Towards a New Theory of the Concept of Gameplay

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Introduction

This paper presents a new theory of gameplay partially inspired by phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*.[1] The goal of the paper is to show – to some extent, at least – the inherent complexities and convoluted layers of play-presence and game-progression which exist in the playing of a game.

Rather than settle with a synonym for fun, player excitement during the playing of a game, or the more abstract relation between player input and machine output, let us take the composite nature of the concept seriously: There is playing and there is gaming in gameplay. The challenge is to identify the exact undercurrents of such an internal symmetry and to determine the proper methodological framework for observations and conceptual refinements of what it means to play a game.

In order to comprehend the crux of playing and gaming – and the two of them combined in gameplay – we must first understand and, in a way, make peace with the fact that the epistemological and ontological nature of gameplay is inescapably interwoven. To ask the ontological question about the being of gameplay, the way gameplay features or qualifies as a 'thing'[2], is discerningly close to enquiring epistemologically about the practice of gameplay: what it feels like to 'be' in gameplay.[3] The same tricky entanglement goes for the term 'game'. Is it a system (artefact) or an activity (Leino, 2009; Stenros, 2017)? We can distinguish between the two modes in a systemic or an analytical fashion (author, 2003), although in real life, which is to say all the time, they are knitted together. Using the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's notion of *Dasein* ('there-being'), which he primarily developed in his famed thesis *Sein und Zeit* ('Being and Time'; Heidegger, 2010), I shall try to explain the subtleties of gameplay as a clash between presence, or 'play', and progression, or 'game'. This way, the object-activity polarity in the concept of gameplay is not resolved but instead used as a guide to unstitch the knotty tiers of gameplay.

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[1] This paper takes off from a collaboration with Lasse Juel Larsen and an article entitled 'The Ontology of Gameplay: Towards a New Theory', forthcoming in *Games and Culture*, 2018.

[2] Compare Martin Heidegger: *What Is a Thing?*, tr. W.B Barton and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967).

[3] Throughout this paper I use words like 'be', or 'exist', rather than the ones also designed to narrate the sensation of being engulfed or perhaps immersed by the game, since such words would inevitably signal a somewhat different research tradition (psychology, player community studies, etc.).

Hypotheses

First, whenever there is play there is a deep involvement in an appeal to stretch the sensation of presence. Games, however, posit a hungriness for progression. One negotiates with other players or, more broadly, with the repertoire laid out in play (location, tools, obstacles, physics, etc.) in order to come up with guidelines. One follows the guidelines in a game that are already there, which are called rules. The two in tandem make up the notion of gameplay.

Second, while the realization of play means to be present – or simply to experience being; gaming gravitates towards being *there, exactly there*, on a specific level or square, for instance. Also, play not only requires presence but also constitutes a 'here', an appropriation of space that afterwards becomes a special place in our everyday environment (Sicart, 2014). Gaming is intensely purposeful and level oriented, constantly making players search feverishly for the next 'there' of the game; and so gameplay toggles continually between a 'there' and a 'here'. As we shall see, the notion of gameplay involves a non-equilibrium between the here and there of playing games.

Third, play and games are reciprocally symbiotic. They extract energy from each other. Play is always on the path, perhaps even in danger, of turning into games and gaming. At the same time, gaming needs a certain amount of playfulness in order to stay addictive and evocative.

Gadamer's play

The element of freedom in Salen and Zimmerman's understanding of play relates well to Huizinga (2014) and Caillois' (2001) definitions; both stress that play is a free activity. Similarly, Gadamer (2006) points out that play is a mode of being that do not simply belong to subjectivity. Being *in play* is not something we choose by volition. Play takes hold of us and is presented through the players, but it is not something we can control by command. Thus, Gadamer seems to point to a transcendental structure of play as something that can grab us from "outside" beyond our conscious control.[4] This more or less correlates with Salen and Zimmerman's view of "outside". Here too play happens in an interstitial space, a space which is rooted somehow between the actual, physical place of play and the locus that 'play' itself forcefully but playfully colonizes; spaces that are thus simultaneously present and absent. Thus, in Gadamer's view play almost seems to be an agency of its own transcending the will of its players.

Gadamer further explains the dynamics of play by incorporating Buytendijk's (1933) description of to-and-fro movement devoid of any goal that would bring an end to the play activity. Not only does play exist in interstitial spaces; it also rests on a particular structure of movement. This dialectic feature makes it possible for play to renew "itself in constant repetition" (Gadamer, 2006, p. 104), but the activity is not generated for its own purpose because when we play we always play *something* – and that something is very often a game. In Gadamer's phenomenological depiction of play it is the game that orders and shapes the movement where play *can happen*; but it happens as an experience that grabs us from the outside beyond our explicit intentions. The latter is not far from Sicart (2014) when he describes play as *appropriative* taking over the unfolding

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[4] Note also the intimate link between the external pull towards play and the psychic sensation of 'ex-stasis', quite literary, to be moved away from oneself and one's own equilibrium. Play seems to be a playful way of being thrown out of course (compare further Callois' subcategory of 'ilinx', dizziness).

activity and the place in which play situationally finds itself as the result of players negotiating rules and setting up communities around play.

As Gadamer point out, play carries yet another interesting feature, which is that when 'in play' we cannot *say* we are 'in play' since it would disturb the experience and bring us 'out of play'. Self-reflection kills the thought. Only before and afterwards the distinct duration of activity play opens up to characteristics. During play we are under the control of play or fully absorbed as Murray (1997) would phrase it when she outlines the characteristics of immersion.

Understanding play this way describes a particular activity that takes place with a to and fro movement in an interstitial space with indeterminateness and improvisation in relation to some sort of structure. Furthermore, players cannot consciously force the activity into being by sheer will. Such an account of play leaves out the imaginary aspect (Caillois, 2001; Huizinga, 2014; Sutton-Smith, 2001, Rasmussen, 2003; Paley, 2009a) normally associated with make-believe (Walton, 1990). In turn, make-believe can be regarded as a spatial dyad comprised of "two separate yet interconnected spatial layers" (author1, 2015 p. 185). The first layer constitutes the actual locality (a specific 'here'), while the other layer consists of the assigned mental content – the pretended aspect (the projected 'there'). The dyad structure manifest itself in three different ways: 1) If the play object is absent it can instead be represented by, say, an imaginary soccer ball. 2) A physically present object may act as a placeholder for the imagined content (Vygotsky, 1978). 3) The physical object is replaced by the player itself (implying self-referentiality). In all three instances an imagined object holds primacy over the physical objects. Note, however, that this structure merely outlines the formal-spatial structure of make-believe, not a specific content or personal motivation for play.

In the following sections I will differentiate 'game' and 'play' further and then bring them synthetically back together as gameplay with a reading of Heidegger's *Dasein*.

Here and there, presence and progression

A quick but obviously abstract way to think of (and 'build') a game is to consider it a troika of squares, values, and goals. These three parts are the basic building blocks of a game, any game, in addition to which a 'video game' implies automatized calculations, a rule and interaction set, a screen, and a number of haptic interactions. The interior of a game consists of 'parametrical edges', meaning that the players (often represented by avatars or pieces) are either inside or outside of the game's edges (Author2, 2007). Think of the discretely arranged squares in chess, or Tic-Tac-Toe. To conceptualise a game in a physical-abstract way is to think of it as composed of these edges or transitions; whereas to envision a game by means of possibilities for interaction and modes of winning is to think of it as consisting of squares, values, and goals. Player-centrically speaking: where can I put my pieces? In what way do the rules restrict my behaviour, interactions, turns? Is it a zero-sum game? And so on.

What sets a game apart from pure play (Callois' *paidea*) is the existence and awareness of *squares* that refabricate the non-discrete, open scenery of play formed by the mutual contracts and storytelling activities of the participants into a systematised (computational) and structured (strictly rule and interaction based) 'board'. The passage from play to game is also the route from play*ground* to game *board* (there are no pieces on a play ground; instead there are elements or physical things). Specific qualities are then assigned to the squares so that they now have *values*, points, scores, numbers, and meaning.[5] Finally, once play evolves from the ground to the board

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[5] It is interesting how the point of observation inescapably and subtly shifts from the 'what is'-question of formalism to the 'what can I do'-question of player studies. This is symptomatic not just of our conceptual attempt at clarification

gaming conjoins with *teleology* (after the Greek word for goal, *telos*). The telos of a game is a dominant force, a reference point for what could be termed the semantic valorisation of gameplay: the deliberate combination of discrete calculations and the all too human cognition of meaning and purposefulness.

Yet, there are still elements of play even within a structured game board. There has to a be a 'here' posing as the result of the appropriation of a place within the possibility space of reality prior to the logical occurrence of a 'there'. This latter 'there' is immensely important for games, or, rather, for the *playing* of a game. The ability to go 'there' – and not just remain in play's 'here' – is fundamental in gaming. Locating a 'there' is an invariant feature of gaming.[6] Analogue to this one moves from the appropriated place-space of play, from the almost violent taking over of play, to the teleology of games and their already laid out discrete logic. Intricate relationships between the 'here' of play and the 'there' of games correspond furthermore to the ritualised *presence* of playing as opposed to the rule-based *progression* of gaming – in which case game-play simply means 'progression-presence'.

In the tradition of sociologists like Gregory Bateson (Bateson, 1987) and Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann, 1995) the central mark of 'play' is the participants' ability to invest in something that is both real and, at the same time, not real. Bateson's own prime example is monkeys fooling around (Bateson, 1987, p. 179f.). They bite, and they do not bite. In fact, monkeys are good at not-biting, producing that particular bite which is simultaneously a bite and not a bite. Monkeys take fun very seriously: they bite the not-real bite for real. The distinctive awareness here, says Bateson, is neither the predicative nor transformative quality of the bite (the bite 'is'; the bite 'stands for') but rather the word 'not' – as in 'this is *not* a bite' *and* 'this is *not* a non-bite', at the same time. Empirically speaking, a monkey's playful bite should not be hard, but not too soft; not soft, but not too hard.

The monkey illustration is analogous to the whereabouts of human players. One *really* puts an effort into killing foes in *Counter-Strike* (Valve, 1999-); and yet one is highly aware, since this is part of playing's tacit knowledge, that *in reality* those teams are merely pixels and virtual trickery. In play, the deep fascination therefore lies in the oscillation between play and non-play, which is the 'other' of play and is usually considered to be reality. In the playing of games, we are more fixated on progressing in the prior structure that is the game (Kirkpatrick, 2004, p. 74). Gaming presupposes the tension of the initial transgression in which one constantly resists falling out of the fantasy context of play. Furthermore, gaming also presupposes a focus on a second transgression in which success and failure is measured against the achievement of defined objectives. Thus, in playing a computer game, one works within a second simulacrum, an as if-structure containing edges, squares, values, and goals overlain on top of the initial transgression that makes play possible in the first place.

The most important feature of play is without a doubt to *be* there, that is, to be present. One has to invest in the activity of play. The other players mock those who do not take the immersive stance and the flow of play seriously, and eventually the latter group will be banned from play. The arena that encircles play is widely known as a 'magic circle' (Huizinga, 2014; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). By stepping into this physical and conceptual circle (Montola, 2009b), one abandons reality or, strictly speaking, non-play. As we all know, the practices of everyday life,

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but of any. The same difficulty, as in the transition from game-centric formalism to player-centric epistemology, arises, as we shall see later on, in the development from an analytical, static framework to (the pursuit of) a dynamic, real-time based model of gameplay.

[6] In the tradition of Edmund Husserl, one could think of the 'ground-ness' of play vis-a-vis the 'board-ness' of games.

work, leisure, family duties, threaten to obstruct the existence of the magic circle, but a set of unique rules, even natural laws, exists within the codified domain of play. The worst aspect of playing is without a doubt interruption because it is a termination of the 'sacred' duration of *the temporality of being* within the circle. The best, thus, is when it just goes on and on. Play is presence.[7]

So, what differentiates a game from play? A chessboard can serve as our archetypical example of games. The board is divided into sixty-four discrete fields with no continuous transitions between them (i.e. the board is shaped along parametrical edges). One must be either on one field or the other since one cannot be in the middle. This configuration is gaming in a nutshell; the free space of play is transformed into the fixed structure of the game board. One should not ask why one plays but, rather, how to get from A2 to F4. Games, therefore, are progression.

The two faces of *Dasein* – introducing a tripartite methodology

The dialectic of the 'here' of play and the 'there' of games, as well as the gluing together of presence and progression, cue quite remarkably into the dynamic of Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*. Heidegger's etymological reworking of the word *Dasein* designates the normative, authentic, pre-ontological existence of *Das Man*, but at the same time it is a concept explaining the mind's capacity *to* be, to exist, as well as to ask about the being *of* being itself (*Seinsfrage*). According to Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*, *Dasein* is different from all other things or artefacts because it relates to its own being. Or as Heidegger writes, 'Dasein is a being which is related understandingly in its being toward that being [Sein]' (Heidegger, 2010, § 12, p. 53). It is essential that we do not see *Dasein*'s relatedness to its being as an attitude or way of being. Rather

[…] the 'essence' ['Wesen'] of this being lies in its to be. […] Thus the term 'Dasein', which we use to designate this being, does not express its what – as in the case of table, house, tree – but rather being [Sein]. (§ 9, pp. 41–41).

Dasein's reflection upon its own being (that it 'carries with it') should not be mistaken for subjectivity or some sort of psychologism. It is far more fundamental since *Dasein*'s essence cannot be reduced to its ontic qualities but is the transcendental condition of its being-in-the-world (Dreyfus, 1991). *Dasein* cannot escape its ontological circumstance; and still *Dasein* is (or must be) capable of asking the *ontic-ontological* question that Heidegger claimed to be forgotten by philosophy.

Furthermore, *Dasein* ought not to be confused with a conscious subject (Heidegger, 2010). It is preferable to think of *Dasein* as a 'being-there' or a being 'here' *and* 'there', at the same time. It is being that consists of being in a place (here) and being open to another place (there), simultaneously. *Dasein* and place are therefore always already integrated into each other (and so are space and time) through its being-in-the-world (Malpas, 1999).

In fact, there are clues in the word *Dasein* itself that give us what we are looking for in relation to gameplay. First, when we consider the play-side of the concept, we should pay attention to *Dasein* as *'Da!' 'Sein!'*, i.e. 'look! here's being!'. Heidegger would naturally never have put it this way (things turn out quite differently in *Sein und Zeit*); yet it is a way of stating that Being always implies a sudden but also repetitious manifestation of itself. Being shines through itself,

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[7] And, following from this, one could state that playfulness as a mode of being-ness is the transcendental prerequisite for play's being.

observes itself as the focus of its own being-ness. Similarly, 'play' discovers, or even rediscovers, its own playfulness. Second, when we look at *Dasein* from the game-side, we see that focus is now not so much 'here's being', but, rather, *there's* being! In other words: *Dasein's* playmode stirs towards the inherent apparition of being itself (like when we are completely engulfed by being) while *Dasein's* game-mode centres on a specific *point* in which Being *occurs* and *will occur* (as in being is exactly over there).

Following these remarks, *Dasein* can be repositioned directly into my argument on gameplay. While play is Da-*sein* emphasizing the present sense and the phenomenological quality of being, games are *Da*-sein that highlight the quest for progression, the temporal openness towards a future 'there' as a particular mode of existence. Somehow games do not (only) install a desire in players to dwell within the being of being-present, as in play, but instead shift the attention towards the 'being-*there*-ness' (Author1, 2012). This being-there-ness springs from the mixture of the game's formal qualities and the activity that brings these qualities to life. Hence, gameplay translates into an equation:

Gameplay = Progression [Da] + Presence [Sein] = DA-SEIN.

Another way of putting it would be like this:

***Here* is play -> the game moves towards a *there*.**

What I propose here is the outline of a philosophical methodology to describe the various realisations of gameplay described in the figure below where the complexities of gameplay in light of *Dasein* operate on three levels.
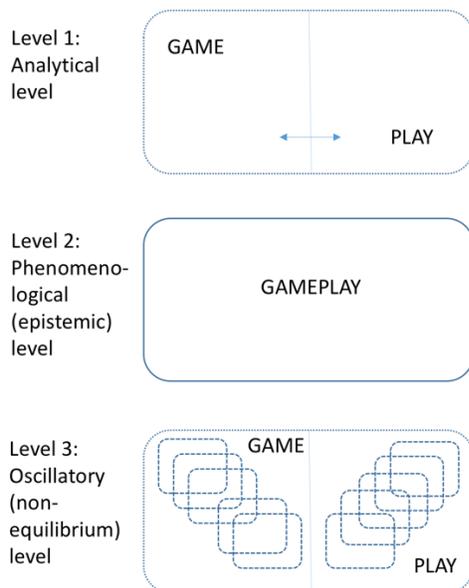
Fig. 1. The analytical, phenomenological, and oscillatory level of game-play based on the dynamics of *Dasein*.

On the *analytical* level 'game' and 'play' are deliberately separated from each other using a

deductive logic (see figure 2 below). This level serves as the necessary base of possibilities for the actual dynamics of gameplay and posits that 'game' (or gaming) equals *Da*sein while play equals – or stands for – Da*Sein*. Note, however, that the analytical level implies a 'game' that are frozen in time; no one has yet played the actual game, that is, accentuated or 'played out' the various instances of here and there.

ONTOLOGICAL MODE
(the way we analyze it)

GAME   PLAY
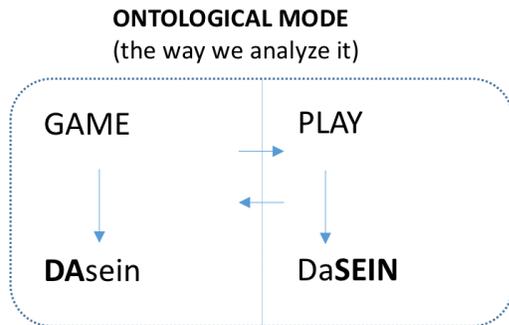
DAsein   Da**SEIN**

Fig. 2. The analytical level combined with the two faces of *Dasein*. This is the abstract or ontological level of our methodology.

On the *phenomenological* (or epistemic) level things start to get messy. No 'analytic' dotted line is visible here; once play *happens* (by the appropriation of a place in a space), and a game is being played (and progression becomes even more important than presence), clear cut distinctions can no longer be made. Instead, the interaction of players or gamers may tune into the 'play-mode' of a game (by emphasising presence) or the 'game-mode' of a game (by focusing on progression), and very often so in a rapid fashion, like a constant oscillation back and forth between the two. Here gameplay addresses shifting states between game-mode and play-mode.

Out of this, a third level arises: An *oscillatory, non-equilibrium* level. Here we have moved from the ontological, pure level (the first level) where we were able analytically to differentiate between game and play, to a third level in which the players' *actual* and *perceived* instances of gameplays' 'here' and 'there' take place. This level will be scrutinized more fully in the next section.

The dynamic nature of gameplay

Differentiating and underscoring the oscillation between play-mode (DaSEIN) and game-mode (DAsein) outlines the two modes and their unstable and dynamic relationship. But it does not account for the equally unstable and oscillating internal relationship between the two modes. This dynamic arises from each of the two modes and their inherent dyadic structure. Play can be perceived as a *being-here*, such as being in a place or formulated in a prosaic fashion, that covers the actual location where play takes place. However, play is also a *being-there*, understood as the presence of the mental as-if content. This shadowy presence of being-here and being-there propels forward the nucleus of play. Play's 'there' should not be mistaken for a game's 'there*'*, conceived as progression. This means that the experience of play is centred on physical absent things. They 'disappear' or falls into the background leaving near-ness or presence in the hands of the as-if

content. (The phrase 'let's pretend that …' exactly makes absent things present by way of imagination).

The reverse is the case in games. Games can like play be viewed as a dyad divided between a 'here' constituted by the experience when engaging or interacting with the game, and a 'there' understood as a future desired state dictated by progression. This state is characterised by absence since it is not yet realized. Hence the near-ness or presence in games centres on the immediate experience of the game by here-and-now interactions. As such, the 'here' in games is constituted by the actual present content, whereas in play such content falls into the background acting as a placeholder for the actual yet physical absent play substance. In short: games constitute a dynamic between presence (the actual experience of playing here-and-now) and absence (the desired future progression of a not yet realized state). Play consists of a dynamic between presence (the physical absent conditions) and absence (the physical reality which 'disappears').

Explicitly injecting Heidegger's *Dasein* understood as a configuration of here-and-there makes it possible to view the 'here' in games as presence while it's 'there' functions as the absent, yet not present or realized state. In play, we find the reversed relationship, where 'here' is an absent presence while 'there' holds the actual ontological presence.

When game and play are viewed together this way, the concept of 'gameplay' becomes an entangled model containing unstable, oscillating dynamic relations: A 'here', denoting presence in games, may connect with 'there', in play (presence); while a 'here' in play (absent) merges with 'there' (absent) in games.
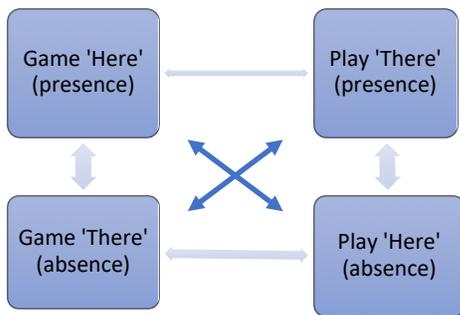
Fig. 3. The internal dialectics of 'here' and 'there', presence and absence in game-play.

Obviously, the modelling of 'here' and 'there' and the interaction between them are presented in a static way in figure 3 above. Reality is far more complicated: During the actualisation of gameplay, the four aspects interconnect in an oscillating dynamic. The player's experience may rapidly alter from being focused on the game's 'here' to the game's 'there', or play's 'there' or 'here', or it may result in a combined mixture of relatedness.

Now, to further explain the relations between here and there, as well as those between presence and play-mode and progression and game-mode, I propose the following figure (figure 4):

ONTIC MODE
(the way we perceive it)

GAME

INSTANCES of "there"

INSTANCES of "here"

PLAY

DISPLACEMENTS
of "there-and-here"
(within the flow of
gameplay)

DISPLACEMENTS
of "here-and-there"
(within the flow of
gameplay)
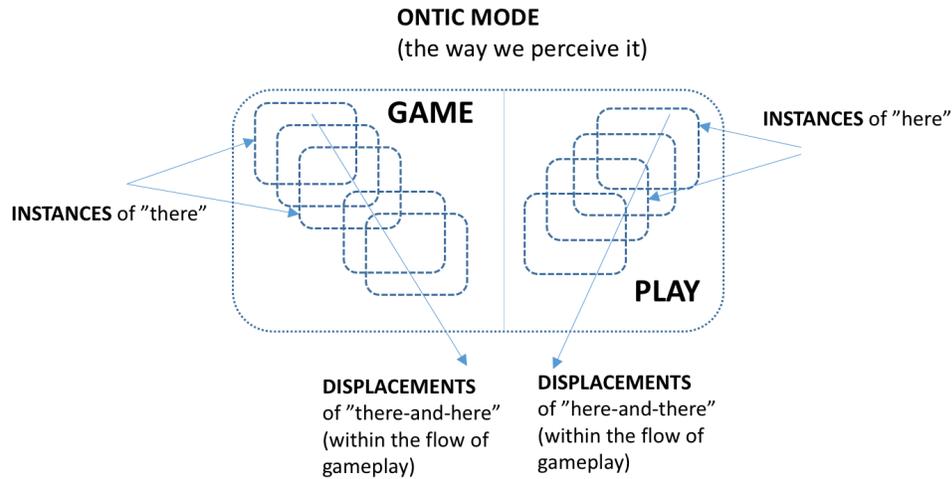
Fig. 4. Instances and displacements in the dialectics of gameplay.

Since we are dealing with the actual perception of playing a game – the drift of gameplay – our attention has moved from the ontological (analytical) to the ontic (dynamic) realisation. Basically, a computer game can be thought of as a finite state machine (FSM) (Pedroni, 2013). Similarly, our model works from the basic assumption that each existence of gameplay occupies either a formal (or game-centric) state or a *felt* (perceived), or player-centric state. In a formalistic description each of these states belongs to a game or play modality (with corresponding here and there). However, these states (which rapidly shift place during actual gameplay) contain transitions, which we may call edges or, in our case, displacements. Hence, each dialectical relationship between 'here' and 'there', as described above, represent an instance within the formal 'stack' of instances; while, player-centrically viewed, every transition from wanting to obey the progression scheme of the game and focusing on the play-presence of playing a game, represents a displacement of the 'slices' of the stack. Overall, the perceived experience of gameplay possesses *emergent* qualities: One slice, no matter how ideal or pure, cannot account for the total *experience* of playing a game; and the sum of displaced, transitioned slides cannot explain the *formal* property of gameplay. Rather, gameplay hovers in between. Again, this is yet another way of stating that neither game formalism nor player centrism are sufficient alone to attest the dynamics of gameplay.

This point, however, does not exclude the fact that game-mode and play-mode have quite unequal endpoints, as we saw in the previous section. Their teleology differs from each other. Gaming and playing 'exist' for different reasons, as shown in figure 5 below:
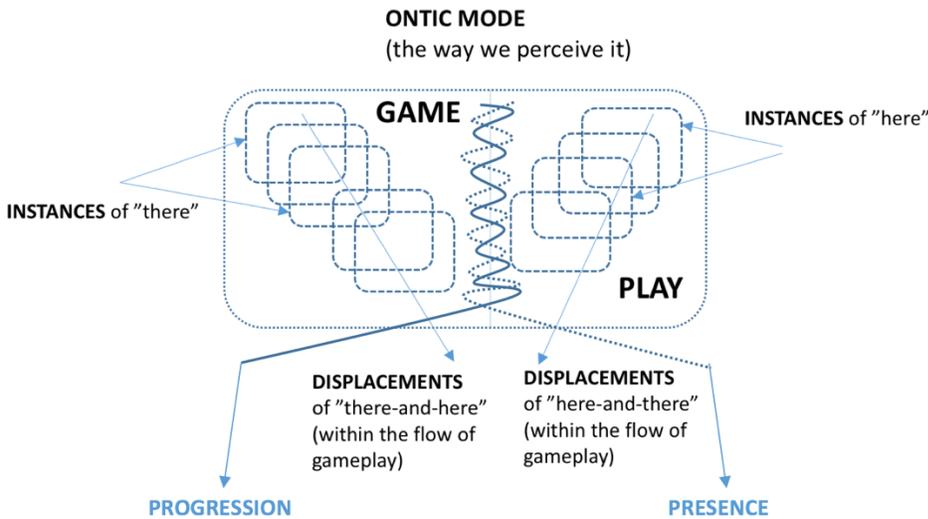
Fig. 5. When perceiving gameplay from within, in the ontic mode, there is a constant oscillation back and forth between displaced 'here's' and 'there's'.

The two spiralling, snake-like movements toggle rapidly back and forth across the vertical centre of the figure, between the domain of game and the domain of play, each representing the other movement's twin or shadow. Remember, play is always on the verge of becoming a game; and, vice versa, games contain strong elements of play within them. But, while the curvy line starting from the game-side eventually ends in Progression, the accompanying, dotted line taking off from the play-side is eventually pulled towards Presence.

One way to portray the deceitful duple of thing versus activity would be, inspired by Timothy Morton's object-oriented ontology, to think of it as the irreducible parts of the phenomenological *givenness*: The condition of possibility for data (Morton, 2017, p. 64f.).[8] It is exactly these data, the here's and there's of gameplay, that provide the spectrum of instances or perceived displacements of a 'hidden' essence. Then, why shouldn't we try to locate such a hidden, ontological essence? This essence would, in Husserl's terms (Husserl, 1973), translate into the *eidos* (idea) of the thing-in-itself that is the game; but rather than to look for such essence, a primary or invariant super quality of 'games', a phenomenological take would instead zero in on the *gameness* of the game being played *while* it is being played, i.e. the way in which all the possible features of oscillating game-modes, play-modes, and trajectories towards progression and presence show themselves in an ontic perception (see figure 5). This doesn't mean that we shouldn't search for the very ontology of these perceptions, the being that lies beneath them; on the contrary, *pace* Heidegger and his *Seinsfrage,* we may perfectly do so, *as long as we are intensely aware that the ontological level is a purely analytical (and therefore effectively unrealistic) level*. The boundary between what things (games) are and how they appear in gameplay, once everything is set in motion and, quite literary, played out, evokes in a very practical manner the quarrel of the ontological versus the ontic: What reveals itself is the simple but almost numinous fact that there has to be a pure state or 'slice' of gameplay before there can be any perceived displacements or 'stack' of such slices. The effort of returning to this ideal, pure state and perform, as Husserl wanted (albeit without mentioning games at all), an 'eidetic reduction' in search of a true ontology behind our perception

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[8] Fittingly, 'data' means 'that which is given'.

– in our case of gameplay – is nonetheless impossible since our *access*, phenomenologically viewed, is always through the 'stack'.

As I hinted at earlier, my proposal is therefore not a philosophical 'proof' paving the way for a final heart of gameness. Also, it is not an unveiling of the true *an sich* of gameplay. Rather, it is a prolegomenon to a *transcendental-methodological framework* for the temporal and multi-layered interconnections of game/play and here/there in gameplay operating from a deep, ontological-abstract level to an ontic-epistemic level of analysis.

Conclusion

Gameplay is a "slippery" or "nebulous" concept. In helping to understand what the term actually covers I divided it into its two parts, play and game, and distilled play as presence or 'here-ness' and game as progression or 'there-ness'. This phenomenological approach bridges game formalism and player centrism, or game objectivity and player activity. By associating game's 'there-ness' and play's 'here-ness' with Heidegger's *Dasein* (here-and-there), I developed a tripartite framework for understanding the sophistications of gameplay. The framework consists of three levels: 1) an analytical, 2) a phenomenological, and lastly 3) an oscillatory, dynamic level. Each level covers important aspects of gameplay pointing to the spatio-temporal, multilayered interconnections that thrive in gameplay. Thereby I showcased the inner workings of gameplay ranging from the ontological to the ontic level of analysis.

Why do we call it *playing a game*, rather than *gaming* a game? In a way, the latter would be analytically more correct if we follow our speculations in the above. First, it would be an awkward vernacular. Second, 'play' features as a kind of tongue-tied premise in games, while 'game' always serves as a potential – maybe even a threat – in play: Once play gets organised and planned, gaming arises. The life of a game is also the evolutionary death of play; as an object, that is, but certainly not as transcendental premise for playfulness and presence during gameplay. Third, does 'playing a game' imply a playful approach to the game with its rules, goals, and parametrical edges? This would suggest a flexibility in the otherwise imperative obedience installed in the player when she ties herself, willingly, to the confines of the game. Yet, it could also mean that in playing a game we must adopt a playful obedience *that allows for presence* in steering towards the system and structure – and most notably progression – that is the game.

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