

6-18-2012

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### Recommended Citation

Lizardi, Ryan (2012) "DLC: Perpetual Commodification of the Video Game," *Democratic Communiqué*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/democratic-communication/vol25/iss1/3>

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*Democratic Communiqué 25, No. 1, Spring 2012*

# DLC: Perpetual Commodification of the Video Game

**Ryan Lizardi**

*The United States video game industry has become a multi-billion dollar-a-year business, due in large part to the explosion of downloadable content (DLC). Video game DLC includes handheld gaming and additional content not found on software discs. The DLC trend is examined for its increasing exploitation of video game consumers through a perpetual form of commodification. This article will show that video game DLC is a cyclical form of commodification, though not simply imminent or intertextual. Meaning that players are not paying for a commodity that springs from a previous product, but continually coming back and paying for the same product over and over again. DLC multiplayer maps in the first-person shooter, additional music tracks in rhythm games, and MMORPG microtransactions are explored for the ways they exist to fill the monetary gap between game software releases, but end up simultaneously exploiting consumers and their free/immaterial labor.*

## Introduction

A popular sentiment passed around about the Great Depression in the US is that the film industry not only survived where other industries had failed, but flourished in the face of incredible adversity. The film industry was seen as an indestructible source of escape for those going through hard times. In the recent bout of economic turmoil, sometimes called the Great Recession (Wessel 2010), it is not as if the film industry is floundering, but another medium has taken up the mantle of a "turmoil-proof" cultural force. The United States video game industry now accounts for over twenty-five billion dollars a year (Entertainment Software Association 2011), and by some estimates has surpassed the film industry in economic earnings and importance both in the US and internationally (Chatfield 2009). The economic force of this growing industry alone makes it important to study for its impact on culture, but this article will argue that when coupled with issues of exploitation of consumers through a cycle of perpetual commodification, some of this industry's practices have become quite problematic.

Another popular sentiment that is involved in discourses surrounding video games is that they give their users more worth for their money proportionately compared to other forms of media commodities, though this article will argue this is not the case. Scholars like Edward Castronova posit that video games offer a milder form of commodification compared to other media as a "person will watch a film for two hours but play a game for one hundred hours" and that if "a film costs \$10 and a game \$50, you might expect the game to occupy

ten times the number of hours. It is much more than that, however" (25). Not all genres would fall into this inflated temporal commitment, as story-based games and those with high replay value would most likely be played for longer than those considered more casual and ephemeral. These economic exploitation considerations do not include initial investments in hardware, which for video games can be substantial, but the larger issue with this postulation is that the video game has only the appearance of proportionately "lighter" consumer exploitation, and that contemporary economic trends and developments in this industry show the truly "heavy" form of consumer exploitation.

While analyzing the increased consumer exploitation, the focus will specifically be on console gaming (though PC gaming will not be ignored) given console's dominance of the gaming market. In 2002, Dmitri Williams noted that even though the amount of titles released by the PC gaming industry compared to the console producers was around ten to one, PC gaming profits per title were a mere 1.5 percent of consoles (47). In an updated look at United States sales figures by the Entertainment Software Association in 2011, the percentage of dollar growth in the PC gaming industry represented only 4 percent. Concurrently in console gaming, there has been an increase in digital delivery sales of which supplemental downloadable content, known as DLC, is a large portion representing 24 percent of video game sales in 2010. This 24 percent equaled sales of 5.8 billion dollars in 2010 and points to the increasing importance of this sector to not only supplement software sales (Entertainment Software Association 2011), but in the case of DLC to extend the market life of a successful product.

The video game industry has recently shifted from one based predominantly, if not solely, on the sale of software discs or cartridges to one that increasingly relies on DLC to extend the commodity life of profitable games. Historically, success for consoles meant "establishing a large title base for a system's launch through an established network of developers, brand recognition and a 'killer app'" (Castronova 45). Much like other media defined as culture industries (Adorno 2001; Hesmondhalgh 2002), this need for a software base placed pressure on the video game industry to rely on a structure where a "small number of 'hits' must cover the production costs of a large number of products which fail to make a profit" (Kerr 45). In fact, these hits only represent a small number of games made as "it is estimated that only 3 percent of digital games make a profit" (Kerr 45). Not only does this lead to the video game industry's embrace of bankable "generic categories" (Kerr 45), but also makes it even more pertinent that game producers attempt to extend the timetable of popular, profitable game franchises. Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter describe the console as a "machine for using up the ephemeral experience encoded in the game software" (78), meaning that games are designed to have a planned obsolescence. Many times selling these consoles at a financial loss so as to capitalize on software sales, Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter note that "if each game took thirty hours to complete or abandon, then gamers would have to spend about three hundred hours, controller in hand, to 'repay'" console makers (78). This gap between initial console sale and eventual profits from software becomes important for this article, as console makers doggedly search for ways to shrink this gap, and recently this search has revealed DLC. Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter

discuss Microsoft as the pioneer of this mentality as they developed "other dimensions to the console-based extraction of machinic surplus value" in the form of their Xbox Live service and Xbox Live Arcade game downloads (78).

This article examines the DLC trend and its increasing exploitation of video game consumers from a variety of perspectives. First, by exploring the history of DLC and the ways in which it has become the ubiquitous norm for all of the major companies involved in the console video game industry, important aspects of its cultural impact can be ascertained. Second, the idea of a perpetual cycle of commodification will be more closely examined for its implications on user exploitation enhanced by DLC, which appeal to completionist ideals amongst fellow users. Third, and significantly related to exploitation, DLC will be examined as part of a larger trend in the video game industry to exploit their users not only for this money but also for their free and immaterial labor in the areas of implicit game testing and content creation. By examining these three interrelated areas surrounding DLC it will be possible to understand key logics involved with the economic and cultural impact of this ubiquitous new video game industry trend.

### **Downloadable Content Explained:**

DLC can mean different things for different industries, but with this analysis focusing specifically on console gaming it will refer to a smaller payment designed to enhance a game text to which a user already has access. The economic strategy of getting consumers to pay smaller amounts of money multiple times over the life of a product is not a new strategy and is employed in a variety of ways in our current media landscape. This economic model is used in many media such as purchasing e-Books for an e-Reader even when one already owns a physical copy of those books. In the video game world, this economic logic manifests as extra textual content that does not originally come on the software disc, such as multiplayer maps for first-person shooters. This supplemental content is extremely important for many game genres for a multitude of reasons, including offering additions to the in-game story as well as keeping a game "fresh." However, the most significant reason for an increasing reliance on DLC for video games is that consumers end up paying for a game long after their initial purchase. Instead of paying once for a video game and leading to the aforementioned misconception of users enjoying a proportionately higher amount of hours of leisure time, the user is drawn into a perpetual cycle of commodification through DLC.

Advances in technology play a large role in this burgeoning commodification trend, as much of the DLC implementation would have been difficult if not impossible just a few years ago. Far from being a technologically determined business strategy, larger hard drive sizes, portability of media, and faster Internet speeds certainly opened up the possibility for many of these supplemental media downloads. As an example, one of the primary video game consoles in the current "generation" is Sony's Playstation 3, which initially launched with twenty and sixty gigabyte versions, then increased this capacity in upwards of 250 gigabytes in the console's first three years. Not only does this speak to the popular Moore's

Law, which states that the "number of transistors on a chip will double about every two years" (Intel 2011), but also points to the ability to download a large amount of complementary files associated with the game/media already on the physical software discs. Internet speed is also important here, as some of these files, from full-length films to add-on content for video games, are large and are best downloaded on fast connections. Finally, portability is something that goes hand in hand with DLC not only because of the ability to take this media on the go, but also because of the ability to access and download this media away from home. A product like the Amazon Kindle would most likely not be nearly as popular if the e-Books could not be accessed through wireless and 3G connections. Again, this is not to say that these technological advancements determined that DLC would become the norm in media acquisitions, but they simply made available forms of monetization that had been desired for some time.

One corporate entity that benefits a great deal from the rise of DLC is the console producers themselves. These companies now have a more technologically attractive system that can download the expansion of their previously static video games directly from the console. They also frequently produce video games themselves, which leads not only to revenues from the console and the game, but also from the DLC that follows. Even when a console producer, like Microsoft, does not produce a game the production of value through DLC is all but guaranteed. For example, in 2009 the game developer Valve, the makers of *Left 4 Dead* (2008), was in the process of releasing an expansion pack for this game. Valve originally planned to give this DLC to its consumers for free, but encountered a roadblock to this strategy by Microsoft, who looked to monetize the expansion by saying they were not able to give this product away for free. Fans of *Left 4 Dead* thus became differentiated by their console system: "The downloadable add-on will be available to owners of the PC version at no cost, with Xbox 360 players needing to pony up 560 Microsoft Points (\$7) for the experience" (Faylor 2009). The idea that Microsoft would claim that it was not "possible" to provide this content for free is indicative of the entire relationship the video game industry has with DLC. Whereas gamers were used to paying for a game once and enjoying it for a while, the rise of DLC provided the tools to exploit and extract value from these games in a perpetual cycle of commodification that lasted long after the wrapper was opened on the physical software package.

In fact, the need to monetize DLC has also affected the prices of the console systems. This money-grab attitude has led to a 50 percent increase in console prices over the previous console generation during an economic time in which the average gamer has less ability to afford them. In a November 30, 2010 U.S. Senate General Speech, Senator Bernie Sanders noted the "disappearing and shrinking middle class of our country" with those in power, which would include entertainment gaming giants, always clamoring for "more, more, more." The Entertainment Software Association even noted in their "Video Games in the 21st Century: the 2010 report" that "from 2005 to 2009, the U.S. entertainment software industry's annual growth rate exceeded 10 percent. Over the same period, the entire U.S. economy grew at a rate of less than two percent" (2010). With the gaming industry flaunting

its equality with the film industry's economics, it seems especially problematic that there concurrently exists a drive for ever-higher software profits through the DLC model.

### **Perpetual Cycle of Commodification:**

By the time video game users are done playing a specific game, it is quite possible that they will have spent a great deal more money on this game than the original game price tag. What the DLC model does is create a cycle in which users are given the choice to purchase just a "small" addition to enhance a game they enjoy, but adding all of transactions highlights that there is nothing small about the investment into a single game. The notion of the immanent commodity is exemplified here where "one commodity gives rise directly to another" (Mosco 2009, 141), though in this case it is even more pronounced in a perpetual cycle of commodification. This phenomenon is related, in part, to the debate over "transmedia storytelling" that Henry Jenkins advocates for (2006), and more critical scholars problematize as the creation of "commodified intertextual flow" or "narratively necessary purchases" designed to exploit fan fervor over a text (Proffitt et. al. 2007, 242-43). What makes this a cyclical commodity and not just immanent or intertextual in that players are not paying for a commodity that springs from a previous product (such as the novelization of a popular movie), but continually coming back and paying for the same product over and over again.

The reason that many large video game corporations are increasingly reliant on the DLC business model is very simple; it fills a monetary hole. The hole is different for various media, with the music industry relying on small prices for single tracks to combat rampant Internet piracy, and the video game industry looking to use these additional monetization of individual games as a way of ensuring consumers continue to pay for a game after they already own the physical disc. However, in both cases these smaller payments also have the benefit of discouraging consumers from redistributing content in ways that cut out the major economic players. With video games, by encouraging consumers to keep the original physical game software, the resale market in outlets like GameStop and Amazon that buy used games and sell them at a reduced cost shrinks. By focusing on new downloadable content that can only be played by retaining the original physical disc, the video game industry producers ensure that users are locked into a continued cycle of commodification and other companies who would benefit from the resale of these discs are increasingly locked out.

Three video game genres especially illustrate the ways in which DLC locks users into a cycle of perpetual commodification and exploitation: the rhythm music game, for its additional music tracks; the first-person shooter, for its additional multiplayer maps; and the massive multiplayer online role-playing game, for its use of the "microtransaction." Economically, these three genres represent important areas of needed U.S. economic research in regards to DLC, with the shooter games capturing 15.9 percent of total game sales in 2010, MMORPGs dominating the top 20 chart of computer games sold in 2010 (Entertainment Software Association 2011), and music rhythm DLC sales continuing to generate millions of DLC dollars for their producers (Berardini 2009). This is not to say that these three gen-

res are the only types of games that utilize DLC—as this practice is increasingly becoming the norm especially with the explosion of mobile gaming—but that they exemplify the commodity traits and characteristics that have come to define this contemporary trend in the video game industry.

The rhythm music video game stretches to every gaming system and littered the top twenty games of 2008 (Entertainment Software Association 2009), and is also inextricably tied to the idea of the downloading extra content after the initial purchase. Though this genre has fallen off in disc sales over the past few years, this decline actually highlights the importance of additional DLC for this genre. When over 2000 downloadable tracks are available for the *Rock Band* series (2007 - present) alone, the initial disc sales fade in importance. The *Guitar Hero* (2005 - present) and *Rock Band* series are the two most popular and consist of "notes" that must be played in sync with the corresponding songs by plastic guitars, drums, and a microphone. Popular tracks from actual bands and musicians as well as the ability to emulate pop culture figures with one's friends have made these games a veritable phenomenon. What ties these series to the perpetual downloading of new content is the simple idea that players become bored with the tracks included on these discs, a connection that game companies have masterfully exploited.

These games employ a few strategies that ensure the perpetual flow of monetization through new downloadable content. First, much like Debord's thoughts on the pseudo-cyclical nature of time in which the leisure is "time spent consuming images" and whose moments' "cyclical return we are supposed to look forward to" (1983, 88), these DLC appear on a pseudo-cyclical basis. A situation is constructed in which consumers expect the opportunity for new content nearly every week. This becomes a slow trickle of new songs and obviously contributes to a perpetual monetization of these games. For example, the first *Rock Band* game was released in November of 2007 and has consistently released DLC every week since then, totaling 1,244 additional songs to date that cost an additional \$1.99 each (Harmonix Music Systems 2011). Of course not everyone will download even close to every one of those songs, but the opportunity is still there to spend nearly twenty-five hundred dollars on one game in addition to the initial purchase of software and expensive plastic "instruments." Harmonix's *Rock Band* series is also cumulative in that players can export songs from previous discs to be played on new iterations. So when *Rock Band 3* was released in 2010, players could export the songs contained on the first two games for ten dollars each. Although there is the added convenience of not having to switch discs when playing, the economic logic is based on the consumer literally paying for content already purchased.

Another technique employed by the rhythm game to make the DLC more attractive to players is to put just one or two songs from the most popular bands on the software discs themselves and then to make the bulk of songs from that same artist only available through additional DLC purchases. For example, on the *Rock Band 2* (2008) disc the song "Alive" was included from the widely popular band Pearl Jam. A few months later, the entire album *Ten* (1991), from which the included track "Alive" derives, was made available to download. This same "disc-first single, full album DLC later" strategy has been employed

numerous times, counting the *Rock Band 2* disc inclusion of the Foo Fighters "Everlong" track from their album *The Colour and the Shape* (1997) and the full album availability a year after the game's initial release. This technique entices players with the initial songs, increasing the chances that they will make more of a monetary investment in their leisure time down the road.

Whole album downloads, a feature employed for *The Beatles: Rock Band* (2009), has an interesting economic relationship with an earlier legal issue the music industry faced with CDs. A class action lawsuit was brought against major music labels for keeping "consumer CD prices artificially high" in the late 1990s (Lieberman 2002), with the average CD costing around fifteen dollars. Currently the rhythm videos games price the DLC albums at about seventeen dollars each. This is not to say that there is not a lot of work involved in creating these additional tracks justifying the price, but considering that these songs or albums are restricted to being played in-game and cannot be listened to on an iPod or on a home stereo system, the price point seems artificially high. Rhythm video game producers are setting up this structure to ensure that the maximum amount of perpetual profits can be extracted from a game that has long been paid for.

If players did not participate in this DLC strategy, and to be sure some players are simply content with the software disc content, then an argument could be made backing up scholars like Castronova that these games provide for the aforementioned relatively lesser-monetized leisure time with friends. After an initial investment the game would provide players with enough content to fill up many hours of being told that you and your friends "rock." However, it is the idea of artistic difference in songs and the pseudo-cyclical nature of track releases that create this desire to download additional content, and by 2009 sales of these extra music tracks for the *Rock Band* series alone reached 40 million paid individual song downloads (Berardini 2009). It is clear that the perpetual commodification of the *Rock Band* series worked to not only extend the lifecycle of these discs for the producers, but also to fully exploit their loyal completionist fan consumers.

Another video game genre that has been heavily influenced by the rise of DLC is the first-person shooter, or FPS. Unlike the rhythm game genre, downloadable content in the FPS are not normally additional narrative content for the single player "main" game, but instead enhance the experience of the online multiplayer for users. What DLC consists of in FPS are more "maps," or pre-determined areas in which to play against other players online. There are quite a few issues within this model of maps being released that are tied up in the concepts of heavy consumer exploitation and perpetual commodification.

First, this technique is particularly insidious because it is aimed only at those who play online against other users and relies on at the minimum not one but two players to download the same new map. One user cannot download a map for *Modern Warfare 3* (2011) and simply share it with his friends unless they all gather in the same room. The simple concept of peer pressure comes into play here, but also ideas of fandom and the need to feel as if one has a "complete" version of a certain property. Here, the DLC map is not a "narratively necessary purchase" (Proffitt et al. 243), as it does not deal with the main narrative of the game, but instead could be considered a communal online playing necessary purchase. These com-



pletionist fans are pressured into this perpetual cycle of commodification despite the fact that the game has long since been paid for. Second, and related, these maps represent the admission on the part of the game developers that the product purchased initially was already inherently incomplete, and it was knowingly sold that way. Video games, like many media products, are not quickly or easily produced and as such it is impossible to believe that the "extra" content being released through the DLC model was not being worked on during the "main" game's development. Even if the excuse could be made that the DLC was not complete at the time of the game's release, it is far more likely that the additional monetization of these games was planned from the start. In this respect, the FPS DLC is an even more explicit version of the aforementioned "immanent commodity," as this commodity is "born directly out of the process of creating another" (Mosco 2009, 141). Finally, the DLC represents the Marxian concept of "commodity fetishism," or the ways in which a commodity rises above its inherent use value and takes on qualities that "are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible" (1978, 320). Being a derivative from the "original" game, any form of artisanal argument begins to become leaky as it seems entirely likely that this "extra" content is developed simply to extract more exchange value from consumers that have already paid for a product. Marx describes how a table made out of wood is still inherently "that common, everyday thing, wood" and if made by an artisan would retain the markings as such, "but, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent" (1978, 320). In this case, downloadable content transcend any pretense of the artisan once they rely on the perpetual cycle of commodification through the fetishization of this content.

Third, in the list of video game genres that base a great deal of its economic model on DLC is the massive multiplayer online role-playing games, or MMORPGs. Two things set this genre apart from the previously discussed examples. One, these games are mostly designed for what is commonly referred to as "PC gaming" existing on home computers as opposed to "console gaming," which have their own proprietary machines. Two, many of the games in this genre are entirely based around DLC, instead of using it as a supplement.

MMORPGs are known as "persistent" game environments, meaning they continue on even when users log off, and as such they usually require a different form of monetization. The two predominant models are a monthly subscription fee, used by such games as *World of Warcraft* (2004 - present) and *Second Life* (2003), and an initially free system based around future DLC, known in this case as microtransactions, used in games like *MapleStory* (2003) and heavily considered though abandoned for *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (2011) (Miller 2008). In this second form of monetization, players are able to play completely for free as long as they are content with a very limited number of choices when it comes to things like playable characters and weapons. This is a hyper-realized version of the earlier DLC issues with a game that arrives initially and knowingly incomplete. In this case, users are lulled into a false sense of free play only to have the bare bones given to them with everything else under monetary lock and key. The linguistic choice to label this form of monetization as microtransactions is also problematic, with this term many times meaning an automated transaction that consumers barely even notice. Many of the same previous implica-

tions are true in this case too, like the commodity fetishism of the microtransaction sword versus the "free" one, as well as the idea of a completionist fandom that puts users who do not invest money at a distinct disadvantage to those who spend to get a digital representation of a better sword.

All of these forms of video game DLC not only attempt to lock their consumers into a perpetual cycle of commodification, but also exploit the imperceptible difference in cost it takes to reproduce this downloadable content en masse. It is not as if it costs a great deal of money to reproduce and duplicate the physical software discs sold to users, but once the transmission of media to its consumers becomes completely digital the costs obviously go down significantly. This has not gone unnoticed in all the areas of media content discussed here, as music, e-Books, and video game DLC rely on similar forms of "lossless" digital copying and transmission. Drawing on the canonical Walter Benjamin and his "Art in the Work of Mechanical Reproduction," this phenomenon can be understood deeper despite Benjamin's era coming well before digital reproduction. Benjamin may have seen a certain progressive potential inherent in lossless art reproduction due to it creating "distracted" viewers (2006, 240), but he also famously warned of a loss of aura involved in stripping the art of an original and of its anchor in place and time (2006, 220). This obviously has implications for the aforementioned issues of commodity fetishism and the ability of these media companies to sell an infinitely reproducible product that users feel the need to invest in to "complete" their original game purchase.

Video game user exploitation reaches an all-time high through this increasing reliance on the DLC model that is formed around the Debord concept of pseudo-cyclical time, and works in concert with issues of commodity fetishism and completionist fandom. Not just an immanent commodity, but also a perpetual cycle of commodification constructed by making players pay for the same game over and over again. What truly becomes an issue then is that this exploitation through DLC comes concurrently at a time when the video game industry places a parallel increasing reliance on users for free and immaterial labor in the form of game testing and content creation.

### **Exploitation of Free and Immaterial Labor:**

Currently, and probably even more in the future, the video game user's free and immaterial labor is being exploited on both an explicit and implicit level in multiple ways. Not only the use and exploitation of what is known as user-generated content in an increasing amount of video games, but also the literal exploitation of users free and immaterial labor to save money on the costly process of thoroughly testing games before their release. Both of these processes of free and immaterial labor are intrinsically related to the concept and implementation of the DLC model. As such, this video game industry trend rises at a time when the exploitation of the video game user reaches an all time high through the confluence of commodification and free labor.

First, a definition of what constitutes free labor and immaterial labor in a political eco-

conomic sense will obviously be helpful for this analysis. Free labor is a relatively easy concept to explain, as it is simply labor for which no payment is given. This is, however, separate from the concept of surplus value, which refers to the time labored after which a worker has produced enough value for their employer to pay for their days' wage (Marx 1978, 357). Free labor on the other hand refers to production where no monetary compensation is rendered whatsoever. Free labor differs slightly as well from the classic definition of immaterial labor, which has been defined as labor that "produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato 1996, 133). Immaterial labor refers mainly to that which does not have a material basis, also described as information as a commodity. Categories include "audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities, and so forth", and most significant this concept forces "us to question the classic definitions of work and workforce" (Lazzarato 1996, 136). Looking at these two definitions, does immaterial labor correspond directly to free labor? Certainly not as one is inherently free and the other only tends to be so, but the two are often found together, especially when it comes to the production of value that users generate for the video game industry.

One example of this confluence of DLC, free labor, immaterial labor, and exploitation is in the increasing area of what is known as user-generated content. Simply put, this content was produced by the users themselves and not by the video game developers, but significantly most times created with tools provided by the developers. This content ranges from expansions on the content of the game itself, to new ways to utilize a game. One example is the generation of new music tracks for games like *Guitar Hero: World Tour* (2008) created through the proprietary "GHTunes" tool. These songs were labored over by consumers of this product and are then able to be uploaded to a server, with no compensation to the creator, for all users of this game to download. Other users are not charged a fee for downloading these songs, though future subscription fees have been discussed, but this is still exploitative of free labor because users have added "value" to this game and its attractiveness for consumers without any direct compensation. The exact same model is also being used in other games like the *Little Big Planet* series (2008 - present) for which users create new levels in which other owners of the games can download and play. Again, this download service is free, but this is still a DLC transaction and users are the ones adding value without extracting monetary compensation.

Creating an additional level or song through a preconceived in-game process is one thing, but some video game users take the next step and actually create content for games in much the same way as developers do. A seemingly altruistic move on the part of many developers is to release what are known as the "authoring tools," which give users the ability to fix and fashion their own versions of the game from the nuts and bolts provided on the software disc. The shelf life of *Half-Life* (1998) and *Half-Life 2* (2004) was extended as "[m]odding tools were" one of the main reasons "players kept playing" (Haas 2009). This dynamic ends up taking on the same characteristics as the examples previously discussed, as these modified versions, or "mods," are given free to other users, but are used to add value to the game franchise and many times also end up being used in sequels. The kinds of DLC

transactions described in all of these examples of user-generated content might total zero dollars, but there is an important link to video game companies still extracting value by exploiting the free and immaterial labor of their consumers.

The second way in which game companies are using the free and immaterial labor of their consumers through DLC is in the implicit game testing that occurs in the first few weeks of a game's release. Before video game consoles were connected to the Internet with enough storage, a game needed to be thoroughly tested to the point of exhaustion as any kind of major error would be unable to be fixed in the copies shipped to stores. These overworked game testers might not be the highest paid employees at a video game developer, but this process can still be time-consuming and expensive. This overwork culture was shown jokingly in the popular film *Grandma's Boy* (2006) and explained thoroughly in the 2009 Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter book *Games of Empire*, which contained a chapter dedicated to "A Workers' History of Videogaming." What the DLC model provided to change this dynamic is that games can now be shipped with less testing and more critical playing issues that can simply be fixed by sending users what is known as a "patch," or a digital fix to the problem on the physical disc. Significantly, many times the problem is not discovered in a game until after the release when users devote their free and immaterial labor to discover the issues and complain about them to the company. Again, downloading the patch is free to users and they are usually quite effective at fixing most gaming issues, but the exploitation damage is done, as video game consumers have become implicit employees slowly replacing the previously more stringent, and expensive, testing process.

### **Conclusion:**

The video game industry is certainly not comprised wholly of console gaming systems with producers who allay their concerns about the long time period between the release of *Gears of War 2* (2008) and *Gears of War 3* (2011) with the release of three DLC multiplayer map packs in between. Mobile gaming alone has become a huge focus of game producers as well as a huge source of new DLC income. Research examining the connections between current console downloadable content and the mobile gaming sector, which is almost entirely based around DLC, would be fruitful and important to explore, but this analysis has examined the clear importance of exposing the console DLC for its problematic features. This model in console gaming employed to extend the lifespan of profitable software is on the rise, and sets up a structure of exploitation and perpetual commodification for loyal fans.

Game developers are not alone in their exploitation of their own consumers through the perpetual cycle of commodification and the extraction of value through free and immaterial labor. The video game industry includes many who benefit from this burgeoning source of revenue and value, such as the producers of games and even large media conglomerates who see convergence opportunities in having the DLC of a *Rock Band* song that creates a fan of the music who then downloads the song again for their iPod. The aforementioned Microsoft *Left 4 Dead* example in which there was a claim that free content was "not possible" points

directly at the way those who control the release of downloadable content are fiercely protective about this new opportunity to extend the exploitation and commodification lifespan of its all-important software products. From map packs to new music tracks, and for some MMORPGs as the entire basis for monetization, the DLC model creates a perpetual commodification of a product that previously was perceived by many scholars as a "milder" form of consumer exploitation. At the very least, this contemporary video game industry trend will hopefully expose the fallacy of this conception about a form of media that generated 25 billion dollars in 2010, at the same time as the economic gap widens between game producers in power and their middle class consumers who are increasingly unable to afford these perpetually commodified products.

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