fandom and Helen Stuckey's fascinating account of how paper war gamers turned themselves into computer gamers. Another standout is Jennifer deWinter and Carly Kocurek's use of Walter Benjamin's figure of the collector in conjunction with interviews to explore how fans' collections are institutionalized.

This book is an essential read for those of us who study what people (especially communities) do with games beyond designing and playing them. It will be of interest to anyone working in game history and especially those who study issues of preservation and archives. It should also be useful for fan scholars. The high price and scholarly tone will probably keep the layman and, ironically, fans away.

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Metagaming: Playing, Competing, Spectating, Cheating, Trading, Making, and Breaking Videogames

Stephanie Boluk and Patrick Lemieux
Minneapolis, MN: University
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and index. 383 pp. $30.00 Paperback
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"Metagames are the only kind of games that we play" (p. 3). *Metagaming* opens with a rather bold statement. Or, possibly, with the most common of common senses about games. We never really engage with the abstract, platonic, perfectly formed rule set of a game, but rather we play around it, engage with it in messy ways, shape it to our and other players' advantage. Playing means, in fact, performing meta-operations on and around the materiality, authored mechanics, and rules of the peculiar object that is a game. Not absolute obedience to the precepts of the game, nor boundless, liberating freedom, the metaplay of the metagamer is an act of approximation and negotiation, at times subdued ("spectating," "making," "trading"), at times violent ("cheating," "breaking"). Stephanie Boluk and Patrick Lemieux, both professors at the University of California, Davis, build a compelling theoretical structure that rests on this complex duality, ultimately claiming that the metagame is the site where the authority of the game and the creativity of the player coexist in a constant state of tension.

The rhetoric of metagaming can be defended as true for games of all sorts, but here the authors choose to analyze its relevance to digital play. This inclination operates a double framing on the work of Boluk and Lemieux. Primarily, within the context of digital game studies, metagaming certainly subscribes to what can be defined as an exceptionalist theory of video games. This theoretical stance—found in numerous other recent studies—claims that video games are in fact exceptional kinds of games because they rely for their functioning on the unique properties of computing. In a digital game, everything must be programmed in advance and executed by a string of code. Using the authors' clever similitude: whereas gravity is taken for granted when playing baseball in real life, in a digital simulation of baseball, entities such as gravity, mass, and attrition become rules that need to be programmed. This focus on pragmatics, in turn, situates this

book within the wider arena of materialist media theory, a branch of media studies that is particularly interested in the relation between the materiality and politics of media. It is no surprise, then, that the two authors often refer to the work of McKenzie Wark, whose research on digital games helped bridge game studies and media theory.

Boluk and Lemieux's work explores the ways in which "metagaming undermines the authority of videogames as authored objects" by presenting a series of in-depth analyses of meta-ludic practices and following their influences on the ways in which games are currently produced, distributed, and played (p. 25). From tool-assisted speedruns to competitive e-sports, from mourning within the community of a massively multiplayer online game to theories of the cyborg body found in Hideo Kojima's work, the breadth of *Metagaming*'s reach makes the case for studying games from their periphery, refusing analytical formalism in favor of a freer and more associative intellectual practice. This is certainly both the strength of this work and, at the same time, a potential drawback for its ability to engage the wider audience of game studies. *Metagaming* is an explicitly political book, rooted in post-Marxist skepticism, and decidedly unapologetic in its approach to video games and video game players, whose interaction is often described as a site of negotiation of authorities rather than a playful encounter. Moreover, the book proposes a study of play, usually understood as a fleeting, irreducibly human phenomenon, without resorting to the methods of social sciences. If German media theorist Friedrich Kittler's work has been described as

"media studies without people," Boluk and Lemieux offer an example of game studies without players. This is not to say that *Metagaming* is interested in metagames as stable, authored objects, but rather that the book understands players as a component of the complex assemblage that is a video game, in which the human and the digital, the playful and the political coexist.

Every chapter of *Metagaming* is glossed by a game produced by the authors that can be downloaded and played by the reader as both a compendium and a demonstration of the theories offered in the text. This is an example of what philosopher Stefano Gualeni describes as "doing philosophy"—the practice of producing interactive objects with precise rhetorical and epistemological functions. In this sense, games in general work particularly well as philosophical artifacts or playable thought experiments (and, one could argue, what is a syllogism if not a very compact game of logic), as they present systems and mechanisms in a compressed and often elegant fashion. This is also the case of the games found in *Metagaming*, which often walk the line between contemporary art practices (such is the case of *It Is Pitch Black*) and radical rom-hacking as in the case of *99 Exercises in Play*, an *oulipo*-esque collection of variations on the theme of the first level of *Super Mario Bros*. Taken singularly, the games reflect effectively the content of each chapter, but as a collection they serve as a demonstration that playing, making, and writing about games are not three separate activities, but rather different modes of the larger practice of metagaming.

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