Order Up: Decoding food through cooking games

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ABSTRACT
This paper presents a preliminary analysis of several cooking-themed videogames, from the perspective of gesture, labour and time. In particular, I highlight the games' attention to rhythm, timeliness, and modularity of cooking tasks. The spatiotemporal organization of "playing with food" has important implications for contemporary issues of sustainability in food systems.

Keywords
videogames, food, gesture, labour, sustainability

INTRODUCTION
This paper addresses how food is represented, coded and performed within cooking-themed videogames. The growth of food-flavoured titles such as *Cooking Mama*, *Diner Dash* and the *Overcooked* series is positioned as part of a broader "mediatization" of food politics (Goodman, Johnston &Cairns, 2017). The significance of food and the rules that govern its preparation and combination have been the subject of critical debate since long before Brillat-Savarin said "tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are". Culinary codes, routines and protocols are also taken up by Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1998), a crucial study of the relationship between habitual bodily practices and labour-saving technology in the home. Abundant media research (e.g. Phillipov, 2016) examines how the representation of food contributes to the politics of sustainability, health and development. Yet there is a strange absence of research on what games can tell us about food, and vice versa.

Studies of cooking games to date (e.g. Chess, 2012) have focused on "casual gaming" and domestic labour. This paper argues that the dimension of time is crucial for understanding the cultural and political significance of cooking games. Through a preliminary analysis of the gameplay, interfaces and affects of games in the *Overcooked* (Ghost Town Games, 2017, 2018) and *Cook, Serve Delicious* (Vertigo Gaming, 2012, 2017) series, I draw attention to the way in which food and taste are enrolled as a domain for disciplinary gaming. In particular, I highlight the games' attention to rhythm (cf. Apperley, 2010), timeliness (Pias, 2011) and modularity of cooking tasks (cf. Tarkan et al., 2010). The spatiotemporal organization of "playing with food" has important implications for contemporary issues of sustainability in food systems (Lang and Barling, 2012).

In dialogue with scholarly accounts of gender, gesture and dressage (e.g. Anable, 2013), as well as recent attention to gaming interfaces (Ash, 2012; Nicoll, 2016; Keogh, 2018) I

present an analysis of these games' temporalities that connects to a broader politics of sustenance and sustainability. By bringing these diverse research areas together, this paper attempts to bridging the disciplinary divide between studies of food media and game studies, and thereby contributes to research in both fields.

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