Fonda. TV Show inspired characters are mostly taken from such popular animation series as The Simpsons, South Park and Futurama, to mention but a few. Puppet generations meet when *Animal*, the drummer from Muppets television show is challenged by *Flat Eric*, the hero of the Levi's Sta-Prest adverts. Again, an occasional meeting of *Trooper* and *Bug* models in the

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[4] Earlier most of the gamer-designed characters were called skins, since the outfit was mapped ('skinned') onto the existing 3-d models. Today, when gamers are allowed and able to create 3-d modelled figures of their own, one model can contain several changeable skins.

[5] http://www.polycount.com/

dungeons of Quake III constitutes an interesting intermedial case since Bug is inspired by warrior bugs from the 1997 movie directed by Paul Verhoeven but the trooper character is a straight homage to the animated TV show, Starship Troopers: Roughneck Chronicles (SPFE, 1999). Both the movie and the animation series are more or less based on Robert A. Heinlein's novel Starship Troopers (1959).

Most of the characters inspired by cartoon and animation characters are naturally more or less free interpretations since they are transformed from 2-d form to 3-d models. The shear amount of anime and manga inspired characters is quite striking. Also such maybe a bit surprising acquintances as *Snoopy* (Peanuts), *Betty Boop* and *Cow* based on "The Far Side" series of Gary Larson can be mentioned. The somewhat obvious findings include Marvel comics super heroes like *Hulk*, *Judge Dredd*, and several X-men characters that already appear in television series and video games and conquer the silver screen. Another extraordinary bunch is assembled when *Batman*, *Catwoman* and *Joker* come together to fight against each other. Joker model resembles at least partly the original cartoon character while Batman is clearly based on the animated series character. Then again, the appearance of Catwoman owes a lot to character played by Michelle Pfeiffer in feature film Batman Returns (1992) directed by Tim Burton.

The atmosphere of the Quake III gameworld is based on the earlier Id Software shooter games. On the way the cast of monsters has been updated but gamers take care of their favorites by creating tributes to models from earlier games. *Crakho* is obviously an update to the classic Quake 2 bot and *Revanant*, *Imp* and *Arachnatron* can be found from the levels of Doom. Altogether, the most skilled fighters from various games are brought together on the Arena: *Thug* is the main character from a first-person-shooter game called Kingpin, *Cloud Strife* and *Sephiroth* make their first appearance in role-playing game Final Fantasy VII and *Kazuya Mishima* and *Jin Kazama* have their origins in Tekken, the popular series of fighting games. Classic Nintendo characters are represented by *SuperMario*, *Sonic* (Sonic The Hedgehog) and *Oni Link* (Legend of Zelda). Socal, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater inspired Southern California homeboy and Cheekypoo originally known from Pokemon broaden the variety of references. Furthermore, Tomb Raider enthusiasts can select whether they want to download *Lara*, a Quake variation of original video game character, or *Lara Croft*, a model based on actress Angelina Jolie starring in Paramount Pictures film "Tomb Raider".

I could go on with examples ranging from consumer goods (*Lego man*) to software industry represented by *Tux*, the fat penguin mascot for the Linux operating system and *Clippit*, paper clip famous for his job as Microsoft Office Assistant, but I suppose I have made my point clear. At least in case of Quake III, gamer-made content appears to be radically intermedial. By intermediality I refer here to the contemporary form of intertextuality that transgresses media borders. As Lehtonen (2001) points out, our cultural resources never originate from one media only. Still, through the processes of mediatization, commodification, globalization and digitalization, our late modern culture seems to become increasingly intermedial. (Lehtonen 2001, 76-82)

The actual practices of intermediality in games have been studied very modestly. Examining the models addresses clearly that it is not simply a question of recycling of still images and other static objects. Sophisticated models include custom sounds and animations that bring the character in life. Arming characters with custom weapons address their differences also at the level of gameplay mechanisms. My brief excursion with models could probably continue with an analysis of the larger discursive formations and ideologies but instead I move on to examine these actual means modifications utilize in challenging, resisting, combining and doing homage to other media texts.

It's A Mod World

Aarseth (2003) suggests, that there are three main ways of acquiring knowledge about any game. Firstly, the design, mechanics and rules can be studied through getting information from the developers of the game. Secondly, a researcher can observe others play and read their reports and reviews. Thirdly, the researcher can play game her/himself. While combinations of these approaches probably produce the best results, Aarseth emphasizes the importance of the third one:

> If we have not experienced the game personally, we are liable to commit severe misunderstandings, even if we study the mechanics and try our best to guess at their workings. [---]

> But informed game scholarship must involve play, just like scholars of film and literature experience the works first hand, as well as through secondary sources. (Aarseth 2003, 3)

In my investigation of mods I have applied this method as far as it has been possible. In some cases the versions available appeared to be early betas that included only part of the features advertised in the modder websites. In other cases installing patch files continuously crashed my computer and some model packs just completely refused to co-operate with earlier downloads. Anyways, I have played all the modifications mentioned at least casually in order to familiarize with the athmosphere of the game world and central gameplay dynamics. Some of them I have examined in a more studious manner. Moreover, there is also a significant number of modifications I have played, discussed and read about that did not end up being mentioned in the final version of the article. Thereby, I believe I have gained quite good idea of the computer game modding scene in general and Quake III modding in particular.

Quake III Arena, the game that forms the basis of all mods I have investigated, is the third installment of one of the most popular series of shooter games. The original game arenas are mainly combined of sci-fi space stations, dark gothic dungeons, medieval rooms and hallways with numerous demonic details. The characters – as mentioned earlier – form a colourful bunch of hard-boiled human fighters, cyborgs, demons and fantastical monsters. Developed by Id Software and published in 1999, its engine is still popular among modders. Also the relatively poor success of the official team-oriented mission pack Quake III Team Arena (2000) has been explained due to the extensive supply of high quality gamer-made Quake III mods.

The original Quake (1996) could be played either in single-player mode where player advanced from level to level by basically destroying all the AI-controlled monsters or in multiplayer deathmatch mode that allowed individual gamers compete against each other via local-area-networks and Internet. Quite soon after the launch of Quake, mod developers introduced teamplay modifications like *Capture the Flag* and *Team Fortress* that brought new tactical teamwork elements to the game. In Quake II (1997), Capture the Flag mode was included as part of the retail title beside the single-player adventure and deathmatch option. In Quake III Arena, which is mainly designed with multiplayer mayhem in mind, the single-player mode does not anymore try to form a narrative continuum but is constituted of consecutive deathmatch arenas with varied opponents. Multiplayer options include Team Deathmatch and Capture the Flag. A clear majority of modifications can be named either deathmatch mods or teamplay mods, or in certain cases both of them. Still, there are a couple of significant exceptions to this: for example *The Dark Conjunction* mod aims to bring a whole new story driven single-player adventure to Quake III players and *DeFRaG* is basically a training mod designed to improve gamer's skills in various areas.

The reviews of almost hundred Quake III mods in PlanetQuake's[6] 'Mod of the Week' section were a great help in choosing potential modifications to analyze. Also the loose style-based categorization introduced by Mod Database[7] helped to form a preliminary conception of the whole spectrum. Still, the final selection could not be done without playing dozens of different kind of modifications – some of them very entertaining and inspiring, others mainly poor reproductions of original game levels. The following analysis aims at sketching different means mods use to reproduce and adapt both elements of original Quake III Arena game and other media texts. At the same time I attempt to study which elements of the original game are altered.

The Everlasting Battle

One simple and effective way to alter the gaming experience is to change the selection of weapons available. Similarly readjusting the properties of a single gun can significantly alter the tactics applied. Equally as gamers design player models they also develop imaginative weapon models. Many popular mods are basically based on modest changes in weaponry. For example in Quake III mod *InstaGib+*[8] you only have one weapon with infinite ammunition. When you hit your opponent once, or they hit you, it's an instant death. Like many other mods, InstaGib+ has its origins in earlier mods designed for Quake II and Halflife. It tells something of the popularity of this particular mod that InstaGib mode has been implemented as a basic feature in Quake III's main rival Unreal Tournament (GT Interactive, 1999). However, gun crazies come in various species: a mod called *BFG10K Arena* pays homage to "the classic feel of the Quake2 BFG10K" while *Railgun Frenzy* is dedicated to the sniper rifle, just to mention but a few.

While some examples mainly focus on boosting the weapons into extremes, other mods apply a reverse strategy and minimize the importance of weapons or remove them entirely. *Q3 Paintball*[9] simulates quite faithfully the real life version of paintball. Besides the realistic paintball guns, the maps are designed with the real life experience in mind. Instead of battling in fantastical dungeons gamers run and hide in both indoors and outdoors grounds designed specially for paintball games. The jailbreak mode of Q3 Paintball – borrowed from another modification Jailbreak – places the tagged player to the side for the remainder of the round, just like in a match of real life paintball. Another Quake III mod called *Art of War*[10] turns Quake's high-paced and adrenaline-pumping combats into class based real-time strategy. Instead of shooting everything that moves you collect gold from around the map and use it to construct buildings for your team.

Through technically quite simple replacement of models and weapons Quake III engine can also be turned into an arena of political debate. This is exactly what *Political Arena*[11] does. In the first Political Arena version "PA Vol. I: Death and Destruction on the Campaign Trail 2000" players play the candidates from the 2000 Elections representing the major U.S. political parties. For example *George W. Bush* model masters the Lethal Injection Syringe thanks to his actions as the governor of Texas. Again, according to the website *Dick Cheney* character has been denied the use of nuclear weapons but as a consolation prise he gets a Depleted Uranium Cannon. The gameplay mechanics come straight from Capture the Flag, and successful progress in Campaign Trial rises from stealing the symbol of the other party and defending the flag of your own. In the second version of the mod "Political Arena: Usurper" the intention is to steal the presidency. The characters come in two different model packs, namely "Terrorists of the

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[6] http://www.planetquake.com/ PlanetQuake also hosts a variety of other Quake-related sites including various sites dedicated to a single mod or a modder group.
[7] http://www.moddb.com/
[8] http://www.planetquake.com/instagibplus/
[9] http://www.planetquake.com/q3pball/
[10] http://www.planetquake.com/artofwar/
[11] http://www.planetquake.com/politicalarena/

West - Freedom Fighters or Crusaders?" and "Osama bin Laden and the Most Wanted Terrorists". Also PA: Usurper is based on an earlier mod, *Kill the King*. By picking up the US Flag you become the president and no matter which character you play, at that moment you take the appearance of "the grand usurper himself, George WWIII Bush". Player can score points only while being the president and when the president is killed, the flag becomes an object of pursuit again.

Clearly, the objectives of Political Arena are not limited to pure entertainment. More than anything, Political Arena is a statement in the discussion concerning violence and video games. According to the Political Arena website: "Video games have just become politically conscious - and they're fighting back! Not with guns or bombs, but with art, ideas, and the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression." The way Quake III Arena engine is used for looking at politics recalls some similarity to the website Newsgaming.com[12] and its experiments with web-based games that editorialize on current international events. These kinds of projects raise the question whether games can become or already are a serious medium capable of helping us to understand complex political and social issues.

The attraction of the mod is neither based on the polished visuals nor on innovations in gameplay but on its ability to make people think. In fact, without the detailed background information offered by the website, Political Arena would probably be one more below average version of Capture The Flag. This raises the question of the significance of secondary texts that frame and direct the ways we attach meanings on games. In sum, Political Arena proves that already technically modest changes in characters and accessories can have a considerable impact on the ways the game is played and interpreted. In the following, I move on to examine more extensive mods that completely alter the audiovisual style of the game world.

The World Is Not Enough

Extensive changes in game world elements produce completely new arenas ranging from almost photorealistic to imaginative and abstract. Also new soundscapes consisting of sound effects and soundtrack music have an important role in creating a distinctive athmosphere. Good example of a mod that has next to nothing left of the original Quake series athmosphere is *Midget Wars*[13]. It is a genuine cartoon mod that radically alters the scale of the game world. In practice, player is shrunk into a couple of inches tall figure that can hide behind gigantic flowers and mushrooms and use leafs to land safely from the heights. Otherwise, you can face your death through seeds falling to the ground. Anime styled mod *Bid for Power*[14] also creates a very distinctive game world. Besides custom visuals, animations and sounds it creates a new combat system that more suitably fits into the anime world. In Bid for Power player does not use weapons per-se but masters different spells to do damage with. Even more radical change BfP introduces is a changeable point of perception. Point of perception refers to "the position from which the player perceives, i.e. both sees and hears, what goes on in the game environment" (Järvinen 2002, 116). BfP allows player to switch between three different viewpoints: 1) the standard first person Quake view, 2) viewpoint positioned on model's eyes that allows player to see characters arms and legs, 3) third person view where the model is seen from the outside. The feature is not by any means brand new, since changeable and non-static points of perception are available in many game titles. The significance lies in the fact that Quake III Arena is an archetypical '*first person* shooter'. In changing the point of perception BfP questions the element often nominated as the most characteristic attribute of the whole game series.

Matrix Quake III[15] mod converts the world of the near-future epic The Matrix (1999) into a gaming experience. Matrix Quake III package includes two custom maps, Lobby and Dojo, that

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12 http://www.newsgaming.com/
13 http://planetquake.com/midgetwars/
14 http://www.bidforpower.com/
15 http://www.planetquake.com/matrixq3/

carefully reproduce the audiovisual settings of the key movie scenes. What's even more interesting, is the way Matrix Quake III implements the characteristic elements of the game, namely bullet time and wall walking. Instead of only admiring these special effects gimmicks from a distance, player is able to use them in order to succeed in the game. In other words, the audiovisual motifs are adapted into gameplay mechanisms. Wall-walking feature allows player to defy gravitation and use walls to approach and run away from enemies. Bullet-time effect slows down the environment for a period of time and gives more time at aiming and dodging bullets. In explaining the audiovisual relationship between The Matrix and Max Payne computer game (Remedy Entertainment, 2001) Järvinen points out that instead of representing the bullet-time motif, the game simulates it and allows the player to experiment with it. As a gameplay mechanism available to the Max Payne player bullet-time feature eases the game tasks but simultaneously it also creates an aesthetic effect appreciated by the player. (Järvinen 2002, 117-118) In case of Matrix Quake III, bullet-time effect works in a bit different manner. It is not in hands of an individual player but is randomly turned on and off. Therefore, in multi-player mode bullet-time gives no advantage to one particular player but only alters the nature of the game for a moment. Wall-walking maneuver refers to various directions since the action sequences of The Matrix are influenced both by Hong Kong action movies and oriental fighting games. On the other hand, wall walking motif is familiar from such earlier games as Aliens vs. Predator (Rebellion, 1999) which itself forms quite an intermedial metamorphosis.[16] Not surprisingly, also Enter The Matrix game (Shiny Entertainment, 2003) has its own versions of both bullet-time and wall-walking effects.

Western Quake 3[17] is a pleasant exception among dozens of laser gun powered near-future mods. Maybe the only obvious game cultural predecessor of this "wild west mod" is LucasArts' game "Outlaws" (1997). While Matrix Quake III transforms individual audiovisual motifs into game mechanics, Western Quake 3 creates unique game modes which covert central western settings into playable missions. The idea of Duel game type is to enable classical western shoot-outs using only pistols. Bank Robbery game type requires teamplay: one team equipped with dynamite attacks the bank and attempts to steal the "money bag" while the other team has to defend the bank by eliminating the robbers. These renovations may not look too grand but fresh game modes that nicely fit in to the created game world strongly participate in producing the particular atmosphere.

The website dedicated to the mod states that "Western Quake is intended to be a realistic simulation of the "Old West's great atmosphere". The development team includes some "old west aficionados" and the background research is concluded in detail. The mod includes completely new weapons that are based on detailed information about damage, rate of fire and reload time of the late 19th century weaponry. Instead of laser-boosted melees and massive explosions of Quake III Arena you can hear bullets whizzing in your ears. However, probably the most important element in producing the "right" atmosphere is the soundtrack full of marching drums, electric guitars and melancholic melodies completed by a lonesome trumpet. Obviously, this music was not played in 19th century United States but instead it pays homage to Ennio Morricone who reinvented western movie music with his scores for 60's spaghetti westerns. Looking at the player model names helps to deconstruct the game world further. First of all, player can decide to be *Clint*, a model obviously referring to Clint Eastwood, actor and oscar-winning director who starred in several 60's Spaghetti Westerns. Curiously enough, the next model is *ManWithNoName*, the character played by Eastwood in Sergio Leone's "Man With No

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[16] The first manifestation of the game, namely Alien vs. Predator, was designed for Atari Lynx handheld and published in 1994. The game combines enemies from the Twentieth Century Fox Alien series and the film Predator (1987). Moreover, Aliens vs. Predator feature film directed by Paul W.S. Anderson, famous for the "Resident Evil" film adaptation (2002), is supposed to be premiered in 2004.
[17] http://westernq3.planet-multiplayer.de/

Name" Trilogy[18]. ManWithNoName is accompanied by *Sentenza* and *Tuco*, characters played by Lee van Cleef and Eli Wallach in The Good, The Bad and The Ugly (1966). The cast is completed by female models *Jane* and *Oakley* that take their inspiration from likely the most famous women of the Wild West, Calamity Jane and Annie Oakley. Here, the modders are joyfully mixing different levels of fact and fiction and on the side succeed in exposing the nature of "wild west" as a highly complex cultural construct.

Towards simulating simulations

The brief examination of player models implied that other games form a rich source for mod designers. The same seems to apply to modifications. *Generations Arena[19]* mod is based on every first person shooter released by Id Software so far. Elements from Castle Wolfenstein 3D, Doom and all three Quake games are mixed to arenas that imitate the memorable originals in style. Actually none of the material is cropped straight from the games but they create a close enough resemblance. Like so many other mods Generations Arena has its origins in an earlier mod, namely Quake 2 project called Generations. As mods draw on games, similarly mods build on other mods. And eventually, games draw on mods by converting popular modifications into game modes.

Instead of focusing on only computer games, mods simulate all kinds of games. One illustrative example are different sports and their remediations on Quake arenas. *Gridiron[20]* produces a unique simulation of (American) football. The latest add-on pack even includes detailed Superbowl 2003 skins. The game is played between two teams and part of the arenas available simulate a standard football field. The offensive team tries to clear their way to the end zone on the other side of the field and the defensive team tries their best to keep the offense from getting into the end zone. The scoring follows pretty much the real world rules, touchdowns and field goals being the central source of points. Additionally, if you can rocket jump[21] yourself through the up rights with the ball, it's worth seven points. This rule reveals that unlike in realistic simulations of football, the characters are still heavily armed and you can for example help your team's ball carrier by eliminating the opponents with a rocket launcher. So, in fact Gridiron is a curious mix of football and team-oriented shooting game. Another mod that stretches the Quake 3 engine to its limits is a racing game *Q3Rally[22]*. The set of maps is optimized for racing and even the player models are changed into racecars. Taking elements from the first person shooter game and mixing them with newly-implemented racing game features results a car race where your opponents have heavy weaponry to keep you from crossing the finish line. While most of the commercial racing games focus on producing photorealistic simulations of actual car races, Q3Rally finds its parallels somewhere amid RollCage (Attention to Detail, 1999) and the notorious Carmageddon (Stainless Software, 1997). Thereby, it seems that the shooter features implemented in Q3 engine tend to move on to other arenas through mods.

Eventually, it's time to look at *Q3Pong[23]* that promises to bring the archaic video game Pong (Atari, 1972) to 3-d arenas. The original Pong is a crude simulation of tennis/table tennis. Q3Pong, in turn, is played in two teams that have their own goals in the arena. Both teams try to roll a gigantic ball into the other team's goal. You can push the ball but the most effective way

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[18] This trilogy also known as Dollars trilogy consists of the films: A Fistful of Dollars (1964), For A Few Dollars More (1965) and The Good, The Bad and The Ugly (1966)

[19] http://www.planetquake.com/wirehead/generations/

[20] http://www.planetquake.com/gridiron/

[21] Rocket jumping is a popular FPS gimmick. In rocket jumping you use your own rocket launcher to propel yourself to higher levels.

[22] http://www.quakerally.com/

[23] http://www.planetquake.com/teamreaction/q3pong/

to move it is using your weapons. The ball can also be used to kill other players since the quickly-moving ball will basically crush everyone on its way. To be honest, Q3Pong has very little left from the arcade game. Its family resemblance with a game of tennis is even more remote. So, what exactly is Q3Pong simulating? Another related question is posed by mods that reproduce old games from the yards. *King of the Mountain* (King of the Hill for Quake) and *One Man Army* – applying the "it" system from the famous kids game – produce violent simulations of the games played on the schoolyards for ages. Does this count as intermediality or should we use some other terms?

In conclusion, it would be tempting to draw a separation between mods mostly altering the audiovisual elements of the game world and the ones manipulating the game mechanics. However, as explained earlier even the most minor changes in game world objects can simultaneously change the mechanics and significantly influence on the ways the game is played, so a diversified overlapping between categories is evident. Another way to construct categories is to look at the tactics and objects of resistance. Mods can reveal game cultural biases and suggest alternative ways to tackle the future challenges. As in case of Political Arena, mods can also be used as forums of societal dialogue in discussing and resisting the conventional values. Instead of straightforward resistance modding can also be explained in terms of control and creating new competences. Through playing with texts of corporate media culture modders control and reconstruct the relationship between gamers and game industry.

From participatory culture to participatory design and beyond

In his ethnographic study of fan cultures, *Textual Poachers* (1992) Henry Jenkins introduced the concept of participatory culture. According to Jenkins fan cultures draw their resources from commercial media culture while also reworking them to serve alternative purposes. In a larger scale, cultural studies tradition has emphasized the activity of any media audiences for decades and it has also suggested that instead of talking about 'reception', consumption of popular culture should be understood in terms of production. It goes without saying that modders hold a peculiar place among media fans because of the mutually beneficial relationship with game developers.

Jenkins borrows de Certeau's term 'poaching' to characterize the relationship between fans and corporate producers of media texts as "an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings" (Jenkins 1992, 24). As John Fiske (1992) suggests in his seminal article, all media audiences engage some degrees of semiotic productivity but fans often turn their productivity into textual form. Fanfiction and other forms of petty production give a material form for media fans actions. Traditionally fan cultural texts are not produced for mass-market to make profit and they are normally not circulated outside fan community. This system with its own rules for production and distribution is called a 'shadow cultural economy' by Fiske.

In his critique of Jenkins's theory John A. L. Banks claims that the notion of participatory culture runs into difficulty when discussing the development of once-petty-producers to semi-professional and professional producers and distributors.

> Jenkins is uneasy with the potential reconfiguration of boundaries between fandom and official, commercial, corporate culture. This emerging dynamic does not fit easily within much of his placing fandom in and oppositional stance towards commercial culture. It does not sit easily within the frameworks of Cultural Studies' often all too predictable political posturing. The fans are fraternizing with the enemy or even going commercial themselves, what is to be done! (Banks 2003, 10)

As the writer himself is willing to admit he is overstating Jenkins's position here but even so he succeeds in revealing that the landscape of participatory culture has moved on during the past

decade. Earlier fan activities were mainly discussed in conventions and copies of texts were circulated inside the fan community. Today Internet is extensively used both for distribution of materials and as a platform of discussions. Furthermore, the corporate media production companies have lately been eager to bring fan cultural petty productions from the "subcultural shadows" to the "mainstream light". (Sotamaa 2003, 258-259)

The competitions organized by corporate media companies are a good example of fan cultural production's insitutionalization. One famous example is Star Wars Fan Movie Awards[24], a yearly competition organized by Atomfilms in partnership with Lucasfilms, the producer of official Star Wars movies. Awarded fan filmmakers receive a commercial distribution contract that guarantees them the legitimate royalty payments. On the other hand, no attempts to expand of Star Wars universe are allowed but "[f]ilms must parody the existing Star Wars universe or be a documentary of the Star Wars fan experience". The rules also forbid the use of copyrighted Star Wars music or video but the website provides an online "Production Kit" with action figures and audio clips. The rules also determine nudity, excessive swearing and graphic violence as ineligible content. This clearly highlights the nature of the competitions as a tool of control and regulation. The same applies with the mod community. In the summer of 2003 Epic Games announced a million-dollar modding competition "Make Something Unreal" to generate new mods for the popular first person shooter Unreal Tournament 2003.[25] While offering considerable prizes and significant publicity opportunities for winning mod groups, the company obviously expects some good publicity and a possible increase in sales of UT2003. High quality mods are naturally expected to extend the popularity and the life span of the game title. Moreover, the competition offers an important opportunity to manage "unruly" fan production.

In this context, if we examine closely the word 'participatory' it seems to refer to two different directions. First of all participation indicates someone being actively involved: contrary to non-participants, a participating individual contributes and takes her part. Secondly participant's power always remains partial. A participant is never fully independent in her actions but operates only through collaboration and negotiation. In this connection it is useful to recall the dual meaning of the term 'subject' as both an agent and a subservient to something (Lehtonen 2001, 145-147). The contributions modders make to games still have their limitations and game companies actively attempt to address modders in order to supervise and govern mod production.

In describing the mechanisms of participatory culture Jenkins notes that "fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment industry's decisions" (Jenkins 1992, 26). Due to the rapid development in computer hardware powerful and inexpensive machines are today available to the hobbyists. Thanks to user-friendly software, even amateurs can experiment with editing and mixing media contents. In addition, Internet distribution is at least potentially offering a worldwide audience for homebrew productions. Simultaneously, the media industry, in order to protect their intellectual property and to maximize their profits, is actively developing new ways to retain its control over the forms of petty production.

In addition to competitions mentioned earlier, game companies organize and maintain websites that enable gamers to discuss with other gamers, to share gamer-made contents and to be in contact with company representatives. Companies also employ 'community managers' who scour the net and collect feedback, comments and ideas from consumers. More mod-specific methods of regulation include the "official" modding tools developed and distributed by the companies themselves and the end user license agreements (EULAs) governing the creation of modifications (Mactavish 2003).

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[24] http://atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/spotlight/collections/starwars/
[25] http://www.unrealtournament2003.com/contest.php

Looking at EULAs sends us back to Doom. Back in 1993 Id Software had not provided a user license with Doom and therefore could not govern the distribution of early mods. Only later, Id's business manager posted an agreement for prospective Doom modders. This statement included a request that the mods should work only with the registered version of Doom. (Kushner 2003, 168-169) Reading through the EULA of almost any contemporary game reveals that this humble wish has in ten years time changed into a standard requirement in game industry. For example Quake III Arena user license includes the following lines

> ID grants to you the non-exclusive and limited right to create for the Software (except any Software code) your own modifications (the "New Creations") which shall operate only with the Software (but not any demo, test or other version of the Software).

Other interesting part of the Q3 EULA is defining the appropriate circulation of "new creations".

> You shall not rent, sell, lease, lend, offer on a pay-per-play basis or otherwise commercially exploit or commercially distribute the New Creations. You are only permitted to distribute, without any cost or charge, the New Creations to other end-users so long as such distribution is not infringing against any third party right and is not otherwise illegal or unlawful.

Basically, the development of modifications is supported, but only as far as the homemade contents do not conflict with the commercial interests of the companies.

In his recent attempt to update the understanding of participatory culture Jenkins frames different categories in order to explain what happens in the intersection of participatory culture and corporation-driven media convergence. The continuum includes following levels:
- conflict (as in ongoing legal battles for access to or regulation over intellectual property rights)
- critique (as in the political activism of culture jammers who use participatory culture to break down the dominance of the media industries)
- challenge (as occurs with the blurring of the lines between professional and amateur products which may now compete for viewer interest if not revenues)
- collaboration (as in various plans for the incorporation of viewer-generated materials)
- recruitment (as when commercial producers use the amateur media as a training ground or testing ground for emerging ideas and talent) (Jenkins 2003b)

All this and much more can be found among gaming cultures. Only a couple of decades ago a single amateur enthusiast could write a game in weeks and develop her hobby into a business. Today, a significant amount of professional game designers have their background in mod scene. In connection to this it is noteworthy that a mod-themed feature article in Edge magazine, issue #126 (August 2003) forecasts the end of the lone-wolf modder. The increase of detail in next generation games is going to cause a huge increase in the workload of mod developers. Instead of single virtuosos we already witness the rise of large global development teams. Coordinating and facilitating such teams places new challenges both on mod community members and on the game studios. It seems likely that even more complex symbioses between media companies and individual media (prod)users will arise.

From the player perspective maturing of game industry has produced new interesting possibilities. In some cases gaming can shift from being a hobby to a full-time job. Video game tournaments with considerable prizes and sports-like national teams can transform gaming into a serious business. Also as the modder develops from an amateur to a skilled specialist, he/she is likely to become more dependent on capital relationships and the market. (Sotamaa 2003) From the game industry point of view mod community can serve as inexpensive research and development team. For example in 2002 members of top mod teams all over the world were

flown to *Electronic Arts' Westwood Studios* for a full day *Mod College* aimed to inform the mod community of the new *C&C: Renegade* engine. The activities of mod-savvy developers can be interpreted as an alternative design philosophy where instead of analysing user needs and validating user requirements (user-centred design) the tools are given to the users and fiddling and experimenting with them is encouraged.

Further perspectives

> "Modding is the electronic entertainment industry equivalent of a four-track recorder, or an affordable digital video camera; mod teams are the garage bands of gaming."[26]

The way modders create fresh ideas through experimenting with technologies clearly has some similarities with the tactics applied by indie bands and bedroom djs. Some bands play just for fun while others are determined to gain mainstream success. Probably most modders fall somewhere in between, where having fun with mod community friends is the primary motivation but the idea of achieving a job in game industry can also play some role. Therefore I suggest that we can attach a few other metaphors beside that of garage band. Modding as "popular hackerism" refers to the unique fashion mod phenomenon combines true hacker spirit and commercial interests. Modding as "knitting club" emphasizes the social aspects: while the inborn urge to experiment can drive single individuals, the significance of modding community should be recognized as an irreplaceable source of information and respect. "Preschool" metaphor pays attention to modders' instrumental goals: today it is not uncommon that mods are used as a portfolio in pursuing game industry paychecks. Every metaphor opens up a very different set of questions and presents mods in a different light. I hope they can also serve as a general starting point for further research on mods.

One interesting question not discussed in this article is the relationship of modding and the independent game scene. While the annual sales of game industry have been announced to exceed the ones of movie business the structure of the market is very different. The independent film scene or say, independent music labels provide alternative contents via alternative distribution channels but so far the gaming culture has mostly failed to create corresponding structures. Such events as the annual Independent Games Festival[27] offer a forum to showcase indie products but only few projects end up with a publishing contract. Analysing the differences and similarities of these parallel scenes of game cultural underground could help to achieve a more profound understanding of the place of modding on the map of gaming cultural activities.

In a larger scale it is easy to agree with Jenkins who claims that we are witnessing "the emergence of elaborate feedback loop" (Jenkins 2003b) The idea is that most commercially viable practices invented and experimented by amateurs are absorbed into the mainstream media. In return, mainstream media produces inspiration for amateur efforts, which "push popular culture in new directions". This can be interpreted from various perspectives. One possible way is to suggest, that Jenkins is here only recycling the old "pop culture is a bastard" argument. This line of thought returns the origins of any popular cultural innovation or revolution emerging from the minorities. Pop in itself is just an instrument with which counterculture is turned into the dominant culture. (see Poschardt, 401) Otherwise and more positively, Jenkins can be read to preindicate a future where fan works can no longer be treated as simple derivatives but as sources of inspiration and reworking for mainstream media.

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[26] "Building Blocks" in Edge presents Equip: The insiders Guide to the Future of PC. Future Publishing ltd. 2003, 64-75.
[27] http://www.indiegames.com/

Finally, it is important to bare in mind that the same way as modders adopt different positions, also the game industry is far from a homogenous entity. There is no consistent dominant culture but the attitudes on modding and supporting it vary between game designers and development teams. As I have tried to argument, mods are designed from a variety of starting points and used for very different purposes. Such academic research projects with practical goals as Biohazard[28] by ECT and MIT indicate that there is still much more to come.

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[28] http://www.etc.cmu.edu/projects/biohazard/spring03/

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