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Creating Alternative Worlds: How Play Produces Queer Times and Spaces in Dungeons & Dragons

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Abstract:

This dissertation removes queerness from strict identity practices to look at how spaces and times can be queered during moments and movements when players interacted with the fantasy role playing game Dungeons & Dragons. I conducted 7 semi-structured interviews with avid players of Dungeons & Dragons to investigate their relationships with play, time, and space. Throughout the dissertation I employ and build on the work of prominent queer scholars of time and space to create my own framework of queer space/time analysed in the context of play. I found numerous routes to queerness including, counter affective feelings in boredom, extreme success, player modifications, wandering of 'course' and boredom. These routes are united by their argument that individuals' expressions and interactions with their play practices can create alternative locations, feelings, and desires - crafting queer worlds and inverting normativity.

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Introduction:

Role-playing is elastic. It allows for a flexible expansion beyond the self into the realm of the Other. People who engage in role-playing games (RPGs) open themselves up to participate in creation. This is because RPGs articulate construction, that of a character, a group, or a world. To play an RPG is to open the door to ‘fantasy and illusion’ (Gerber and Götz, 2020: 10). Fantasy plays a pivotal role in launching possibilities for crafting new subjects and forming new worlds (Carbonell, 2019: 2). The form of RPGs is highly varied; they can be played on a tabletop, digitally on a screen and even live action in specified spaces. What underpins many fantasy RPGs is Dungeons & Dragons (D&D), an RPG played on a tabletop where characters embark upon imagined adventures within a fantasy setting designed by another player called the Dungeon Master (DM). D&D has provided the structure that still underpins the RPG genre today (Taylor, 2009: 21). When it was first published in 1974 by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson, D&D was merely a small box set of three booklets. It has since expanded to become enormously popular, with it being sold in 50 countries and played by over 20 million people across the globe (Wizards of the Coast, 2011 cited in Gillespie and Crouse, 2012: 444).

What separates D&D from other RPGs is its reliance on player creativity. Where digital RPGs have a canonical unchanging text, D&D has a game system facilitated by player agency and interaction. There are ‘Three Pillars of Adventure’ in D&D: exploration, social interaction, and combat (Wizards of the Coast, 2014). All of these offer the basic structure of a typical D&D campaign as agents produce new identities, build communities, and take on different responsibilities. As Taylor (2009: 28) suggests ‘people live and through that living, play’. Play becomes the vehicle to express different ways of living. It is the intersection between play, creation, and agency that I have set out to understand in this dissertation, with specific reference to how play practices performed by individuals intersect with theory surrounding queerness in

time and space (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2019; Foucault, 1989; Freeman, 2010).

How players decide to build their fantasy worlds is important, through personal interaction with D&D I witnessed the significance of creation first hand. This gave me a specific interest in how play implicates temporalities and place, particularly, how these new sites offer some form of alternative to the normative scriptures of everyday life. From the queer space and time paradigm, there are many routes to queerness. All of which, however, share a common ethos that queering time and space creates alternative modalities of beings for subjects. Queerness and play thus felt like a natural intersection because ‘they work inside two highly complementary philosophical frames’ (Harper et al., 2018: 4). At its core, queer theory endeavours to ‘invert the players, or the scene’, to question how normativity can be twisted, upturned, and interrogated (Dilley, 1999: 467). At the same time, play can also be a place to push borders, explore boundaries and uproot normativity. Thus, I explored this inversion of play and queerness through the meanings and methods participants used to resist, alter, and play against normativity to expand and develop on theory in queer time and space.

Recent academic research on D&D particularly concentrates on the reasons people play D&D (Adams, 2013; Laycock, 2015), the communities players build (Bowman, 2010) and the external discourses that surround play (Garcia, 2017; Trammell, 2018; Stang and Trammell, 2020). I identified a place that required further investigation, that looks at how place and space are formed through agency, co-creation, and the affective response that occurred when players played D&D. There has been little scholarship that focuses upon how play crafts new and potentially queer space and time cultures in D&D. Therefore, what runs throughout this dissertation is a concern with this alternative possibility from the position of play and queerness. In response I formed my research questions:

RQ: How does play provide alternative time and space in Dungeons & Dragons? And to what extent does this time and space become 'queered' in Dungeons & Dragons?

Methodological Considerations

D&D is a constructive text, it is a built system made up of mechanics, structures, instructions, and rules to create a game. At the same time, D&D is a cultural practice - it something beyond the text, that occurs when players play with each other and their fantasy worlds. To put it simply, games appear to be rigid, whilst play is flexible, free forming and relies on agency. D&D as a cultural practice highlights the importance of play and thus the player. This reflects how I understand queering in this dissertation as a player-driven possibility rooted in practices and co-creations. Semi-structured interviews felt like a rational choice as they lend themselves to 'investigations of meaning, ideologies thoughts, feelings, and so forth' (Kendall, 2008: 135). As such, I investigate the reasons, meanings, and feelings players attached to their play practices in relation to D&D.

A total of 7 participants were interviewed. Participants were comprised of 4 people who identified as male, 2 who identified as female and 1 who identified as non-binary. All participants were active members in a D&D campaign, meaning that they were in a committed and long-term narrative with the same group of people. Some participants reflected upon their status within the LGBTQ+ community despite it not being a direct question that occurred within interviews. Participants were recruited through a process of snowball sampling that utilised my social networks as a player in the D&D community. I established initial links with participants I had known prior to research and developed from these to capture a chain of participants. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and took place online on MS Teams or Discord.

The interview questions were originally crafted as a result of my personal understanding as a player of D&D but were altered based on topics and trends that arose during the early interviews. I began interviews with ‘warm up’ questions that asked participants basic information like how long they had played D&D and who they typically played with. This was followed by questions surrounding how time and space was organised in games, as well as player perceptions of rules and world/character creation. Interview questions were designed to investigate participants behaviour and the meanings attached to play, spaces, and time.

During the entire course of my research, I adhered to the University of Nottingham’s code of ethics. All participants were given informed consent, were aware of the ability to pull away from the research at any stage and were pseudonymised during my chapters. As part of the ethical process, it was agreed that the interview transcripts would be discarded post completion of this dissertation. Additionally, I possess insiders’ knowledge as a result of my own participation with D&D and engagement with the RPG genre. As such, my position as researcher was carefully considered through recognising my own subjectivity and the power relations in operation during the production of knowledge. Therefore, I recognise the situated nature of the data I gathered through which my vision was a ‘doctrine of embodied objectivity’ (Haraway, 1988: 581). This was particularly the case during interviews where I had previously played with the participant.

Structure of Dissertation

This research emerges within the current rise of queer game studies as a research field (Ruberg and Shaw, 2017; Harper et al., 2018; Ruberg, 2019). The idea of queer games studies as a discipline is ‘young but not new’ (Harper et al., 2018: 2) and so this research transpires as a response to raising interest and developments within the field. Therefore, I intend to pursue research gaps within this new and emerging body of scholarship, primarily by unifying

perspectives of tabletop play practices with key queer temporal spatial literature. I will argue that the queerness inherent in play is routed in its potentiality – for exploration, failures, success, wandering, creation, experimentation, unexpected desire, and feelings. Here, I aim to develop and build on such work to offer different theoretical considerations and new perspectives. Thus, this dissertation proceeds as follows:

In Chapter 1 ‘Queering Space and Time: Theoretical Considerations’, I will define and illustrate my usage of queerness in the context of my research, outline and explain key work in queer time and space literature and synthesise theories to develop a framework applicable to D&D. This is followed by ‘Chapter 2 – D&D and Queer Game Studies’ which provides an assessment of the themes and scholarship significant to D&D as a macro research topic and the literature in queer game studies to illustrate the foundation and field which my work builds upon.

Both these chapters review and evaluate the theoretical and research foundation of my research to provide the structures that I build on but also depart from. My analysis is divided into three chapters, all of which focus on different elements of playing: ‘Chapter 3 – Rolling the Dice: Failure and New Forms of Pleasure’ presents counter affective feelings in failure and excessive reactions to success as processes of queer play. This is followed by ‘Chapter 4 - Homebrewing and World Making’ that addresses how player creations and agency produces differing play experiences and desires, often aligning with queer potentialities in the arrangements of time and space. The final chapter ‘Movements in Play: Slowness and Boredom’ looks at the temporal dimensions of movements that occurred during play to illustrate how non-normative movements craft different locations around alternatives to heteronormative, productive temporalities.

All three chapters employ similar analysis, addressing how queering in the arrangements of time and space can occur through the play. The scope taken in each chapter differs, yet they cross over and interact with each other. The chapters are united by their argument that individuals' expressions and interactions with their play practices can create alternative locations, feelings, and desires - crafting queer worlds and inverting normativity.

The objective of this dissertation is not to provide a definitive or exhaustive account of what it means to play queerly. Instead, I aim to bridge theoretical work and develop on previous scholarship in queer game studies. Firstly, the research will demonstrate the relationship between queerness and the tabletop RPG D&D in opposition to the typically digital perspective taken in queer game scholarship. Secondly, I will apply the work of scholars whose voice has never been a large part of game studies, allowing for a development of new ideas within the context. Thirdly, through interviews I will look at queer play from the perspective of participants, where their voices are prioritised above an analysis of the game. All of these will allow me to build and develop upon existing work in queer studies and game studies, respectively.

Chapter 1 – Queering Space and Time: Theoretical Considerations

Defining ‘Queer’

The paradoxical strength and weakness of queer theory is its conceptual flexibility, its inability to be caught, pinned down or solidly defined. Resting on paradigms of Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and Foucauldian theory (Hanson et al., 1999: 4), queer theory is a critical method that questions normative discourses. When defining the ‘queer’ in queer theory, it is possible to employ it as a noun, adjective, or verb as a process of description, action and being. Queerness is polysemic in nature, as it has numerous associated meanings, values, and connotations (Rumens et al., 2019: 596). Typically, ‘queer’ is used to denote lesbian and gay individuals under an umbrella term related to sexual identity (Marcus, 2005: 195 – 196). Here, queer theory explores the hierarchical nature of binaries within gender, sex, and sexuality (Carroll, 2012: 6). However, queerness can also indicate an antithetical relationship with normativity more broadly and reveals the power structures of the prescriptive discourses that shape social life. It can allude to whatever runs in opposition with normalcy, legitimation, and regularity. Uncovering discourses and dismantling hegemony, queer theory pulls apart culture to offer spaces of freedom. This notion of freedom is central to my research as I explore how individuals articulate the creation of spaces and times that disrupt and question normativity.

Spargo (1999: 9) argues that ‘queer theory is a collection of intellectual engagements’ in relation to gender, sexuality, and power, as opposed to a methodological or conceptual framework. Therefore, in the evaluation of queer theory that follows I present an outline of the major engagements that situate my own theoretical and conceptual analysis as opposed to an exhaustive or chronological account. I firstly discuss my definitional standpoint to contextualise my usage in the sphere of time and space. Definitional work is followed by an

outline and evaluation of the key scholarship in queer temporal spatiality, which is then synthesised to create frameworks useful in the context of my research on play.

Outlining Queerness

Queerness has a deconstructive ability to challenge phenomenological and structural knowledge (Turner, 2000: 24), resulting from its capability to dislodge itself from the matrixes of everyday life. This contests the epistemological certainty and binary oppositions that construct everyday practice. Here, queer theory's poststructuralist roots become visible as it draws on Derrida's (1974) deconstruction of binary conceptual and language structures, Lacan's (1977) unstable, decentred identity and Foucault's (1980) model of power/knowledge (Spargo, 1999: 40/41). Queerness, then, is a process of dissonance and deconstruction, of looking outside at structural operation and within agent experiences. Namaste (1994: 224) claims, it is not enough to know that boundaries exist but also to explore how they are 'created, regulated and contested'. For instance, queer theory's primary aim is to break down the boundaries between 'normal and abnormal, inclusion and exclusion, homosexual and heterosexual' (Dilley, 1999: 469). Therefore, what takes primacy in my theoretical employment is queer theory's deconstructive possibilities, leading me to question how queer play enables a breaking of boundaries and normativities that exist in cultural structures.

For many scholars, what takes centrality in queer theory is identity (Dilley, 1999; Marcus, 2005). This is not just the queer subject but queerness as a set of sexual norms that contain identity practices. Often, this is tied to a political ideology based on collective identity and discrimination experiences, which reflects prejudice faced by queer people (Dilley, 1999: 458). The binary between homosexual/heterosexual creates a hierarchy that represents and establishes heterosexual power and so subjugates queer individuals (Carroll, 2012: 6). Subjects here are not constituted preceding politics or structures but through specific 'socio-political

organisation' (Namaste, 1994: 221) and so their identities are discursively produced through power, knowledge, and discourse. Therefore, identity and power become formational in defining queerness as they simultaneously construct one another through social, cultural, and political relationships. Each cannot be evaluated in isolation as they act in accordance with one another.

However, other perspectives in queer theory note how queerness cannot be contained to 'so-called queer' identities (Rumens et al., 2019: 597). Instead, queerness should also be considered as an 'action' (Hudson, 2018: 453), a method through which transgressive spaces, times and bodies can be examined. When analysing processes through queerness as an *action* queer theory becomes fixated in deep seated power relations. From this lens, the simultaneous manufacturing of the hegemonic and subaltern is questioned and dismantled. As such, queerness turns things inside out (Watson, 2005: 73), uprooting what is natural, normal, and dominant - subverting power structures and dismantling hegemony. This reflects my own definitional standpoint as I wish to dislodge queerness from strict identity processes and instead apply it as an action, a process that can occur in the spaces and lived experiences of D&D players.

Marcus (2005, 196) is critical of this 'beyond identity' definitional standpoint as she suggests that through removing queerness from identity regimes makes it ubiquitous and diminishes its capacity to explore and evolve. Resultantly, queerness becomes a process of consensus writing against normativity, creating a binary opposition within analysis between the normal and the counter normal (Marcus, 2005, 196). This process then simplifies the wider, fluid possibility of queerness. In my research this definitional problem will be mitigated by forcing a reconceptualization of queerness as a category tied to political, sexual identities. I intend to extend far beyond our current notions of 'queer' to signify nonnormative practices that can arise in time and space (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009; Freeman, 2010).

Examining space and time shows us how queerness can expand beyond identity and subjects towards the operation of place. Queerness exists on the fringes of societal intelligibility which modifies spatial tempo and pace to become ‘contrapuntal, syncopated, and at worst, erratic, arrested’ (McCallum, and Tuhkanen, 2011: 1), therefore, creating a place outside of normative logic and constructions, a queer space-time. In its simplest form, queer spatial temporality is an existence against linearity, normativity, futurity, and hegemony. What unifies approaches to queer temporal spatiality are their political foundation through which structure, ideology and hegemony become critically contested (Winnubst, 2010: 138). These political foundations highlight the cultural context of my research. The spaces I discuss exist within wider processes of hegemony, with games consciously and unconsciously embedding systems of power and control into rules and play (Garcia, 2017: 234). Thus, localities of queerness in D&D can provoke a discussion of social processes beyond play settings. What is central to me is the removal of queerness from subjects and strict identity processes. This is because the imagined worlds created in D&D generate sites that utilise human autonomy and action through play. Such sites overlap with queerness at the axis of difference, expression, and resistance, where games and queer theory contain a parallel ethos: to pave the way for alternative bodies and localities (Ruberg, 2019: 1). Therefore, I align with notions that queerness can simultaneously be used to describe *and* act. This is a ‘queer adjustment’ that seeks to disconnect queerness from an essential definition of ‘homosexual embodiment’ (Halberstam, 2005: 18). For the purpose of my analysis, I draw from Halberstam (2005: 19) who uses ‘queer’ to refer to nonnormative logics and organisations of ‘community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity’.

I will explore the foundational work within queer space and time scholarship such as Edelman (2004), Halberstam (2005), and Muñoz (2009; 2019). This will also be addressed in relation to Foucault’s (1986) theory of ‘heterotopia’. Whilst Foucault (1986) is not typically listed in this

category, I argue through contemporary adaption, namely by Jones (2009), that the notion of heterotopia is welcome in queer temporal spatial scholarship. Here, all scholars share a common ethos: queering space provides alternative methods of being that potentially disrupts norms and power structures. These power structures include gender, heteronormativity, racial systems and also capitalism. All of these structures are interwoven. For instance, capitalism is inherently important to my analysis as it acts in conjunction with the production of heterosexuality as a means of reproduction and normative progression (Edelman 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Freeman 2010).

Reproductive Futurity

In *No Future: Queer Theory and The Death Drive*, Lee Edelman (2004) depicts an imaginary figure of the Child as a heteronormative conservation of the self, where the future is continuing through the Child as they preserve the ‘us’, the values, the cultures, and the politics that will endure beyond an inevitable death. For Edelman (2004: 3), the Child is a ‘perpetual horizon’, a phantasmatic inheritor of politics. Adults fetishize the Child as they embody ‘the telos of the social order’ (Edelman, 2004: 11), outlining heteronormative boundaries, political boundaries, and national ideals. Therefore, queerness inherently criticises this ‘reproductive futurism’ set out by Edelman (2004: 26) as queer subjects are ‘future-negating’ through their inability to reproduce and therefore generate the future. Queers become vilified as they pose an obstacle to conservation, to continuation, to existence and ‘thus to the social’ (Deutscher, 2017: 44), where queerness threatens the Child and by proxy threatens the political and social future.

Queerness becomes ‘the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure’ (Edelman, 2004: 4) as by threatening the future is to threaten the state, hegemony, and culture. This creates a drive towards death where queer individuals embrace ‘a culture of death’ (Edelman, 2004: 40, cited in Deutscher, 2017: 42), ensuring the ‘destruction of the Child’. To be queer is to

destroy the heteronormative temporality that organises life around the Child. Queerness then generates an apolitical temporality of resistance and negativity, where life is not organised around a prospective future but death and *jouissance*. Edelman (2004) proposes that queer people should abandon politics and hope, to instead align with a queer *jouissance* routed around abjection and symbolic failure (Muñoz, 2019: 92). Edelman (2004: 25) uses queer *jouissance* to refer to ‘a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of enjoyment and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, and law’. It is an exhalation of hopelessness that diverts into the dimensions of the excessive or transgressive. Attached epistemologically to incomprehensibility and anti-creation, the queer subject is proposed by Edelman (2004) to go beyond struggling against this classification but to embrace negativity (Halberstam, 2008: 141). At this juncture, queer negativity becomes fertile ground to create new methods of possibility as the is future paradoxically dying and surviving. In other words, queerness is about no future because the concept of future is understood in relation to standards of success and production defined by heteronormative Western capitalism. Yet, at the same time, queerness ‘unfolds incalculable futures’ driven by radical negativity (Dean and Ziarek, 2008: 128).

In the second chapter of *No Future*, Edelman (2004) draws on Lacan’s (2016 cited in Coffman, 2013) concept of *sinthome* or symptom, which signifies expression beyond analysis, a unique form of *jouissance*, that shifts beyond desire to ‘engage the Real and the drive’ (Coffman, 2013: 58). Thus, the *sinthome* refuses meaning, it is a subject driven outside of desire or logic, it occupies ‘the site at which meaning comes undone’ (Edelman, 2004: 35). From this Edelman (2004) coins the term ‘*sinthomosexual*’ to describe the queer figure of annihilation and antisociality who are projected by the death drive, abjection, and destruction. The *sinthomosexual* functions in accordance with incomprehensible algorithms ‘obstruction, profit, replaceability or irreplaceability, revenge, self-interest, refusal, resistance, or a revenge to be

delivered by arranging their own death' (Deutscher, 2017: 48) and so resist the heteronormative pull towards the future. It is a negative logic of unproductivity, masochism, self-annihilation, incomprehensibility, radical apathy, and aggressive contradiction that act as an anti-social challenge to the homonormative assertion of assimilation politics proposed by neoliberalist liberation.

In a queer analysis of the American horror *Final Destination* (2000) Clark (2020) draws on the work of Edelman (2004) to suggest that characters in the film exist outside of the heteronormative imaginary to occupy a state of 'queer crisis' (Clark, 2020: 139-140). The characters in *Final Destination* (2000) face an omnipresent jeopardy that resituates them in opposition to the future and instead towards the direction of death. Clark (2020) dissects the symbol of the airport to suggest that it is used to explain a queer spatial temporality that is 'out of time'. The airport becomes a heterotopic place, an umbilical cord between the 'here' and 'there', 'life' and 'death', where time simultaneously moves and stands still (Clark 2020: 140). This ruptures normative time and so characters face an ontological uncertainty through their inability to craft a reproductive future. They instead exist in a state of queer crisis.

Here, Clark's (2020) employment of reproductive futurity illustrates its applicability to texts outside of the abstracted employment taken by Edelman (2004). This allows me to develop a similar theoretical engagement within my own research. I seek to mitigate some of the criticisms faced by Edelman (2004), such as his stance that being queer is the only possibility of 'non-reproducible life' (Marriot, 2011: 107). However, in Clark's (2020) and my own argument there is a removal of queerness from queer identified individuals, to instead, illustrate how people's engagement with space has queer outcomes. In Chapter 4 of my own analysis, for example, I will question how players in D&D create sinthomosexual characters to produce a temporality that is resistant to reproductive narrative logics and futurity. In other chapters, I particularly stress the importance of *jouissance* as an opportunity for queer desire in play

failures which create alternatives to heteronormative times and space. I still maintain a central criticism of heteronormative temporal organisation that is prevalent in Edelman's (2004) work but approach theoretical engagement from a different angle – one that attributes queerness to temporality and agent action rather than identification.

Paradigmatic Markers, Chrononormativity

According to Harvey (1990), time and space become naturalised in Western civilisations through their relationship to capitalist accumulation, production, and consumption. Daily life revolved around segregated working hours and leisure time. However, class is just one dimension that structures spatial temporality. Halberstam (2005: 23) argues that time and space are also hegemonically constructed with gendered and sexed dimensions. What occurs is in fact an entangled relationship between capitalism and heteronormativity: not only is space and time constructed around production and consumption, but through a propagation of the heterosexual nuclear family. As a result, there exists a time of the 'family' and a time of 'inheritance' that are structured around the supposed needs of children (Halberstam, 2005: 19). The normative arrangement of the everyday becomes organised around processes such as 'early to bed, early to rise' (Halberstam, 2005: 18) that centres around child rearing and the conventional working hours. Such conditions enable a space and time that is fixed, linear and organised around labour, reproduction, and futurity.

By contrast to heteronormative capitalist time, Halberstam (2005) proposes the potentiality of a queer space and time that eradicates the 'paradigmatic markers' of life, namely marriage, reproduction, and labour in favour of fluidity and dissonance. This is a subcultural possibility that emerged out of the AIDs epidemic and postmodernity: 'compression' and 'annihilation' (Halberstam, 2005: 14) structured the lives of queer individuals as AIDs created a constantly diminishing future, emphasising instead the here and now. From this, a radical rethinking

emerged where the conventional insistence on longevity and the future became replaced in queer contexts by ‘potentiality’, a potentiality to live a life unscripted by ‘family, inheritance, and child rearing’ (Halberstam, 2005: 14). The so-called biological, heterosexual clock is smashed in replacement of a space/time of ‘crisis and opportunities’ – a crisis in the stability of meaning which provides an opportunity to reassess power creating practices (Halberstam, 2005: 20). As such, what emerges in queer time and place are performances, memories, and moments that run-in opposition to normative logics. Queer space and time arise both in opposition to normative institutions such as the family, but also according to ‘Othered’ logics of identity, movement, zaniness, and eccentricity.

In chapter 7 of *In Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam (2005: 308) grounds his theory through an interaction with performance in the independent dyke music scene. By means of performance, audiences are able to interact with a time and subjectivity beyond their own. The stage and theatre become a ‘vertiginous temporal space’ (Halberstam, 2005: 312), producing sensations of whirling where individuals become dislodged from their own subjectivity and projected into moments of queer history. Mirroring the disorientation and disorganisation of the heterotopia (Foucault, 1986) that simultaneously exists both inside and outside of place and moment. When watching these performances audiences are not driven by the future but living simultaneously in the moment, the now and the past.

Drawing on Halberstam (2005), Freeman (2010: xii) in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities and Queer Histories*, coins the term ‘chrononormative’ to describe regimes where cultural structures are deemed natural through rigorous linearization of specific temporal and spatial forms (not dissimilar to the ‘paradigmatic markers of life experience’ described by Halberstam, 2005: 14). Therefore, chronormativity establishes ‘expected heteronormative trajectories’ (Riach et al., 2014: 1678), that dictate the appropriate life paths given to subjects. Such paths reinforce and naturalise pre-existing power structures whilst pushing the queer Other into a

liminal spatial-temporal stance. However, in opposition to chrononormativity is a queer temporality that is non-sequential, against the synchronies of heteronormative capitalism. Queerness is able to unbind time away from dominant cultural tempos and so remove itself from the beginning-to-end order of time as well as away from the pace at which normative life is expected to occur. ‘Queer temporalities are sketchy’, a disrupted, dispersed time where chrononormative timeframes no longer operate (Pearlman and McLaughlin, 2020: 316).

Like the queer space and time described by Halberstam (2005), freedom from chronormativity serves to enable sites, subjectivities and bodies that exist outside of restrictive normative logics. These will look different dependent on what is being analysed – in my project I look at queer temporalities in imagined spaces. I use Freeman’s (2010) concept to build on the initial theorisation created *In Queer Time and Place* (2005) as I see their works as intrinsically interconnected. Freeman’s (2010) concept of chronormativity is particularly useful in my analysis as D&D as a game has its own chrononormativity, the ‘logics that structure how games are meant to be played and in what order, creating the sense of a straight—that is, correct—path for the player to follow’ (Ruberg, 2020: 638). Thus, in Chapter 5 I particularly address how play resists the chronormative and linear operation of time both outside of play and inside the medium of the game.

The Queer Utopia

When initially published in 2009, José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* generated a new perspective in queer temporal spatial scholarship. Criticising the anti-social thesis that the work of Halberstam (2005) and Edelman (2004) rests on, Muñoz (2019) proposes that queerness encompasses futurity instead of opposes it. For Muñoz (2019: 11) the anti-social, anti-relational theories romanticises negativity. By contrast, he suggests that queerness should revolve around imagining a collective future that transcends the negativity of

the present. In his turn towards futurity, Muñoz (2019) rejects the ‘homonormative’ assertion proposed by neoliberalist liberation that queer people should assimilate into mainstream institutions like marriage. Instead, Muñoz (2019: 21) insists that we should look forward at the horizon to imagine and hope for new desires and potentialities. ‘The here and now is simply not enough’ (Muñoz, 2019: 96), and so queer people should envision a future of new pleasures, ‘other ways of being’ and ‘new worlds’ (Muñoz, 2019: 1).

Muñoz (2019) refers to the scholarship of Ernst Bloch (1995) in *The Principle of Hope*. As such, he outlines a clear difference between concrete and abstract utopias (Muñoz, 2019: 3). In contrast to the banal hopefulness of the abstract utopia, concrete utopias are situated within ‘real’ culture, agents’ lifeworld’s, and potentiality. The concrete utopia evolves through the realisation that new futures can be actualised by feeling and experimentation. This reflects Muñoz’s (2019: 3) vision that the queer utopia is lodged within a collective imagination and historical specificity which facilitates an articulation of alternative forms of human social reproduction outside of capitalist heteronormativity. They exist ‘relational to historically situated struggles’ (Muñoz, 2019: 3) and so concrete utopias envision a potentiality to imagine a place without such struggles. Therefore, Muñoz (2019) stresses hope, the hope to shape and imagine new horizons, in the present, the here and now and the real.

In line with previous work in queer temporal spatiality, Muñoz (2019: 28) identifies a time that is ‘straight’ and ‘auto naturalising’ through its futuristic promise of propagative heterosexuality. Like chronormative (Freeman, 2010), reproductive (Edelman, 2004) and paradigmatic (Halberstam, 2005) assertions, straight time expresses linearity and conformality to heteronormativity and Western capitalism. The time of the queer utopia offers a glimpse into something extra to the everyday, the normality described by straight time (Muñoz, 2019: 28), as to see queerness as a horizon is to ‘perceive it as a modality of ecstatic time’, against the temporal stranglehold’ of straight time (Muñoz, 2019: 32). This ‘ecstatic time’ is a space in

time where individuals are overcome by feelings of pleasure but also contemplation from looking backwards or forwards to the past or the future. In my research I will question and explore how this ‘ecstatic time’ presents itself through play as a method of pleasure as well as creating alternative modalities of being for subjects.

The time in the queer utopia reflects the sensation of ecstasy. According to Muñoz (2019: 186) the consumption of MDMA, or ecstasy mirror the feeling and operation of queer temporality. Both queer time and psychoactive drug induce sensations that allow individuals to comprehend a temporal unity of the ‘the past (having-been), the future (the not-yet), and the present (the makingpresent)’ (Muñoz, 2019: 186). This ecstatic time is announced by ‘scream or grunt’ of pleasure to reflect the euphoric feelings induced by this temporal harmony where people can conceive of a queer place wrapped up in desire (Muñoz, 2019: 32). Here Muñoz (2019) is drawing on Halberstam’s (2005: 312) notion that performances in the dyke music scene offered audiences the chance to interact with a time and subjectivity beyond their own. Like ecstasy, performances articulate a new temporality to reimagine and remake the past in the present which has an implication for how we imagine and move toward the future. D&D arguably contains these performative spaces through player agency and exploration which facilitate a multitude of improvised outcomes (I elaborate on this line of thinking in Chapter 3).

Whilst Muñoz’s (2019: 185) primary focus is on a temporality, the queer future contains a spatial dimension. In line with Halberstam (2005), Muñoz (2019) continues to draw on performance to illustrate how time and space are intrinsically tied to one another through a ‘spatialization of time’ (Muñoz, 2019: 29). Like Halberstam (2005), Muñoz (2019) frames queer temporal spatiality in relation to the stage and crowds. For Muñoz (2019: 111), the stage of queer artists is always one of potentiality, ‘empty one moment and overflowing with sex and movement the next’. The stage is bursting and brimming with utopian performances that are always linked to becoming and what could be, to potentiality. Like performance, potentiality

never entirely vanishes but, instead, lingers as a channel, a pipeline, for knowing and feeling other people (Muñoz, 2019: 113). Therefore, in the crowd of a performance, amongst other queer people, the venue, club, theatre, becomes a ‘utopian subcultural rehearsal space’ (Muñoz, 2019: 111), a place to practice and project an ‘ecstatic time’ (Muñoz, 2019: 32) that allows people to reimagine who they are and what they want. Like the stage, I suggest that the tabletop in D&D offers a place to imagine and desire differently and queerly.

The Queer Heterotopia

By contrast to the imagined utopia of Muñoz (2019), Foucault (1986) illustrates a concept of ‘Othered’ spaces through his vision of the heterotopia. In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault (1986: 24) describes the heterotopia as a ‘place outside of all places’ as an antithesis to the conventional unreal spaces that are utopias. For Foucault (1986), utopias are sites without tangible place, they have no material reality in society but are an upturned analogy to be dreamt of and imagined. By contrast, Foucault (1986: 24) outlines the heterotopia as an unreal real space that exists by juxtaposition to utopias. Where utopias embody an idyllic, sublime perfect society, the heterotopia is a counter-site that all other places in society ‘simultaneously represent, contest and in-vert’ (Foucault, 1986: 24). Therefore, heterotopias both exist within and outside of our society as a place between utopia, dystopia, and material society.

In the Derridean sense, heterotopias are a supplement to society as an ‘addition from the outside, but it can also be understood as supplying what is missing and in this way is already inscribed within that to which it is added’ (Bernasconi, 2014: 19). Society and the heterotopia are simultaneously unified and Othered from one another. This is expressed by Foucault (1986: 24) through his mirror allegory, where in the heterotopia and the mirror ‘I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface’. Heterotopias reflect and distort the picture of our world. The specific fantasy sites created through play can

be regarded as heterotopic through their ability to mirror and bend representations, meanings, and moments in everyday life.

There are two classifications of heterotopia: crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation (Foucault, 1986: 24 - 25). The crisis heterotopia is a forbidden place composed of individuals who occupy a state of crisis such as adolescents and menstruating women. These heterotopias are continually created and abandoned as individuals dip in and out of crisis. The heterotopia of deviation is relative to crisis heterotopias as an extension and deviation against the cultural norms of their former crisis state. Thus, these classifications do not exist outside of one another but are related through their replacement of each other. The heterotopia of deviation is characterised by its relation to deviance and opposition to the cultural norms and values of society, such as psychiatric hospitals or prisons.

Heterotopias are understood in relation to the social and display anxieties, repressions, and otherness into wider cultural landscapes. Heterotopias encourage a ‘playing with traditional normativity’ (Llewellyn, 2021: 6) found within society. However, heterotopias are criticised as being ‘sketchy, open-ended, and ambiguous’ (Johnson, 2013: 790). Instead of regarding this as a criticism I argue that this allows heterotopias to naturally correspond with queerness, as something unwilling to be pinned down, confined, and stifled. Therefore, I would argue that queerness and heterotopia are akin through their ability to provoke and destabilise normative boundaries. For Frowd (2014: 862), queerness fundamentally blurs distinctions between the Inside/Outside. This is also present in heterotopias as they simultaneously exist within and ‘outside of all places’ (Foucault, 1986: 24). Both blur and question boundaries.

Furthermore, Jones (2009) expresses a possibility for the creation of queer heterotopias that challenges the heteronormative regime where individuals can create and enact new subjectivities. For Jones (2009: 2) they are sites where agents possess the freedom ‘to perform

their gender and sexuality without fear of being qualified, marginalized, or punished'. Queer heterotopias involve a vision beyond humanity as to disrupt both the binaries between men and women, straight and queer but also human/and non-human (Haraway, 1991 cited in Jones, 2009: 5). Throughout my analysis, I look at how the tabletop becomes a queer heterotopia through its inversion of spaces and norms – drawing on different characteristics and classifications of the heterotopia. In Chapter 4, I particularly utilize Jones's (2009) conceptualisation that regards queer heterotopias as places to enact new subjectivities when looking at how player experiment with characters during short games.

Unifying Theory

The dominant strain of the queer time and space paradigm has been coined as the anti-social thesis through its move away from gay-rights activism and reclamation projects, to instead denote a 'negative, anti-social, anti-relational theory' (Monaghan, 2016: 14). However, by contrast, Muñoz (2019) and arguably to some degree the theory of queer heterotopia (Foucault, 1986; Jones, 2009) looks towards the future against the anti-social, to suggest that queerness contains potentiality. However, what is key to all theorists in this area despite their theoretical camps, is the notion that time, and space contain power structures through which subjects gain and elude agency (Farrier, 2015: 1401). Broadly, what unifies the ideas of Edelman (2004), Foucault (1986), Halberstam (2005), Freeman (2010) and Muñoz (2019) is their ability to conceive an existence outside of the normative logics of heterosexuality, reproduction, and fixed futures. In this vein, I understand queerness as a means that challenges spatial and temporal orders, to disturb and disrupt the normative logics of space and time. As such, queer sites in play are erratic, asynchronistic, ecstatic, negative, and abnormal.

I will employ both the work that negates and pushes towards futurity, drawing on their theoretical similarities where Edelman (2004), Foucault (1986), Halberstam (2005), and

Muñoz (2019) all conclude that queerness allows for the creation of alternative cultures of the body, time, and space. Whilst I do employ anti-social work, I align more with Muñoz's (2019) and the queer heterotopia's (Foucault, 1986; Jones, 2009) notions that queerness is surrounded by potential. The death, destruction, and political negativity of Edelman (2004) and to some degree Halberstam (2005) can be reconceptualised through an argument that creation emerges from the ashes of destruction. I employ all theories from the same foundation, where the creation of alternative lifeworlds, times and spaces take centrality – where the approaches to this creation simultaneously contrast and complement each other.

Queer Resistance: Risk, Crisis, and Failure

All the theorists I have mentioned thus far make brief mentions of 'crisis' (Foucault, 1986: 24), 'risk' (Halberstam, 2005: 26; Muñoz, 2019: 36) and 'endanger[ment]' (Edelman, 2004: 112) to suggest that agents must engage in something risky or the potential to fail in order to facilitate the creation of queer space/time. I intend to build on this fleeting mention of risk to suggest in the context of play, risk and failure becomes a major process through which alternatives in space and time can be created.

Queer time and space create liminal worlds occupied by subjects who exist outside of long-established social practices. One dominant factor characterising these worlds according to Foucault (1986), Edelman (2004), Muñoz (2019), and Halberstam (2005) is crisis and failure. At the crux of queer worlds is instability. This instability destabilises 'the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure' (Halberstam, 2005: 26). Once one exits the temporal frames of capitalist reproduction and family longevity they are in a time of flux and uncertainty. Foucault (1986: 24) uses the example of the boarding school that houses adolescents as a 'crisis heterotopia' to describe a place for young people living through puberty, a sense of limbo – between adulthood and childhood. The boarding school student is without a

role in society and so exists purposelessly in a state of crisis. Crisis here is a ‘turning point’, a liminality, existing simultaneously between two places, moments, and times. In this regard, I argue that the tabletop exists as a ‘crisis heterotopia’. It is the umbilical cord between the body of the player and the body of the avatar. The space of the board on the table or the screen facilitates a crisis through its presentation of two moments: play and the outside world.

Halberstam, (2005: 26) similarly theorises individuals’ states of crisis to explain that queer time can be occupied by ‘people who live without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs’, as like the adolescents in the boarding school, the homeless, the poor live outside the conventional structures of reproductive capitalism, on the borderline, at the edge. This creates a time of risk as people’s lives are not secured by the typical processes that ground them such as ‘family, longevity, safety, and inheritance’ (Halberstam, 2005: 20). In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam (2011: 15) explores this notion of risk but characterises it as failure to ‘consider the utility of getting lost over finding our way’. In getting lost there is a possibility to align with alternative potentials, to subvert the path individuals typically follow. In getting lost, failure ‘imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being’ (Halberstam, 2011: 88).

Failure is equally important to Muñoz’s (2019) formation of the queer utopia. For Muñoz (2019) failure becomes a ‘kernel of potentiality’ (Muñoz 2019: 173). Like in Halberstam’s *Queer Art of Failure* (2011), there is opportunity and potential in a lack of success which allows for the reimagining of the future. Through failure, individuals are able to exit straight, linear time and opportunities. Where agents are able to dislodge themselves from a lifeworld dictated by ‘alienation, exploitation, and drudgery associated with capitalism or landlordism’ (Muñoz, 2019: 173). This failure is driven by ‘negative sentiments’ such as ‘cynicism, opportunism, depression, and bitchiness’ (Muñoz, 2019: 176). Such sentiments typically reflect an affective, emotional hopelessness; however, Muñoz (2019: 177) argues that these feelings are a critique

of our current social and cultural situations. They, therefore, function to facilitate an imagination of alternative and other possibilities, again, unfolding less conventional futures.

As such, I argue that failure, risk, getting lost all become a place to imagine new goals, alternatives to the linear, expected story. D&D play is based on improvisation within systems of rules - narratives and player actions are continually created based upon player agency and outcomes based on dice rolling. It is at the point of improvisation where failure and loss ensure that a queer space time becomes possible. Therefore, in Chapter 3, I look at the way player intention and outcomes impact the paths and narratives that unfold during play. This notion of 'failure' is entangled with risk as through the risk, of rolling dice failure becomes a likelihood. It is at this failure point where individuals must reimagine the future and the path at which they take during play situations.

For Edelman (2004: 39) the queer subject exists 'in intimate relation to a fatal, and even murderous, *jouissance*'. 'Fatal' and 'murderous' connote the dangers of living queerly, to revolve life around the death drive. It is a 'corrosive enjoyment' (Edelman, 2004: 30), a destructive pleasure that orientates people in death and annihilation. Time can become orientated around the threat of destruction as opposed to reproduction (see Clark, 2020). I suggest in Chapter 4 that through short, one-shot game creations and situations, player characters and by association players, are placed in a position of continuing peril, orientated around the threat destruction and death. As such, players are unable to participate in the realm of productivity and reproduction, moving into a space and time beyond the heteronormative.

Through my engagement with Foucault (1986), Halberstam (2005), Edelman (2004) and Muñoz (2019), I suggest that playing with risk, danger, and failure individuals are able to create alternative bodies, times, and spaces to those prevalent in normative society. I employ risk in

three simultaneously differing and converging ways: the liminal space of the heterotopia, alternatives to the linearity through failure, and player orientations around death.

Forming a Queer Space and Time

Queer space and time rests on the creation of different kinds of subjectivities and localities against civic, sexual, and cultural normativity. All conceptualisations of queer time and space align through their description of sites orientated around dissonance and difference: for the queer heterotopia, it is a place of contestation and inversion (Foucault, 1986: 24), for a time against reproductive futurity, it is queer negativity routed in *jouissance* (Edelman, 2004), for Halberstam (2005) and Freeman (2010) it is the creation of non-linear and non-synchronic sites and temporalities, for Muñoz (2019), it is the collective imagination of a future or horizon. Individuals in these spaces reject fixed identities, subjectivities, and bodies in order to produce alternative methods of being. The methods of being in all conceptions revolve around difference where there is an eradication of the structures present in normative society to facilitate this creation of queer space and time.

What is eradicated in Halberstam's (2005: 14) analysis is the paradigmatic markers of life experience, specifically 'birth, marriage, reproduction, and death'. Similarly, for Muñoz (2019: 96), it is a stepping out of a fixed straight time to reimagine a place of flux, a temporal disorganisation, and ecstasy. Comparably, in Edelman's (2004) formation of *jouissance* epistemologically attaches the queer subject to negativity, the anti-social, the unintelligible, against productivity. While, for Foucault (1986) heterotopias are sites of resisting and reordering power as by connection to the dominant order heterotopias clash with hegemonic orders and 'simultaneously produce new ways of knowing' (Topinka, 2010: 54).

Halberstam (2005: 25) suggests that the heterotopia created the conditions for the 'postmodern geography' his work rests on. It is unsurprising then that queer space/time and heterotopias act

in unison with one another, for Halberstam (2005: 315) the stage creates a ‘heterotopic space crammed with overlapping temporalities for both audience and performer’. This is a queer heterochrony, a fleeting slice of time (Foucault, 1986: 26), as through performance performers create an ‘affective vortex’ (Halberstam, 2005: 316) by pulling audiences into a time they do not remember or know through history. Arguably this is the time of the sinthomosexual (Edelman, 2004), as the time of the heterotopic stage is orientated around performance and memory as opposed to futurity.

However, for Edelman (2004) queerness sits less in its potential of imagining lives unchained from the normative scheduling of daily life than in its sweeping destruction of every depiction of the future (Dean and Ziarek, 2008: 137). *No Future* (2004) locates queerness on the side of death to imagine the emergence of something new ‘solely by means of apocalyptic, nondialectical negation’ (Dean and Ziarek, 2008: 137). However, Edelman’s (2004) argument is limited in his overstating of death and destruction as to become queer is an enterprise of invention as opposed to negation (Muñoz, 2019; Dean and Ziarek, 2008: 140). Here, Edelman’s (2004) argument becomes repurposed in its alignment with Muñoz (2019) and Halberstam’s (2005) argument to suggest that queer time and space while destructive is able to create, birth and give life to new ways of being. Edelman’s (2004) vision is to be reformed to suggest that queerness unfolds incalculable futures against heteronormative structures and that queerness aligns with death and *jouissance*, but this is not the end – rather it is the beginning. It is as Muñoz (2019) would frame it as a ‘potentiality’, filled with capabilities and possibilities for the queer future and queer desire.

Conclusion

This review of queer theory has illustrated the adaptability of queer space and time scholarship through outlining and synthesising the work of Foucault (1986), Edelman (2004), Halberstam

(2005), Freeman (2010), and Muñoz (2019). What is central to all these scholars is their unified vision that queerness is fundamentally aligned with the creation of alternative sites and subjectivities where individuals are able to disrupt normative lifepaths. This enabled me to create a theoretical framework rooted within my own research on D&D to suggest that scholarship overlapped at the junctures of risk, performance, and opportunities. Theory here will be drawn on, developed, and expanded within my own analysis. I simultaneously refer to and build on these scholars, crafting my own, original analysis. However, this juncture is only one axis at which queer temporality has been explored as the texts drawn upon are not complete but foundational. Therefore, in order to develop a more holistic approach this review will need to be developed further in relation to literature within ludology studies that focuses upon queer play.

Chapter 2 – D&D and Queer Game Studies

D&D was the first codified roleplaying game and therefore holds a significant position in RPG studies. Since its creation in 1974, D&D has gone through multiple editions, different publishers and rid itself of its previous occult associations (Laycock, 2015). D&D play instructions stress a focus on creativity, inclusivity, and social engagement all of which has elevated the access and popularity of the game, especially in the past few years (Sidhu and Carter, 2020: 4). Recent academic research on D&D has responded through a focus particularly on *why* people play D&D, *who* they play with and the discourses that shape play. However, there has been little scholarship that focuses on the queer time and space cultures of D&D. In this review I firstly assess themes and scholarship significant to D&D as a macro research topic. I then address literature in queer game studies. This chapter is divided into thematic sections that address the wider subjects that have arisen in D&D scholarship: D&D and the occult, re-enchanting modernity, social relationships, identity, and representation as well as a section that explains literature within queer game studies which is formational in my own application of queer theory to play.

D&D and the Occult

In contemporary contexts D&D is regarded as beneficial through its ability to provide individuals with entertainment, escapism and more recently, to alleviate the effects of isolation during the era of COVID-19 (Scriven, 2021: 11). D&D has been hailed for its ability to maintain friendships, enable the creation of remarkable experiences and creating a heightened moral construction between good and evil (see Adams, 2013). However, in the past D&D was met with widespread contention and controversy. During the 1980s the game suffered attack from US fundamentalist religious groups who feared that it had capabilities to brainwash adolescents and vulnerable groups. Such critics argued that D&D was socially, morally, and

spiritually dangerous through its ability to ‘corrupt young people’ (Laycock, 2015: 20). The fantastical setting of the game alongside its inclusion of mythological creatures, spell casting, and supernatural beings all led to D&D being framed through an occultist lens (Pfeifer, 2012: 281). A ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 2011) surrounded D&D and the people that played it.

Cohen (2011: 78) claims that moral panics act as a form of ethical boundary maintenance in times of wider cultural anxieties. Therefore, fears surrounding D&D were not isolated within individual criticism but operated inside wider cultural structures. For instance, Laycock (2015: 105) illustrates how negative public responses to D&D were shaped by fears of cults and new religious movements in the 1980s. The most prominent critic of D&D was Pat Pulling who founded the organisation Bothered About Dungeons and Dragons (BADD). Pulling correlated her son’s suicide with his interest in D&D (Fine and Victor, 1994: 72). BADD describes D&D as a fantasy RPG which ‘uses demonology, witchcraft, voodoo, murder, rape, blasphemy, suicide, assassination, insanity, sex perversion, homosexuality, prostitution, satanic type rituals, gambling, barbarism, cannibalism, sadism, desecration, demon summoning, necromantics, divination and other teachings’ (Pulling 1989 cited in Waldron, 2005: 3). BADD attempted to associate D&D with the occultist deviancy, reflecting wider societal fears of brainwashing and satanism.

D&D’s alleged ability to ‘corrupt’ young people rested on two components. Firstly, through its ‘imaginative dimension’. Players were placed in a world of monsters and fantasy. Secondly, there was also ‘the mystical quality of compulsion to the game’, the reason and meanings people attach to play (Richardson et al., 1991: 111). However, as the next section illustrates these are not separate components but intricately related as a vehicle through which people strive for enchantment in a disenchanted world.

Re-enchanting Modernity

As I have illustrated, in the past, claims by the Christian Right compared D&D to religion. Critics were concerned both by the content of the game, but also the affective and experiential properties of play (Waldron, 2005: 13). Therefore, in response to D&D's cultural situation within the occult, a body of literature focuses on its spiritual and pseudo-religious potentialities. They argue that these occult sentiments do not 'have any basis in reality' but were merely reflections of external processes (Laycock, 2015: 120). Instead, scholars note that D&D does not corrupt or brainwash but consciously creates a delusion that allows for a 'modern enchantment' (Saler, 2012: 13).

According to Huizinga (2008: 9) 'play is distinct from "ordinary" life'. Play, like religion engages in a 'separateness' (Caillois, 2001: 9), where alternative worlds and meanings are constructed (Plate, 2010: 221). As such, the worlds in D&D act as 'paracosms', frames to reflect and analyse our 'real world' (Laycock, 2015: 236). Within these frames there is an interaction with the fantastic (Carbonell, 2019: 11). Players engage with the extranormal and the mythical, casting spells, communicating with Gods, and slaying monsters. This interaction with fantasy moves beyond the 'normal range of experiences' individuals typically have in their daily life (Wright et al., 2020: 102). Religious feelings and D&D play both fulfil a 'need' to interact with the 'otherworldly' (Laycock, 2015: 29).

Interactions with the otherworldly allows for an enchantment of the 'disenchanted world' (Saler, 2012). In contemporary settings that are defined by globalisation, risk, and fluidity (Beck, 1999) the world is becoming increasingly unstable, secularised, and fragmented. Yet through D&D's world-building processes, individuals are able to 'recapture meaning', creativity, and imagination to re-mystify the world (Martin and Fine, 1991: 121). There are also many similarities that run across D&D systems and spiritual systems. Like religion, D&D play is ritualistic, structured, and mirrors the way in which cultures 'construct an idea of sacred

order’ (Laycock, 2015: 227). For instance, the DM is akin to a ‘powerful ritual elder’ that controls the fate of character players during gameplay (Hughes, 1988).

Processes that structure play thus mirror systems that are ingrained within religious operation. This combined with the imaginative and mystical quality of D&D allows scholars to suggest that, even in an increasingly secularised world, human beings still strive for mystification and meaning. Even though religion has been disenchanted through scientific and bureaucratic systems, the argument here stresses that play mirrors the affective sensations of religion through interacting with fantastic worlds built in D&D (Saler, 2012).

Debates surrounding the potentialities of D&D to mystify or ‘re-enchant’ the world illustrates a focus on the external meanings that individuals attach to play. Here, play is removed from the context of the game and tied to larger societal, macro processes that shape the social world. In my own research I also illustrate how individuals craft alternative spaces to fulfil their needs and desires. Much like how New Age spirituality ‘provided a crucial space for the articulation of this unorthodox vision’ (Dixon, 2001: 3), spaces in D&D allow people to articulate alternative methods of being and acting. In line with theological visions, I explore the need and want for new spaces and times.

I particularly draw on Laycock’s (2015: 32) logic that play spaces rearrange symbolic elements of daily life where players dislodge themselves from normative understandings of the world in order to craft new ones. Like scholars in this field, I illustrate how the tabletop acts as a space of potential and is inscribed with player meanings. However, unlike this literature, I focus primarily on how world-making does not just provide alternative spaces, but how these spaces produce queering effects in both time and space.

Social Relationships

Sociality is a core aspect of play in D&D (Scriven, 2021: 2), with social interaction forming one of the three ‘Pillars of Adventure’ seen in the basic rulebook (Wizards of the Coast, 2014: 6). Interaction takes a variety of forms in play, it can be ‘table talk’ between players, dialogue between characters and conversations between player characters and NPCs created by the DM. This forms the base from which a game and narrative can be enacted. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a substantial amount of D&D scholarship focuses on roleplaying’s social potentialities. Such literature has consistently suggested that play exists within communal and co-operative contexts (Fine, 1983; Bowman, 2010; Coe, 2017; Scriven, 2021). These contexts lead to the building of social bonds and friendship maintenance (Adams, 2013) as well as the exploration of identities within new social contexts (Bowman, 2010). This section looks at communal and individual implications of interaction in the context of D&D literature.

In his classic text, *Shared Fantasy Worlds*, Gary Fine (1983: 6) suggested that gameplay is a collective achievement ‘only possible through interaction’. It is at the juncture of interaction that play, and community simultaneously arise. People in groups or ‘parties’, develop both personally and within the group setting through mutual emotions and collective imaginations (Daniau, 2016: 435). For Bowman (2010: 13) players ‘participate in the construction of their own narratives in a group practice of co-creation’. Hence, role-playing encompasses individual freedom in constructed collective environments. What is inherent in these studies is that play in D&D is something that is shared, co-operative and communal. Typically, scholars focus on the benefits of community, through their ability to cultivate players’ ‘self-understanding, empathy, moral imagination, and civic commitment’ (Hollander, 2021: 317). Additionally, the sociability of D&D has also alleviated loneliness and the effects of isolation due to lockdown restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 (Scriven, 2021: 11).

However, as in any social setting there can be barriers to communication and community. Fine (1983) notes that in roleplay communities, players can develop hierarchies and power

relationships which limits collaboration. Roleplaying can also be an awkward or uncomfortable process for some individuals and so they may not become immersed in the fantasy social worlds developed in play (Brummel et al., 2010 cited in Henrich and Worthington, 2021: 3). The perceived social benefits of D&D, however, arguably outweigh such criticism as scholars much more consistently argue that the social networks created and maintained through D&D become a vehicle through which players ‘meet psychological needs of connection’ and ‘relatedness’ (Coe, 2017: 2852). A shared fantasy promotes communication which in turn generates belonging, intimacy, and community (Coe, 2017: 2857; Bowman, 2010: 8).

Literature pertaining to sociability has illustrated how D&D is a medium of collaboration and community building. Playing in groups meets psychological needs for individuals whilst also facilitates collective environments to flourish. Play and creation will thus be analysed within the wider social context of the party, as I illustrate how queer space and time can occur through interaction between players and collective desires.

Identity

Identity acts as a ‘meeting place’ (Kehily, 2009: 6), it is relational – formed and enacted in association to who we are and who we are not. D&D, as a roleplaying game, becomes a space where people can ‘play’, question, and form identities. The process of character creation allows individuals to create a subject beyond their core identity. It is unsurprising then that scholars consider the meanings players attached to the construction and making of new subjectivities when engaged in play (Fine, 1983; Bowman, 2010; Coe 2017). The primary argument in identity scholarship suggests that individuals dislodge themselves from their normative sense of self and their cultural context (Bowman, 2010). The personification of a character leads to the reflection of primary, self-identity whilst at the same time, forming new identities through

play (Nielsen, 2015: 48). Here, multiple identities are negotiated simultaneously: the player, the player character, the dungeon master, and the host of NPCs that inhabit the world.

In D&D player identity is twofold. There is the individual who plays the game, carrying with them ‘real -world interests’ but at the same time they act as ‘animators of a persona’ (Fine, 1983: 144) - the player (the agent at the board) and the player character (their created avatar). Identities here become plural and unstable as they are produced and enacted simultaneously. For Shank (2015: 194) roleplaying characters produce an oscillation, a movement to and fro between identification where identities become ‘singular and multiple’ (Shank, 2015: 194). Through this oscillation ‘players simultaneously express and discover who they are’ (Laycock, 2015: 238). ‘Experimentation with moral, political, and metaphysical decision-making’ becomes a core process of alternative identity exploration (Hollander, 2021: 318). However, for Cross (2012: 74) identity can be implicated beyond the tabletop as for her and other transgender individuals, roleplaying offered the first opportunity to explore gender expression and identity.

There have been attempts to typify this relationship between player and player character. In *The Functions of Role-playing Games*, for example, Bowman (2010: 164-176) created a typology that placed character type on a spectrum that ranged from close to far from a players primary ego identity. This includes classifications such as ‘the Doppelganger Self’ which reflected the player and the ‘Experimental Self’ that allowed for an exploration of an identity far from that of the player. These typologies illustrate the ways in which players see their avatars/characters as tools, mirrors, assistants, and Others. For Bowman (2010: 8) no matter the place on the spectrum, roleplaying offered players important opportunity to actively participate in their identity expression, exploring parts of themselves that were suppressed by daily life and culture. Through play, agents are presented with opportunities to develop and

resolve their identity. The tabletop becomes a playtest location where individuals are able to explore a variety of characteristics, traits, and identities (Coe, 2017: 2857).

Literature that intersects at identity and play studies is inherently important to my research. I align with scholars who argue that the tabletop is an experimental and expressive location for players. Whilst identity is not the primary focus of my analysis, I build off the notion that D&D offers the potential for Otherness and alternative. I go beyond identity to illustrate the queer potentialities of expression and experimentation in play spaces and times. Players not only experiment with alternative identities but also alternative ways of being, moving and feeling.

Representation

Worlds in D&D are created by rules and systems that shape and limit player experiences. These rule systems occur in the texts that inform play such as the *Dungeon Masters Guide*, *Players Handbook*, and the *Monster Manual* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014). However, these texts do not occur in a vacuum: they are crafted by individuals and so embedded within them are explicit and implicit biases and inequalities (Garcia, 2017: 234). This leads to stereotypes, antagonising narratives and concepts of hierarchy embedded within systems of play. A large body of literature pertaining to D&D has explored the biases that emerge through representation within system texts and rules (Long, 2016; Garcia, 2017; Trammell, 2018; Stang and Trammell, 2020; Premont and Heine, 2021; Ferguson, 2022). These scholars critically assess how races, classes and monsters are constructed in texts and how this perpetuates problematic visions of gender, race, disability, and sexuality. Literature here typically explores the way texts express power and discipline through representation as a reflection of larger social contexts and prejudices.

‘Race’ has a fundamentally different meaning in D&D than it does in wider culture (Garcia, 2017: 240). Like class and skills, race is another choose-able, playable component of the game.

Players can select their racial group from a large selection of humanoid and anthropomorphic fanciful creatures (as well as the ‘basic’ human). This illustrates that ‘race’ in D&D is used to identify a selection of playable mythical beings instead of a method to characterise humans based on essentialist biological categories. However, this does not mean that D&D is able to escape prejudice as racist discourses translate into the representations and systems of play presented in D&D texts (Garcia, 2017; Premont and Heine, 2021). As such, fluid ethnicities are transformed into essentialised races with inherent biological differences (Hodes, 2019a, par. 22; Trammell 2018B, 444 cited in Albom, 2021: 9).

Playable races, especially those characterised as lesser or innately evil in handbooks become dehumanised and attacked. This is particularly the case of the ‘orc’ and ‘half-orc’ race, whose representation incorporates previous prejudices and pseudoscientific beliefs about racial hierarchy (Albom, 2021: 9). Hofer (2020 cited in Ferguson, 2022: 1) notes how the Orc intentionally alludes to human ethnic groups to perpetuate racial prejudice. Descriptions of orcs in the *Players Handbook* suggest that they are dark-skinned savage beasts with low intelligence and aggressive tendencies (Garcia, 2017: 241; Premont and Heine, 2021: 9). Embedded within these representations are imperialist civilising discourses that regard darker races as in-need of salvation. In the *Players Handbook* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014), the half-orc is able to ‘transcend’ the status of monster through their human heritage (Premont and Heine, 2021: 9). For instance, orcs are encouraged to venture into the human-dominated world to demonstrate their merit among ‘other more civilized races’ (Wizards of the Coast, 2014: 41). This example is just one of many that illustrates the ingrained historical and cultural racism present within representations of racial groups within D&D.

Systems that shape D&D also draw on misogynistic concepts of power and control (Garcia, 2017; Trammell, 2018; Pinkston, 2019; Stang and Trammell, 2020). Mechanics and representations within texts devalue and discriminate against women. For instance, in earlier

editions of D&D, women were not addressed in *Player Handbooks* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014), had a lower strength threshold than men and the charisma modifiers were replaced with beauty. This reflects women's restricted agency in earlier editions of the game (Trammell, 2018: 140). Perhaps the most famously chauvinistic representation put forth in D&D is the 'Harlot table' published in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons manual Dungeon Master's Guide* (Gyrax, 1979) (Trammell, 2018: 137). The table describes the type of random NPC encounters that can occur in a city. On this table women occupy one of three archetypical roles: night hag, harlot, good wife. Scholars found that these representations perpetuated a heteronormative and patriarchal cultural order that reflected the presumed primary male players (Trammell, 2018: 140).

Additionally, the *Monster Manual* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014) has come under scrutiny from Stang and Trammell (2020). Traditionally, the label monster was a mode of classification used to contain Otherness by the state and church. When looking at D&Ds representation of hags, Stang and Trammell (2020: 731) illustrate how the marker of monstrosity enforces a discursive patriarchal control that especially targets women's bodies and motherhood. Representation like the hag is deployed as method of surveillance to ensure that the moral boundaries within culture are efficiently policed (Stang and Trammell, 2020: 734). Thus, to restore the 'normative, dominant patriarchal order', a male 'hero' slays the hag (Stang and Trammell, 2020: 732). The killing of the monstrous woman, the abject mother, is an act of female containment. At the same time. by applying numerical association with monstrosity in the *Monster Manual* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014) through 'tables, pictures, and statistics' (Stang and Trammell, 2020: 743) naturalises this misogynist depiction of women. This brief example of the hag illustrates how representations in D&D reflected inherent misogynistic cultural and patriarchal historical structures.

Game texts contain problematic portrayals of race and gender in D&D; however, they are not static, nor strictly enforced. Players are able to express their agency to collaboratively dismantle or extend the problematic and discriminatory representations embedded within the rules and system (Garcia, 2017: 241/242). Therefore, there is the possibility to disrupt stereotypes that have been built into systems through players. To be considered holistically, representation needs to be studied through the reciprocal relationship between textual authority and player agency. Extending the work of Stang and Trammell (2020), I will explore player relationships to the texts and systems that shape play. However, unlike Stang and Trammell (2020), my theoretical work runs in conjunction with players' feelings and experiences of these texts with a focus on rules. Thus, I address similar processes of power but from individual experiences (bottom up) as opposed to textual discourse (top down).

Section Summary

In this review I have presented the various themes and motifs that surround the research landscape of D&D. Within each category I have illustrated how I will draw from previous scholarship, particularly building on themes surrounding alternative expressions and spaces that arose in identity and theological scholarship. However, unlike previous studies, I will develop my research in conjunction with queer theory, specifically surrounding how time and space can be queered. Theoretical considerations surrounding the queer potentials in space and time have rarely been explored in the context of D&D. Focus in this area is explored through video gaming as I will illustrate in this chapters next section. The gap of theoretical considerations towards the tabletop perhaps could be explained through the rise in queer space time theory that emerged around the same time as a surge in videogame play.

Yet, D&D has 'resurged' recently, becoming increasingly mainstream due to the rise of representations in media (such as *Stranger Things*) and popular YouTube series (Such as

Critical Role) (Sidhu and Carter, 2020). I also analyse the latest, fifth edition of the game which has a ‘theoretical gap to bridge’ as the majority of scholarship surrounding D&D was undertaken prior to its publication (Hollander, 2021: 318). My research stresses the importance of D&D as a location of study as its recent resurgence and mainstream popularity has given life to new avenues of study.

Queer Game Studies

In *Men Play Games*, Caillois (2001: 9/10) famously characterised play as: free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules and the made-up. Because of these principles, Caillois (2001) argues that play constitutes a fundamental element of human social and spiritual development. To play is to engage in potentiality and possibility. Arguably then, play works synchronously with queerness as they both offer parallel experiences with both approaches exploring borders: where normative constructions can be investigated, stretched, or dismantled (Harper et al, 2018: 5). Therefore, over the past few decades, scholarship has been emerging in the ‘young but not new’ field of queer game studies (Harper et al., 2018: 3). Queer game studies’ primary focus is digital videogames, with little research exploring the queer potential of the tabletop. Therefore, I will draw on and adapt concepts and theory from queer game studies under an emerging context of tabletop play.

Much of the existing research surrounding queerness in videogames focuses on LGBTQ content as opposed to ‘queerness as a mode of critique’ (Ruberg and Shaw, 2017: xv). Therefore, when I say queer game studies, I use queerness as a paradigm that facilitates a reconsideration of gaming and play (Ruberg and Shaw, 2017: xvii). This section is thus divided into two parts, one exploring representational and social game related practices as to contextualise the landscape at which queer play emerged. Following this is an exploration into how people can play queerly. My focus here is primarily attributed to queer play processes as

it is formational to my own research surrounding how alternative times and spaces can be created through play in D&D.

Contextualizing Queer Game Studies: LGBTQ Games and Gamers

LGBTQ narratives, homosexual sex, and same-sex marriage storylines are what the majority of the scholarship surrounding queer content concentrates upon (Chang, 2015: 7). If queerness appears in videogames games, it is generally stereotypical, normative, and reductive to binarities between gender and sexuality. In Shaw and Friesem's (2016: 3877) archive of queer videogame content, representation and inclusion are broken down into subcategories such as LGBTQ characters, relationships, queer actions to instances of homophobia. A large body of scholarship falls within these subcategories, exploring the positive or negative role of LGBTQ characters (Bragança et al., 2016; Ruberg, 2018A), how same-sex relationships are portrayed (Kang and Yang, 2018) as well as the prominence of homophobic and transphobic discourse in mainstream games (Colliver, 2020).

Some of the most prominently cited examples of queerness in games includes investigations into The Sims franchise (Consalvo, 2003; Lauteria 2011: 17) (Electronic Arts), The Dragon Age Trilogy (BioWare) (Greer, 2013; Østby, 2017; Krobová et al., 2015; Brown and Partridge, 2021) and the Fable series (Lionhead Studios) (Shaw, 2009; Greer, 2013). All of these explore non-normative romantic relationships, as same-sex and polyamorous options are made available during play. However, in these games, queerness is continuously a conspicuous form of classification, where men are noticeably queer through stereotypical signifiers and women through their relationships to other characters (Shaw and Friesem 2017: 3881). For instance, 'camp' NPCs in Fable III (Lionhead Studios 2010), are 'visibly homosexual' through the way they speak and dress (Shaw and Friesem 2017: 3881). There is also a 'complete and utter absence of transgender lives and experiences' in videogames (Lauteria 2011: 21). Therefore,

representation is underpinned by structures that constitute queer identities as ‘Other’. In-game representations are encrypted with hegemonic discourses that pervade all social realities. So, it is unsurprising that videogames perpetuate heterosexual masculinity as the norm whilst symbolically annihilating, underrepresenting, or misrepresenting queerness (Shaw, 2009: 379). Inclusion and representation are arguably better in the indie game market (Howard, 2021), as queer designers craft their own narratives and characters. For instance, Stone (2018) illustrated how she created her own game ‘Ritual Moon’ that allows players to imagine what a future would look like for a queer disabled woman.

This outline whilst brief illustrates the contextual landscape at which queer game studies evolved. LGBTQ representations and game spaces for queer players still remains problematic in mainstream gaming. There are, however, instances of resistance through player action and agency in crafting spaces as well as in the indie game market.

Approaches in Queer Game Studies

To achieve a more comprehensive exploration of queerness in games we must go beyond the simple parameters of representation - analysing games through a queer paradigm has wide-reaching and subversive potentialities (Ruberg, 2019: 15). Approaches in queer game studies thus questions experiences, playstyles, players, and game mechanics to denaturalise assumptions surrounding play, bodies, and world-making. Research in this realm of study does not attribute much time to LGBTQ content but rather to how videogames are designed, interpreted, and played (Ruberg, 2019: 15). To play queerly is to resist, express, and derive pleasure through anti-normative gaming practices.

More precisely, Chang (2015; 2017) coined the term ‘queergaming’ as a response to normativity’s entrenchment within games. Ultimately, queergaming proposes a method of play that lends to imagining and playing differently. This can be through challenging the notion that

the ‘ideal player’ is adolescent, straight, white, cisgender, masculine, able, male - whilst at the same time, embracing modding practices, glitches, and failures as methods of queer play (Chang, 2017: 15 - 17). Queergaming changes and challenges the built-in horizon of potentialities within games. In this section I dedicate time into analysing the most prominent queergaming practices that arose in scholarship; modding, failure and movement. All of these processes are formational in my own research surrounding queer play. Therefore, I address how my analysis will be informed by and builds on previous queer gaming scholarship.

Modding

Reflecting on the relationship between game design practices and queerness, scholarship has addressed how ‘modding’ acts a method of queer resistance and world-making (Lauteria, 2012; Chang 2017; Halberstam, 2017; Ruberg, 2018B; Welch, 2018; Howard, 2021). ‘Modding’ is derived from the term “to modify” to explain a method of altering game fabrics that allows players to perform functions not originally built into game design. In the 1990s modding arose to allow players to design new game settings for first person shooter games, using editors such as Quake Radiant to craft new levels (Schleiner, 2012: 38 - 39). Since then, modding capabilities have shifted from solely reconfiguring virtual game environments and characters to game mechanics – the rules that govern how a game is played. To mod is seen as a practice of reappropriating space against a ‘gamified global capitalism of Empire and its intrinsic connections to biopolitical, normative sexualities and genders’ (Lauteria, 2012: 5).

Halberstam’s (2017: 188) chapter in *Queer Game Studies*, invites readers to see modding not only as an altering in the realm of queer characters and narratives but in the change at the ‘level of algorithms’. This means transforming how audiences interact with and play games. In my analysis of discussions on modding practices I draw from Halberstam’s (2017) ideas and address how modding can facilitate queer systems and characters as well as new methods of

play that are not solely built around normative constructions of violence and progression. My analysis sits on the foundation of this previous work surrounding queer mods. However, as this work largely focuses on digital game and play structures, I evaluate the potential freedom provoked by the tabletops lack of rigid texts or rather players ability to ignore texts. Thus, I assess how during play in D&D players not only ‘mod algorithms’ but can repurpose game design entirely.

However, not all modding is inherently political or queer. In fact, many modding practices are for comedic purposes and continue to participate in the ‘heteronormative dominant culture that surrounds games’ (Pelurson, 2017: 174). For example, naked or voice altering mods such as the ‘Nude Raider’ mod for the protagonist Lara Croft of the established Tomb Raider series (Square Enix; Feral Interactive; Ubisoft,) is inherently sexist and heteronormative (Galloway, 2006: 114). Additionally, in the game Fallout 4 (Bethesda) players begin the game in a heterosexual marriage, however, modding communities altered the game so the player can be in a same-sex marriage throughout the opening, as well as, crafting a ‘femboy’ customisable option for the game’s male characters (Howard, 2021: 107). As illustrated through the examples, modding provides opportunities for critical reflections upon entrenched power systems in games, questioning normative assumptions surrounding the body, gender, and sexuality. Here, players resisted against normative constraints in creation that contained play. As such, they created alternatives which provided players with ‘new spaces’ whilst remodelling old ones (Chang, 2015: 28).

Failure

It is generally presumed that agents play videogames to win - that failure is a vital obstacle on the ‘road to success’ (Ruberg, 2019: 136). To fail in gameplay then questions the notion that winning is fundamental to enjoyment and progression. A body of scholarship in queer game

studies emerged following the work of Jesper Juul (2013) and Jack Halberstam (2011) who study failure in the context of gameplay and queer theory, respectively. They both illustrated the multifaced nature of failure and break down the dichotomy between success as “good” and failure as “bad”. Queer game studies scholarship views failure differently. Failure here becomes a form of queer resistance and non-normative pleasure seeking (Ruberg, 2015; Ruberg, 2017; Ruberg 2019; Halberstam, 2017; Youngblood, 2017). For Youngblood (2017: 212), failure weaves together game play and narrative to unsettle worldviews. Thus, in the context of videogames failure becomes a counter-affective method of transgression. It is able to destabilise the heteronormative ‘paradigms of failure and success’ (Ruberg, 2015: 115).

When looking at the video game *Burnout Revenge* (Criterion Software), Ruberg (2019: 138) suggests that flipping notions of success upside down prompts players to perform ‘spectacular scenes of self-destruction’. When playing *Burnout Revenge* (Criterion Software), the aim of the game is to lose, to destroy and so when interacting with this game players feel pleasure in their destruction. Or alternatively, individuals can “fail” in play practices. For instance, players have reported playing *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar Games) for hours as a law-abiding citizen (Ruberg, 2019: 146), which questions the violent and criminal ethos of the game. To embrace this method of play, is to ‘consider the utility of getting lost over finding our way’ (Halberstam, 2011: 19), to enjoy the moments of failure and inscribe them with new meanings.

In my own application of failure, I also scrutinise the phenomenological feeling of ‘fun’ and the cultural game structure of ‘success’. Like previous research, this stresses the importance of alternative feelings and interactions with game spaces as to create new and challenging experiences for players. However, I delve deeper into failure’s connection to queer literature on time and space, drawing on work from theorists to create my own theoretical framework based around risk and failure but also pleasure (see Chapter 1).

Movement and Progression

When looking at *Gone Home* (Fullbright Studios), a story driven game, Ruberg (2020: 633) indicates that gameplay is structured around a ‘queer wandering’. This portrays the story of a queer romance by wandering around a seemingly abandoned family home (Ruberg, 2020: 633), whereby play is not centred around a quest or objective but meandering and moving. The gameplay is orientated around non-linear movement around the game’s ‘temporal and spatial dimensions’ (Ruberg, 2020: 633). Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s (1997) *flâneur*, Ruberg (2020: 637) employs a reinterpretation through the lens of the queer *flânerie*: where the queer figure who wanders through the cityscapes, moves slowly in a way that resists reproduction, embraces leisure, and chooses ‘the meandering path over the straight’. The player of *Gone Home* (Fullbright Studios), much like the *flâneur* moves through the world slowly, strolling, observing, and avoiding direct routes. Research here explores the queerness inherent in movement. For instance, queer wandering in games has a temporal lens by resisting chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010), it does not provide the typical ‘tempo or approach to navigating space’ associated with games (Ruberg, 2020: 638). This illustrates how through play non-normative spaces and temporalities can be created and enacted.

Ruberg’s (2020) case study here suggests that queer engagement with space and time, wandering and pleasure disruption, creates alternative temporal and spatial dimensions through which subjects reject a heteronormative pull towards futurity, productivity, and normative desires. I build upon Ruberg’s (2020) work within my own analysis. However, Ruberg (2020) largely focuses on the spatial dimension of wandering, whereas in my research the temporal impacts, the slowness of wandering takes primacy. Unlike previous research, I also address player experiences and feelings of movement and slowness. This allows for movement and temporality to be looked at through a different lens.

Conclusion

Throughout this section I have presented the various themes that surround the research landscape of queer play, whilst illustrating how I will build on previous scholarship. My research will extend and build from prior scholarship through its move from the digital to the tabletop. The tabletop provokes more accessibility and freedom and so allows me to look at distinct modification practices, different constructions of failure and a distinct approach to non-normative movements. There is also a change of lens from game to player wherein I look at the perspective of play from those that are playing. Both of these considerations will allow me to develop my own theoretical considerations of queer play. Reviewing both scholarship in D&D and queer game studies has provided the foundations for the next chapters that draw on literature and primary research to produce new analysis.

Chapter 3 - Rolling the Dice: Failure, Success, and Queerness

Dice occupy a vital position when individuals are playing D&D - nearly every outcome, ability, and possibility are determined by dice. The core mechanics of the game occur through the 'D20' (a twenty-sided dice), these are ability checks, attack rolls, and saving throws (Wizards of the Coast, 2014: 7). Players fates are dependent on the number of the dice, to role high is to succeed whilst to role low is to fail. Will players notice the secret hatch, avoid being charmed or discover the history of an ancient artefact? All of these scenarios are based on whether a player is able to reach the "difficulty class" when rolling dice. To put it simply, the difficulty class is the number that determines how tough something is to do. This exists on a scale from one to twenty, with failure occurring at the lower end of the scale and success vice versa. The aftermath of dice rolling, success or failure, is then narrated by the DM. It is through every participant rolling dice that actively shapes the story, drives the narrative, and propels players into a diverse range of scenarios.

Success and failure are an integral part of play as they are built within the game fabrics. Player relationships with success and failure as a result of rolling becomes a location for potential queerness. On each side of the pole there are opportunities for play to move beyond normative experiences which implicates the construction of times and spaces. During moments of failure, players are able to divert into the realm of the transgressive as they have a counter affective relationship with play. At the same time, success becomes a location of excess that produces sites of extravagance. This chapter is thus divided into two interrelated sections: one that looks at the function of failure as a process of queer future making, this is then followed by an analysis of the excessive dimensions provoked by successes. Both sections are unified through their exploration into the production of alternative times and spaces for players and their characters. Here, I utilise the framework of risk and failure created in Chapter 1, as well as

drawing from larger arguments within queer temporal spatial and queer game studies scholarship. What is utilised particularly throughout this chapter is the utopian and heterotopic potentialities of the tabletop through player relationships with dice rolling.

The Function of Failure

There is a preconceived notion that, in play situations, there is a ‘correct’ method to act and enjoy, that the ‘right’ way to play is to ‘maximize normative enjoyment’ (Ruberg, 2015: 109) or to follow the linear paths set by design. This is because play is typically defined through its purpose as a ‘source of fun and amusement’ (Caillois, 2001: 6). Thus, there are norms attached to the affective and emotive responses that occur during play. Typically, failure is associated with sadness, incompetence, and anger whilst success with happiness, skill, and prowess. Juul (2013: 2) suggests when players play a game, they are choosing to engage in an activity during which ‘they are almost certain to fail’. Games, then, are built with failure in mind. To play, is to fail, at least some of the time (Ruberg, 2017: 201). Between these arguments is a paradox as enjoyment is essential to play, whilst at the same time games are built to make players fail which supposedly causes players to feel bad. Failure in games then becomes a key place to question the fun paradigm of play. It is here that I argue that player responses to failure are not polarized through either enjoyment or disappointment but rather they are diverse, numerous and complex.

Games are built systems where success and failure are both considered, there is however a difference in failing inside (the way a game intends you to fail) and failing outside a game (failing in a way that is not intended by the game) (Juul, 2013: 11; Ruberg, 2019: 146). To fail in the way a game intends does not disrupt the systems of the game or the cultural landscape that surrounds it because it is corresponding with the norms surrounding games and play. However, to feel and play in unexpected ways during failure allows for a questioning of the

goals of games, those ‘who play them, and pleasure more broadly’ (Ruberg, 2015: 110). Like Ruberg (2015; 2019), I argue that fun is hegemonic as it is inscribed with cultural and structural logics, and thus, to play against or towards alternative feelings is to divert into the realm of the queer. Players in my research engage with transgressive and queer dimensions through their emotive responses to failure. In these examples individuals are failing towards D&D and yet their relationship with play is counter affective, and thus countercultural. These moments of play contain heterotopic and queer spatial potentialities as responses to failure becomes a form of defiance, intervention, and world-making. Failure, here, paves the way for queer sites as it questions the norms surrounding play and pleasure.

When asked about experiences of failure and success, Liam retells an encounter when his character, Drancher, entered a room with an enemy trapped within: “I was not going to free him. I would not do that. I would never do that. And then I proceed to do exactly that because I messed up the roll”. When asked if he thought this was a good or bad outcome, he told me: “I wouldn't do it again, but I think it's OK to make mistakes... I think that it's funny”. Here, Liam expressed how he simultaneously felt disappointment and fun in his failure. This was a feeling shared by Sarah, as when asked about her experiences of rolling failure she explains:

“When I first started playing if I rolled badly, I'm letting down my party, I felt really bad...but now that's really funny, and that's something that like, becomes part – you can bring that into your personality, your character's personality... I think a group, team, party can turn any sort of negative thing into at least something fun.”

In *the Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam (2011) invites readers to challenge the notion that success is fundamental to continuation and enjoyment: pleasure and potentialities can be instead found in disappointment, failure, and pain. At this juncture, then, players expressions of failure can be inscribed with new meanings that implicate queer world making. This

proposition inspired Ruberg (2015: 115) to suggest that to reject fun in gameplay, the heteronormative paradigms of success and failure are dismantled. Built on masochistic logics, ‘no fun’ creates new worlds of experiences through affective feelings of disappointment, annoyance, boredom, sadness, and pain. Whilst, Liam and Sarah felt disappointment, they did not entirely reject fun in their creation of new worlds but felt it simultaneously with a variety of other emotions.

For both Liam and Sarah, there is a freeing sense of self destruction as their failure becomes met with feelings of pleasure and longing. This allows them to be freed from the structures of normative enjoyment and paradigms of success, where they embraced the “something fun” in the “negative”, the “funny” in “mistakes”. Caillois (2001: 28) acknowledged this particular semantic of play, he stated through playing agents can engage with ‘primitive joy in destruction and upset’. The dichotomy between pain and pleasure becomes broken down as players revel in a temporality of unproductivity, masochism, and self-annihilation. Here, time becomes orientated around a juxtaposing annihilation and fun. The pull towards the future rests on a dialectic between the positivity of joy accompanied by the risk of violence; to characters, to play and to narratives. Near death experiences, character pain and stand-still narratives are all consequences of dice rolling failures, all of which lead into a destruction of people, places, and times. Yet, at the same time players long to continue along their destructive paths.

Queer play here embodies a drive towards annihilation (Edelman, 2004: 27) as Liam and Sarah revel in a *jouissance*, an exhalation of despair that occurs within the transgressive dimension of failure and the risk of consequences attached to such failure. Bound towards a ‘corrosive enjoyment’ (Edelman, 2004: 30), Liam and Sarah engage with an excessive, transgressive kind of pleasure that is built on risk and consequence. They continue to play, continue to roll, and find enjoyment in an abject method of play that works to destroy the subject of the player character and the structure of normative narrative progression. However, in opposition to

Edelman's (2004) argument that this queer negativity and *jouissance* destroys the future, I suggest failure and the pleasure derived from it allows for the continual creation of new, negative queer futures. This notion of destructive creation is epitomised perfectly in the words of Connor when he stated that:

“Bad rolling is deemed a failure and it's called a failed dice roll, but in my personal opinion, it's part of the story. Succeeding or failing isn't a failure, it's just building on a building. On the story, you might have failed in what you were trying to do, but all it's doing is building on the story that is being told.”

Like Liam and Sarah, Connor experiences creation in failure. This “building on a building” mirrors how failure becomes a place of new narrative and experience creation. Player actions and rolling unfolds new and potential future pathways whilst simultaneously destroying potential other ones. These opportunities allow for a vision of queer play as a ‘horizon’ (Muñoz, 2019) as this creation is defined by its incomplete, perpetually creating state. In D&D there is a ‘constant mutation’ (Kawitzky, 2020: 135) rooted in inconclusiveness and exploration. For example, going back to Liam's mistake of freeing an enemy we are able to see how dice rolling destroys linearity and predetermined structures whilst reflexively creating new visions of the future. Liam could have been successful and never had to think of the enemy again, but through his low roll he had to imagine a narrative beyond his initial vision. He had to see the enemy now as a threat and question how he should approach that threat. His “mistake” illustrates Connor's notion of “building” - through failure, visions of futures are cooperatively experimental and communally constructed.

Cooperative and continual “building” at the level of the tabletop creates a temporality that is continuous, information, and eternal. It is a time that is growing through failure, where the past, present, and future is always created. Through play, time is ‘building up and topping its own

summit' (Foucault, 1986: 26). Here, time is in flux, stretching towards a future that is continually pushing past the parameters of what the future was predicted or intended to be. Queer space and time during moments of failure are built on an instability of the 'normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure' (Halberstam, 2005: 26). The capitalist temporal frames of reproduction and productivity are broken down and replaced by flux and uncertainty. Through failure, players are able to withdraw from linearity and 'straight time' (Muñoz, 2019) that propels them towards a valuable, successful future. They are instead, defined by a lifeworld of imperfection, abjection, and inadequacy.

In this flux, there is a presentation of two moments, two dialectical feelings. This is illustrated by Liam and Sarah who claim on behalf of the character, narrative, or goal of the party there is the moment of disappointment, the "mistake" or "negative", yet in the moment of the social, the player, there is the "something fun". There is the actions of the player and the outcome for a character. These two moments and feelings occur simultaneously, there exists a midpoint, a liminality, an in-between. Through the dialectic between disappointment and fun, play exists in a state of liminality where players revel in the masochism of failure, the negativity, the *jouissance* of disappointment. Therefore, the space of the board on the table becomes heterotopic through its exhibition of two moments (Foucault, 1986): play and the outside world, the site of the real, the tangible, the player and the imaginary, fantasy space of play.

Additionally, through having synchronised feelings of disappointment and fun players reframe how they interact with play. There is a breakdown and rupture in the hegemonic assumptions surrounding how players *should* play. This is because when players in my research experienced failure, disappointment, and fun simultaneously they destroyed the notion that the 'right' way to play is to 'maximize normative enjoyment' (Ruberg, 2015: 109). Frustration through failure can be added to Muñoz's (2019: 176) list of 'negative sentiments' which act as an affective, emotional critique of current cultural and social situations. A less conventional future therefore

unfolds through facilitating an imagination of other possibilities beyond initial intentions, feelings, and narratives.

Arguably, utopia and heterotopia are both created here despite Foucault's (1986: 24) claim that 'utopias are sites with no real place'. When reframed in Muñoz's (2019) argument that stresses the realness of the utopia through its position in the collective imagination of players, the heterotopia and queer utopia can exist together in the context of D&D. Heterotopic play is being acted out in the ever-changing present, encapsulating the simultaneous sensations of players. By contrast, queer utopia exists within the player imagination: the improvised fabric of the game allows for a constantly moving horizon of possible outcomes, narratives, and player experiences. These are all implicated by dice rolling, player intention and outcomes - where "restrictions are limited to your imagination and the roll of a dice" (Connor).

Unlike other players when discussing rolling, Helena expressed how she felt only annoyance and disappointment when rolling "just doesn't work out". For Helena, failure prevented her from expressing her desires as she suggested how she felt restricted and contained by dice rolling:

"I want to roleplay and if the dice don't allow me to do what I want it's still a little bit difficult for me to accept it."

Helena's desired conversations, movements, and futures were inhibited by rolling failure. No pleasure was felt, but instead Helena's play was stunted before she felt that she had the opportunity to explore. Failure in this instance became a barrier for desire and a location of restriction. Creation of new narratives and spaces was prevented as a result of Helena's desires being denied as she reclined during moments of failure. For instance, rolling low on a perception check would inhibit vision and make the routes available to her stricter. Helena did not revel in the negativity of failure (Edelman, 2004), nor did she craft new avenues of pleasure

and imagination (Muñoz, 2019). In examples of Helena's play, futures were built on restriction and prevention as opposed to alternative pleasure and desire. Helena's opposition to failure illustrates the limitations within queer time and space construction as we must remain critical of the queer paradigm as it does not encompass the experiences of all agents.

Success and Excessive Play

Failure was not the sole method through which players in my research crafted new times and spaces. On the other side of the same coin, extreme success through "high rolls" arguably extends notions of queer play. However, unlike failure, success is not inherently transgressive but *excessive*. Excessive play extends the definition of queer play into the realm of the unnecessary, the 'too much', the flamboyant extravagance often associated with queerness (Geczy and Karaminas, 2013: 17). Typically, high rolls are met with what participants in interviews identified as the "rule of cool". The "rule of cool" occurs in play when the DM creates moments and experiences that go beyond the predetermined capabilities or expectations in official rulebooks to allow players to do something cool, fun, or cinematic. DM Robert expressed a keen usage of the rule of cool as a method to reward players for high rolls and as a facilitator of fun for groups. When asked about his stance on abiding strictly to rules he suggested that:

"You know if somebody rolls very, very well, there's nothing within the book that says you know you can't do a back flip and chop somebody's heads off and then you like land on one foot, and then you'd like I don't know punch a dude and then catch your baby or something. If you want to do that because it creates a fun memorable moment."

Here, Robert's example gets more and more ridiculous, more and more extravagant, flamboyant even. This illustrates how he attempts to create moments of play that go beyond normative expectations. In an article surrounding fashion at Mumbai pride, Horton (2020: 296)

explains how queer subjects perform an excessive flamboyance in clothing and gesture as a mode of creating space. These excessive styles and performances counteract the demands of normative lifestyles, normative dressing, and normative acting. Style for queer people ‘is both the sign of their exclusion and the mode by which they survive’ (Halberstam, 2005: 267) – their excess is both a marker of their difference and of their power. In the same vein, temporalities of excess are created through high rolling during play. Temporalities of excess lay on an intentionally extravagant logic where through extreme success, potentialities are no longer bound by rules but are improvised by what can possibly be imagined. For example, Robert goes on to provide an example of the “rule of cool” in a game he oversaw, where players levitated a bore as a method of incapacitating and moving it:

“The players are having a lot of fun and it still gets across to like the point that I wanted, so why not lean into the ludicrousness of it? Like start describing the bore as kind of like rotating in zero G's. The little legs kicking in the air - just steer into the madness.”

Robert expressed how his players could have easily killed and dragged the bore to achieve the end goal of this quest, how the levitation was completely unnecessary. Yet, when accompanied by a high dice roll, player imagination transformed a mundane task into a moment of “ludicrousness” driven by exaggeration. A temporality of excess is created where something that is not possible, necessary or should not happen, happens *just because*. There is a lean into absurdity of abnormality to create a fleeting but queer method of play. Like in drag there is an exaggeration, drag artists overstate their femininity, and here players overstate their success. Both drag and success are built on a logic of ‘too much’.

The normative expectations of play are pushed during these moments which challenges the existing ontological assumptions surrounding how we should play. When you roll high possibilities are endless, ridiculous, and queer, not contained by rules or expectations. Moments

and spaces of queer excess are created through fleeting but extreme fanatic instants. There is a transgressive dimension to excessive play. It is counter normative through its interaction with the extreme. Unlike failure, success revolves around a queer positivity, a production. It is akin to moments of ‘ecstatic time’ (Muñoz, 2019), built around pleasure and desire because there is an exhalation and pleasure for players when experiencing this intense queer space and time. Another example of this comes from Sarah:

“Climbing into it (an enemy) and like cutting it from the inside.... She probably would have not been able to do that in the real world and also probably according to the rules in the Players handbook, but the DM was like that's super cool, so she did it and she rolled really well, and it was great.”

To an extent, times of excess resembles Halberstam’s (2005: 312) ‘vertiginous temporal space’, where individuals are dislodged from their own subjectivity and projected into moments. During these moments individuals are living in an instant that simultaneously exists both inside and outside of place and time. Players are situated within the play spaces, but player characters are existing, briefly in a moment. Therefore, players are not projected to the future but living in the here, the now. Unlike failure, there is not an imagination of future possibilities, but a living in/for a moment. As such there is a questioning that the notion of success is associated with linearity and progression, the straight and natural path forwards. Success in this instance is queer and moves beyond the normative limits of play. Success is suggested to be inherently heteronormative, however in this interrogation of excessive play, success becomes loaded with queer potentialities as something unproductive, frivolous, and inconsequential.

Conclusion

During these moments of failure and success the norms of the game and play are pushed to their limits. I have scrutinised the phenomenological feeling of ‘fun’ and the cultural play

structure of success, each of which illustrated that to play or feel differently opened players up to new, less conventional futures and desires. To play queerly here is to feel in unexpected and diverse ways. In the next chapter that follows, player creativity takes centrality, where through creation they also push the confines of play and feeling

Chapter 4 - World-making: Homebrewing and One Shots

During play, individuals are building worlds. This can be literally through the creation of characters, landscapes, and stories, but also through play situations in which the world is being brought to life by player interaction. These worlds are created in the imagination of players and often visualised through drawings of maps, figurines of characters and original character artworks. When a player moves their figurine on a map, they are moving their character in a living, breathing world - a world of the fantastic, populated with magic, mythical creatures, and adventures to pursue. Through exploratory performative interactions and creations, RPGs can present understandings of player, character, world, and self (Kawitzky, 2020: 134). Such activities facilitate the creation of spaces and times.

Throughout a given game of D&D individuals are typically engaging with the realms of fantasy and play, both of which craft a ‘performative space apart’ (Kawitzky, 2020: 132), a ‘separate occupation’ of expression (Caillois, 2001: 6) and sites of ‘difference, contingency, and pluralism’ (Saler, 2012: 7). There is the space of play that exists isolated from the rest of ‘normal’ life and a carefully crafted fantasy location with its own cultures, societies, and civilisations. Both of these sites operate through and against normative arrangements (Laycock, 2015), often inverting values of conventional life, creating altered realities for individuals and their characters. Creating altered realities, spaces of suspension – sites of freedom and expression - is a historically queer practice (Kawitzky, 2020: 132). It is rooted within a necessity of access; access to places that are not ruled by systems that threaten, shun or Other queer expression. It is at this juncture at which I explore how world-building and play in D&D act as a form of queer expression - for Otherness and alternative creations.

In this section I look at two processes of world-building and play which participants in interviews continually discussed: “homebrewed”, player defined rules and short, standalone

games referred to as “one-shots”. Both of these instances look at how specific world-building and creation practices produces differing play experiences and desires, often aligning with queer potentialities in the arrangements of time and space. Homebrewed worlds reflect a want to play and create differently, whilst one-shots alter the ways in which players engage with such play and creation.

Breaking the Pillars: A New System in Play

In its traditional sense, homebrewing is the crafting of alcohol at home as opposed to a shop or factory. In the D&D community world-building from player creations is also commonly known as 'homebrewing'. Like modding in the context of videogames (see Chapter 2), homebrewing is a method for players to modify game and play systems. Outside of the realm of the digital, modding or homebrewing in D&D strays away from the ‘official’ content published by Wizards of the Coast (2014) to create their own worlds, characters, and rules. Player’s craft new bodies, worlds, and times that do not exist within these official texts, altering the fabric of the worlds and game that they play. I argue that homebrewed worlds and characters can be built on a queer expression.

The rules in D&D texts, primarily the *Players Handbook* and *Dungeon Masters Guide* (Wizards of the Coast, 2014), were referred to by players during interviews as a “guideline”, a “fundamental foundation” and “a means to an end to create a good story”. Game worlds and play situations are thus built with these rules and systems in mind, as Turkle tells us (1984: 83 cited in Nitsche 2008: 25): ‘Beyond the fantasy, there are always rules’. At the same time, tabletop RPGs stress an open-endedness where in moments of play, rules can be created, modified, or destroyed all together. Videogames reject ‘co-authorship; (Stang, 2019). However, unlike in videogames, D&D does not rely on a strict text, therefore, there is a shift from the designer’s authored mechanics to player-authored social agreements and ‘house rules,

developed in play’ (Sturrock, 2015: 65). As such, player agency and authorship can take centrality in some instances. As interview participant Robert suggested: “The Rules are like scaffolding - you can build around it, but the scaffolding should never dictate the building.”

In this chapter I investigate the method through which the foundations of game rules can be modified or completely obliterated through play, exploring the queer and political potential of homebrewing. However, it is worth mentioning that homebrewing is a normative and encouraged practice of D&D. During interviews all participants were involved in a homebrewed campaign created by a DM, and many expressed how they created their own rules, systems, races, and items during play. Even the widely used official website (D&D Beyond) for D&D has homebrewing pages that urges and facilitates the creation of player content. Thus, there needs to be a distinction between playing within and against the built system of D&D. Like failing inside a game in Chapter 3 (Juul, 2013: 11; Ruberg, 2019: 146), homebrewing allows for creativity in a way that the game deems appropriate. As Connor stated, “the rules in D&D are there to be broken” - the creation of new races, new spells and new worlds is an encouraged, widespread, and normative game practice in D&D.

Yet, there were also instances of homebrewing that played and created against the system, disrupting the pillars on which the game stands. In this sense, rule breaking, like counter affective feelings in failure, is political. It rejects normative processes of containment as players disturbed the foundations and histories which the game stands on. Homebrewing here, becomes a place of queer potential as it creates a space and time of alternative creation/playing as well as resistance. Since gameplay is not designed with consideration of unrestricted freedom participants in my research had to modify or homebrew normative systems to reflect their own expressions, desires, and playstyles. Queerness here becomes a process of constantly ‘recoding and rebuilding worlds’ (Halberstam, 2017: 187). DM Robert expressed a rebuilding and recoding in line with one of his player’s desires:

“The vast majority of Dungeons & Dragons really revolves around kind of fighting, and that's not really the spirit that this person has at the table. They are much more of a talker. They want to solve problems peacefully.”

When Robert's player expressed a peaceful approach to play, both players worked together to remould aspects of the 'ranger' class system. One example included - altering the purpose and use of the ranger's companion. Typically, when a ranger reaches 3rd level, they gain the ability to have a companion, usually a small or medium sized animal that 'is trained to fight alongside' the party (Players Handbook: 93). However, as Robert's player did not enjoy combat nor the idea that her companion would be in danger, they altered and created new rules that repurposed the companion from fighter to scout. In this instance, when players communicated and collaborated, they open the tabletop up to become a utopian subcultural rehearsal space. In D&D rules are a 'social process' (Cross, 2012: 78) at the same time the crafting of temporal and spatial relations is also an inherently collaborative process (Halberstam, 2005: 265). Communication between Robert and his player meant that they were able to establish needs, wants, and boundaries that let them manipulate the official content of the game.

Perhaps the most intriguing process in the case of Robert's homebrewing rules is the denial of violence in place of communication. This offers a subversive potential through its spirit of disruption, denial, and alternative. There exist three pillars of adventure in D&D, one of them is 'combat' (D&D Basic Rules, 2018: 6). However, Robert shatters this pillar in-line with his players wish to act democratically and peacefully. As such, new routes and possibilities were created. Where the player would have simply engaged in a restrictive, turn based combat sequence, they instead had to find alternative methods of encountering situations such as dialogue or missing them out completely. Each movement Robert and his player made created the environment below their feet, with each step crafting a new vision for the future. The 'paradigmatic markers' (Halberstam, 2005) of play, namely combat as a core narrative device,

were questioned in these moments. Robert's player did not engage with a progression where resolution and movement forward were based upon combat and so they strolled away from the easiest and most linear direction forwards.

Additionally, there was also a destruction of both masculine and hegemonic assumption that violence is central to histories of D&D (Albom, 2021). This is because D&D rules have historically cultivated a masculinised gameplay style built on 'militaristic and patriarchal values' (Trammell, 2018: 135) that promote violence and domination over the more feminised forms of expression. D&D was influenced by war-gamming and so obtained attributes of aggression where 'pleasure is derived from exerting control or a show of excellence – the ability to defeat monsters and win battles' (Kawitzky, 2020: 130). Here, the non-combative encounters created through Robert's modification and rule modifying generates a heterotopic game space of 'contestation and inversion' (Foucault, 1986). Peaceful play questions the basic rules of D&D, and the combative playstyle foundation that it lies upon and so it dually contests and inverts normative expectations of a typical game of D&D. To avoid or not prioritise battles is a call to question conventions of D&D play, and so challenges the norms surrounding rules and structures of play. As such, here, Roberts group member played 'queerly' through a style that acted counter to the normative experiences of D&D as a game.

Despite the malleability that was expressed by Robert and his player, official texts exist for a purpose. They produce an 'authoritative voice that allows players to start from a professionally designed setting and rule set, sparing one the trouble of having to start from a blank slate' (Cross, 2012: 79). Thus, it is unsurprising that most instances of homebrewing fell within normative confines. Typical instances of homebrewing were either minor rule modifications, where the pillars lay unquestioned, or aesthetic components for player characters. Homebrewed content therefore tended to rely on the conventional methods of play and game. For instance, Ash told me how their main campaign character is part human and part Aasimar, a celestial

being who was born with wings but could not fly - He could not fly because “flying mechanics are complicated” and so Ash’s character was limited by the mechanics of the game. Their character could not move differently or approach situations differently despite imaginative homebrewing. Thus, homebrewing capabilities are still largely limited and confined which restricts expression in play.

For players to continue to play queerly, they need to engage in more disruptive homebrewing processes – ones that result in player expression beyond the confines of the game. Like in digital modding, there must be a distinction between ‘radical gameplay’ and ‘radical graphics’ (Galloway, 2006, 125). For homebrewing to be truly resistant, truly queer, truly utopian, it must disrupt play rather than just aesthetics. This allows for a critiquing of both game and play itself. For homebrewing to be a radical, political countergaming practice, players should ‘reinvent the architectural flow of play and the game’s position in the world’, rather than solely character appearances and minor rules (Galloway, 2006, 125).

One Shots: Risk and Experimentation

In the basic rules for D&D, it explains a campaign as a ‘whole series—a string of adventures joined together, with a consistent group of adventurers following the narrative from start to finish’ (D&D basic rules, 2018: 6). Often campaigns run for many games over a long course of time, following the same characters along an overarching narrative. Worlds here are built to a massive scale, containing histories and cultures. All participants illustrated a commitment to a long “main campaign” game. By contrast, “one-shots” that are short, stand-alone, and self-contained sessions offer a different player experience. Unlike in homebrewed campaign worlds, one-shot worlds are often built with this small and self-contained experience in mind. As Robert’s analogy amply explains, one-shots for a DM is like “you’re an author trying to write a book - but you only have 50 pages”.

Through one-shots, different stories, narratives, and experiences become available to players. One-shots provide an alternative to the typical D&D campaign. During these one-shot sessions players encountered different methods of creating and playing that were atypical in a “normal” game of D&D. In this section, I explore how players constructed time and space in one-shots and how this provides a place of risk, experimentation and most importantly alternative. This section is divided by notions of risk and experimentation, both of which offer a different player experience to a conventional game of D&D.

Risk of death and injury are familiar for players who explore the worlds of D&D. In campaign games, players felt a great deal of unease when their characters, narratives, and worlds came under threat. However, during one-shots players expressed how this sense of threat dissipated – allowing them to play in a more risk adverse and chaotic way. Connor explained:

“I play like a madman in a one shot, whereas I do try and be at least a little bit careful in an actual game where my character's life is at stake but in a one-shot, yeah, I'll take every risk.”

To take “every risk” meant that Connor intentionally placed his temporary character in more situations of danger. Often, these situations have consequences, as Sarah explained. A one-shot she played led to a “TPK”, or a total party kill, meaning that every player character died during her game. Here, play became centred on risk. During one-shots players did not feel the same weight of consequences so became more inclined to play towards threat, towards death. Connor and Sarah engaged in a play that was careless and risky as they had no attachments to their characters or narrative of this world. One-shots became a place of risky isolation where individuals could throw consequences to the wall and play without concern.

Characters created for the purpose of one-shots become figured by this risk and self-destruction as it was their core signifier; they existed for that one, inconsequential, risky game. To echo the work of Edelman (2004: 38), they became ‘sinthomosexuals’ - figures of antisociality and

annihilation who are projected by the death drive, abjection, and destruction. The traditional explanation of the sinthomosexual expounds an individual who retaliates against the future through disengagement with the Child and thus with reproduction, capitalism, and the future. Thereby when a player character becomes a sinthomosexual, productivity and reproduction are not the driving forces of their play. Instead, characters were to be used once for the short and inconsequential period of a one shot. Projected not by narrative completion but by a risky, more paidiac form of play - which was 'active, tumultuous, exuberant, and spontaneous' (Caillios, 2001: x) as opposed a to ludic, calculated, confined, and structured method of operation.

Clark (2020: 148) notes how the 'figure of the sinthomosexual is equally applicable to the figure of death' – as an intangible force that longs to disrupt existence. In this sense, Sarah's total party kill example highlights how her player character, through death, becomes erased of their existence and are signified by their very negativity as a "dead character". To follow death is to push against the linear temporality marked by birth, reproduction, and death. As Bataille and Hurley (1988: 32) note, the most remarkable form of excess is death. Thereby, when all characters die, they are engaging with a wastefulness that produced a surplus, an excess of energy never to be used for play. There was a complete bypass of reproduction, and productivity as players were not even able to "complete" the one-shot narrative. To play in line with risk, death and incompleteness embraces the 'powerful act of playing the "wrong" way' (Ruberg, 2019: 18). To not play, to be unfinished, is arguably the most resistant form of playing – one that disrupts play's preconceived purpose.

Chess (2016) argues that in traditional forms of media such as film there is a heteronormative nature attached to narrative through its mirroring of heterosexual orgasmic pleasure. Typically, narratives progress in a way that prioritises a built up towards climax, an escalation of events that lead to resolution and satisfaction. When audiences are engaging with a narrative there is a preconception that for it to be considered gratifying that it must 'end

productively/reproductively’ (Chess, 2016: 87). What connects music, films, books with sex are the rhymes of ‘tumescence and detumescence, of tension and resolution, of intensification to the point of climax and consummation’ (Scholes, 1979: 26). This narrative projection is built on a heteronormative temporality that sees pleasure and desire at a singular instance of release. Yet, the incomplete one-shot rests on a queer unproductivity that exists outside of the milestones of this heterotemporality, this chronormativity (Freeman, 2010). Outside the order of logics. The heteronormative demands of narrative climax are not met, as incomplete narratives are unconcerned with reproductive, productive acts. The game here may end at the beginning or right in the middle of the narrative, suspended without a point of ‘climax’ or ‘consummation’ (Scholes, 1979: 26). As Chess (2016: 88) suggests in the context of video games, the pleasure for players is routed in ‘becoming, rather than...coming’. Death and incompleteness were never the case in discussions surrounding main campaign games as players expressed how there were often “loopholes” or “some bullshit” that prevented their valued characters from dying.

At the same time, alternative pleasure can be found in one-shots (like in videogames), not through ‘reproductive completion, but in the process of play’ (Chess, 2016: 90). The condensed form of one-shots allowed for experimentation beyond just risk but with fun, pleasure, *jouissance* and excess. As Ollie suggested, one-shots time is like “dream time...You skip right from interesting bit to interesting bit. You’re going holiday and you think home, plane, France, you don’t think about the taxi to the airport”. This highlights how players can have multiple climaxes, multiple instances of pleasure in a short but intense period of time - jumping from pleasure to pleasure. This loosens the grip of narrative, forcing play in an inevitable direction to centre it around the flow of moments or “interesting bit[s]”. Experimentation was also key in one-shots. Many players found one-shots as a place to experiment with new characters as Connor suggested:

“I think my favourite part about one-shots is being able to create a brand-new character”.

One-shots offered a short and intense period to experiment with an alternative identity – both to their primary ego identity, their self but also their main character in a campaign game. This is because one-shots typically occurred alongside or during “breaks” of main campaign games. There was a fluidity here at which players oscillated to new and familiar characters. For instance, Liam expressed how in a one-shot he played as an avian creature that could not communicate through traditional verbal language. He could only repeat back phrases that he had encountered or simply write his thoughts down on a small chalk board. Liam remarked how this would be tedious in his main campaign game but within a one-shot it allowed new avenues for interesting encounters and communicating.

Here there was a fluid movement to different characters mirroring the queer heterotopia’s reliance on nomadology, unfixed and exploratory subjectivities (Jones, 2009: 3). Where queer heterotopias are built on a hybridization, multiplication, and amplification of ‘difference and identities’ (Jones, 2009: 12), so too could you argue that one-shots offer a playful experimentation with posthuman, post-self-subjectivities. Characters here are a spatially imaginative formulation of new bodies with ‘new organs’ (Halberstam, 2005: 164). Yet these characters did not just have ‘new organs’, but new bodies completely, ones with wings, beaks, tails, claws, scales, hoofs, and horns. A body with these qualities crafts a new form of embodiment that creates new spatial frames organised around fluidity and expression. Players here could jump from game to game, body to body.

Conclusion

During moments when players crafted their own rules there was a queer potential to create spaces and temporalities that pushed against the normative confines of game and play. At the same time, players who engaged with one-shots flirted with moments of risky play and

experimental creations leading to locations of both negativity and fluidity. Each of these points have illustrated that to create and play differently opens the potential for queerer spaces to be crafted – ones that resist the heteronormative flow forwards and push back against normative methods of creation confinement. Yet, these potentials were limited under the prescriptive mechanics of D&D rules or confined to smaller one-shot games. Thereby, to continue to play queerly there needs to be a revel in radical creation, fluidity, and destructive engagements. In the next chapter, the resistance towards heteronormative flows takes centrality, this however, is not illustrated through creation but through movements.

Chapter 5 - Movements in Play: Slowness and Boredom

De Certeau (1984) was able to detach himself from what he called the *practices of everyday life* when he viewed New York from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre. His god-like, panoramic view of the city allowed De Certeau (1984: 91) to see the city as it created itself ‘hour to hour’, forming new futures and throwing away previous accomplishments. The walker at the street level moved in a way that De Certeau (1984: xix) deemed as ‘tactical’, an everyday practice that resisted the ‘strategies’ of powerful institutions. In other words, the walker, through taking detours or shortcuts defied the totalising power of the city, the map and by proxy the map creator, the city proprietor. Here, De Certeau (1984) is analysing how individual movements create space through resistance and alternative paths. Walking, wandering, and movement transforms places into lived environments.

Like the city, the tabletop is brought to life through interaction. Streets become living, breathing places through the routes, explorations, and movements that people make. On the tabletop this movement, this practice, is play. Are the players not like De Certeau (1984) viewing the tabletop from the same panoptic perspective above, seeing the world unfold beneath them from the walking, and movements of their player characters? These movements can be the motion of the player through rolling dice, touching game pieces, and writing on character sheets but also the actions of player characters who occupy and interact with a fantastic, crafted world. I argue that, like a cityscape, movements contribute to building spaces - where during play individuals open themselves up to multiple instances of queer world-making. As Morris (2004: 678) notes, ‘it is the ‘turns’ and ‘detours’ of the walker that transform place into space’. The turns, detours, and meandering of the player quite literally create the worlds, paths, people, times, and spaces of a D&D game as it is through co-operative interactions with space where games are brought to life.

In this section, I particularly look at the temporal dimensions of movement, how the speed of movement produces different times and spaces for the individuals that are moving. My focus here is how agents and their characters move slowly, in what I term as ‘slow play’. I address two instances of slow play that arose during interviews: wandering and boredom. I focus particularly on how wandering “off the rails” produces new locations and playstyles built against the notion of linear play paths and how affective responses to boredom allows for non-normative movements both inside and outside the tabletop. Such non-normative movements like the streets viewed by De Certeau (1984: xxi) ‘fill with forest of their desires and goals’, this is a desire, a goal, to play differently. Thereby, to move slowly in these ways is unified by their ability to form a life around a queer tempo that resists chrononormative passages of time (Freeman, 2010) and normative play movements.

Living in the Slow Moment

During discussions surrounding the passage of time which took place throughout play, participants in interviews continuously distinguished between an “in-game” and “out of game” temporality. Time in game did not follow the same tempo and linearity of time outside the game. Play as a ‘separate occupation’ (Caillois, 2001: 6) becomes illustrated wholly in an analysis of play time as player characters were not bound by seconds, minutes or hours like agents sat around the table. This separation meant unlike the player, the character was able to slow down, fast forward or pause the clock all together. As such, all interview participants remarked that there was a disjuncture between the slowness of a campaign game and the “normal” time of play. Helena gave me an example:

“So, in total it goes much more slowly. Much, much more slowly. I mean the last game – I think game time was around 10 minutes and we played for hours.”

Players explained that the reason for this slowness were multiple; they took their time exploring locations, engaged in lengthy turn-based combat sessions, and had in-depth “table talk” discussions. All these play practises decelerated play, facilitating a wandering, meandering approach to navigating space. Perfect performance and normative progression were pushed to the side-lines. Players instead took careful consideration of their decisions, discussing in-depth their next move or their plan of action. They also engaged in unproductive moments of exploration – looking at their surroundings, touching objects and interacting with NPCs. During long combat sequences play froze-in-time as characters were unable to move freely as they awaited their next turn. These practices of play manifest a queer temporality that focuses on player exploration and wasted time as opposed to linear narrative progression and productivity.

In the last chapter of Schoonover and Galt’s (2016: 261) *Queer Cinema in the World*, they suggest that a queer cinematic time can be created through ‘anachronism, asynchrony, slowness, inattention, excision, and ellipsis’. They note that slowness has a queer dimension. In film, this includes long sequences with very little happening which yields an uninhabited time that is ripe with possibility and desires (Schoonover and Galt, 2016: 279). Slowness thus produces a cinematic temporality that distends and delays time to create new sites of queer longing. When watching slow cinema there are two bodies at work: the body of the spectator and the body of the film screen (Schoonover, 2012: 68). Like film, the tabletop produces two slow bodies: the body of the player and the body of the board. Here, I refer to the term ‘slow play’ to provoke a discussion between slowness, queerness, and relationships between play and the ‘heterocentric domination over time telling’ (Schoonover, and Galt, 2016: 262).

Slow play encourages an unproductive wastefulness: through slowness play as an occasion of ‘pure waste’ (Caillois, 2001: 5- 6) becomes explicitly visible. When players revel in these slow moments they are resisting the pulling forces of productivity and progression. This is arguably

an inherent quality of some forms of play, despite strategies to contain the threat of play by making it productive and purposeful. Queerness is interconnected with notions of waste as to live queerly is to waste time, waste lives, waste productivity (Schoonover, 2012: 73). Queers revel while normative others produce. Slowness thus queers play through its indulgence in time, wasting moments and energy for players and their characters.

On the surface, slow play appears to negate the future (Edelman, 2004). It resists the pathway towards futurity and production. However, the future appears to still be something players strive towards but in a delayed, distended fashion crafted around potentialities and alternatives. This is exemplified in Ash's example when their players went "off the rails":

"Usually when they get a crazy idea that they think is funny I um – play it out with them because I'm not in a rush to get anywhere. I think if they wanna do it then sure. I had this instance – I forgot the name of the spell – but the bard changed their appearance to look like the mayor of the city. Disguise self is the spell. Like in the beginning they did it to get some police people off their back but in the end, they had a whole field day pretending to be the mayor."

Ash's "no rush" approach to play facilitated a moment of slowness for their players and player characters, as neither progress towards their preconceived shared goals: to complete the campaign, resolve the ills in the fantasy world and receive rewards for such behaviour. Instead, players moved into an open and flexible time and space where slowness acted as the vehicle for a present that consisted of multiple stories, multiple narratives. Ash remarked how at first their players using a 'disguise self' spell was a method to aid the narrative and their characters, but then took it further as they were just having fun beyond their primary objectives. This focus on fun slowed time as within these moments nothing that aided narrative progression was occurring. There was not just one flow toward a preconceived future, but a complex, plurality

of temporal intricacies. Thus, through meandering and player improvisation movement created, transformed, and abandoned space (De Certeau, 1984: 98). On some occasions this time and space provides the most interesting, or as Connor suggested the “best bits” of play, players have a “field day” and find pleasure in these moments of slowness and wastefulness.

Additionally, slowness acted as a vehicle for multiple moments of play that all occurred at the same time through numerous player movements. Some players for example, engaged in roleplay moments, looked to gain “benefits” from their new mayoral status or in other cases simply rolled perception checks to look around the environment. These moments were frivolous pursuits that merely slowed progression. This created temporalities and spaces of queer excess – coded by waste – squandering time for both characters, their players, and the DM. In instances of excess, players’ characters bodies become reoriented from the pathway towards the objective, making visible the spatial dimensions of slow play. From taking-their time, characters wandered into new places both in space and time, whilst players rolled minor roles, wrote down insignificant notes, and engaged in trivial conversations. Movement and moment became intertwined as players shifted into spaces and lived in moments defined by pointlessness. During these moments players noted how they had to improvise new spaces during their encounters of slow play and wandering. For example, Ollie told me of an instance where he had to devise new locations during a game session:

“I didn’t plan out any part of the city yet and they ended up at a constabulary and stuff. Someone turns into a rat and tries to sneak in. I’m like oh cool now I have to come up with the interiors of that building as well. Like it has to be that constant thing of having a basis and being ready to spring away from it at any time.”

What occurred in both of these examples was the creation of new spaces responsive to queer wandering and slow play. Players literally went off the board, off of the linear path into

alternative spaces. Such spaces were built solely on potentialities and player agency, they served no external purpose, not like a campaign dungeon for instance, but rather existed for the moment that they were occupied. The interiors of the constabulary Ollie created were thought of in the moment, never previously imagined until he was creating them right then, right there. As such space was crafted through ‘inversions, displacements, and accumulations’ (De Certeau, 1984: 94) as Ollie had to accumulate new spaces whilst displacing the plan and narrative he developed and created prior to play. Moving beyond normative progression and rigid locations thus facilitates alternative yet, wasteful, sites of possibility. To ‘play slow’ then leads to a temporality that goes sideways, spirals outwards or recursively back-and-forth. Typically, a normative regime of speed prohibits this movement because we ‘have to be constantly on guard and attend to what is right in front of us’ (Hamilton et al., 2019: 472). To some degree then, slow play, and spaces of digress are utopian in their ability to conceive something ‘extra to the everyday’ (Muñoz, 2019: 22). These utopian gestures are built on player agency, pleasure, and improvisation.

Conventionally games are structured by logics of the ‘correct path for the player to follow’ (Ruberg, 2020: 638), meaning that they have their own chronormative method of operation. When discussing walking simulations Kegan (282 cited in Ruberg, 2020: 638) notes that ‘wandering is the game’. In the same view, when players are playing with a radical slowness that prioritises a free forming meandering suggests that the player is always at and will always be at their destination. Play itself becomes the true destination rather than any goal, completion, or endpoint. As Ollie puts it “[D&D] is meant to be very player directed and I write the setting and they decide what they want to do. I write the scenarios and they decide what pace they want to go at”.

In the sense of aimless movement, the wanderer in play embodies much of Walter Benjamin’s (1997) notion of the *flâneur*, ‘the mere stroller’ (Frisby, 2014: 1) as players characters engaged

in a movement that was idle, slow, and frivolous. Players, like the *flâneur* are able to dislodge themselves from society, from productivity and can simply observe and digest their surroundings. They become observant wanderers, taking in the sights of the game worlds, like how the *flâneur* becomes engrossed in the urban life of modernity. Historically, as theorised by canonical thinkers such as Benjamin (1997) the *flâneur* is a male middle-class figure (Wolff, 1985: 37); his free movement in space is a result of patriarchal and class privilege. Wolff (1985) and others point out that women, for example, could only experience *flânerie* through consumption as the shopper, the buyer, or the prostitute – the object that is consumed (Dreyer and McDowall, 2012: 36). Yet, the ‘*flâneur* has been allowed, or made, to take a number of walks away from the streets and arcades of nineteenth-century Paris’ (Frisby, 2014: 1) and arguably can also be moved from its traditionally white, middle-class heterosexual male association. Munt (1998) facilitates this rereading of the *flâneur* by regarding them as an allegory of anomie and ambiguity, figured as a cultural outsider ridding them of masculine and class privilege. At the same time, de Souza e Silva and Hjorth (2009) illustrate the ludic dimension of the *flâneur* as they reterritorialize the city through playful actions.

These contemporary readings allow the *flâneur* to be used as a model to think about queer temporality during play (See Ruberg, 2020) as the player becomes the cultural outsider, wasting their time in the ‘pathologized mode of living’ that is play (Halberstam, 2005: 266). Play is deemed as a childish and pointless pursuit. As Huizinga (2008: 8) notes for ‘the adult and responsible human being play is a function which he could equally well leave alone. Play is superfluous.’ Thus, when a player and their characters embody the slow wandering and playfully spontaneous, approach of the *flâneur* they become enveloped by a slowness that resists the chronormativity (Freeman, 2010) both in game worlds and the external world – figured by a wastefulness that resists the pull of productivity in-game and the capitalist and heteronormative drive towards the future.

Slowness and Boredom

Fun, however, was only one vehicle of slow play as slowness also contained queered dimensions of boredom. Players expressed how they primarily felt boredom through slow combat sequences, during which time slowed to an almost halt as a result of combat structures that are informed by a turn-based play style. Combat is the most rigid element of play in D&D, as each player is given a turn within which they can perform one action, one bonus action and some movement (Wizards of the Coast, 2014: 189). Unlike the free and exploratory movement of the *flâneur*, movements during combat are restrictive, purposeful, and ultimately sometimes boring. Liam expressed how during the time between his turn and other players he felt bored:

“If you've got a large party, then it takes around 15 minutes in order for your go. You know you've been planning this thing since your last go...and you just have to wait there.”

The moments of boredom in between play suspends players and their characters. They live in a slowed down, liminal state, existing between two moments of play. They occupy a position of waiting and inhibited time. As such, players revelled in a radical boredom, unable to do anything, yielding to their surroundings. Boredom in play is arguably alienating through its refusal to ‘engage with players in methods that feel rewarding’ (Ruberg, 2015: 118). To not reward during play provokes an opening of time, it frees people from the rewards of productivity and progression. In moments of waiting, players fulfilled different longings outside of their player experience. Ash, for example, played solitaire whilst Connor suggested that he “browsed the internet or made a cup of tea”. Slowness and the boredom that accompanied it expanded player movements outside of play. These departures from the ordinary conventions of gameplay engagement facilitated a rupture in how players conceptualised play. Players were still playing and not-playing simultaneously. This allowed

them to become engaged in a new mode of subjectivity and provoked ‘sites of risky spectatorial idleness’ (Schoonover, and Galt, 2016: 277).

There are two boredoms at work here: a ‘profound’ and ‘vulgar’ boredom (Richmond, 2015). During moments of profound boredom players were engaged in a more contemplative form of playing, where at times, combat creates a loose sense of anticipation. As Liam’s words articulate, his moments of boredom were filled with planning and preparing for his next move. He envisioned what the future might hold for his character. During profound boredom individuals are detached from the ‘here and now and thus can engage in acts of interpretation and criticism’ (Richmond, 2015: 32). At the epicentre of this boredom is possibility, it has a restlessness that allows subjects to move into ‘new relations and attachments’ (Anderson, 2021: 205). To be bored in this way is to long for something different. Boredom in this theorisation is animated by hope and potentially, in the same way Muñoz (2019: 99) sees queerness as a ‘horizon’, boredom serves as a way to position subjects to the not-yet, delaying the here and now. When players are bored during slow play, they are longing at a horizon of queer play that is ‘something more’. Imagining a beyond, a future built around an anticipation of moments occurring during the game.

It is worth noting, in a utopian notion of boredom, we ignore that paused temporalities are formed around access. When hooks (2014: 1) evaluated Friedan’s (1963) famous notion that second wave Feminism emerged out of boredom, the ‘problem that knows no name’ she articulated how not all subjects had equal access to this boredom and excess. Arguably, boredom in instances of play then becomes an expression of privilege as opposed to potentiality. When players are playing and longing, they are expressing their ability to waste time. In this sense, to play slowly, wastefully, and longingly is routed in ideas surrounding who has the possibility to play and the possibility to waste. Playing in this way is excessive, it becomes sumptuous, a ‘luxurious squandering of energy in every form’ (Bataille, 1988: 33).

Meanwhile, vulgar boredom merely disconnects subjects from the present enough to be with themselves in an ‘ordinary way’ (Richmond, 2015: 32). The emotional experience of boredom in the case of some players in my research made individuals realise that there were also other things to do, other ways to occupy this slowness. In moments of waiting where players fulfilled different longings outside of their player experience, such as playing solitaire or browsing the internet, they were bored in a vulgar way. They were not overwhelmed by longing or anticipation but moved in a method that crafted micro-temporalities, filling this wasted time, this ‘dead time’ (Juul, 2004), meaning that boredom was never truly encountered but rather displaced to a future. This indicates that longing for ‘something more’ was also shifted, creating a temporality not organised around a teleology of subsequent occupation or future play and so becomes inherently riddled with negativity as a pursuit of pure waste. Waste without longing, hope or anticipation creates a vulgar waste where people are bored without any utopian sentiments, bored for the sake of it, which revels in a queer negativity through its meaninglessness, ‘it’s resistance to determinations of meaning’ (Edelman, 2004: 27).

Conclusion

Slowness that occurred during play facilitates the creation of a queer time and space through its ability to resist the domineering effects of ‘straight time’ (Muñoz, 2019), of chronormativity (Freeman, 2019). For players, slowness transformed the tabletop into a heterotopic location that is simultaneously inside and outside of place and moment (Foucault, 1986). Queerness in this instance is formed around desire and boredom, both of which run in opposition to linearity, progression, and normative methods of play. In this chapter, I have illustrated how slowness contained two dimensions: existing within the moment through wandering off course and existing outside of the moment through playing/not playing during moments of boredom. When players wandered, they revelled in moments of play, becoming engrossed in the game and its setting, whilst boredom dislodge individuals from play, meaning that they crafted moments to

envision the future or were figured by their boredom entirely. When players played slowly or experienced slowness, queer time and space were built on wasteful creation and wasteful negativity. This waste is inherent to the time and space of both the player and the player character in producing alternative tempos for avatars and the people that play as them. In this sense, what is crafted is *times of waste* as opposed to *wastes of time* as waste in this analysis creates new times and spaces through disrupting linearity, progression, and continuity.

Conclusion

The aim of my research was to examine the queer potential that occurs when individuals played D&D and how D&D players craft times, spaces, and worlds. Ultimately, I found that to play queerly is to play failure, to play boredom, to play slowly, to play dangerously, to play differently and sometimes to not play at all. Supported by a theoretical and secondary literature foundation, my analysis chapters addressed and analysed different expressions of play practices that emerged during interviews. I discovered that there was not just one route to queerness, but rather a multitude of contrasting and complementary paths, directions, and practices. Rolling dice, agent improvisation, exploration in game worlds, new creations, and counter affective feelings all became processes to build queer worlds. However, whilst each route differed, all showed that when individuals play queerly, they create sites of alternative, difference, and resistance.

In Chapter 3, through a criticism of the structures of success and the phenomenological feeling of ‘fun’, alternative was found in failure and high rolling. In Chapter 4, player homebrewed rules and short-standalone games offered alternatives to conventional game and play practices, both of which resisted linearity. In Chapter 5, sites of waste from playing slowly produced alternative rhythms for player characters and the individuals that played as them. When agents played differently or expressed themselves in a counter-normative way, they were conveying a different form of existence aligned against ingrained hegemony. Play here was both transgressive and excessive as players had experiences that moved beyond normative forces surrounding how one should feel and act. During these moments, ‘play’ and the influences encircling it comes under question. In the case of my research, play questioned the chrononormative and heteronormative logics that produce a straight and normative time and space.

The analysis chapters show how during play, the creation of queer times and spaces is multiple, vast, and contradictory. This queerness can be simultaneously negative, utopian, and heterotopic. When discussing ‘perfecting the art of failure’ Ruberg (2017: 210) examines that perfection in failure is a practice characterised by inadequacy and crudeness. They note what is needed is to ‘embrace the paradox’ (Ruberg, 2017: 210), to welcome the perfection, failure, and successes as they emerge during play. It is here, where I embrace the paradoxical nature of both play and queerness as they bring about new understanding of subjects, fantasy worlds, and everyday life.

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