

Humour in Video Games

Play, Comedy, and Mischief

Anne-Marie Grönroos

Aalto University

School of Art, Design and Architecture

Department of Media

Media Lab Helsinki

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Author Anne-Marie Grönroos

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Abstract

This thesis studies how humour is used in non-abstract video games, focusing on the player's agency and emergent humour.

Humorous qualities of games are analysed in light of film comedy techniques and the main three theories of humour: incongruity, superiority, and relief. Instances of humour are further examined through game mechanics, characters, and the game world, and by putting the single elements into the larger contexts of building narratives and player behaviour.

It is found that the player's role in certain types of humour differs from non-interactive media: players can either initiate humorous instances or become their victims. Allowing for the player's input even in scripted sequences personalises the experience. Characters, the game world, and especially game mechanics offer ways to create emergent humour, particularly when the narrative is fused with the gameplay, and surprising the players is effective for eliciting both emergent and scripted humour. Humour can be used to push the boundaries of social contracts between players and the player and the designer.

It is suggested that the unique features of games are not currently used to their full extent when it comes to humour, and the role of the player is the key into taking advantage of them.

Keywords humour, games, comedy, players, emergence, gameplay



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Tiivistelmä

Tämä opinnäytetyö tutkii, kuinka huumoria käytetään ei-abstrakteissa videopeleissä keskittyen pelaajan agenssiin ja emergenttiin huumoriin.

Pelien humoristisia ominaisuuksia analysoidaan pohjaten elokuvakomediakäsitteisiin ja kolmeen tärkeimpään huumoriteoriaan: inkongruenssi-, ylemmyys- ja huojennusteoriaan. Humoristisia hetkiä käsitellään tarkemmin pelimekaniikoiden, hahmojen ja pelimaailman näkökulmasta ja asettamalla erilliset elementit narratiivien muodostuksen ja pelaajien käytöksen viitekehyksiin.

Tulee ilmi, että pelaajan rooli tietyissä huumorityypeissä eroaa ei-interaktiivisesta mediasta: pelaajat voivat joko aiheuttaa humoristisia hetkiä tai joutua niiden uhreiksi. Pelaajan panoksen salliminen myös ennalta kirjoitetuissa tapahtumasarjoissa tekee kokemuksesta henkilökohtaisen. Hahmot, pelimaailma ja erityisesti pelimekaniikat tarjoavat tapoja luoda emergenttiä huumoria etenkin, kun narratiivi ja pelattavat elementit nivoutuvat yhteen, ja pelaajien yllättäminen on tehokasta luodessa sekä emergenttiä että käsikirjoitettua huumoria. Huumorin kautta voi koetella sosiaalisia sääntöjä pelaajien ja pelaajan ja suunnittelijan välillä.

Todetaan, että pelien ainutlaatuisissa ominaisuuksissa on huumorin kohdalla vielä käyttämättömiä potentiaaleja ja että pelaajan rooli on avain sen hyödyntämiseen.

Avainsanat huumori, pelit, komedia, pelaajat, emergenssi

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1. Introduction

Humour and games both assume a dimension separate from ordinary life. Humour involves a play mode that allows us to think, say, and do things that would normally be forbidden (Morreall, 2009, pp. 49–58), and games take place in the magic circle where special rules apply. The magic circle, coined by Huizinga (1947, p. 20) and adapted to the virtual worlds by Salen and Zimmerman (2003, pp. 94–98), calls for a lusory attitude where the players accept rules that require inefficient means for reaching an end, creating a social contract. Humour breaks and renegotiates social contracts. What happens when humour is added to the magic circle of games?

This thesis examines how humour is and could be used in games. It looks for the differences between games and other, non-interactive, media and pays special attention to the unique features of games: the player's actions, emergent and situational humour, the relationships between the player, the system, and the designer, and how humour relates to both gameplay and narrative.

The thesis is limited to non-abstract video games. Its main focus is on single-player games, but a few multiplayer games and issues are considered. Games and humour share the characteristic of being difficult concepts to define, and yet everyone knows what they are. For the purposes of this thesis, humour includes mirth, wit, and the comic. Humour can make us laugh, but often it makes us smile. Unless otherwise specified, “game” and “video game” always refer to a digital game on any platform, whether a console or computer.

Humour matters. It can be a powerful tool or a weapon, both condemned and praised by thinkers. It has been known to reduce social friction, defuse conflict, and promote critical thinking by calling attention to issues with the protection granted to court jesters. Shifting perceptions through humour develops divergent thinking and creativity. However, humour can be insensitive or even cruel. It can promote irresponsibility by trivialising problems as jokes and perpetuate stereotypes. (Morreall, 2009, pp. 102–118)

From a personal point of view, I ended up with the subject by pinpointing the recurring element in the games that had left an impression on me. In game worlds, characters, atmosphere, and my actions, there had been something quirky and playful that, as an experience, felt different from humour in non-interactive media. Sometimes it was because of my personal involvement, and sometimes because of the unpredictability of the situation. I could not quite explain *what* made it special, and without knowing that recapturing its essence for the games of my own design would be based on guesswork. Thus, this thesis is in parts a journey towards *educated* guesswork, in

parts a venture to satisfy my curiosity, and in parts an experiment to see whether by analysing this phenomenon I will ruin it for myself or take it to the next level.

1.1 Background and Methods

Humour is a multidisciplinary subject of study, but very little research exists about humour in video games in particular. Claire Dormann along with Robert Biddle and other co-authors has published most of the academic research on the subject. Dormann and Biddle's (2009) qualitative study of player experience of humour is one of the major sources of this thesis. Besides Dormann's research, there are some lone papers about satiric games, but they are brief and narrow in scope.

Humour research has been mostly advanced in the fields of psychology and philosophy, each looking for reasons and explanations behind laughter and humour. Philosopher John Morreall (2009, pp. 2–26) has done several historical overviews about various theories of humour, including the works of authors such as Plato, Thomas Hobbes, Herbert Spencer, Henri Bergson (1900), Sigmund Freud (1905), and Arthur Koestler (1964).

Comedy research, likewise, reaches many fields and forms of media including but not limited to film, theatre, literature, and stand-up, and is even less organised than humour research. Since films are often thought to be closer to games in language and production values than, for example, theatre, and the research of film and television comedy is somewhat established, the comedy techniques from films offer a point of comparison. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990), Geoff King (2002), and Jerry Palmer (1987) are some of the contributors to the study of film and television comedy.

To compensate for the scarcity of academic game research about humour, the thesis takes into account the experiences and opinions of several game designers, journalists, and bloggers. Because humour divides opinions, often overall trends are considered rather than individual pieces. Looking at journal and blog articles of humour in games and game comedy, the overarching theme is mourning for the graphic adventure game era and lamenting the rareness of successful humorous games (see e.g. Gonzalez, 2004; Fahey, 2009; Mackey, 2009). Primarily comedic games do seem to be few and far between, but humour is used in a wide variety of games, and many of them are commercially successful. This may be a question of recognition: games use humour in ways that are unfamiliar from other media, and often humour elicits amusement instead of laughter.

The psychological theories and explanations for the existence of humour are not the focus of the thesis, but they cannot be completely avoided. Comedy techniques play a significant role, and the thesis could as well be called *Comedy in Games* if not for its inclusion of emergent and situational humour that does not lend itself to discussion through the language of film comedy.

In addition to the existing literature, the thesis includes a qualitative analysis of games from several different genres and from studios big and small. To find out what kind of elements make them humorous, general literature on game design is used as a basis for analysing the game functions through humour. Some quantitative data about the volume and types of humorous games in the recent years is acquired by listing games from the Finnish game magazine *Pelit*.

1.2 Contents of the Thesis

Chapter 2 starts with a historical outline of games containing humour from the arcade era to the indie revolution, acknowledging the special status of the graphic adventure genre but highlighting the ubiquity of humour in all genres. The qualitative and quantitative research done for the thesis is introduced next, because the resulting analyses will be used as examples for the rest of the thesis. It is followed by the principal theoretical background formed by the three main theories of humour and Dormann and Biddle's study. The chapter concludes with an overview of how humour in games compares to the film comedy genre.

Chapter 3 provides a closer look into how different game elements can elicit humour. It analyses humour through game mechanics, characters, and the game world, which are all defined to fuse theme and gameplay.

Chapter 4 puts the elements together and inspects building narratives, verbal humour, and player behaviour.

Chapter 5 is a reflection on old student projects in light of some of the issues discussed earlier. The chapter concludes by introducing a new game concept born out of the thesis process.

Chapter 6 reviews the paths taken and makes conclusions about where they have led.

Appendix A lists the discussion points used for analysing the games, and Appendix B shows one filled questionnaire as an example.

Appendix C lists the games found in the quantitative research.

Appendix D presents sketched ideas for the game concept introduced in Chapter 5.3.

2. Overview of Humour in Games

Humour in fiction and life in general infuses many territories and takes many forms. Games are no exception. This chapter maps the span and dimensions of humour in games, looking at the past, present, and what could be.

2.1 A Brief History of Humour in Games

Comedy and humour have traditionally been thought of as the domain of the adventure games, which, while not the whole truth, suggests how influential the genre has been. The genre gained its name from Crowther and Wood's text-based adventure game *Colossal Cave Adventure*. The combat mechanics of *Adventure* were inspired by tabletop role-playing games, and Wood's expansion included references to Tolkien's Middle-earth (Fernández-Vara, 2009, pp. 26–27). *Adventure* went on to inspire other games, such as Infocom's first game *Zork I*, a fantasy comedy with references to Tolkien and the hacker culture of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Around the same time, humour became important in the new types of arcade games. In the 1970s most arcade games had been about shooting, racing, or space battles, but in 1980 Toru Iwatani came up with *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980) to offer a humorous and nonviolent alternative that also female players would enjoy (Wolf, 2008). *Pac-Man* was the first video game to have named characters and encouraged other designers to come up with “cute” games with new game mechanics. Shigeru Miyamoto's *Donkey Kong* (Nintendo, 1981) introduced a complete narrative, platforming, and Mario (then called Jumpman) (DeMaria and Wilson, 2004, p. 82, 238). The adorable main character of *Q*bert* (Atari, 1982) cursed in gibberish with a speech bubble reading “@!#?@!” when he was hit by an enemy, and a pinball knocker inside the game cabinet accompanied Q*bert's fall off the game world with a thud (Cassidy, 2002). Even a boxing game like *Punch Out!!* had a humorous presentation with goofy characters (DeMaria and Wilson, 2004, p. 92).

Meanwhile, the graphic adventure games were pioneered by Roberta and Ken Williams who founded Sierra, also inspired by Crowther's *Adventure*. Their breakthrough was the genre-defining *King's Quest* (Sierra On-Line, 1984), the first graphic adventure game from the third person perspective, in a pseudo 3D world. It was not until later instalments in the series that *King's Quest* gained its typical humour, but Sierra's *Space Quest: The Sarien Encounter* was a fully comedic space opera. Every death was accompanied by a joke, and humorously addressing the player and cultural references were frequent. (Moss, 2011)

Frustrated by the text parser and the sudden deaths in *King's Quest*, Ron Gilbert from LucasArts came up with a new approach for *Maniac Mansion*. It had a point-and-click interface, multiple endings, and humorous puzzles. It let the player control multiple characters, and dying was much harder than in the Sierra games. The player-friendly design philosophy opened the genre for new audiences and became the norm for LucasArts games, refined in *The Secret of Monkey Island* (Lucasfilm Games, 1990). The interface was streamlined in *Sam & Max Hit the Road* to allow for more space for the environment. (Moss, 2011)

From the late 1980s to the 1990s, humour came to be used in all kinds of genres. The quirky *Populous* let the player be a god looking down at the world, consequently spawning a new genre (DeMaria and Wilson, 2004, pp. 266–267). *Super Mario Kart* was the first in the series (1992–2011) that set the standard for humorous racing games with unnatural physics and mischievous power-ups, still drawing comparisons whenever a new comedy title enters the genre (Smith et al., 2011). The Fatalities of *Mortal Kombat* were ridiculous in their overt brutality and caused an outcry that led to the invention of video game age ratings and *Mortal Kombat II* adding even more absurd finishing moves, called Friendships, to balance out the violence (Kent, 2001, pp. 462–480). *Cannon Fodder* was a strategy game that sent an explicitly anti-war message through its dark comedy: unlike most other war games, it had a limited supply of soldiers, and everyone had a name (Gillen, 2007). When someone died, a gravestone was added to the hill that by the end of the game resembled a cemetery. The game even caused a press controversy and was accused of exploiting the British Legion remembrance poppy despite being one of the few war games that did not glorify war. A lighter contribution to the war theme was *Worms* with its cute sounds and graphics, absurd weapons, and chaotic gameplay (Dykes, 1995). In contrast, the life simulator *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) accomplished a rare feat in breeding its humour from everyday situations.

Unlike Japanese role-playing games, which revel in cartoonish art style and humour (Barton, 2008, ch.8, para.5), most western RPGs have been grimly serious, with only a handful intended as comedy (ch.10, para.131). Examples of the exceptions are Sierra's *Hero's Quest: So You Want to Be a Hero* with a silly tone throughout the game and manual (ch.8, para.93), and the *Diablo* clone *Dink Smallwood* with irreverent and provocative humour (ch.10, para.130). However, humour has been an important part of many RPGs with an overall sombre tone: *Fallout* (Interplay Entertainment, 1997) owns its appeal to surreal aesthetics of cheerfully morbid Cold War imagery juxtaposed with satirical and dystopic films (Barton, 2008, ch.10, para.190).

The first-person shooters have their share of comedy titles, as well. *Duke Nukem 3D* differentiated itself from the other *Doom* clones by including a main character whose one-liners informed the player of his personality (Walsh, 2007, p. 108). Once the crass style of *Duke Nukem* became an archetype, *Serious Sam* added some sarcasm and self-consciousness to the delivery (Gonzalez,

2004). More recently, Valve surprised the gaming world with the simultaneous release of *Team Fortress 2* (Valve Corporation, 2007c), an online multiplayer with unique visuals and nine cartoon caricature player classes, and *Portal* (Valve Corporation, 2007b), a darkly humorous and misleading puzzle game using the same Source engine as Valve's first-person shooters (Gerstmann, 2007; Macy, 2013).

Graphic adventure games went through some rough times towards the end of the 1990s. The popularity of *Myst* had started saturating the market with badly done clones, which damaged the consumer confidence and killed innovation when publishers tried to imitate its success. The genre clung to outdated conventions and unintuitive puzzles while the overwhelming popularity of first-person shooters and other action genres, the new pinnacle of gaming technology, eclipsed it. Thus, adventure game enthusiasts started turning to third-person action adventure hybrids. Thought by many the swansong of the traditional graphic adventure genre, the darkly humorous *Grim Fandango* (LucasArts, 1998) was acclaimed as Tim Schafer's masterpiece for its story, art style, and audio, but it sold poorly, ultimately leading to both LucasArts and Sierra abandoning the genre. The adventure genre was assumed dead in the U.S., but the European market kept releasing new titles, the British *Simon the Sorcerer* series among others. (Moss, 2011)

Finally, in 2006, Telltale Games began the so called adventure game renaissance by publishing new *Sam & Max* games in an episodic format with modernised puzzles, interface, and inventory systems. Later, the popular adventures from the 1990s started getting remakes and ports for Nintendo DS, PC, iPhone, and the current home consoles. The lower costs of digital distribution helped small studios to succeed, and Telltale Games has kept publishing episodic adventure games from classic and new intellectual properties. (Moss, 2011)

Along with small studios, digital distribution has contributed greatly to completely or partially independent games. The indie game phenomenon took root in the 1990s with the advent of affordable and technologically accessible platforms like Flash and blossomed in the 2000s with social networking making them known via word of mouth. Indie games are free to experiment with innovative gameplay due to a quick prototyping and feedback cycle, and they can explore any subject matters the designers like. Particular trends have been moving a marginal gameplay element to the centre of attention, seeking new aesthetics with minimalist approaches, and revisiting earlier genres, styles, and techniques that no longer belong to the mainstream. (Camper, 2008)

Indie games are a promising and already successful venue for humour. *World of Goo* (2D Boy, 2008), made by two people with a budget of \$10,000, temporarily rose to the bestselling PC game on amazon.com, beating several blockbuster games on the way (Mysore, 2009). The whimsical

physics-based puzzle game lets the player build unstable structures out of curious and constantly wandering Goo balls. This kind of innovation is more likely to occur in indie games than with big publishers, because publishers want to mitigate risks and avoid things that might alienate people, including and especially humour (Crecente, 2010).

At the beginning of 2012, indie projects and specifically crowdfunding gained new publicity when Tim Schafer's Kickstarter project for funding a graphic adventure game and a documentary raised over three million dollars (Double Fine and 2 Player Productions, 2012). In addition to breaking Kickstarter records, the Double Fine project encouraged people to fund other game projects on Kickstarter as well (Kickstarter Blog, 2012). The long-term effects of Schafer's success are still to be seen, and there are those who remain sceptical about the crowdfunding model. Schafer's achievement is hard if not impossible to duplicate because he was well known for making games that had gained a cult following but suffered financially, and his fan base was eager to help. There are also predictions of a Kickstarter backlash, presumably because of some huge project failing and funders losing confidence, or because of the public perception of the developers changing to less sympathetic (Fahey, 2012). Furthermore, unknown newcomers are far less likely to succeed than famous veterans, which perhaps goes against the Kickstarter and indie ideal. Walker (2012) points out that Kickstarter game projects tend to appeal to nostalgia rather than innovation to attract funders. For all these reasons, it is too early to evaluate the significance of crowdfunding, but it could give a rise for more projects with creative and unproven ideas.

2.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Research for the Thesis

Determining the role of humour in a game can be equally difficult as defining humour. Game journalism makes it seem as if humorous games were very rare and in some sort of crisis ever since the decline of the golden age of the graphic adventure games (Gonzalez, 2004; Fahey, 2009; Mackey, 2009), and yet humour is frequently used in games. Partially this might be because the critics expect to see humour used in the same way as in other, non-interactive media.

Dan Cook notes this phenomenon and makes a distinction between "humour-through-storytelling" and "humour-through-mechanics" (Cook, 2012). Cook defines humour-through-storytelling as prepackaged jokes, consumable content like cut-scenes and dialogue that is mastered in a single loop. All non-interactive humour falls into this category. Humour-through-mechanics is a more nebulous concept that emerges from what Cook calls "laughter-generating systems". He describes it as a game creating situations that are funny because the player has become part of the magic circle of the game, and are therefore difficult to retell to outsiders. Cook also remarks that we lack the language to talk about it because the experience is so localised and

transient. This is supported by Morreall's (2009, pp. 83–84) observation that the academic research has concentrated on jokes and other prepared texts, neglecting spontaneous, real-life humour. Because spontaneous humour is more situation-dependent than prepared humour and thus less accessible to a wide audience, it has not been as suitable for analysis in social sciences. Consequently, this kind of humour often goes unrecognised and is rarely talked about. This ambiguity is illustrated how in an earlier paper Dormann and Biddle state that “in general there seems little humour explicit in videogames” (2007, p. 249), and later that humour “is frequently used in the design of computer games” (2009, p. 802).

2.2.1 Qualitative Study of Humorous Games

Because of the elusive nature of the subject and the scarcity of existing studies, I started the thesis research by playing and analysing several games to identify what kind of humorous elements they have. I chose games that had been advertised as being humorous either officially or unofficially. I tried to include as many gameplay genres as possible and paid special attention to games with emergent gameplay, which will be explored more in Chapter 3. Rather than going by historical significance or the first or most influential use of a certain technique, I chose the games based on how well they demonstrated different aspects of humour in different ways and their accessibility.

For the analyses, I made a questionnaire based on viewpoints raised by game journalism and film comedy literature (Neale and Krutnik, 1990; Gonzalez, 2004; Cutler, 2011; Jack, 2011). The questionnaire, included as Appendix A, contains discussion points that I used to take notes about the games while playing. The questionnaire is more concerned with comedy techniques than behavioural sciences, whereas Dormann and Biddle's (2009) earlier study, introduced in Chapter 2.3, focuses on the psychology of game humour.

I filled the questionnaire for each game as I was playing them, trying to be as thorough as possible but leaving blank the inapplicable questions: an example of a filled questionnaire, in its original unedited form, is included in Appendix B. I strived to be objective and consider how the humour was designed instead of critiquing its success too much, but since humour by its nature is subjective, the games chosen and the analyses made by necessity show a bias towards my personal taste. The games could have been contrasted with failed attempts at humour and poor gameplay, but admittedly I did not want to spend my limited resources on bad games. The filled questionnaires were further refined by writing analyses from the relevant perspectives.

I started by playing 20 games, analysed 12 (Table 1) with the questionnaire, and later partially analysed more of the original 20 and some new ones. The research was strictly qualitative because the sample size was too small to make any meaningful comparisons between the types of humour

and the types of games. Virtually all games included incongruities and irony. Slapstick, likewise, was nearly as ubiquitous. Only a few of the games had a significantly dramatic tone, but that is probably due to how I chose the games. Over half of the games included referential humour, and I might have missed the references in the few games where I did not notice any. Unlike film comedy, only *The Sims 3* (The Sims Studio, 2009) was thematically close to everyday life or even this world, but the abundance of fantasy worlds holds true for games in general. The analyses are used throughout the thesis to demonstrate various concepts. All game examples, unless another source is explicitly referred to, are based on my observations.

Table 1: The originally analysed games.

Game	Gameplay genre	Narrative Genre	Year	Studio
<i>Brütal Legend</i>	action adventure/RTS	fantasy	2009	Double Fine
<i>Cthulhu Saves the World</i>	RPG	fantasy	2011	Zeboyd Games
<i>Fallout: New Vegas</i>	RPG	sci-fi	2010	Obsidian
<i>Octodad</i>	action adventure	fantasy	2010	Young Horses
<i>Portal 2</i>	puzzle	sci-fi	2011	Valve
<i>Psychonauts</i>	platform	fantasy	2005	Double Fine
<i>Super Scribblenauts</i>	puzzle	fantasy	2010	5 th Cell
<i>Team Fortress 2</i>	FPS	history, sci-fi	2007	Valve
<i>The Secret of Monkey Island</i>	adventure	fantasy	1990	Lucasfilm Games
<i>The Sims 3</i>	simulation	slice of life	2009	The Sims Studio
<i>We Love Katamari</i>	puzzle	fantasy	2005	Namco
<i>Worms 2</i>	strategy	war	1997	Team 17

2.2.2 Quantitative Data from *Pelit* Magazine

To add some quantitative data on the recent trends, I listed all humorous games reviewed in the Finnish game magazine *Pelit* from the years 2010–2012 (*Pelit*, 2010). I discounted reviews of older games, HD remakes of classic games, and downloadable content that required the original game to run. Only one episode was counted for each episodic game series. This brought out 175 games with humorous content (listed in Appendix C), out of the total number of qualified reviews, 659 games, making the fraction of humorous games 27% (Figure 1). Many obviously humorous games were easy to identify as such by the graphics or the name, but many others required careful reading of the review. Sometimes even the review did not help, and I had to look for more reviews elsewhere. I only did this for games that I strongly suspected to be humorous, which is why the list probably excludes some that are not outright hilarious but still contain humour.



Figure 1: All game reviews.

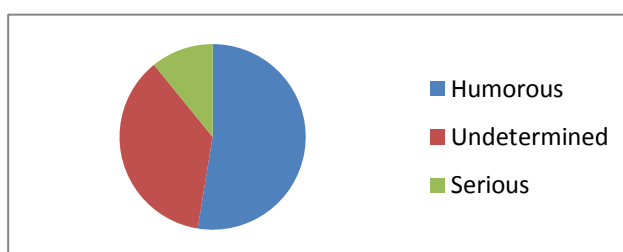


Figure 2: The degrees of humour in the games containing humour.

To determine how much humour was used in the games listed, I further divided the 175 games into ones that were comedic or intended to be primarily humorous experiences, ones that had an overall serious tone but contained humorous scenes or characters, and ones that I could not decide on based on the information I found. 53% were primarily humorous, 11% were serious, and 37% were undeterminable (Figure 2). 47% of the 175 games were sequels or otherwise used characters that had been established in an earlier game. To compare different genres to each other, I assigned each game a gameplay genre according to how the main gameplay was described in either the reviews or Wikipedia articles. Because game genres are both unbalanced and confusing describers of games (Junnila, 2007; Kempainen, 2012), the genre classifications could be reinterpreted.

It would have been interesting to find out how many of the games were independent, but what counts as an indie game is not a straightforward issue. The indie status of a game can be mainly thought of as an economic aspect, but “indieness” could also be understood as something defying mainstream, even when it has a publisher (Kempainen, 2008, pp. 8–37). Indie games share aspects with indie films and music, “indie spirit” signifying freedom and self-expression. Unlike mainstream games, indie games are also made by hobbyists and semi-professionals, possibly without profit, and they can be more unpolished. However, not all independent games aspire to the indie ideal, and successful indie games attract clones just like big budget games (p. 74). Taking all this into consideration, I did not attempt to classify all 175 games.

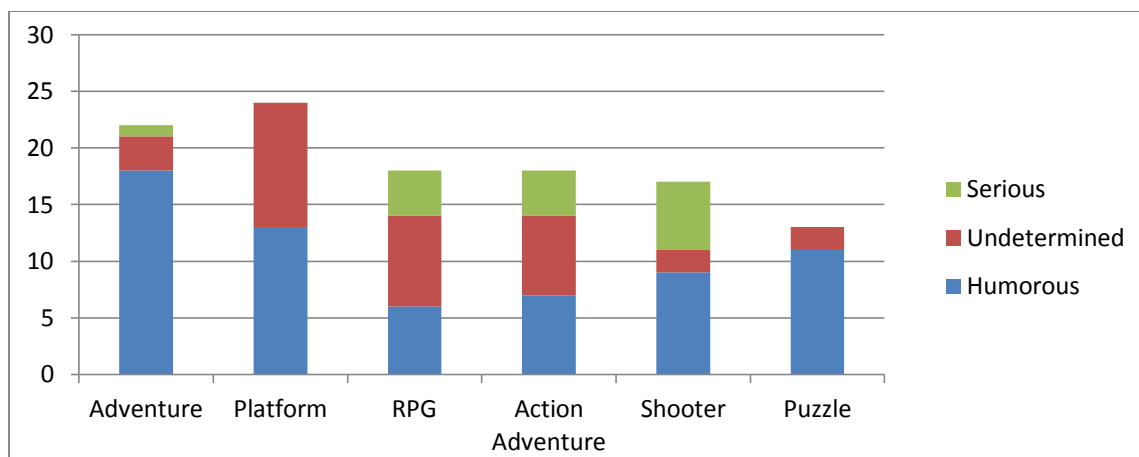


Figure 3: The amount of humorous games per gameplay genre.

The 175 games included works from all mainstream genres, without huge differences in volume (Figure 3). The adventure genre and the platform genre had the biggest amount of games, with 13% and 14% respectively. Almost all of the adventure games were primarily comedic, and the quality of their jokes was often scrutinised in the review. Only half of the platform games were comedic, but appraising their humour status was harder than with the adventure games, because the humour was more visual, dependent on the player actions, and seldom mentioned in the review. Judging from the reviews, adventure games rely more on humour-through-storytelling and platform games on humour-through-mechanics, although both can use both kinds of humour. Over half of the platform games were based on a character that had debuted elsewhere, in many cases decades earlier, while the adventure games had fewer sequels. This might be because platform games are more popular and thus financially more secure, and because the characters in platform games are not expected to form coherent narratives from game to game or have new story premises.

The next biggest groups were role-playing games (11%), action adventure games (11%), and shooters (10%), including first-person and third-person shooters. Only 32% of the role-playing games were primarily comedic, almost all parodies of the genre, and 21% were primarily serious. 42% of the action adventure games were comedic, but they, too, had 21% games with a serious tone. 59% of the shooters, however, were primarily comedic. Since action adventure games and role-playing games are typically story-driven, their inclusion of comedic elements is expected, but the shooters scoring this high is surprising. Some shooter reviews mentioned the dialogue between the non-player characters and the ragdoll physics. There being this many humorous shooters could have something to do with the popularity of the genre. Dark comedy and gross-out jokes were specifically mentioned in some reviews from all of these genres. This makes sense

since these games are generally aimed at an older audience than platform games, which did not use dark comedy.

The next biggest group was puzzle games with 7%, almost all of them action puzzles with cute graphics and a potential for slapstick comedy. There were a few fighting, action, party, sports, strategy, simulation, survival, and horror games, but none of the other categories rose over 5%. Some genres drew constant comparisons to earlier games: the *Mario Kart* series was mentioned in almost all reviews of humorous racing games. In a few reviews humour was regarded negatively and the reviewer called the jokes or comic relief characters annoying. In many more the reviewer praised the humorous aspects. Sometimes the reviewer was confused whether the game was meant to be taken seriously.

This overview of the recent games shows that humour in games is neither rare nor limited to only few genres. Nevertheless, the games are not always easily identifiable as humorous, and the importance of the humour to the game experience as a whole varies. Certain types of humour were more prominent in some genres than others (humour-through-storytelling in story-driven games, slapstick-inducing chaos in physical action-oriented games, more adult jokes in games with higher age ratings), but nothing was restricted to only one genre.

2.3 Theories of Humour

Humour has been researched and debated over in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and linguistics. The different theories have been categorised into the main three theories of humour: the superiority, relief, and incongruity theory. The terms are meant to capture one feature shared by different explanations, proponents of a theory may not agree on all aspects, and many theorists have elements of multiple theories (Morreall, 2009, pp. 6–7). Some theories are about humour, some about laughter, and they do not necessarily make the distinction, even when not all laughter is caused by humour, and not all humour leads to laughter. Raskin (1984, p. 40) writes that the three theories supplement rather than contradict each other and approach humour from different angles: the incongruity theory is concerned with the stimulus, the superiority theory with the relations or attitudes between the speaker and the hearer, and the relief theory with the feelings of the hearer.

The superiority theory, also known as aggression or hostility theory, proposes that we laugh at the misfortune of others, seeing ourselves as superior or triumphant. It was the only widely circulated theory of humour before the Enlightenment, and its antisocial nature has been used to criticise laughter since Plato (Morreall, 2009, pp. 4–6). Hobbes expanded on Plato's theory, seeing

humankind in eternal competition, and identified the reason for laughter as the “sudden glory” when we realise we are in some respect better than others or some former state of ourselves (p. 6). The defenders of humour have either abandoned the superiority theory or found something commendable in it (p. 8). Bergson (1900), among others, saw laughter as socially corrective. One of the modern proponents of the superiority theory, Gruner (1997), likens humour to a game that, after conflict keeping the tension high, concludes suddenly with a winner and a loser.

The relief theory asserts that laughter comes from a release of nervous energy. It focuses on the physical side of laughter, especially in relation to the nervous system (Morreall, 2009, pp. 15–16). Spencer writes that emotions take the form of nervous energy, and laughter is used to release the excess of it when our consciousness is transferred from great things to small in a descending incongruity (1911, cited in Morreall, 2009, pp. 16–17). The best-known version of the relief theory is Freud’s (1905, pp. 80–115), which divides jokes into harmless and tendentious. Harmless jokes are abstract and have no targets, while tendentious jokes can be aggressive, obscene, cynical, or sceptical, all attacking someone or something. Tendentious jokes release the energy that we would spend repressing feelings related to them, and harmless nonsense jokes release the energy needed for logical thinking.

The incongruity theory propounds that we laugh at the violation of our normal mental patterns and expectations (Morreall, 2009, pp. 9–11). It is currently the dominant theory in philosophy and psychology. Koestler (1964, p. 35) conceived the term “bisociation” that means the simultaneous perception of a situation or an idea within two contrasting frames of reference. The older versions of the incongruity theory proposed that incongruity was sufficient for humour, but fear, disgust, anger, and puzzlement are also reactions to incongruity (Morreall, 2009, pp. 12–13). Morreall (pp. 52–53) suggests that to laugh we need to be in *the play mode*, disengaged from the potentially disturbing situation due to its fictional status, our distance, the passage of time, or our lack of role.

To research how the three main theories of humour relate to video games, Dormann and Biddle (2009) carried out a qualitative study of player experience of humour, the most extensive academic work done on the subject of humour in games. The study was done through semistructured interviews where the participants were asked to describe humorous or comical instances in video games. It included university students, staff, and faculty with varied experience in games. Although the focus of Dormann and Biddle’s paper is serious games, the research used entertainment games as material because those were the games the players recalled. For Dormann and Biddle, the importance of the theories was not only to explain humour, but to suggest humour’s functions and uses. The study suggested that the categories of the participants’ experiences correspond to the humour theories.

2.3.1 Superiority Humour in Games

The superiority theory corresponded with competition in multiplayer games (Dormann and Biddle, 2009, pp. 807–808). Humour was directed towards other players to show aggression in a socially acceptable way, mediating game action and relationships. The most prototypical examples of superiority humour involved a player’s avatar’s death, either eliciting laughter at the target’s incompetence or emphasising the winner’s superiority. “Laughter and initiation through humorous avatar death” is also one of the humour patterns identified in a later work by Dormann and Neuvians (2012). The pattern uses an example of older members of a group tricking new players into killing their avatar in a sort of bonding ritual. The humorous avatar deaths usually involve a practical joke or unexpected comical circumstances.

Most multiplayer games can generate superiority humour, but some appear to be designed with this in mind. *Team Fortress 2*, a light-hearted multiplayer first-person shooter with cartoon graphics and distinct character class personalities, features taunts whose main purpose is to mock other players, although some taunts can also be used to impractically kill opponents. This would be enough to elicit superiority humour, but in an interesting role reversal, taunting leaves the user vulnerable for a few seconds, giving the enemies an opportunity to kill the player in mid-taunt. Some classes, like the Spy, need to employ clever tricks to kill the other, physically much stronger classes, as shown in Figure 4.

A skilled Spy can be devastating to the opposing team, but in the same kind of reversal incompetent Spies die fast. *Team Fortress 2* is a likely candidate for generating superiority humour thanks to the high risks and rewards that can quickly turn a situation around. To top it off, the deaths in the game are gory in a cartoony way, and the game identifies the avatar’s different body parts across the screen after death.



Figure 4: A Spy about to backstab a Sniper. *Team Fortress 2* has various character classes whose abilities make them each other’s natural nemeses. Spies have to get close by to use their best attack, while Snipers excel at distance.

The *Worms* series (1995–2012), like *Team Fortress 2*, owes much of its popularity to how chaotic the gameplay becomes with inexperienced players and how experienced players learn to benefit from the chaos-inducing elements. Most weapons in *Worms 2* (Team17, 1997), for example, tend to cause chain reactions that have a good chance of destroying the attacker instead of the target.

The score list after a match even points out which team was the most entertaining in its ineptitude. The suicidal attacks are also an example of incongruity humour due to their surprising nature.

From these examples it seems that superiority humour can be promoted by giving the players opportunities to be unexpectedly killed by their own ambitions. High rewards tempt players to undertake risky manoeuvres, which in turn lead to frequent reversals of fortune and overall chaotic situations. The more options the player has, the more they can be creatively used to demonstrate her cleverness or incompetence. A light-hearted tone in the visual and sound design encourages the players not to take the game too seriously and is a basis for great slapstick.

Dormann and Biddle (2009, p. 807) note that the presence of other players seems to be necessary for superiority humour to occur. However, according to Järvinen (2009, pp. 88-91) the game system itself can be perceived as an agent with certain behaviour, and the players can feel emotions towards it. Consequently, it seems plausible that the player suddenly defeating the game system after a long struggle could elicit superiority humour. Furthermore, Wilson and Sicart (2010) describe a design philosophy, abusive game design, which aims to create a personal contest between the player and the designer, thus producing opportunities for superiority humour to occur even in single-player games. Nonetheless, superiority humour is probably much more common in the company of others and more likely to lead to laughter.

2.3.2 Relief Humour in Games

The relief theory matched the least with the study of player experience (Dormann and Biddle, 2009, pp. 810–811). In the cases found, the laughter seemed to have almost a cathartic value by releasing the tension and frustration of gameplay, and it supported friendship among colocated gamers by preventing the players from getting mad at each other. It is possible that some examples of superiority humour also have a relief function, and a comical avatar death after taxing gameplay can release tension.

Relief humour could partially explain the allure of extremely hard, unforgiving games where the player dies frequently and in many different ways. *Super Meat Boy* (Team Meat, 2010) rewards the player for clearing a level by showing a simultaneous replay of all the attempted playthroughs and consequently, all the deaths (Figure 5).

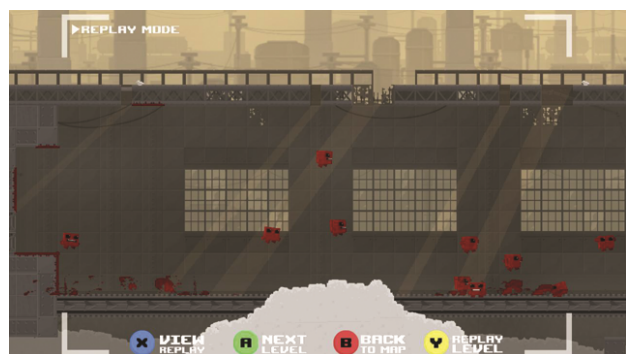


Figure 5: Replaying the deaths. Making the player laugh at her failure can be an example of both superiority and relief humour: she can release tension by laughing at her former self.

In most games the avatar's death is little more than a minor nuisance to the player, but *NetHack* (DevTeam, 1987) deletes the save file if the avatar dies, potentially erasing tens of hours of gameplay. This can be circumvented by copying the save file to another folder, but this is considered cheating and bad sportsmanship. "Yet Another Stupid Death" is a constant source of humour for *NetHack* players, told to others to alleviate the frustration. Games that are designed to be unfair in addition to unforgiving are even more aggravating and yet popular enough in the indie games community that they have earned a subgenre name, "masocore" (Wilson and Sicart, 2010, p. 43).

Some players in the study seemed to enjoy transgressing what was normally permissible or going against the game designer's intentions (Dormann and Biddle, 2009, pp. 810–811). The *Grand Theft Auto* series was cited by various players. *Grand Theft Auto III* (DMA Design, 2001), for example, allows the player to commit various realistic crimes, most frequently stealing cars or driving over pedestrians. In many other games, the player's actions are far more removed from the real world. Driving over a pedestrian, on the other hand, is a question of morals rather than opportunity. Even in *GTA*, the game does not enforce or significantly encourage the act, leaving the power and the responsibility solely to the player. This emphasises the transgressive nature of the mayhem the player can cause.

Although closer to real life than a fantasy game, *GTA* still takes place in a criminal subculture that is unfamiliar to most players. *The Sims* series (2000–2013) lets the player transgress social norms of everyday life either by living through the characters or playing god with them. Even players who have never lived in a suburb can recognise all aspects of *The Sims*, making inappropriate actions all that more inappropriate. A common joke among *The Sims* players is drowning characters by removing the ladder of a swimming pool where a character is currently swimming. Starving or burning the characters to death is popular, as well. Apparently, games that encourage nurture also enable torture. Peter Molyneux tells how some players reacted to *Black and White: Creature Isle*:

Obviously it's a very open-ended game and that means quite a lot of people... did find every opportunity to abuse the world. We had quite a few "suffering" maps with little people being horribly tortured or photographs of creatures absolutely beaten to hell. (Butts, 2002)

This kind of video game cruelty and joy at destruction is a more elaborate and potentially disturbing version of a child knocking down a tower of building blocks. It is controversial, but some players will always find it funny. Games that do not enforce destruction even if they allow it can make the player feel like she is transgressing against the designer as well as the normal social conventions.

2.3.3 Incongruity Humour in Games

The category of the player experiences related to the incongruity theory was more varied and encompassed all game elements and any game genre. Humour of this kind can be scripted, accidental, or generated by players. Incongruity humour is the most likely type to be used in comedy games, especially in slapstick and parodies. The instances of incongruity humour include but are not limited to verbal humour, humorous character design, unexpected series of actions, and game mechanics. Surprise seems to be an important element, and some player stories described surprises that the players saw as unintended by the designers, such as bugs and glitches, funny coincidences, and strange non-player character behaviour. (Dormann and Biddle, 2009, pp. 808–810)

The whole premise of a game can be incongruous, as is the case with *Cthulhu Saves the World* (Zeboyd Games, 2011). Cthulhu is a cosmic horror originating from H. P. Lovecraft's short story *The Call of Cthulhu* in 1928. Since Lovecraft, the Cthulhu mythos has been widely used by different media including games, and most gamers have at least a passing familiarity with it. According to the mythos, Cthulhu will one day awaken and destroy the mankind, which is the starting point of *Cthulhu Saves the World*. Before Cthulhu has a chance to begin destruction, however, his powers are locked away. Cthulhu then learns by eavesdropping on the narrator that the only way to get his powers back is to become a true hero (seen in Figure 6). Here begins Cthulhu's quest to selflessly help those in need in order to kill everyone in the world in the end. The game pastiches and makes fun of the 1990s Japanese role-playing game clichés and the geek culture in general. Usually, the main character in this genre has to serve others out of the goodness of his heart, but Cthulhu complains constantly and still has Cthulhu-appropriate powers like the ability to turn any opponent in the game insane. Most of the humour in the game is mined from this juxtaposition.

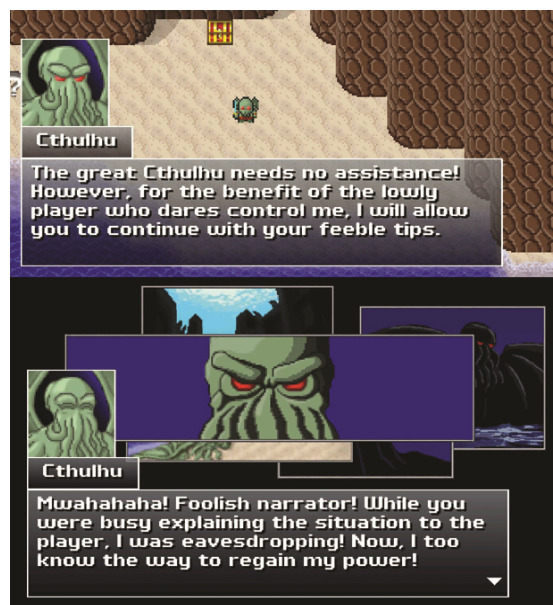


Figure 6: Cthulhu insulting the narrator and the player, and eavesdropping on the narrator. Cthulhu's incongruity in the frame of reference of a typical JRPG hero makes the game comical.

Dormann and Biddle (2009, pp. 808–809) propose that incongruity humour has two kinds of added value: 1) a funny and surprising component that enhances the gameplay by providing

emotional moments of comic fun, and 2) a more functional component that supports game design by, for example, directing the player's attention. The many forms of incongruity humour are further explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.3.4 Functions of Humour in Games

Based on the study, Dormann and Biddle (2009, pp. 811–818) suggest several functions of humour. The three theories are used to determine, which aspects of humour the qualitative data refers to. The superiority theory represents the social aspects of humour, the relief theory the emotional, and the incongruity theory the cognitive. Dormann and Biddle point out that humour can be used with opposing intents, for social or antisocial purposes, to entertain or to offend.

The social functions of humour include social bonding and intensifying friendships (pp. 812–813). Players frequently engage in humour together in multiplayer games. Humour improves the social atmosphere and promotes social play. It also offers an acceptable way of criticising players, either by other players or even non-player characters. For example, the player's allies in *Left 4 Dead 2* (Valve Corporation, 2009) have several sarcastic lines for whenever the player accidentally shoots them.

The emotional functions of humour contain enhancing the mood of the players, generally drawing interest, and providing relief (p. 814). Almost any game could benefit from these, and aiming for amusement rather than laughter is enough to lighten the overall game experience.

The cognitive functions of humour involve improving problem-solving and creativity by developing divergent thinking (pp. 815–816). Humour is found to have positive effects on attention and memory, which is demonstrated by the fact that the players could recall examples from their childhood. This could be useful when relaying players new information, but humour can also be distracting or annoying if it is unconnected to the learning material. *Portal 2* (Valve Corporation, 2011) uses humour in its tutorial: instead of just telling the player to walk and look around, it asks to “admire this art”. Then the player is asked to “say apple”, but the game shows the jump command key. When the main character jumps instead of talking, her robot assistant infers that she is brain-damaged. This establishes the character as mute and indicates that jumping will be an important game mechanic in *Portal 2*. Using humour both helps the learning process for those who need to be taught how to move in a first-person game and makes the obligatory tutorial entertaining for the majority of players who already know how the controls work.

These humour types and functions are frequently combined in games, and being aware of them helps the designers in determining what kind of experience they want the game to be. A full-fledged comedy game probably includes all or most of these functions.

2.4 Comedy Genre

Comedy as a genre in general is hard to define because of the immense variety of forms it can take. The important conventions are the generation of laughter, relationship to everyday life, a happy ending, and a light tone, but none of these are required. Comedy is an aesthetic term, while *comic* is something causing or meant to cause laughter. Another reason for the difficulty of defining the genre is that comedy seems especially suited to hybridisation with other genres and can be inserted in most genre contexts without disturbing their conventions. (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, pp. 10–25)

Unsurprisingly, then, the comedy genre is even harder to define for games whose own system of gameplay genre categorisation is in a state of confusion. Although some may call individual games or a type of graphic adventure games comedy, a comedy genre has never been recognised for video games in the way it exists for other forms of entertainment like film or television. In a Game Developers Conference 2010 panel about comedy in games, only one of the three panellists, Tim Schafer, thought a comedy genre would be useful because it would encourage more humoristic games and help the comedic games find their audience (Schafer et al., 2010). Sean Vanaman and Rhianna Pratchett, on the other hand, did not see a need for a genre because comedy can be used across genres.

To assess what types of comedy has been and could be used in games, the following overview discusses the best established modes and subgenres of film comedy in regards to games. The different techniques of the categories can and often do cross over, and most of the games listed belong to more than one category.

2.4.1 Satire

Feinberg (2006, p. 7) defines the technique of the satirist as “*a playfully critical distortion of the familiar*”, “playfully” stressing the element of pretence. Satire is often confused with parody, but satire draws on and highlights social conventions whereas parody draws on and highlights aesthetic ones (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p. 19). The confusion is not helped by the fact that parody can be used for satirical purposes. Satire can represent aspects of life that could not

otherwise be shown and offers a way to discuss serious socio-political material without veering into melodrama or straight propaganda (King, 2002, p. 107).

Satire is the type of game comedy that has gained the most academic attention. Madsen and Johansson (2002) analyse short satirical games on the Internet using Feinberg's (1967, cited in Madsen and Johansson, 2002, p. 77) identification of basic satirical techniques (incongruity, surprise, pretence, superiority) and state that these games seem to be primarily made for communicating ideas rather than played recreatively and can handle serious subject matters. Dymek and Lennerfors (2005) examine racial discourses in *Grand Theft Auto III* in light of phthonic (malicious) and incongruity theories of humour, and Ouellette (2010) questions the validity of *Grand Theft Auto IV* as satire. Natunen's (2010, pp. 41–43) MA thesis and persuasive game *Nuclear Tycoon* uses satire as the narrative rhetoric to criticise nuclear power.

Ian Bogost's "playable theory" of social games, *Cow Clicker* (Bogost, 2010), ended up as an 18-month-long social experiment. It was meant to embody the worst aspects of social games: wasting the player's time even when she is away from the game, turning the player's friends into resources, options to pay to skip the tediousness of the gameplay, and feeding into the player's addiction. The player could click a cow once in every six hours, earning *clicks*. Friends could be invited to join the player's *pasture* for more clicks. Every click was reported on the player's Facebook newsfeed, and a leaderboard showed the top clickers. The players could buy more cows or circumvent the time delay with micropayments. *Cow Clicker* soon attracted an audience that played it as an ironic protest against Zynga and Facebook games. However, it virally grew from a cult hit among game industry insiders to over 50 000 users, both those that were in on the joke and those that took it in earnest. Instead of abandoning the game after its launch, as he had originally intended, Bogost started sustaining the experience. He added features such as clicking on the newsfeed updates, transparently stupid prizes, and new cows, the most cynical one being the default cow facing the other direction. It was strangely compelling for both the user base and Bogost himself who spent more time on it than he was comfortable with. He used *Cow Clicker* to satirise also other gaming trends, such as gamification and simplistic "educational" software, but in the end he removed all the cows in the *Cowpocalypse*, leaving only empty grass that can still be clicked for points. The whole ordeal left Bogost unsure whether *Cow Clicker* was his greatest success or most tragic failure. (Bogost, 2010; Tanz, 2011)

Games satirising something game industry or community related often use parody to get their point across, and sometimes it is hard to judge whether a game is mainly intended to be commentary on the player or the game form. The never released *Desert Bus* was Penn Jillette and Teller's offering for the people who complained about video games being unrealistic and too

violent (*Penn Jillette Discusses Unreleased Sega CD Game*, 2006). The goal of *Desert Bus* was to drive the bus from Tucson to Las Vegas, in real time: a boring drive of eight hours in the middle of a desert. The game was designed so that the player could not just tape down the game pad button but had to steer the bus for the whole ride. The reward for getting to Vegas was one point and the option to drive back for another point, as long as the player's patience lasted.

This kind of abusive game design is fairly common for both satires and parodies. Unlike traditional player-centric game design, it does not aim to satisfy the player's desires (Wilson and Sicart, 2010). It forces the player into a dialogue with the designer, because understanding the designer takes a more important role over understanding the system. Wilson and Sicart categorise abusive game design into unfair design, physical abuse like *Desert Bus*, lying to the player, and aesthetic and social abuse. Since satire has an agenda outside of the player enjoying the game, abusive game design can force the player to think why the game was made and pay attention to the issues behind it instead of entertainment.

Although satire is a fitting comedy mode for abusive game design, there are many genuinely enjoyable and player-friendly games that involve satire. As earlier pointed out, the *Grand Theft Auto* series tends to be interpreted as satire, and they have a high budget. *Canis Canem Edit* (Rockstar Vancouver, 2006) (known as *Bully* in the U.S. region), also by Rockstar Games, is a long open-world game that satirises social hierarchies in boarding schools. The World of Goo Corporation in the indie hit *World of Goo* satirises exploitative big businesses. Its designer Kyle Gabler told that the World of Goo Corporation is a metaphor for some of the absurd experiences the developers had with publishers during the development process (Gallaway, 2008), but this is not easily deducible from the game alone.

A satirical game makes the player both its willing participant and victim. The players of *Cow Clicker* made a statement about the hollowness of Facebook games, but not without wasting their own time. *Desert Bus* could have ended up as a throwaway joke, but in 2007 an Internet comedy group started using it to raise money for charity in yearly events where the group marathon-plays the game as long donations are coming in, raising so far over \$ 1,000,000 (Jacek et al., 2012). Even fun satirical games like *GTA*, *World of Goo*, and many tycoon games where the player plays as a corrupt capitalist usually push the player into doing something morally questionable. Like any other comedy, satire can cut both ways, and it is probably the most respected comedy mode to address social concerns.

2.4.2 Parody

It is unclear whether parody has deconstructive or affirmative implications (King, 2002, pp. 112–120). In mocking its target, a parody pays a tribute to the original and can serve a process of renewal for a genre by clearing away clichés in favour of other, more “authentic” elements. A parody alters some aspects of the target, yet retains others to provide anchorage to the original. Harries (2000, cited in King, 2002, p. 114–118) identifies six primary methods of combining the similarity and difference between the parody and the target:

1. Reiteration is the point of departure, anchorage to the original.
2. Inversion ironically suggests the opposite meaning than the original.
3. Misdirection takes an unexpected turn after initially being played like the original.
4. Literalisation makes metaphors literal or non-diegetic elements (e.g. background music) diegetic.
5. Extraneous inclusion inserts elements from works “foreign” to the target.
6. Exaggeration magnifies the original elements to a ridiculous degree.

Games can parody either other games or game genre conventions, or specific works or aesthetics of other media. Commercial games that are foremost parodies of specific works, either games or other media, are very rare, and most examples own the license to their target, like *Lego* games (1997–2013) parodying Indiana Jones, Star Wars, and Harry Potter, among others. Some games parody other works in certain scenes but are not full-fledged parodies as a whole. Publishers are wary of using parody because of the potential legal trouble despite its status as protected speech (Kuehnel and Entin, 2007, p. 165). Most games whose main purpose is to parody another specific game are non-commercial, short, and usually made by fans.

Games parodying gameplay genre conventions tend to have trouble not becoming self-parodies due to using too much reiteration and not enough of the other parody methods. *Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard* uses the worst shooter genre clichés and builds its humour around the main character commenting on how annoying those clichés are (Haywald, 2009). Haywald felt that the main character’s quips added “insult to injury”, taunting the player with the fact that the designers knew the problems of the game and did nothing to fix them.

Another peril is players not even noticing the parody. According to Palmer (1987, pp. 134–135), when something seems too plausible, it does not seem absurd, and the audience takes the intended parody at face value. In the same vein, Cutler (2011) points out that players are trained to accept the logic the game puts toward them and usually cannot distinguish a parody of bad design from actual bad design. He uses Goichi Suda’s games as examples: *Killer7* is a shooter that mocks the

linearity of modern shooters by putting the player on a rail, and *No More Heroes* (Grasshopper Manufacture, 2007) makes fun of empty open-world games by featuring an empty open world. They are exaggerated, but not all players will recognise it as parody and for many who do, it is not enough to excuse the deliberate clumsiness of the gameplay.

WarioWare, Inc.: Mega Microgames is an unambiguously successful example of parodying game clichés. Gingold (2005) discusses how it foregrounds game design conventions by pushing the formal boundaries of game complexity to minimum. *WarioWare* consists of minigames that each last for five seconds until the player is dropped to a new, different game. The game space is bounded by the tiny space of a Gameboy Advance screen, and the goals and input mechanisms are so simple that they can be understood in the short time even when they are constantly changing. The minigames resemble existing game types, and some are direct parodies of older games, reiterating the genre conventions before departing from them. Some apply misdirection by showing what appears to be a familiar game genre but then subverting it into something else. Gingold posits the minimal features that, according to *WarioWare*, make a game a game: a goal, agency, and the fiction that helps the player understand the first two. The rapidly changing minigames of *WarioWare* illustrate how complex games are built out of simpler ones, and how continuity in goals, commands, and the avatar is usually employed to create coherent games.

There are numerous short free indie games that parody some aspects or even a single aspect of game design. *Pick Up the Phone Booth and Die* (Noyes, 1996) is a minimalist text adventure parodying the “second-guess the parser” metagame inherent to games with text parsers. It can be lost by picking up the phone booth and won in two moves if the player guesses what the right command is. *Progress Quest* (Fredricksen, 2002) has no interaction at all, just tables of statistics that change while the game plays itself. The designer claims it to belong to a new breed of “fire and forget” role-playing games that remove all the “tedious micromanagement” of older generation of role-playing games (*Progress Quest Manual*, n.d.). *Super PSTW Action RPG* (Rhete, 2009) accepts only one input — pressing space — which is used for everything in the game. The game misdirects the player by giving her “choices” that cannot be refused. *Achievement Unlocked* (Armor Games, 2008) gives the player an achievement for every mundane task and some more obscure ones, making it possible to get a hundred achievements in five minutes of gameplay. It has no goal aside from getting all the achievements.

In addition to game genre conventions, parody games can target the genre conventions and aesthetics of other media. The world of *Brütal Legend* (Double Fine Productions, 2009) is an affectionate parody of heavy metal, and the player must save the music genre from Goths, glam rock, and other perceived indignities. Heavy metal is already so over the top that noticeably exaggerating it would be challenging. Instead, heavy metal clichés are played literally and

seriously for a comedic effect. Music is power and used for fighting, and the world takes its imagery directly from heavy metal album covers. Because *Brütal Legend* is targeted at the fans of heavy metal, it can use referential humour and parodies of real musicians with the knowledge that the audience will recognise them. An interesting nuance in the main character is that he is the road crew, the one doing the actual work behind the scenes instead of the main performer, which gives him a good reason to accept anything that aids the band as a side quest. The inclusion of real-time strategy in the otherwise action-adventure game could count as an extraneous inclusion. It is certainly unexpected when it first appears in the game, and its heavy metal thematisation is amusing. The strange mix of gameplay genres makes *Brütal Legend* a somewhat uneven experience, but the strong theme helps to unify it.

Parody is an interesting comedy mode because it can be used to learn more about game design and to bring new life to genre conventions. It is, unsurprisingly, a very visible comedy mode in the experimental indie game community.

2.4.3 Slapstick

Slapstick is about physical humour and visuals. It is widespread in games with a light-hearted tone, especially ones that include some kind of physical actions in the gameplay. All Mario games contain some degree of slapstick, from the platform games to the *Mario Kart* racing games, and from the *Super Smash Bros* (1999–2008) fighting games to the *Paper Mario* (2000–2012) role-playing games. The online multiplayer shooter *Team Fortress 2* is a less child-friendly but still cartoonlike example. *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* (Nintendo, 2006) takes physicality to a new level by requiring the player to act out the moves with the Wii controller. The *Angry Birds* (2009–2012) franchise shows that complex animations are not necessary for video game slapstick, and the main star in these games is the physics engine combined with the funny character designs. Even games with a serious storyline can easily slip into the slapstick territory due to exaggerated physics and unexpected moments in gameplay (Dujnic, 2010). Although violence seems like a natural foray for video games, *The Sims* series manages slapstick without it (and with it).

2.4.4 Dark Comedy

Dark comedy (or black comedy) has disturbing shifts in tone that keep the viewer unsafely imbalanced (King, 2002, pp. 180–188). The difference between slapstick violence and dark comedy violence is that slapstick is coded harmless and not-real, while dark comedy violence is generally more realistic. Theatre critic Styan (1962, pp. 239–259) writes that dark comedy invites the audience to get emotionally involved but have moments of uncertainty where it becomes self-

aware. When the spectators re-engage in the play, they are more cautious and charged with tension. The climax of a dark comedy may be where the tensions are at their tipping point. The darkest comedies deny their audience comic relief.

In games, dark comedy is usually linked to the subject matter and rarely to the gameplay, which prevents them from reaching the same tension and unease as films like *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) or *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000). Mainstream games are too long to maintain a pressing feeling all the time, and if they try, it bars the player from getting into the flow, likely making her to have a break or stop playing. On the other hand, games could be ideal for making the player anxious because she is responsible for the main character and not just a passive spectator. Games often straddle the line between dark comedy and slapstick. Even when the violence looks realistic, the consequences are rarely more than a minor nuisance. Sympathetic non-player characters may die permanently, but in almost all games the player character is safe.

The *Fallout* series (1997–2010) relies on its darkly ironic tone. One of the designers, Leonard Boyarsky, has said that the humour of *Fallout* comes from a “juxtaposition of the powers that be... trying to put forth a silly ‘everything’s great!’ attitude and the stark reality that actually exists in the world” (Brother None, n.d.). The juxtaposition does not come from just the story elements but also the interface elements with illustrations of the inappropriately cheerful *Fallout* mascot, Vault Boy (Figure 7). Even with some of the silly elements the *Fallout* series has, it overall uses dark humour rather than silly humour.



Figure 7: Vault Boy.



Figure 8: Raz in front of a camp cabin building with Psychonaut advertising on the walls.

The tone of *Psychonauts* (Double Fine Productions 2005) is downright bizarre. The game takes place in a summer camp meant for psychic ten-year-olds training to become Psychonauts, special psychic agents. As seen in Figure 8, the visuals are bright and colourful, the characters look cartoony although a bit grotesque, and at first glance the game appears to be made for players far

younger than its intended audience. However, very soon the camp starts to resemble child soldier training. The whole game is littered with details and scenes that seem funny at first but are warped disconcerting later. Sasha, one of the adult non-player characters, rants hilariously about Tiffany lamps and uses one to teach the player how to psychically destroy objects. This seems like a throwaway joke until the same kind of lamp is shown in a flashback scene of Sasha's mother dying when he was young. The player can eavesdrop on the campers and hear stories of boys planning to sneak into the girls' cabin, one of the children conversing with voices in his head, and cheerleaders discussing their suicide attempts. Most of the time the disturbing tone is separate from the gameplay, but the last level is distressing on both accounts: the player has to fight the main character's, Raz's, mental image of his father in a nightmarish circus with a rising water level enforcing the hectic pace. In addition to the level being obnoxiously hard, the "father" insults and throws knives at Raz, the narrative implying that this is how Raz really sees his father. Completing the scenario rewards the player with a heartwarming and comical cut-scene that will feel truly earned.

Since dark comedy often goes hand in hand with satire, methods of abusive game design might bring the gameplay closer to the thematic feel. Wilson and Sicart (2010) describe the aim of "good" unfair design as trying to make the players paranoid and still surprise them when they are at their most alert, which sounds close to how Styran (1962, pp. 239–259) sees dark comedy. Anyone can make an impossible game, but the popular masocore games have a glimmer of hope that keeps the players playing. The unfair games build on the moments of hesitation that could be interesting when combined with dark comedy.

2.4.5 Gross-Out Comedy

Gross-out comedy is a relatively young subgenre of film comedy based on crude transgressions of good taste (King, 2002, p. 3; p. 63). It is more controversial in games than in films and presented mainly in games with higher age ratings. Extreme violence is generally much more accepted than sexual content, swearing, and adult themes, and retailers may ban too risqué games from their stores (Kuehnel and Entin, 2007, pp. 164–165). Probably the most famous — and infamous — example of gross-out comedy in games is Sierra's *Leisure Suit Larry* series of adventure games with its sexual themes that started off raunchy and oscillated back and forth for the rest of the series (Meeus, 2008). *Conker's Bad Fur Day* shocked the press because it was released on Nintendo 64, which was generally known as the family-friendly console compared to its contemporaries (Gonzalez, 2004). Conker looks like any other cute Nintendo character, but the game is full of lewd, foulmouthed, and scatological humour. More recently, *The House of the Dead: Overkill* is strictly an adult-only game, mining its humour from not only ultraviolent gore

but adult language and incest and disability gags (Castle, 2009). Judging from the game reviews of *Pelit* magazine (Chapter 2.2), gross-out comedy is a likely subgenre for humorous action games rated Mature.

2.4.6 Romantic Comedy

This subgenre is included for the sake of pointing out that it is almost nonexistent in games, and yet perhaps the dominant form of situational comedy in film (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p. 132). Some games have single storylines and characters whose relationship resembles romantic comedy, but there are no Western mainstream games that are primarily intended as romantic comedies. Japanese dating simulators feature many romances and probably also romantic comedies, but due to a language and culture barrier they are outside of the scope of this thesis, and it is unclear how much comedic dating simulators resemble Western romantic comedies. So far the few funny dating simulators getting noticed outside of their niche market have drawn attention by being strange, like *Hatoful Boyfriend*, which puts the player in the role of the only human girl in the country's premier school for birds and presents the boyfriend candidates as photographs of pigeons (Cox, 2012).

Reasons for this lack of an entire subgenre can only be speculated. Since romantic comedy in film is seen in general to have a specific appeal to female audience (p. 133), the historical dearth of female players has surely had an impact, although the statistics show that 47% of the players were female in 2012 (The Entertainment Software Association, 2012, p. 3). Even if marketability was not an issue, romantic comedy is unknown territory gameplay-wise. It is hardly suitable for the same kind of repetition and game loops as the dominant game genres, and the game would either require very complex AIs or a lot of scripting, constricting the player's freedom. Even for writers it would call for a different skill set than most existing games, and the current 3D animators are more adept at explosions than making two people convincingly touch each other.

2.4.7 Comedy in Non-Comedy Works

Comedy scenes are often included in primarily non-comedic films to lighten the mood, offer relief from tension, or show a contrast to the seriousness (King, 2002, p. 172). Likewise, many primarily non-comedic games contain humour, but it is rarely talked about because it does not permeate the whole game experience. It does affect the mood, and its presence or absence changes the overall character of the game. *Assassin's Creed II* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2009) has a different feel than *Assassin's Creed III* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2012), even when they belong to the same series and share some characters. The main character of *Assassin's Creed II*, Ezio, is

flamboyant and funny, and the whole game has a lighter and more colourful atmosphere than *ACIII* despite having tragic events like Ezio's father and brothers being executed. Many small things keep *ACII* constantly amusing: Ezio's dealings with courtesans and thieves to get to the restricted areas, Leonardo da Vinci's inventions, and the citizens' nonchalance about Ezio's freerunning antics, occasionally speculating whether he is drunk or in hurry to meet a girl. *ACIII*, in contrast, has both a more serious main character and non-player characters. This did not go unnoticed by reviewers: many pointed out that the main character of *ACIII* lacks Ezio's charm (see e.g. Barnes, 2012; Edge Online, 2012; Teti, 2012).

3. Humour through Game Elements

Most game researchers and designers have a notion of game elements, but their taxonomy is not unified and researchers tend to define their own categorisation of game elements. Thus, the game elements used here are chosen for their suitability of analysing humour in games. The taxonomy is originally based on Järvinen's (2008) classification of game elements but is quite different from it. Järvinen identifies game elements as the components, environment, rule set, game mechanics, theme, interface, information, player, and contexts. For analysing humour, there are needlessly many elements isolated from each other, and particularly problematic is the theme as its own game element and not melded with all the elements that can be used to present it. A more fruitful approach was redefining game elements to implicitly include the thematic meaning and discuss the player's role, context, rules, and interface whenever appropriate. Therefore, the game elements used in the chapter are game mechanics, characters, and the game world. In Järvinen's taxonomy a character is a type of component and the game world is called the environment, but the new name was chosen to emphasise the fictional rather than the functional side of the concept.

3.1 Game Mechanics

Verbs and actions that the player can perform are a defining factor for a game experience. The terminology varies by user, but in this thesis these actions are called game mechanics, as per Järvinen's definition:

Game mechanics is a functional game feature that describes one possible or preferred or encouraged means with which the player can interact with game elements as she is trying to influence the game state at hand towards attainment of a goal. The practical realization of a game mechanic is a sequence which starts from a player and is conducted via a direct or indirect interface to the system, thus combining at least two game elements (the player and another element) into interaction. (Järvinen, 2008, p. 255)

Various game designers, writers, journalists, and bloggers promote humour emerging from game mechanics (Kuehnel and Entin, 2007; Schafer et al., 2010; Cutler, 2011; Jack, 2011; Cook, 2012). The game mechanics usually take up most of the game time, and deriving humour from them, from what the player actually does instead of passively watching, does not have an obvious analogy in non-interactive media. Schafer advises the designers to give the players tools to realise their own hilarity (Gonzalez, 2004). Furthermore, Rhianna Pratchett says that humour through game mechanics helps with pacing that tends to be a problem with game comedy due to the lack of control (Schafer et al., 2010).

Game mechanics can be inherently humorous, most often as instances of incongruity humour. An effective method, especially with experienced players who are familiar with the genre conventions, is surprising the player by subverting expectations. A famous example is the insult sword-fighting in *The Secret of Monkey Island*. Most players would expect to be able to control the sword, but instead they have to collect insults and witty comebacks and correctly combine them to hit the opponent. The insult sword-fighting is both implausible, because the “fighting” is actually conversation, and plausible, because pirates in films spend a lot of the swordfights shouting taunts and quips at each other. Schafer, who worked on the game, recounts that he initially found the idea insane but then learned that players actually want to be surprised (Gonzalez, 2004). He cites the lack of courage and self-censorship as the top obstacles the developers need to overcome to make funny games, and says that sometimes people incorrectly blame failure on the innovation rather than the execution.

The players can also initiate the subversion. Jack (2011) discusses *Dead Rising 2* that lets the player distort the serious story by dressing the player character in silly outfits, ignoring calls for help and riding a pink children’s bicycle. The characters in the game do not acknowledge the ridiculousness in any way. This creates an illusion of subversion in the player by making them feel that they are playing a joke on the game or the designer, although of course the developers intended this to happen when they put those tools of subversion in the game.

3.1.1 Dynamics

Dynamics, sequences of game mechanics realised in the feedback loop, describe the system behaviour of a game as a whole. The more game mechanics there are, the more variation there is between dynamics when a game is played by different players with different choices and strategies. (Järvinen, 2008, pp. 250–259)

Instead of independent game mechanics, humour can emerge from the dynamics of the whole game. Schell (2008, pp. 140–144) writes about emergent gameplay and how a small number of game mechanics could result in a large number of dynamics. He uses the words “operative actions” and “resultant actions” synonymously with what Järvinen calls game mechanics and dynamics. Schell has five suggestions for attaining more emergence in a game:

1. Add more operative actions that interact well with each other while keeping in mind the ratio of meaningful resultant actions to operative actions.
2. Make operative actions that work on many objects.
3. Make goals that can be achieved in more than one way.
4. Add more subjects the player can control.

5. Add side effects that change constraints.

Lemmings (DMA Design, 1991) integrates all of these guidelines. The player can control up to a hundred lemmings and perform eight different game mechanics through them. Most game mechanics that affect the environment also affect the lemmings, and one misstep starts the descent into chaos. The levels are puzzles where the player must work out the required dynamics to save enough lemmings from walking off a cliff and other suicidal tendencies. Depending on the level design, the goal can be reached in a variety of ways, and at least there are always many different ways to fail. *Lemmings* is simple, but the interconnectivity of its rules makes it seem more complex and surprising. Moreover, the emergence arises from a humorous premise. The chaotic gameplay alone does not make *Lemmings* funny but the absurdity of trying to control that chaos to save creatures that are too stupid to live.

3.1.2 Elegance

An alternative to an arsenal of different game mechanics is elegance through one game mechanic that defines the game. In the puzzle-action game *We Love Katamari* (Namco, 2005), the player spends the large majority of the game time rolling both inanimate and living objects into an adhesive ball called a katamari (as shown in Figure 9). Any objects smaller than the katamari stick to it, consequently making it bigger. However, colliding too fast into bigger objects causes some of the already-rolled objects in the katamari to fall off. New areas in the levels can be reached when the katamari is big enough to roll the blocking objects into it. Even when the activity stays the same, the levels feel different. The level goals depend on the requests of the in-fiction fans: usually, the katamari must be rolled to a certain size within a time limit, but some levels have stranger objectives. In one level, the player is placed on a fast-moving racing track. In another, the katamari is a sumo wrestler who must be fed by rolling food into him in order to defeat a bigger sumo wrestler by rolling him, too, into the katamari. In yet another, the katamari is on fire and needs constantly more objects to keep the fire going. This time living people cannot be rolled up, but they will catch on fire and run away screaming if the player touches them with the katamari. Many levels take place in everyday environments, making the incongruity of the player's actions more apparent, and the objects are scattered nonsensically across the levels, such as different foods on the road and samurais guarding a school. Rolling the katamari retains its charm when the player constantly comes across new objects to roll up and gradually advances from paperclips to whole planets.



Figure 9: The player rolling up animals who are desperately trying to flee.



Figure 10: Octodad in his living room. A still image does not do *Octodad* justice, but even it shows how Octodad's body resembles a marionette.

3.1.3 Levels of Abstraction

A rarer method of eliciting incongruity humour through game mechanics is choosing an unusual level of abstraction. Juul (2007) defines a level of abstraction as the level on which the player is allowed to act in a game. The level of abstraction identifies the game and the game genre: *Cooking Mama* lets the player prepare food step-by-step because it is a simulation of cooking, while *Diner Dash* does not concern the player with where the food comes from because it is a resource management game of running a diner. Especially short indie games sometimes use an abnormal level of abstraction as a source of humour. *Qwop* (Foddy.net, 2008) challenges the player to learn what most of us take for granted: the ability to walk. The avatar is a runner from an underfunded training program, and the player has to use QWOP keys to move each calf and thigh individually. This is very hard, and an inexperienced player may end up jumping backwards and falling down with a negative score. The ragdoll physics of the character makes the whole process look ridiculous, and even a horrible score is rewarded with the cheerful text “everyone is a winner”.

Octodad (Young Horses, Inc., 2010) is a longer, more ambitious game that applies a similarly strange level of abstraction to moving tentacles. The player takes the role of an octopus who is pretending to be a normal human father, and the avatar is controlled like an ill-balanced marionette (seen in Figure 10). Mundane tasks such as walking or grabbing objects are made difficult by the fragile control the player has over Octodad’s limbs and body. The boneless tentacles must be moved one at a time, and they are intentionally hard to aim correctly, the rest of the body making the act even more difficult. If the player acts too strangely, Octodad’s human family grows suspicious and realises he is an octopus. The comedy in *Octodad* is built on slapstick and the absurdity of the premise. The family considers Octodad’s fumbling and even innocuous things like handling make-up suspicious but apparently does not notice the fact that Octodad is an octopus in a business suit, with a clearly visible octopus head and tentacles.

As has been seen, playing with the levels of abstraction can be a fertile ground for creating slapstick. Parody seems another obvious comedy mode due to the possibilities of exaggeration and understatement. Slapstick and parody are probably the most effective modes for humour derived from game mechanics, but game mechanics should receive serious consideration in relation to any type of comedy or humour.

3.2 Characters

Since comedy allows disruption of cultural and fictional rules, comedic characters are not bound by the same rules as those in a drama (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p. 149). The characters can break social norms, and certain types of characters are more easily accepted than in other genres. Thus, comedic game characters are likely to be more diverse than the macho space marines of a multitude of action games.

Comedy does not shy away from stereotypes, but comedy characters are stereotypes on purpose and the comedic effect arises from that (Parker, 1998, p. 88). Stereotypes and caricatures exaggerate specific features of a person and reveal stiffness that is a chief constituent of Bergson's (1900) theory of laughter. He proposes that humour comes from the perception of rigidity within something flexible, a machine within a human body. Repetition is funny because it reveals a mechanism behind life, and obsessions show inflexibility of mind. Interestingly, revealing a mechanism behind the fictional game world seems to be more comical in games when it is unintended: glitches are funny because they are unexpected and surreal, and laughing at them probably also has elements of superiority humour targeted at the developers (Farrell, 2013). If glitches were included on purpose, they would lose much of their spontaneity and humour value.

Game comedy based on a group of characters is not very established but not unheard of. Situational comedies on television have a small core of strongly typed characters, and the dramatic conflict stems from the characters reacting to each other (Parker, 1998, p. 30). The emergent humour in *The Sims* series and *Team Fortress 2* has the same basis. For scripted conflict, Egri (2007, p. 115) advises orchestrating characters of a drama by choosing “*well-defined and uncompromising characters in opposition, moving from one pole toward another through conflict*”. Conflict for comedy characters is created in the same manner, but change is less important, and situational comedy typically tries to maintain the status quo (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, pp. 234–235). However, mixing drama with comedy is common, and according to Durgnat (1969, cited in King, 2002, p. 10) a dramatic undertow is necessary for creating incongruities out of emotional tension.

For a practical approach, author John Vorhaus (1994, pp. 31–43) suggests four elements for creating a comic character: the comic perspective, flaws, humanity, and exaggeration. The comic perspective is a character's unique way of looking at the world, differing clearly from the norm. In games this would manifest itself in the character's dialogue and actions, both of which can be influenced by the player. Flaws add conflict and create distance between the audience and the character, making it easier to laugh at the character. Humanity makes the audience sympathise or

empathise with the character, facilitating engagement with the character's struggles, which in games tends to be more effective if the character's struggles align with the player's goals. Flaws can also be a part of humanity. Both the comic perspective and flaws are usually exaggerated to make the character stand out and make the incongruity in the character apparent.

Although many issues about writing humorous characters are relevant to any comedic game or non-game character, an additional important consideration for games is the player's agency in relation to the character.

3.2.1 Player Character

The player character (PC), also known as the avatar, has a special relationship with the player. How the player experiences the relationship depends on the player and the character, but most likely the player is neither completely separate from the character nor fully immersed in it. The immersive fallacy is the idea the game should strive to fully immerse the player in the game, to the point where the player believes to be a part of an imaginary world (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003, pp. 450–455). Salen and Zimmerman argue that the player becomes engaged in the game through play, maintaining a double-consciousness where the player is aware of the artificiality. In the case of the PC, the player exerts herself into the game world through the PC but at the same time treats the PC like a tool or a puppet.

There has been debate over whether the PC should be an iconic cursor or a multidimensional character, with supporters on both sides (Lankoski, 2010, pp. 33–34). Even iconic PCs can have humorous elements like Pac-Man's death animation, but primarily comedic PCs need a distinct personality. An adventure game is the most likely culprit for having a comedic PC, some famous ones being Guybrush Threepwood (*The Secret of Monkey Island*), an endearing but clumsy pirate with sarcastic wit; Sam and Max (*Sam & Max Hit the Road*), a comedy duo of a straight man and a violent psychopath; and Larry Laffer (*Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards*), a balding forty-something trying to seduce young women. Humorous character designs are common especially in simple platform and casual games, but PCs with a comic perspective are rare outside of adventure games. A notable exception is the multiplayer first-person shooter *Team Fortress 2* whose nine character classes all have unique comical personalities. All the more unusual is that unlike with PCs in other comedy games, the player cannot see her own character while playing, although she can see the other players', including those with the same character class. In addition to the visual design and incidental dialogue, the characters' personalities are supported by out-of-game videos and comics.

Character Limitations

While the personality of the PC gives the player less freedom, a game system always limits and affords choices, and a defined PC is a natural way to constrain the player. The PC can be defined through possible and impossible actions, goals, predefined functions, and characterisation. Possible and impossible actions define the PC's skills and possibly morals. Goals are ways to reduce a player's freedom in a game and imply what the PC should be able to do. They can be explicit, given by someone, or implicit, discernible from the PC's personality and situation. Inconsistency in the PC's personality and goals affects the interpretation of the whole game. Sharing and being motivated to reach the character's goals helps the player become engaged in the game. Predefined functions are the parts where the designers have control over the PC, such as cut-scenes, dialogue, or character animation. Characterisation concerns the observable facts of a character, similar to how characters in any other media are designed. (Lankoski, 2010, pp. 93–114)

Superman in *Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes* (Traveller's Tales, 2012) is at his first appearance defined as ridiculously overpowered through his abilities and predefined functions. Until Superman turns up, Batman and Robin have been using various suits and gadgets to solve puzzles and advance in the game, but suddenly many of Batman and Robin's skills are rendered useless by Superman's superiority. This is reminiscent from the source media, the comics and cartoons, where Superman could easily make the rest of his team unneeded if not for the convenient appearance of his few weaknesses. *Lego Batman 2* also adds to the long history of Batman and Superman being played against each other like a comedy duo: the cut-scenes show Batman being annoyed by Superman's help, which may even spread to Batman's player. When I played *Lego Batman 2* in the co-operative mode as Superman with my friend as Batman, she quickly became irritated at the power imbalance and shared Batman's demeanour from the cut-scenes until laughing heartily at the second half of the game, where Superman is exposed to Kryptonite, loses some of his abilities, and is now reliant on Batman to make progress. The ironic role-reversal is accentuated by Superman's new animations: earlier his cape was constantly fluttering, but now he moves sluggishly and gets out of breath.

Character Creation

Instead of giving the PC a predefined personality, many games allow the player to adjust the PC's personality to fit a play style. Most role-playing games let the player choose at least some of the PC's attributes, and some offer a system for defining the PC's morality. Even these partially or completely player-created characters can be comical but usually only by the player's conscious choice. "Carnavalesque character design" is one of the humour patterns identified by Dormann

and Neuvians (2012, p. 3). The pattern describes players producing absurd and comical avatars through the character customisation tools, most often by dressing the character in funny clothes or changing the character's physical appearance to something incongruous.

Fallout allows the player to choose the PC's attributes and make decisions ranging from extremely good to evil. Most players tend to be helpful to non-player characters and stay more on the good side, but the evil route offers some moments of superiority and relief humour especially to someone on a second playthrough. The player can also make the PC too stupid to be able to communicate with the other characters or complete most quests. This is not recommended for the first playthrough but is a welcome comical diversion for an experienced *Fallout* player wanting to experiment.

The Sims 3 goes to the extreme of letting the player completely create the PCs including their goals, which are derived from the personalities the player gives the PCs. The player can decide how much free will the characters have, and either micromanage the characters' actions or let them act according to their personalities. The game offers a system for creating a wide variety of fairly complex personalities. For each adult character, the player can choose five different personality traits out of a list of over 60. The traits may define how the character acts towards others, abilities and interests, or specific quirks. For instance, *evil* characters delight at others' misfortune, *absent-minded* characters tend to forget what they were doing, *coward* characters may run away or faint at the face of danger, and *insane* characters make nonsensical decisions. Some traits have their opposites, such as *coward* to *brave*, which cannot be chosen for a character with the opposing trait. Many traits have potential for humorous moments, and the player can even build a family of conflicting personalities on purpose, ensuring comical clashes. *The Sims* series is the closest unscripted video game equivalent to situational comedy, and because of the high player contribution, most of the humour in *The Sims 3* is emergent.

3.2.2 Non-Player Characters

Non-player characters (NPCs) have various roles in relation to the PC. Some are on the player's side, some are antagonistic, and even more are neutral by default or unwitting obstacles that the player must overcome. Personality is a great way to conceal the game purpose of a character and to use subtle hints instead of directly telling the player what to do (Walsh, 2007, pp. 109-110). Having an incidental comedy character who is not involved in the story is safer than a full-fledged comic sidekick who tags along with the player to deliver punch lines (Laramée, 2002). Genuinely funny sidekicks are fondly regarded by players, while failed comedy sidekicks inspire resentment.

Portal 2 (2011) is widely acclaimed, among other things, for its excellently written comedy characters. The game starts with the bumbling robot Wheatley in the role of a sidekick and the passive-aggressive AI GladOS as the antagonist. Wheatley's ineptitude is shown not only through dialogue but also in instances where the player has to participate to make a gag work, such as a scene where Wheatley promises to "hack" the access to a room with glass walls but refuses to do it while the player is facing him. When the player turns the first-person camera, a shattering sound is heard, and, turning back, the player witnesses the broken glass wall and innocent-looking Wheatley. GladOS taunts the player by destroying objects that are meaningful to the PC, Chell. The personalities of the characters get a new spin when halfway through the game their roles are reversed, and GladOS must aid the player to claim control back from Wheatley. Newly gained power further reveals Wheatley's idiocy, as he is too incompetent to even make proper puzzles, being forced to steal GladOS's after only managing to make one insultingly easy puzzle and trying to make the player solve it multiple times. Meanwhile, GladOS's hostility and sarcasm is turned more towards Wheatley even if Chell still gets her fair share. GladOS's dark sense of humour was already appreciated in the first *Portal* (2007) despite or because of her murderous intentions, and Wheatley remains sympathetic to many players in spite of being a traitor. In Wheatley's case it probably helps that the player has time to get emotionally attached to him in his sidekick phase, especially when he is seemingly killed, and his lines as an antagonist are funny. Ellen McLain and Stephen Merchant have both won awards for their performances as GladOS and Wheatley, which should validate the characters as successful (Cork, 2011; Bertz, 2012). However, even Wheatley's likeability is not universal: at least one reviewer found him extremely annoying (Bright, 2011), which shows how subjective humour and comedy are.

NPC Reactions

How the NPCs react to each other can be scripted and share the same considerations as characters in other media, but game characters also need to be able to dynamically react to the player. Schafer says that the awareness of the NPCs is more important than their AI and that the game should react when the player tries something funny (Schafer et al., 2010). This is used to great effect in *Psychonauts* where the PC has various different psychic abilities. Some, like telekinesis and pyrokinesis, are mainly for attacking, and others, like clairvoyance and confusion grenades, affect the adversaries and allies in other ways. Besides their use in combat and advancing in the game, all characters and monsters react to the abilities in some way. Some reactions are shared by a monster type, but many are unique to one character. On top of being funny, the reactions reveal something about the characters. For instance, a cruel player can throw a confusion grenade on an amnesiac character who then becomes worried that he is finally losing his mind. Clairvoyance is an especially interesting ability in that it is rarely needed in the game but every character and each

monster type has unique art related to it. Clairvoyance lets the player see how the others see the PC, Raz. The bully sees him as a punching bag, a girl-obsessed boy sees him as a “Not a girl” sign, one of the adults sees Raz as a younger version of himself, and Raz’s love interest sees him as a romantic figure with a rose in the hand.

A more transient set of reactions is required for a game with changing social relationships and factions like the various opposing groups in *Fallout: New Vegas* (2010). The player can join any one of the factions or stay independent. Choosing a faction early on results in a more straightforward game experience than tiptoeing the line of neutrality. Different factions have their own side quests and main storylines that can be followed up to a certain point without committing to the faction, but the faction members will not appreciate it if the player helps their enemies. The player can earn positive and negative reputation points in relation to each faction, and the reputation determines how the factions will treat the PC. If the reputation is negative, the faction members may attack the PC. The player can wear a uniform of a faction to pass as one of their own, which can lead to comical situations: walking to the command centre of Caesar’s Legion dressed as a Legionnaire, killing Caesar, stealing his clothes, and walking back through the camp dressed as him with no one batting an eye adds certain flair to a simple assassination. Disguises in general have been recognised as being comical (Bergson, 1900, pp. 32–34).

Objects

Objects that the player can possess or interact with are functionally close to simple NPCs in that they need to be able to react to the player’s actions. Some NPCs can even be “possessed” in the same way as items, such as the party members of many role-playing games, and used as weapons and tools. The rules of emergence and subverting expectations are probably the best methods of eliciting humour through game objects. If the object has effects and side effects on many different game elements, the player is bound to find something interesting to do with it. Subverting the player’s expectations of a game object is likely to work only for the first time, but it can be very effective: a particularly crafty example is a monster type in *Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, 2006) that disguises itself as a save point and attacks the player when she gets close.

3.2.3 Player as a Character

The role of the player could be considered a hybrid between the main character and the audience. As in other media, comedic game main characters should have enough humanity that the player cares about the goals, yet enough distance that the player finds the character funny, involving “a *play* between identification and distantiation” (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, p. 149). Distance could be created by breaking immersion for irony, although self-reference may have a negative

reception (Adams, 2004). The distance should not remove the overlap between the goals and motivations of the PC and the player, even if the motivation for the player is to acquire new abilities or items by fulfilling the PC's desires.

Some games get personal and directly make fun of the player. Particularly widespread is mocking the player for choosing an easy mode, most commonly by giving the easy mode an insulting name and sometimes by dressing the PC in something emasculating (TV Tropes, n.d.). This is controversial because many players resent being insulted by a game. Ron Gilbert warns against mocking the player for failing and advises to be careful that the humour targets the character and not the player (Agnello, 2012d).

However, certain games thrive on this kind of antagonistic humour. The trivia party game series *You Don't Know Jack* (1995–2012) constantly ridicules the player for picking wrong answers. The head writer Steve Heinrich says that “the most consistent [form] of comedy comes from somebody getting something wrong” and that *You Don't Know Jack* is “a great party game, because people love to see their friends put down by what's basically an inanimate object” (Agnello, 2012b). The game uses humour in the questions to misdirect players, and the jokes are typically related to the content of the wrong answers. Unlike many other trivia games, *You Don't Know Jack* disallows skipping parts to show that the players are not in control and must play at the frenetic pace of their disparaging host.

Being mocked by a game can incite strong feelings that end up characterising the whole game. One of the most memorable aspects of *Duck Hunt* (Nintendo, 1984) is the dog that laughs at the player's failure. In spite of the game being almost thirty years old, the players still remember their infuriation at the dog, and it has made the top of several “the most annoying video game characters” lists (Lovett, 2008; Goulter, 2010; Jones et al., 2011) and even inspired a joke game called *Kill the Dog from Duck Hunt* (I-Mockery.com, n.d.). It is questionable whether infamy is something to aspire to, but the dog is the most iconic part of a game that could otherwise have been forgotten decades ago. Most players' relationship with the dog is something akin to “love to hate”, and it has also been listed as one of the “50 greatest Nintendo moments” (Scullion, 2010).

Antagonistic humour towards the player serves certain games well but always runs the risk of alienating the player. Humour can either soften or sharpen the insults, and can be both motivating and maddening. The most extreme cases are best saved for games that revolve around the concept, so as to only attract the kind of players who appreciate it in the first place. *You Don't Know Jack* gives the players a fair warning: even the title taunts the reader. Gentler and funnier rebukes can still be welcome in a wider variety of games. Humorously passive-aggressive

narrators have been around since Crowther's *Adventure*, used to be common in text adventures, and were later made famous by *Portal*'s GladOS (McNamee, 2011).

3.3 Game World

Space in games can at the same time depict a fictional world and define constraints for the player: the level design in a game may both represent the fiction and determine the gameplay (Juul, 2005, pp. 188-189). This is one of the cases where the game design and the fiction often overlap.

Psychonauts takes a structurally typical but thematically novel approach to world and level design. The area where the psychic summer training camp is set up and the nearby abandoned mental asylum are provided as an overworld to be explored. There, the player can interact with the NPCs in the physical world, gather collectibles, and access new levels. The levels themselves take place in "mental worlds" inside the minds of different characters, such as the camp counsellors and the patients of the mental asylum. The mental worlds vary wildly in their visuals and objectives, and they always reveal something about their owners that cannot be found out in the physical world. Many levels include some kind of twist with dramatic irony when the player comes close to completing the mental world. Sometimes the whole level is dramatic irony in relation to the overworld: at one point the player has to fight a giant fish monster in the overworld, and then enter the fish monster's mind to find a mental world with tiny fish people and the player as a giant monster rampaging the fish city.

3.3.1 Incongruous Environment

Hostile game worlds are a well-honed video game tradition. Aarseth (2001, p. 159) describes most of the early games as "man against the environment" approaches. He goes on to state that the avatar is clearly different from the other elements, "in the world, but not of the world". This shares similarities with how unsympathetic formal institutions are commonly presented as the enemy of the central character in film comedy (King, 2002, p. 40). The protagonist in these films is often a rebel or a nonconformist, through choice or incompetence. A classic example is Chaplin's (1936) *Modern Times* where Chaplin becomes trapped between the cogs of a machine. A game world can serve well as a source of humour, but what is funny in a film does not directly translate into what is funny in a game: players are used to a certain degree of surrealism, and it needs to stand out from the other games to be considered incongruous.

One way to achieve incongruity is to make the game world incoherent. Jesper Juul (2005, pp. 121-133, 163-179) describes a game world as incoherent when there are many events in the

fictional world that cannot be explained without discussing the game rules, such as invisible walls preventing the player from leaving the game space. In a coherent game world the boundaries of the game space would be motivated by the fictional world. The fictional world cues the player into making assumptions about the game rules, which may become a problem if the rules and the representation of the world do not match. For humorous games, however, a mismatch between the rules and fiction can produce a positive effect by playing with the player's expectations, creating parody, or foregrounding the game as a real-world activity.

An example of a world that frequently works against the fiction and the player's expectations is in the free indie game *I Wanna Be the Guy: The Movie: The Game* (O'Reilly, 2007). The player gets the first taste of this at the very beginning encountering apple trees. If the player walks underneath the first apples, they fall down, killing anyone with slow reflexes. Up to this point the game world is coherent: apples can be expected to fall down from trees. However, when the player has to jump over the trees, she is shocked to learn that the rest of the apples fall upwards. Enough players were distressed by this that the developer added the reaction to the FAQ on the game website:

Q: APPLES DO NOT FALL UP

A: They're more like giant cherries... (O'Reilly, n.d.)

At other points in the game, the player's expectations about the fiction and the rules are subverted in a way that makes the game world *more* coherent. In one room, there is a sword from *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986) accompanied by an old man and the text: "It is dangerous to go alone! Take this." If the player tries to jump to the sword to pick it up, as in the scene with a similar setup in *Zelda*, the player is killed and receives a blunt message: "You jumped into a sword. You retard!" This is a logical conclusion to jumping into a sword but a complete subversion of the familiar item-gifting scene. Even more deviously, a dangerous part of the environment, the sword, is misrepresented as an object that the player can acquire in spite of the game not having an inventory system or a game mechanic for picking up objects

The world of *I Wanna Be the Guy* is hostile towards the player in an unusually twisted way and certainly succeeds in creating humorous incongruities, but as a free indie game it is not intended to be commercially viable and is too hard for most people. It keeps the player in a state of paranoia, turning the game into a fierce contest between the player and the designer. Masocore games like *I Wanna Be the Guy* are likely to elicit shocked laughter of disbelief. The game could have had the same kind of surprises while being easier to defeat, but then the player would be less tense and not prone to emotional overreactions. A less hostile approach is favoured for the more player-friendly games.

3.3.2 Hidden Humour

Usually, hidden humour in games tends to be sporadic and only encountered by some players. All GDC comedy panellists agreed that there is a difference between jokes that are in the forefront and jokes that take effort for the player to find. Schafer said that it takes pressure off the writer when the player does something silly on purpose. Pratchett looked for places where the player is trying to break the world and puts things there. Vanaman found that the context of the player's previous actions with the next can make for the funniest moments. Making jokes for personal situations, such as dying stupidly or trying the same pointless action over and over again, makes the player feel special. (Schafer et al., 2010)

Psychonauts encourages the player to hunt for the narrative. The player can collect back stories of the characters by finding Memory Vaults hidden in the mental worlds. They contain static pictures that together form a comic strip about the owner of the mental world. The comic strips tend to be both humorous and tragic, lowering the player's mental defences with humour before the emotional punch. The game has a huge amount of hidden humour, some of which is hard to find in a single playthrough because it becomes inaccessible depending on the story phase. The world of *Psychonauts* is essential in creating the narrative and closely linked to the game mechanics, especially as the whole culture of the fictional world the player experiences is centred on the psychic abilities of the Psychonauts.

Some games have humour hidden as Easter eggs. PC Magazine's Encyclopaedia (n.d.) defines an Easter egg as "[a]n undocumented function hidden in software that may or may not be sanctioned by management". Björk and Holopainen (2005, p. 235) define the game design pattern "Easter Eggs" as "surprises that do not necessarily advance the game story or even fit within the reality of the *Game World*." Therefore, most or all non-story-related surprises could count as Easter eggs, but the kind that is secretively hidden by an individual developer or a small group is interesting in that it plays a joke on the publishers of the game. The term first came to use in relation to the game *Adventure* on Atari 2006 (Robinett, 1983–84, pp. 712–713). Warren Robinett, the sole developer of *Adventure*, was annoyed by Atari's refusal to credit its developers and hid the text "Created by Warren Robinett" in a secret room in the game. When it was later found by a player, Atari spun this to its advantage and called the hidden surprises in their games "Easter eggs". Ever since, Easter eggs have been a potential weapon in the hands of developers in a guerrilla war against unsatisfactory work conditions (Stevenson, 2011).

Hidden humour motivates players to explore the game world, and the effect can be enhanced by turning some of these instances into achievements that belong to “[s]ystems where players collect virtual rewards that in some sense are separated from the rest of the game” (Jakobsson, 2011), most notably the achievements in Xbox 360 and Steam, and trophies in PlayStation 3. Achievements can track the player’s progress of finding all the secrets and lure even the less likely explorers into investigating the world. As a particularly elaborate example, the otherwise mostly serious *Half-Life 2: Episode 2* (Valve Corporation, 2007a) has an achievement that requires the player to carry a garden gnome statue from the beginning of the game to the end and put it in a rocket. This is quite challenging since the gnome cannot be put into the inventory like the weapons, forcing the player to carry it awkwardly in a way that hinders fighting. The presence of the gnome makes the game look silly and absurd, as has been proven by the gnome-carriers who have documented their journey with screenshots like the one in Figure 11.



Figure 11: Almost completed gnome achievement. The taker of the screenshot writes in his travelogue: “It’s nice to have a permanent record of the insanity Valve have inexplicably put me through, but by the end of it the satisfaction of doing something really, really difficult and really, really pointless was enough.” (Francis, 2007)

4. Building towards Narratives

Game designers must be able to simultaneously handle various aspects of games and determine how the game elements are connected and fit together. This chapter puts the single elements into larger contexts and analyses how they are used to build narratives and comedy, still keeping in mind the interactions with the player. Verbal humour gets its own subsection because, unlike visual humour, it is not implicitly included in all the other subsections of Chapters 3 and 4. The chapter concludes with a look on how players can use whatever tools the designers give them to create their own narratives and comedy performances, regardless of the designers' wishes.

4.1 Game and Story Progression

Juul (2005, pp. 67–83) divides game structures into structures of emergence and progression. In the structures of emergence, a small number of rules, when combined, leads into a large number of game variations. Characteristic of these games are strategies and replayability. Sports and card, board, action, strategy, and multiplayer games fall under this category. Emergence can manifest: 1) as the variety of possible game states and sessions, 2) as the number of patterns that cannot be immediately deduced from the rules of the game, 3) as irreducibility, requiring prototyping to predict system behaviour, or 4) as surprising the player or the designer. Progression is the newer structure introduced by the adventure genre. The structures of progression have a predefined set of actions and a small possibility space and are therefore strongly controlled by the game designer. Games of progression are identifiable by how they can be completely solved in a walkthrough.

Most games fall somewhere between the two extremes of emergence and progression. There are a number of familiar approaches to merging a nonlinear game and story (DeMarie, 2007, pp. 72–77). One of the easiest is *gating* the story by allowing the player to solve a set of game challenges in any order in-between fixed linear plot events. *Branching* the story at certain points grants the player more agency but requires a lot of unused resources. Using *parallel paths*, recombining the paths at key story points, limits the amount of combinations but is still much more expensive and harder to implement than a linear story.

Even linear storytelling in games has complications that do not concern non-interactive media, and nonlinearity brings on a whole new set of challenges. Narrative comedy has been better explored in linear media, but that does not mean it is incompatible with interactivity. One strategy could be making storytelling modules that have a limited effect on each other. As already noted,

situational comedy tries to maintain the status quo by forestalling closure in terms of the series as a whole (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, pp. 234–235). A single episode introduces a threat to the stable situation, which necessitates movement towards reassertion of stability. Moreover, the arbitrary and coincidental are accepted in comedy, and, according to Neale and Krutnik (1990, pp. 31–32), comedy provides “a generally appropriate space for the exploration and use of noncausal forms of motivation and digressive narrative structures”. If the storytelling modules worked like sitcom episodes, the order in which the player encounters them would be a smaller concern.

4.1.1 Quests and Gags

Structuring specific gameplay and story segments as quests is a common method especially in role-playing games or any games with an open world. Tosca defines a quest as:

A quest... brings some or all the storytelling elements (characters, plot, causality, world) together with the interaction, so that we can define it as *the array of soft rules that describe what the player has to do in a particular storytelling situation*. (Tosca, 2003)

By “soft rules”, Tosca means the concrete objectives in small strings of actions, problem solving activities, as opposed to “hard rules”, which consist of the properties of the objects and the gameplay dynamics, more in the domain of strategy planning. Quests can vary in time, linearity and whether they are single- or multiplayer. Aarseth (2005, p. 496) claims that “Tosca’s definition relies on too many unnecessary elements (characters, plot, storytelling, ‘soft rules’) to be generally applicable”, but Karlsen (2008) calls Aarseth’s generality a weakness. In any case, for narrative comedy, at least, storytelling elements are necessary.

Quests could be built as sequences of gags following a narrative structure. One structural model of narrative comedy includes the following components or functions in the following order: an exposition (*protasis*), a complication (*epitasis*), and a resolution (*catastrophe*) (Neale and Krutnik, 1990, pp. 26-42). A further element of complication (*catastasis*) can occur before the resolution. The resolution is sometimes specified as having two components, reversal of fortune (*peripeteia*) and a transition from ignorance to knowledge (*anagnorisis*), meaning that the resolution could produce either suspense or surprise. Suspense is created by an asymmetric distribution of narrative knowledge between the characters and the audience. Producing comic suspense by distributing knowledge in certain patterns has led to a number of stereotypical plot structures in narrative comedy, prominent ones being plots with actively scheming characters, and plots with accidental misunderstandings. Often, the characters know less than the spectator, but the spectator can be surprised as well.

The player's knowledge compared to the PC's knowledge depends on the narrative structure of the game: in a detective structure the player's information is limited to the information of a single character, and in a melodramatic structure the player is controlling more than one character and knows more about the game situation than any single character (Lankoski and Björk, 2010, p. 169). The melodramatic structure lends itself to the film techniques of creating suspense. The detective structure can benefit from the fact that at least on a meta level the player knows more about the game and story structure, and the game system can foreshadow events to the player.

Foreshadowing events in linear games is similar to other media, and it is possible even in nonlinear games although less reliable. Outside of the fictional world, future events can be hinted at by using quest names, inventory structures and items found, and even the names and descriptions of achievements. In the fictional world, the events can be foreshadowed by the environment or characters in ways that are independent of the order the player advances, but these hints may go unnoticed by the player. One comic event in *Fallout 2* (Black Isle Studios, 1998) is subtly foreshadowed by having a relatively interesting element in the environment: in the middle of a little town stands a church, not the only one of its kind in *Fallout 2*, but still very rare and eye-catching compared to its surroundings. The same town has a character that can be seduced by the player, but the pair will be interrupted by the character's angry father. The culmination of the sequence takes place in the aforementioned church, where the father, holding a shotgun, forces the PC to wed his child. The absurd and distressing event has even more impact if the player wondered about the church earlier and now realises that this was the reason for its existence.

A linear gag sequence can be made less predictable by dividing it into parts with free gameplay in-between, building comic suspense while only minimally restraining the player. Such a sequence takes place in *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare, 2009) in a slum area where the player is approached by a beggar claiming to be a war veteran and asking for a small amount of money. If the player gives him money, the beggar leaves, and the player is free to leave or continue playing in the area. When the player enters the area again, the same beggar returns with a friend. This time they ask for a bigger sum and the friend obviously lies about being an orphan ("My mother is especially dead."). If the player still gives them money, they leave, and the player will not see them until re-entering the area. The third time, the player is surrounded by a mob of beggars, all making outrageous claims about being orphans or war veterans, and asking for a significant sum of money. As a punch line, the mob contains one well-dressed rich person who, if questioned, admits he only came because he heard there was free coin.

This is the last appearance of the beggars, but the gag could have been stretched out even longer, particularly because it is divided into such small segments that it does not disturb the player's main tasks. In this specific example, the player could have stopped the gag sequence at any point

by refusing to give the beggars money. This obviously runs the risk of the player missing the punch line, but it also makes the experience more involved and personal for those who finish the whole sequence even while losing more and more money. The beggars gag resembles the humour pattern “using [humour’s] rule of three in quest design” (Dormann and Neuvians, 2012, p. 3), except it is technically only one quest divided into three parts and not presented to the player as a quest. The pattern is defined as creating a humorous effect by using two instances of similar quests and a third comical one. In the case of the beggars, the situation takes a turn to suspicious already at their second appearance.

The way the amount of the beggars grows and their stories become more preposterous is what comedians call *topping the topper*. Palmer analyses a gag into two moments:

1. a peripeteia, a shock or surprise that the narrative constructs for us;
2. a pair of syllogisms, leading to contradictory conclusions:
 - a. that the process is implausible
 - b. that the process nonetheless has a certain measure of plausibility, but that this is less than implausibility. (Palmer, 1987, p. 43)

The peripeteia in the beggars gag is going from altruistically giving a little money to one sincere war veteran to suddenly being demanded a big sum by a mob of scammers. In analysis, the process of the gag seems more plausible than implausible, making it not fit Palmer’s criteria, but in the context of *Dragon Age: Origins* the process is quite implausible because the game is otherwise grim and the slum area in particular has nothing else comical or light-hearted about it. Palmer (pp. 119–120) goes on to describe the escalation of a sequence by increasing the peripeteia, implausibility, and plausibility. The beggars make outrageous claims, and the amount of money to continue the gag grows substantially, raising the implausibility of the situation, but other beggars hearing of the PC’s generosity is logical, making the situation plausible. This kind of gag structure is also known as the snowball or slow burn effect.

4.2 Verbal Humour

Games are largely visual, but verbal humour is significant for most comedic games. It can be categorised into diegetic and non-diegetic humour, meaning humour that exists in the game fiction, and humour that comes from the instructions to the player or some of the external game elements.

4.2.1 Diegetic

The most obvious use of diegetic verbal humour is the dialogue between characters, a subject so vast it has its own subchapter 4.2.3 below. Other ways are the names, descriptions, and narration. Funny names of characters, places, and objects are common in primarily comedic games, but their use affects the tone of the whole world, making the approach ill-suited for slightly more serious game worlds. Descriptions of items and characters are important especially for adventure games where they can be presented diegetically, very often as amusing monologue from the PC. Almost all game narration is functionally non-interactive monologue from the system to the player and mostly contained to cut-scenes, but a few exceptions make their narrator into an essential part of the game experience. *The Stanley Parable* (Wreden, 2011) has a narrator who details everything Stanley does and tries to order him around, but the player can disobey the narrator and break the story, thus angering the narrator and engaging in a battle of wills. The game has six different endings, all exploring the themes of free will and interactive storytelling with subtle humour and irony.

The text-based games live or die on the quality of their narration and descriptions, and obviously all of their humour is conveyed verbally. Commercial text-based games have been practically inexistent since the 1990s, but the current text-based games have a small dedicated community of players and hobbyist developers including their own annual XYZZY Awards and Interactive Fiction Competition. Some text-based games even make verbal humour part of the gameplay, such as *Counterfeit Monkey* (Short, 2012) that gives the player a gun for removing letters from words and requires the player to think of the game objects in terms of puns.

4.2.2 Non-Diegetic

Non-diegetic verbal humour includes instructions meant for the player, names and descriptions of quests, skills, and achievements, and interface elements. If verbal humour is used in anything that is meant to instruct the player, the writer should take care not to mislead, distract, or confuse the player, unless it is on purpose.

Non-diegetic names convey the message that the game is not meant to be taken completely seriously but do not affect the reality of the game world. Since humour can have a positive effect on learning and memory (Dormann and Biddle, 2009, p. 815), humorous names of quests and skills may help the player to remember them.

Quest names tend to favour puns and referential humour. Even games with little humour otherwise can have a few humorously named quests. Most quests in *Fallout: New Vegas* are

named after appropriate period songs. The *Fallout* series also uses humour in the names of some skills but restricts this to the Perks, the rarer skills and attributes that the player can earn.

The different modalities of diegetic and non-diegetic humour can also be combined. An unusual and complex example is one of the achievements in *Portal 2* continuing a verbal running gag. At the corresponding part of the game, GladOS says: “Well, this is the part where he kills us”, followed by Wheatley’s line: “Hello! This is the part where I kill you.” As Wheatley is talking, the chapter name *The Part Where He Kills You* comes up on the screen, and just seconds afterwards the achievement *The Part Where He Kills You* pops up. (Wheatley, of course, completely fails to kill anyone.) If the player reads the achievement description afterwards, it says: “This is that part.” Some other achievements in the game require the player to fall into obvious death traps, demonstrating again that achievements are an easy way to encourage the player to clown around instead of aiming for success.

The humour pattern “[humour] through popular culture references” involves referencing popular culture preferably in ways that are just obvious enough to be recognisable but not to break the immersion (Dormann and Neuvians, 2012, p. 3). The more obscure references make players feel clever for recognising them, sustaining engagement in the game. References can be visual but perhaps more often verbal because they require less effort and resources. They can be diegetic or non-diegetic, depending on where they are hidden. References are usually scattered in games for humorous purposes, but they also have other functions. *Batman: Arkham City* (Rocksteady Studios, 2011) and *Transformers: Fall of Cybertron* (High Moon Studios, 2012) are based on intellectual properties with decades of different continuities in different media, and they both reference heavily to their respective multiverses. However, the references in *Transformers* are decidedly more humorous than the references in *Batman*, and the tone of *Transformers* is overall lighter. *Transformers* uses references to its campy 1980s cartoon roots, and this creates incongruity in the game that for some parts tries to take itself seriously and for others is outright silly. *Batman*, on the other hand, avoids alluding to the campier shows or comics and mainly uses references to deepen the world and reassure the fans that the developers have done their homework.

4.2.3 Dialogue

On a first glance dialogue seems like an area that would be closest to its film counterpart, but, once again, the game writers have to account for the player’s involvement. Except in some rare cases, at least the individual lines of dialogue have to be scripted, but the ways they are triggered and how the player can affect them have more freedom. Adams (2012) has a few general

guidelines for writing funny game dialogue: avoid turning the characters into one-liner-flinging machines; generate humour from the personalities of the characters in funny situations; keep the dialogue brief; and avoid artificial language. This is sensible advice and echoed by other designers, but it barely begins to address the issues related to game dialogue.

According to Ron Gilbert, the creator of *Maniac Mansion* and *The Secret of Monkey Island*, timing is the biggest challenge in creating humorous game dialogue (Agnello, 2012d). Because the control over the timing is given up to the players, the jokes must work with long setups for situations where some players get the punch line in seconds, and others encounter it half an hour later. Determining what the player has done before encountering the dialogue also requires nontrivial effort. Schafer avoids this problem by using a style of writing that works for multiple situations and makes sense regardless of the player's previous actions (Pearce, 2003). Long setups may risk the player forgetting or losing interest, but the head writer of *Portal 2*, Erik Wolpaw, tells that the secret to keeping the players invested in the story is to make every piece of dialogue a reward in itself: comedy constantly gives the player "micro-payoffs", which on the macro level build towards a bigger joke or a story point (Agnello, 2012c).

Voice-Over Recording and Incidental Dialogue

Voice-over recorded dialogue is increasingly prevalent and allows for unobtrusive dialogue that does not require taking the control away from the player. *Portal 2* delivers all of its dialogue this way: between the beginning and the end of the game, the player can always at least look around and most of the time move freely. Often, the dialogue (or, rather, monologue) is conveyed by a disembodied voice, ensuring that the player is free to pay attention to what is happening on the screen. This works particularly well because *Portal 2* is a puzzle game where the player can plan her moves at leisure, and the amount of simultaneous action remains manageable. Moreover, the characters are not talking all the time, and the same characters are not present for the whole game, saving the player from oversaturation. The writers of *Portal 2* had more control than game writers in general, because they over-recorded and collaborated with the animators and the level designers to assure that the ideas worked environmentally (Agnello, 2012c).

The unobtrusiveness of voice-over dialogue facilitates background chatter between characters. It could be implemented with only text, but that would usually require the player to look in the right direction, and most players would have to stop what they are doing to concentrate on reading. In addition to the story-related dialogue that the player is only expected to hear once (barring death), many games also have incidental, circumstantial lines that are repeated frequently by unimportant NPCs. The turrets in *Portal 2* speak whenever they detect the PC, and the player hears most of their lines many times during the game. According to Wolpaw, in order to avoid annoying

players, the lines are kept short and not too clever or complex (Agnello, 2012c). The defective turrets, which have a bit more complicated dialogue than the regular ones, speak less frequently and with fewer repeated lines.

The PC can also have one-liners and circumstantial dialogue, which ranges from quipping to battle cries and acknowledging the player's commands. These should follow the same rules as the incidental lines of NPCs, but even more so, because the PC is with the player the whole game. Nathan Drake from the *Uncharted* series (2007–2012) is generally talkative, but some lines he only says once, like commenting on the NPCs' ridiculous loyalty to the antagonist, most likely voicing the player's feelings. Incidental quips have been criticised for feeling throwaway compared to the way they are handled in films (Cutler, 2011), but even so they can make an otherwise boring action hero more memorable.

At the other end of the spectrum is a concept common only to games, the silent protagonist. Much of game dialogue is actually monologue in that the PC does not talk, but it is still commonly referred to as dialogue, and often the PC's answers are implied in the NPC's lines even when they are not shown. Usually the silent protagonist is not supposed to be mute in-fiction, but the players may interpret it that way. Wolpaw says that having a silent protagonist in *Portal 2* helped save time for the other characters to talk (Agnello, 2012c). He describes Chell as "the straight man" in a world gone mad, and she did not need any lines.

Using more involved, consumable dialogue, humorous banter between NPCs is a common method to flesh out characters and make the game world seem alive. The party banter in *Dragon Age: Origins* and its sequel *Dragon Age II* (BioWare, 2011) is popular among players. The dialogue is linear, but it is triggered seemingly at random, most often when the player is running from place to place, and never during a battle. It changes depending on the combination of characters the player travels with, the phase of the game, and the relationships between the characters. For some players, the humour value of the appearing dialogue is a significant factor in deciding which characters to put in the party, and the different combinations are discussed in fan communities.

Generated Dialogue

Generated dialogue is less common and harder to create, but it could be used for dynamic and less repetitive background chatter. Its humour value is dubious since most players regard it as noise unless the characters say something especially interesting, but stranger and slightly insane characters could benefit from it. Tim Schafer tells how he created generated dialogue for a conspiracy theorist in *Psychonauts*:

I wanted to have him create this conspiracy theory on the fly, and constantly change it, and stop and start over again, and get confused. So we have this kind of randomly generated conspiracy that he's always trying to like figure out, so he's got this list of conspirators, like the government, and the illuminati and the Girl Scouts or whatever. And then there's a bunch of stuff they could be doing, like they could be secretly controlling ..., or they're blocking the production of ..., or they're doing something bad to ... some group of victims. ... [T]hat's the one time I really had to make a flow chart for how this could all go, and randomize. And then every once in a while, he'll stick in something, he'll cough or something and that's a little loop, or maybe he'll just say a non sequitur and then loop back. (Pearce, 2003)

Some games have generated dialogue that can respond to the player's comments and questions, but making text parsers is very work-inducing and probably best left for games where it is the main attraction. Bots that the player can converse with are an obvious example, although most of them resemble toys rather than games. *Boyfriend Maker* is a removed Apple application where the players can build and customise a boyfriend and have generated conversations with him (Alexander, 2012). The reason it was removed from the Apple App Store was what made it popular: the conversations bordered on the extremely sexual, racist, and vulgar, without the designers' intent. The replies were generated by a third party engine, an Internet chat bot that the users can teach to reply to word triggers with the desired responses. The incongruity humour arising from the dream date's inappropriate and bizarre chatter encouraged a metagame where the players try to create the funniest conversations and post them on the Internet (as in Figure 12).



Figure 12: *Boyfriend Maker* surprising the player. The J-Pop aesthetics add an additional level of incongruity to the app.

Dialogue Trees

Dialogue trees have the same problems as branching game progression. If the branches are not looped back to the tree, even a simple conversation can result in a combinatorial explosion. Despite their inefficiency, the illusion of control provided by dialogue trees is important enough for many players that they remain a mainstay of certain genres like role-playing games. (Bateman, 2007, pp. 272–273)

Text-only dialogue has some advantages over voice-over recording especially when it comes to dialogue trees. It allows for dynamic text and more branching because producing lines is cheaper. Furthermore, the creator of *Leisure Suit Larry*, Al Lowe, says that plain text is more intimate than a voice actor who probably does not match the voice in the player's head, in the same way as an unrealistic drawing leaves more to the player's imagination than a realistic one (Agnello, 2012a).

The possible lines the player can choose from a dialogue tree are either shown word-for-word or paraphrased or presented as moods, intentions, or attitudes. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. Not showing the exact lines saves the player some reading and may surprise her when the PC speaks the line, but the surprise might not be positive, and if the line has been tagged as witty or charming, the player might disagree with the writer. The dialogue system in *Dragon Age II* shows a summary of each choice and an icon for whether that dialogue choice will be diplomatic, aggressive, witty, or something else. The system is unusual in that the choices the player makes affect the personality of the PC, which in turn determines the dialogue during cut-scenes. On the other hand, the word-for-word approach allows the writer to reveal more information about the PC. Gilbert says that showing the exact lines as choices helps bring out the PC's personality, and in *Monkey Island* he could tell multiple jokes at once in the alternative replies even if the player could only choose one of the shown lines (Agnello, 2012d).

Usually dialogue trees are employed to give the player an illusion of control, but dialogue can also work as an interesting challenge and part of the gameplay dynamics. In the *Fallout* games (1997–2010), speaking with NPCs is not necessarily safer than fighting, and dialogue often offers an alternative way to reach a goal. Like all other skills in *Fallout*, the PC's persuasive abilities depend on how the player has chosen the base statistics and distributed the earned skill points. In *Fallout: New Vegas*, a low intelligence statistic dramatically changes the lines the player can choose: for example, "My interest in this place is scientific" becomes "I is scientific". Raising *Speech* skill raises the chances of persuading NPCs or lying successfully, and some other skills like *Medicine* or *Explosives* allow the PC to use expert knowledge in dialogue. Failure may cause the NPC to attack, making conversations as risky as engaging in battle. Even if the PC has high skills, the player can still make judgements of error. One such incident happened when I was investigating NPCs suspected of cannibalism. Because the NPC I talked to seemed to know something but disliked me, I tried to find common ground. I thought I was being clever by picking the option to lie about being a cannibal myself, but to my shock, this provoked the character and gradually everyone else in the area to attack. This was clearly a trap laid by the designers but not an unfair one since the NPC warned me away from the subject before I kept pushing. Traps and unexpected consequences like this serve both to create humour and to force the player to pay attention. *Fallout* games can afford to have this much extra dialogue because it

is an important part of the gameplay dynamics. The games are very complex and allow for different play styles, but they are also infamous for their amount of bugs resulting from the complexity (see e.g. Kuchera, 2010).

Nonverbal Dialogue

Although this chapter concerns verbal humour, all dialogue need not be verbal. Most *Lego* games adopt a silent slapstick style where the characters use only exaggerated gestures to communicate. *The Sims* adds its own gibberish language Simlish and pseudorandom icons to the gestures. The creator Will Wright says that most people will roughly interpret what they are saying and that “people can’t help but look at a sequence of events and overlay some kind of narrative on it” (Rouse, 2005, p. 427). He ended up with Simlish to avoid the recorded voice getting repetitive and to convey the emotional content through the tone and the cadence.

4.3 Player-Generated Humour

Humour arising from the players has already come up when discussing players playing practical jokes on each other (Chapter 2.3.1), players distorting the world with game mechanics (Chapter 3.1), character creation and customisation (Chapter 3.2.1), and players participating in dialogue with a chat bot (Chapter 4.2.3). Player-generated humour, which promotes creativity and freedom by allowing players to create absurd and incongruous moments of humour by themselves, is an important type of incongruity humour (Dormann and Biddle, 2009, pp. 809–810, 816–818). Players like to have an effect on the game world, and this could be facilitated by allowing for player customisation and more nonviolent actions. In breaking the game rules for comic fun, the players are using their knowledge of the gameplay and problem-solving abilities. Instead of scripted comedy, games can offer a stage for the players to entertain themselves.

Some games are based on player creativity. *Super Scribblenauts* (5th Cell, 2010) is an action puzzle game where the player creates objects and characters by writing nouns and adjectives and uses those entities to solve puzzles. All puzzles have multiple solutions, most likely also some emergent ones that the developers have not specifically intended. For instance, plague, flood, Cthulhu, and God are all valid solutions to causing a dinosaur extinction event. In addition to the puzzle levels, the game has a playground area for experimenting. All animate characters and objects have their own behaviours, and some of the inanimate objects are linked to the characters. The character and object types have rules for how they react to each other, and when the player summons up different combinations of entities, emergence happens. There are many hidden jokes, like a ninja and a pirate automatically attacking each other and other Internet memes, but more importantly, the game mechanics facilitate the players to make their own comedy. Since *Super*

Scribblenauts has no real narrative beyond what the player does during gameplay, all humorous moments are consequences of the player's actions.

More elaborate manifestations of humour through player creativity exist in the surrounding culture, although most of them go beyond the scope of the thesis. Many games now have level creators where the players can make their own levels and share them with others, and modding culture has been around even longer. Machinima, computer animations generated with the use of video games, are typically humorous. Gamer web comics make fun of the gameplay clichés, recount humorous game situations, and comment on the industry. Memes may be viral enough to impact games in production, as was the case with *Portal 2*: including cake jokes, which the players had burned out on, was out of the question (Agnello, 2012c).

4.3.1 Mischief and Grievers in Multiplayer Games

Player creativity can be one of the best and worst aspects of multiplayer games. Players who enjoy disrupting the game experience of others have been an issue ever since the first type of online multiplayer games, the text-based MUDs, and the phenomenon has been of interest to game researchers for a while now (Bartle, 1996).

At the least disruptive level, player creativity affects mainly the player in question and other players only minimally. In their study of creative player actions in *Counter-Strike*, Wright, Boria and Breidenbach (2002) found verbal joking involving wordplay, irony, and popular culture references to be an important part of creative game talk. It was seen to release tension and to keep insults and taunting from getting serious. In addition to verbal jokes, the players liked to “play with the map” by, for example, intentionally jumping to their deaths to hear their characters screaming. One of the few game mechanics not intended for killing, spraying logos, was used to spread humorous messages and images in the game world.

Team Fortress 2 also has the logo-spraying feature, and its creative use shown in a popular YouTube video (mrcuddles100, 2007) gave a name to an official achievement. Spies in *Team Fortress 2* can disguise themselves as members of any class and team and have an instant-kill attack, backstab, that only works from behind the victim. Naturally this leads to the players being wary of exposing their back to anyone. In the video, a Spy player distracts the opposite team's Medic, whom he has tricked into healing him, with a spray logo: “FYI I am a SPY”. When the Medic stops to look at the logo, the Spy runs behind his back and backstabs him. Valve added an achievement called *FYI I am a Spy* that can be unlocked by backstabbing a Medic that has been healing the Spy in question, further instigating comical situations as new players try to earn the

achievement. Valve also added the achievement *FYI I am a Medic* to encourage Medics to hunt enemy Spies that have been calling for them, creating a perpetual game of cat and mouse.

As already established, superiority humour is often used to show aggression in multiplayer settings (Chapter 2.3.1). This can mean good-natured practical jokes, but far less innocuous disruptors of game experience are griefers who intentionally harass other players with varying degrees of malice. Griefers and trolls have a history of partaking in sociopathic behaviour that draws enjoyment from making the victims suffer, but recently the popular definition has expanded to include mischief that is not necessarily malicious (Kirman et al., 2012). This kind of mischief exists on the fuzzy boundary between acceptable and unacceptable social behaviour, constantly challenging it. Unlike mean-spirited griefing, mischief has an attitude of playfulness. It can take the form of subverting established roles in the fictional game world, appropriating game mechanics for unintended purposes like in the *Team Fortress 2* example, or leaving surprising experiences (most popularly crude depictions of phalluses) for other players to stumble upon.

Some griefers take the performance aspect further by recording and editing YouTube videos of their antics with the intention to make the watchers laugh. A *Team Fortress 2* griefing group, Team Roomba, started making videos after getting bored with the conventional gameplay (Gillen, 2008). The group focused on creatively exploiting game mechanics and glitches and edited the videos to show the whole trick. Gillen uses an example of one of the group blocking his team in *Team Fortress 2* into the spawning area and refusing to let the victims pass unless they answer some trivia questions. A challenging part for making the videos was finding the right mix of schadenfreude and humour so that the watchers would not feel sorry for the victims. Team Roomba's Ryan tells that the group has contacted some of the victims afterwards and even they found the situations funny.

Griefing behaviour and attitude has received the most attention in relation to multiplayer games, but similar desire to break the game world and rules can also benefit single-player settings, as has been noted when discussing players' attempts to distort the game world. This can even translate to the same kind of comedy performances with players who record their game experiences on video and upload it for others to see.

5. Designing Humour for Games: Case Examples

After inspecting how humour has been used in others' games, it seems prudent to look back on my own previous projects that have involved humour and comedy. This chapter reflects on two student projects done on the Media Lab courses and introduces one new concept created during the thesis process.

Cold Blood is a 3D murder mystery adventure game finished on the course Game Project during the semester 2010–2011. I was one of the designers and the lead writer of the project, and the other developers were Jaakko Kemppainen, Eetu Kupiainen, Jussi Litja, and Arash John Sammander.

Rivals of the Sea is a board game started on the course Advanced Topics in Game Design in 2011 and has been developed further outside of the course. I am one of the designers, along with Jaakko Kemppainen, Björn Lindholm, and Arash John Sammander. Although analog games are beyond the scope of the thesis, *Rivals of the Sea* is still relevant because its humour should remain the same if it was converted to a digital format, especially if the players were still located in the same physical space.

The last one, *Trickster*, is my current project on a chaotic concept level. It collects together some of the explored issues during thesis project, obviously with my own bias. It is still very much in progress, though, and the subsection is more of a speculation about where I want to go next rather than a coherent concept pitch.

5.1 Cold Blood — a Murder Mystery Adventure Game

Our murder mystery had an intricate premise: instead of just one story, there would be five alternative scenarios with the same setting and characters in each but a different murderer and victim in every case. The self-contained scenarios would have hints and red herrings that would relate to the others, and playing more scenarios would uncover dramatic ironies by exploring the back stories of certain characters in different storylines.

Alas, the timeframe of the Game Project course was too tight for more than one scenario. In a bout of optimism, we still outlined the other four to avoid conflicts between them and the chosen one and still fully intended to include the objects from the other scenarios.

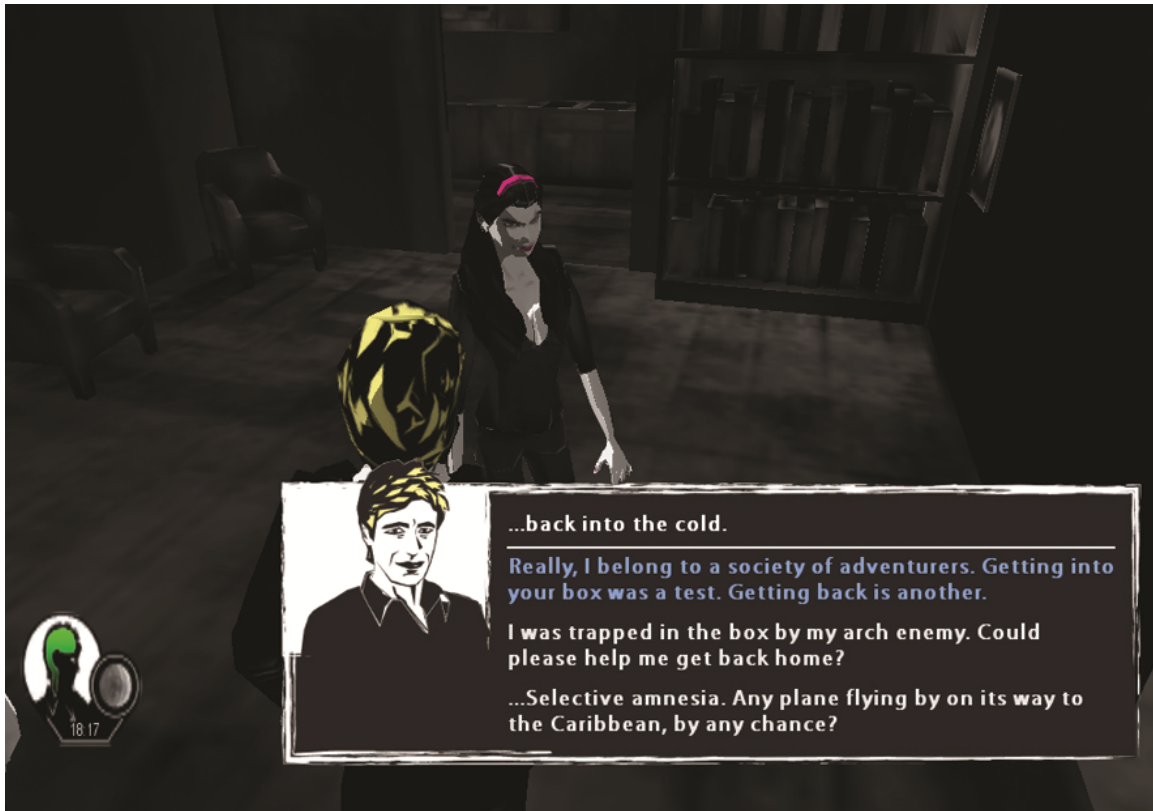


Figure 13: Ivan trying to explain his presence in the crate. The lines are options for the player.

All scenarios started the same way: the main character, allegedly Ivan Smythe, has hidden in a crate on a plane he believes to be flying to the Caribbean. Instead, the crate is dropped on a nearly deserted arctic island. The only four inhabitants of the island work at the research institute the crate belongs to, and they are unimpressed with the impostor who has haphazardly destroyed most of the supplies in the crate (as seen in Figure 13). To get off the island and to the Caribbean, Ivan must break through the other characters' hostility for them to even consider calling down the next plane flying over in five days. Fortunately, it turns out that the chemicals Ivan ate in the crate have given him clairvoyant abilities and omens of a murder about to happen in five days. Stopping the murder could be his ticket to the Caribbean.

Most of the humour in the game comes from the incongruities in the characters' personalities and Ivan's absurd situation. The leader of the institute is the weak-willed Conrad whose timidity is occasionally broken by neuroses and paranoia about someone sabotaging his research. His wife, Lucrezia, seems pleasant but coldly polite and is in fact completely amoral. The native pathfinder, Pookahatha, compensates with spiritual nonsense for the fact that he has been educated in a fancy university instead of growing up with his tribe that used to live on the island. Conrad's daughter from his previous marriage, Annabelle, has an overactive imagination that extends to disturbing and dangerous delusions. The characters' relationships with each other are tangled up to the point where everyone is a potential murderer and victim. This was the intended framework, but not all

personality facets are apparent from playing only the scenario we implemented. The other scenarios would have been needed for the peripeteia with the characters' hidden motives to occur.

Ivan is an unreliable point of view character with a shady past: most of the personal things he shares are exaggerations or outright lies with a comical tint. This starts in the very first conversation where he offers the NPCs a made-up name and an excuse to be on the island. Ivan's lying was challenging to convey to the players because the only information offered about his past was through Ivan himself, and if the lies were too subtle, the players thought they were the truth, and if they were too obvious, it made the characters seem like idiots. Making them outrageous enough to be funny appeased some players, although some others still remained disgruntled.

It would have been interesting for Ivan's lying to have a sense of risk and consequences for the player, but the dialogue could only have a very limited effect on the game world. Since the game could not be saved and replaying it was tedious, making the game unwinnable was too harsh a punishment for anything but the most crucial decisions in the game. There are few opportunities for the player to contribute to the humorous situations, although there are some instances where the NPCs ask for the PC's name again, and if the player cannot remember which name she picked for the PC in the first place, the characters grow suspicious but nothing beyond that really happens. Even at this level, these conversations were arduous to write because of the amount of extra lines and variables to check what choices the player has made earlier in the game.

Most humour in the game comes from the conversations between Ivan and the NPCs. There are a few conversations from NPC to NPC, but they were technically challenging to implement, especially if we wanted to make sure the player would not miss them. Thus, the NPCs' interpersonal relationships are primarily shown in their conversations with Ivan.

Going back to deciding the scenario, to some extent we succumbed to self-censorship. The original scenarios were all rather strange, but the one we chose to implement was a bit more sensible than the others. In retrospect, playing it safe probably added to the game's somewhat unclear identity and tone. Parts of the game aimed for dark comedy, but they failed to create any sense of unease, nor were they really intended to. Even with the less absurd scenario, sometimes humour had to be used to distract the players from the fact that the story made little sense.

Cold Blood ended up overdependent on dialogue because halfway through the project it turned out that we had been too optimistic about the technology and resource limits, and there was no time to implement the planned objects from the other scenarios or more interactions with the objects to make the gameplay more varied. Dialogue was faster to produce than new 3D models and safer to add than new code, and so "let's fix it with dialogue" became a catchphrase I learned

to dread. Looking back, verbal humour does work as a band aid up to a point, but in the end everyone will wonder why there is so much dialogue and so little gameplay.

5.2 Rivals of the Sea — a Pirate Board Game

Rivals of the Sea (Figure 14) is a swashbuckling race filled with fast reversals and high risks promising even higher rewards. Superiority humour is likely to occur when the players hunt treasures and wage sea battles against each other to be crowned as the new pirate king. At the start, the players have to be the first to collect enough gold pieces and return home to win, but one or more of the alternative goals may come into effect during play, introducing uncertainty where it is not always clear which player the others should gang up on. However, when someone gets too rich, the other players take glee in hunting down the lucky player to steal her money.



Figure 14: The board and some pieces of *Rivals of the Sea*. The board is randomly generated at the start of each game session, making it hard for players to come up with dominant strategies. The board changes during play. The Kraken is in the middle.

An unexpected harbinger of superiority and incongruity humour turned out to be the NPC Kraken whose movements are controlled by die rolls. It is the most dangerous non-player opponent in the game, attacking anyone who gets in the range of its tentacles. It cannot move on land, but it can attack there, and it drags its prey to its lair for several turns, after repossessing the player's treasures. The Kraken was added to the prototype in a fairly early phase and never taken out because it was obviously one of the most charming elements of the game. The players who

became the Kraken's victim were usually laughed at and sometimes mocked with tasteless jokes about tentacles. There was definitely something comical about being bested by a randomly moving NPC, even more so when the consequences were so severe. Another source of humour was the incongruity of the Kraken's movements. It could get stuck for a while between islands, sometimes it seemed as if it was chasing a specific player, and when it swam out of the map, it was returned to the lair in the middle, interpreted with the ridiculous explanation that the game world is flat and the Kraken returns home through its secret passageways after swimming off the edge of the world. The designers and players got a lot of fun out of anthropomorphising the Kraken and reading motives into its random movements.

In addition to the accidental incongruity humour created by the Kraken, the game has some intentionally comical descriptions written on the cards and even a story-generating system where story snippets, rumours, are collected during the game and combined to create different stories that may add new victory conditions. Some of the rumour cards were intended to be humorous, but the players usually perceived them as merely strange. Some cards were incongruous when combined, but it was not enough to elicit humour, possibly because they lacked the contrasting frames of reference. Players did not have any expectations about the cards and consequently no frame of reference. Adding illustrations for the cards at some point in the future may help, but for now the funniest moments in the game have come from the spontaneous situations involving superiority and incongruity humour and have been mostly player-generated.

5.3 Trickster — a Concept in Progress

The game starts, and it soon unfolds that the PC is a newborn demigod in a corporate building full of actual gods who mistake him for their intern and assign him the task of killing a loose demigod reportedly wandering in the building. The PC's only possession at the beginning is a letter that claims to be from his mortal mother. Its messages keep changing throughout the game, but the first one urges him to find his still anonymous godly father.

The concept started from the desire to explore the theme of trickster figures that represent an ancient and persisting source of humour. Tricksters are ambiguous beings, sometimes culture heroes, sometimes scoundrels, always disruptors of peace, and they are found in myths at either end of the joke (Hyde, 2008). First, I tried putting the player in the role of a trickster god in a made-up pantheon resembling a hybrid between Norse and Greek pantheons, but then I decided to move the concept to a modern environment instead of the more traditional fantasy world. A big corporation was a natural allegory for a modern pantheon of gods, and it could also provide some opportunities for satire. Most of the gods are anthropomorphic personifications of concepts like

organisation, bureaucracy, and hubris, and also named after them. Appendix D shows a chart of the NPC relationships and some other sketches of the miscellaneous ideas that have come up during the process. The narrative aims to mix family sitcoms with workplace humour, dark comedy, and slapstick. To be able to survive, the player must use what is available to her and become a trickster.

The four most important game mechanics are lying, stealing, negotiating, and shapeshifting, mirroring abilities of various trickster figures. Lying is a minigame with the difficulty level depending on the improbability of the lie and the suspicions of the NPC. The PC can steal all kinds of things in the game world, including illogical and fantastic objects and concepts that by common sense he should not be able to carry around in the inventory. However, just because the things can be stolen, it does not mean that are beneficial for the player: the world is full of trap items that seem useful but have side effects that make them dangerous to their owner. Negotiating is basically trading things and information with the NPCs: this is the way to acquire the best items in the game, but if a deal seems too good, it probably is. Shapeshifting allows the PC to disguise himself as an NPC he has recently met, for a limited time. Ideally, it would make the other NPCs treat the PC like the NPC he is disguised as, but some paper prototyping has shown that the combinations of the different characters and situations grow unmanageable fast. I still like the idea and would like to include it in some form, even if it means severely limiting the effects and availability of shapeshifting. I have gone back and forth with the mechanics while working on the concept, and they are not as well defined as I would like. To get a better idea of whether they create the kind of dynamics I want, I will have to do digital prototyping.

The player's dealings with the NPCs affect the relationship score of each NPC. The NPCs belong to two opposing work teams, and scoring positive points for one team means scoring negative for the other. If the PC ends up completely on either side, the game ends, meaning that to survive the player must avoid aligning herself too much with anyone. Besides the work teams, the individual NPC gods are all related to each other in some way and hold ages-old grudges and family secrets, which are handed out sparingly to create suspense.

Important NPCs give the player quests that can be completed in multiple ways. Some of the different quests have clashing points where they can get mixed up with another quest if the player is completing them at the same time. The kinds of quests the NPCs give depend on the NPC's personality, for example Hubris has some of the grandest quests that can backfire spectacularly. Ideally, the quests would work like sitcom episodes but create a little more entropy and far-reaching consequences when they are completed. However, as I have noticed from paper prototypes, this and the clashing points between the different quests are very complex problems and I am unsure if they can be solved.

The dynamics of the game are intended to keep the player constantly switching sides and encourage her to seek out things that cause chain reactions in the game world. Sometimes the player will receive contradicting mission statements and unreliable instructions, even from the living letter that is supposed to be her main source of advice. It is hard to say without prototyping and testing with outside players how much the player can be deceived while making the game still engaging, but I do want the player to wonder if she is the eponymous Trickster or the game itself. Nevertheless, the game is not intended to go as far as the earlier examples of abusive game design but instead be more subtly misleading and invite the player to a battle of wits.

I envision the game as strongly emergent, which poses problems for dialogue. I have tried to push the dialogue completely away from the core loop and to only initiating quests and other special events. Another way might be writing the dialogue in style that does not require extra lines but could be perceived as alluding to different things depending on the player's previous actions. Lying was originally also presented as dialogue, but I turned it to a minigame to provide a challenge without resorting to tangled dialogue trees. I am fond of verbal humour (especially as it is faster to produce than making new art assets), but the other ways to create it discussed in Chapter 4.2. might be more productive for a nonlinear game.

It is hazardous to design a game of one's favourite mythological figure, especially when that figure is shrouded in ambiguity. The concept has grown to a level of complexity where I need to strip it down to simpler parts to be able to properly test it, and I hope that the chaotic nature of the trickster figures will no longer be confusing my project.

6. Conclusions

The original goal was to examine the uses of humour in video games, particularly looking for the aspects unique to games and how humour relates to both gameplay and narrative. The player was central to most issues, ranging from the player's actions to her relationship with the game.

The journey began by looking at the general state of humour in games and determining that humour has been established in all types of games, although its usage and prominence vary. The introduction of the three theories of humour made further distinctions in the types of humour by grouping the player experiences into superiority, relief, and incongruity humour. Comparing game experiences with techniques of film comedy suggested where gameplay and theme can support each other and where they tend to separate.

A look at different game elements revealed ways to give the player agency for humorous instances. Instead of sitting in the audience, the player is an active participant, sometimes the mischief-maker, and other times, the fool, much like the archetypal trickster figure. Giving the player tools to comically distort the game world puts her in a role exclusive to the medium. Letting the players customise the game experience can also adjust the humour level so that it does not annoy the more serious-minded players, but the aspiring jesters can toy with the game mechanics at their own pace.

The player is often an explorer in a hostile territory, and finding humour hidden for her personal predicament is gratifying and can put her actions in a new perspective. Surprises are an essential fuel for humour, and misdirecting the player and subverting her expectations is not only memorable but could even lead to new gameplay genres, like the exaggerated gameplay of *Super Mario Kart* gave birth to the karting subgenre of racing.

Zooming out from the single game elements showed how the more linear narrative elements can afford the player freedom to act and experience them in a personal way. Even verbal humour, typically the most linear kind in games, can allow for player involvement. And if the players are motivated to do so, they will find a way to turn any tool into an instrument of comedy.

Reflecting on the old student projects brought known problems to new light, gave explanations for the successes, and added a more personal designer's perspective than the interviews of the industry veterans. Creating a new concept, although still rough, explored some of the ideas that have emerged during the thesis project and indicated directions where I want to take humour in my own games.

All in all, the role of the player has been inspected from several angles, and it does seem to be the key into taking advantage of the unique features of video games. There is, of course, a lot of humour used in cut-scenes and other film-like instances, and that is important, too, but they are more in a supporting role to the elements where the player's agency matters.

I had an inkling at the beginning that humour would not be such a rarity as game journalists made it seem, but I was pleasantly surprised by how many diverse examples I found after I started digging. In many cases the humour was the subdued kind that would make the player smile rather than laugh, and consequently it does not draw attention to itself as much. I also started noticing how humour was used in the non-comedic games that I played at my leisure time outside of the thesis research. An interesting topic for further research would be to study the importance of humour for games with a serious tone and to compare the slightly humorous games to those completely devoid of humour.

From a personal viewpoint, the research has informed me of a whole new terrain to take into account when designing games. Of course, I would not have even chosen the subject had I not felt a connection to it, but I had never studied humour or comedy to this extent or properly organised my thoughts, especially in relation to games. I anticipate them to be organised further, but for the time being this research has been worthwhile, for me as a designer, and hopefully later for others. What I find especially captivating is how creating comedy in general but for games in particular requires for the designer to get inside the brains of the player. This is obviously the ideal for designing all types of games and drew me to game design in the first place, but humour includes additional levels that often make the process more personal.

Games have many unique features compared to other media, and currently they are not used to their full extent when it comes to humour. Game mechanics are probably the most effective and unexplored method of eliciting humour in games, and they should definitely be researched more. This may coincide with the humour pattern collection that Dormann and Neuvians are making. Another possible new area of research would be how the types of humour relate to the different gameplay genres.

On the way there were many fascinating things that did not find their place in the thesis. The character types of Commedia dell'Arte learned their improvised comic dialogue or actions, *lazzi*, in a way that almost resembles programming. The current improvisational theatre could have some new tricks for writing game characters. Taunting games like *flyting* are over a thousand years old and known in several civilisations. On a more modern bent, computational humour has been researched for a while now.

Humour is not only important for entertainment but for our culture and is an inherent part of humanity. Humour breaks rules and shines when combined with a rebellious spirit. It is an ideal weapon for disrupting trite game design conventions and the industry itself. It will doubtlessly keep distributing to the indie game revolution, which is in full swing and can afford to make games with unproven ideas and games targeted at niche audiences.

Humour in games will probably develop and mature further, just like film comedy did when its audience expanded. Currently, most players are adults and able to comprehend more sophisticated humour. Moreover, the industry is filling with people who have been playing video games since early childhood. The current retro and nostalgia boom sometimes stops at recycling the old ideas, but I hope it will also continue to take them for a new spin. I love *Monkey Island* as much as any fan of comedy games, but I love unexplored horizons even more.

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Game List

This list includes the games cited that the author has personally played. The other games mentioned are related to the cited sources that are included in the Reference List. Games that are cited as a series are isolated to their own list with the individual played games included under the series name in a chronological order instead of in the individual games list.

The short forms of the platforms are: PS2: PlayStation 2; PS3: PlayStation 3; NES: Nintendo Entertainment System; N64: Nintendo 64; NDS: Nintendo DS; WWW: browser-based.

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Figure Sources

Figure 1: All game reviews. Drawn by the author.

Figure 2: The degrees of humour in the games containing humour. Drawn by the author.

Figure 3: The amount of humorous games per gameplay genre. Drawn by the author.

Figure 4: A Spy about to backstab a Sniper. Steam. Screenshot of *Team Fortress 2* (Valve Corporation, 2007). Available at: http://store.steampowered.com/app/440/?snr=1_7_15__13 [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 5: Replaying the deaths. Steam. Screenshot of *Super Meat Boy* (Team Meat, 2010). Available at: <http://store.steampowered.com/app/40800/> [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 6: Cthulhu insulting the narrator and the player, and eavesdropping on the narrator. Two screenshots of *Cthulhu Saves the World* (Zeboyd Games, 2011), taken by the author.

Figure 7: Vault Boy. Fallout wiki, added by Überdosis. *Vault Boy*. Promotional art from the *Fallout* series (1997–2010). Available at: http://fallout.wikia.com/wiki/Vault_Boy [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 8: Raz in front of a camp cabin building with Psychonaut advertising on the walls. Double Fine Productions. *Psychonauts Press Kit*. A screenshot of *Psychonauts* (Double Fine Productions, 2005). Available at: <http://www.psychonauts.com/screenshots.html> [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 9: The player rolling up animals who are desperately trying to flee. Justin, 2012. *My Usual Spiel: We Love Katamari & Katamari Forever - Keep on Rollin'*. A screenshot of *We Love Katamari* (Namco, 2005). Available at: <http://jdgamingblog.blogspot.fi/2012/02/my-usual-spiel-we-love-katamari.html> [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 10: Octodad in his living room. Young Horses, Inc. *Octodad Press Kit*. A screenshot of *Octodad* (Young Horses, 2010). Available at: <http://www.octodadgame.com/press/sheet.php?p=octodad> [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 11: Almost completed gnome achievement. Francis, T., 2007. *I Played Through Episode Two Holding a Goddamn Gnome*. A screenshot of *Half-Life Two: Episode 2* (Valve Corporation, 2007). Available at: www.pentadact.com/2007-10-15-gnome-quest/ [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 12: Boyfriend Maker surprising the player. <http://boyfriendmaker.tumblr.com/>, submitted by <http://0101010001000010.tumblr.com/>, 2012. A screenshot of *Boyfriend Maker*. Available at: <http://boyfriendmaker.tumblr.com/post/38298871892/regretfullypseudonymous-this-app-is-still> [accessed 20.3.13].

Figure 13: Ivan trying to explain his presence in the crate. Screenshot of *Cold Blood*, taken by the author.

Figure 14: The board and some pieces of Rivals of the Sea. Photograph of *Rivals of the Sea*, taken by the author.

Appendix A: Game Analysis Questionnaire

1. Title, studio, and year
2. Gameplay genre
3. Narrative genre
4. Game premise
5. Goals
6. General tone
7. The player character:
 - personality/character type
 - player's relationship with the PC (how much the player contributes to the PC's characteristics, third person or first person POV, etc)
 - is the PC in any way a typical comedic hero?
8. NPCs
 - reactions to player actions or PC
 - relationship with PC
 - any comedic characters?
9. Plot:
 - repetition, reversals, crossing sequences
 - dramatic irony
 - conflicts
 - is it in any way a typical comedic plot?
10. Pacing:
 - real-time or turn-based
 - structure of emergence, progression, or in-between
 - level design
 - suspense (hope, fear, uncertainty)
11. The type of comedy:
 - referential
 - slapstick
 - sitcom
 - black comedy
 - absurdity
 - satire
 - parody
 - relationship to drama
12. Aesthetics
13. Funny game mechanics:
 - mechanics that are inherently funny
 - mechanics that facilitate the player doing something funny
14. Humorous reactions to player actions
15. Emergent humour:
 - via characters
 - via the game world
 - via the player actions
 - how is it designed?
 - relationships between the elements that create the humour (and the PC and the player)
16. Humour arising out of surprises:
 - unexpected moments
 - unexpected gameplay
 - subverting expectations
 - intentional or unintentional?
17. Hidden humour that takes effort to access
18. Incongruity:
 - exaggerating
 - understatement
 - contrast
 - gameplay, aesthetics, dialogue, characters
19. The player's distance from the game/world/characters
20. Problems:
 - repetition
 - tacked on overused jokes (subjective)
 - pacing (punch line before setup, etc)
 - interpreting gags as hints
21. Context of making the game:
 - motivation for making the game
 - transmedia
22. Other/stories

Appendix B: A Filled Questionnaire

1. Title, studio, and year

Brütal Legend, Double Fine, 2009

2. Gameplay genre

RTS/Action/Adventure?

3. Narrative genre

Heavy metal fantasy

4. Game premise

Save the world through heavy metal. Or rather, save heavy metal from goths, glam rock, and other threats. (Against superficiality.) “Take back our dignity!” Comments music genres through action.

5. Goals

Win band battles to progress, explore the heavy metal fantasy setting full of short side quests. Combines several different game types, like racing, war strategy, melee fighting, tower defence.

6. General tone

Humoristic and awesomely epic. Music is power, and several music subculture phenomena and people are parodied throughout the game. Everything is really over the top.

7. The player character:

The player character, Eddie, is mostly the everyman but with a manic undertone with strange ideas that everyone else seems to go along with. (Kind of typical Tim Schafer –hero.) A bit depressed at the beginning of the game, but not much longer. Third person, and strong personality coming from the scripted dialogue, cut-scenes, and in-game comments. Represent the ideals of the “good guys” of the game. Not a rock star but a roadie.

8. NPCs

NPCs yell comments if you pass by them while driving around, but not much else? The storm following the groups of goths is hilarious. Some comedic characters, like General Lionwhyte, a parody of David Bowie and the first big villain to be defeated in the game. He flies around with huge locks of hair. Ozzy Ozbourne sells you stuff for the points you gain for pleasing the gods of metal.

9. Plot:

The events in the game are really funny, but the plot is not really comedic as much as overly epic and sometimes exaggeratedly melodramatic and serious for a comedic effect.

10. Pacing:

Real-time game time, the main plot advances linearly, but the player can explore the world in-between plot missions. The side missions can be completed at any time. Exploring the world is rewarding but may take away from the intensity of the main plot. It doesn't really affect the comedic tension, though.

11. The type of comedy:

Referential to heavy metal, also parodies (or makes fun of) elements of it, although is not a parody itself. The humour comes from the absurdity of many heavy metal phenomena, also from how seriously it seems to take itself. Dark comedy? The whole game is a love letter to heavy metal, made for other lovers of heavy metal. I doubt it would be as humorous to someone uninvolved in metal. Well defined target audience. Subjectivity, making humour personal.

12. Aesthetics

The characters look cartoony; the creatures and the world look like they come directly from heavy metal CD covers. The music is, of course, a soundtrack of excellent metal.

13. Funny game mechanics:

You can do all kinds of things with you guitar, since music has (magical) powers in the game world. Combining with the NPCs on your side gives you new abilities, like stunning enemies with the loudspeakers or making more damage by moshing with a group of headbangers. The guitar doubles as an axe.

14. Humorous reactions to player actions

Reaction for the guitar overheating is funny, as well as the idea that the guitar *can* overheat. In the firebeast mission, the assistant questioned the sanity of disturbing fire breathing beasts and indeed why Eddie didn't just catch them when they were asleep, after I had kept failing for a while, but that was the result of forcing me to follow Eddie's plan. (Sometimes the player can identify more with the NPC?)

15. Emergent humour:

Not too much. The stage battles get chaotic, and the reversals and the NPC actions could be humorous, but mostly the horrible user interface and general frustration prevented me from enjoying it. Boring for a spectating non-player, too, although player's mistakes generated some laughter, but that was probably not because of the game.

16. Humour arising out of surprises:

Probably the biggest one for those that haven't read reviews before the game is the fact that the gameplay changes from action to RTS. The execution leaves a lot to be desired, but the shift keeps the game fresh and interesting and the player waiting for the next surprise. New elements come in constantly.

17. Hidden humour that takes effort to access

There are all kinds of collectibles and upgrades from Ozzy Osbourne. The overtly epic creation legend of Örmageddon is scattered across the world. There are also some "tourist viewpoint" that give a little XP when used for the first time but are really put there to show off the impressive visuals.

18. Incongruity:

Incongruity in taking the epicness of heavy metal so very seriously. The tone is over the top, but heavy metal aspects can't really be exaggerated much from the source. Rather, heavy metal clichés have been interpreted literally to the world as the game space, characters, or mechanics.

19. The player's distance from the game/world/characters

The characters are far removed from everyday life, but they might be relatable if the player is a heavy metal artist or fan? The emotional parts are meant to be taken seriously, but mostly the characters' distress is comic.

20. Problems:

Nothing much particularly. Some jokes and NPC one-liners did get old, but nothing really overstayed its welcome. The pacing might be problematic in the same way as in all open world games: there's no sense of urgency when you can drive off all over the world at any point not in the middle of a mission.

21. Context of making the game:

It's basically Tim Schafer's love letter to heavy metal.

22. Other

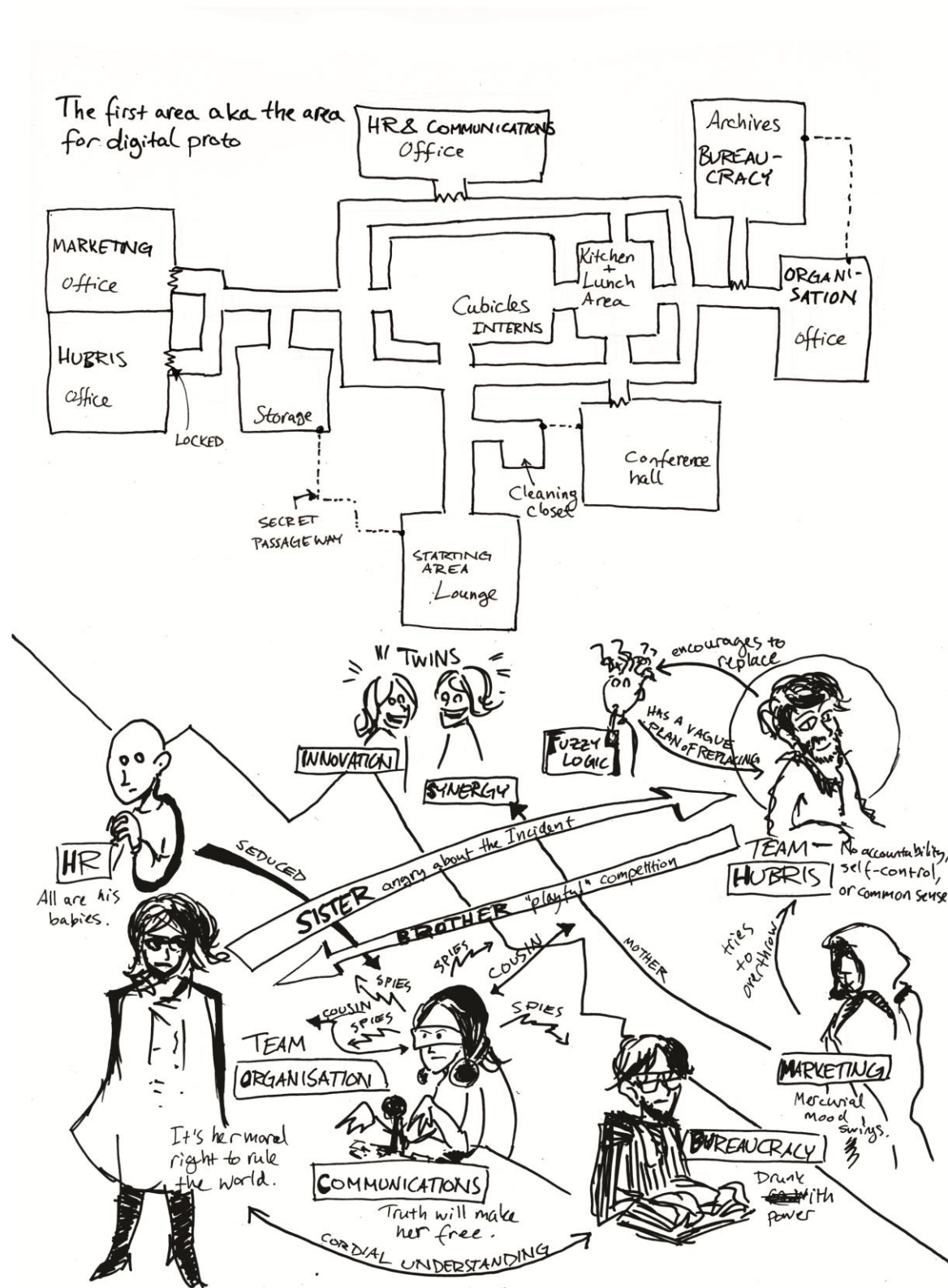
Awesome premise mixed with frustrating execution and user interface. Brutal Legend has action parts, RTS parts, tower defence parts, and racing parts, and it might even work if the RTS didn't combine the worst parts of the RTS and action adventure genres.

Appendix C: Games from Quantitative Research

Angry Birds Star Wars
Little Big Planet Karting
Hotline Miami
Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask
Lucius
Marvel vs. Capcom: Origins
Bad Piggies
Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes
Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted
Borderlands 2
Tokyo Jungle
War of the Human Tanks
Clash of Clans
Quantum Conundrum
New Super Mario Bros. 2
Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance
Pokemon Conquest
Lollipop Chainshaw
Max Payne 3
Tiny Troopers
Tales of Graces f
Fez
Risen 2: Dark Waters
Botanicula
Yakuza: Dead Souls
Trials Evolution
Angry Birds Space
Mario Party 9
Everybody's golf
Reality Fighters
Little Deviants
Modnation Racers: Road Trip
Mass Effect 3
Serious Sam 3: BFE
Gotham City Impostors
Jelly Defence
To the Moon
Book of Unwritten Tales
Kirby's Adventure
Mario Kart 7
Hector: Badge of Carnage
Back to the Future: the Game
Mario & Sonic at the London Olympic Games
Rocketbirds: Hardboiled Chicken
Professor Layton and the Spectre's Call
Game DeV Story
Grand Prix Story
Little Big Planet 2
Donkey Kong Country Returns
Sonic Colours
Deadly Premonition
Kaptain Brawe: A Brawe New World
Dragon Age II
Popcap's games
Mass Effect 2
The Silver Living
Harvest Moon: Animal Parade
Cave Story
DeathSpank: Thongs of Virtue
Ilomilo
Mario vs Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem
Inazuma Eleven
Bulletstorm
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood
Magicka
Blob 2
Kingdom Hearts: Re:Coded
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective
Kirby's Epic Yarn
Stacking
Portal 2
Pokémon Black/White
Mark Leung: Revenge of the bitch
The Witcher 2: assassins of kings
WWE All Stars
Mortal Kombat
Operation Flashpoint: Red River
The Sims Medieval
Patapon 3
Lego Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game
Mario Sports Mix
Playstation Move Heroes
Duke Nukem Forever
Alice: Madness Returns

Shadows of the Damned
 Dead or Alive 5
 Wii Play Motion
 Pirates of the Black Cove
 El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron
 Rochard
 String trek
 The Sims 3
 Toy story 3
 Cars 2
 Penguins of Madagascar: Dr. Blowhole Returns
 Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One
 Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception
 The Binding of Isaac
 Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2
 The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword
 Saints Row: The Third
 Dungeon Defenders
 House of the Dead: Overkill: Extended Cut
 Trine 2
 Rayman Origins
 Kirby Mass Attack
 Super Mario 3D Land
 Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure
 Bike Baron
 Fozzles
 Bayonetta
 Tropic 3
 Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues
 Jak and Daxter: Kadonnut Maailma
 Tales of Monkey Island
 Rabbids Go Home
 The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks
 Critter Crunch
 Bioshock 2
 Machinarium
 Matt Hazard: Blood Bath & Beyond
 Blue Toad Murder Files
 Tomena Sanner
 Battlefield: Bad Company 2
 The Inlaws Episode 1: Nolan's Birthday
 Minigore
 Assassin's Creed: II
 The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom
 Whispered World
 Fat Princess: Fistful of Cake
 WarioWare: D.I.Y.
 No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle
 Ben There, Dan That
 Time Gentlemen, Please!
 Fret Nice
 Super Scribblenauts
 Super Mario Galaxy 2
 Red Dead Redemption
 Modnation Racers
 Simon the Sorcerer 5: Who'd Even Want Contact?
 Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies
 Snoopy Flying Ace
 Joe danger
 Risk: Factions
 Halo: Reach
 Sleep is Death
 Worms Reloaded
 Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker
 Sam and Max: The Devil's Playhouse
 Jett Rocket
 Monday Night Combat
 Start the Party!
 Pokepark Wii: Pikachu's Adventure
 Batman: The Brave and the Bold: The Videogame
 Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep
 Fallout: New Vegas
 Professor Layton and the Lost Future
 Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light
 Wii Party
 The Shoot
 Puzzle Bots
 Puzzle Agent
 Scott Pilgrim vs. the World
 Recettear: An Item Shop's Tale
 Privates
 DeathSpank
 Epic Mickey
 Lego Universe
 Shank
 Costume Quest
 Comic Jumper: The Adventures of Captain Smiley
 Terrover
 Super Meat Boy
 Dead Nation
 Capcom vs Marvel Universe

Appendix D: Trickster Sketches



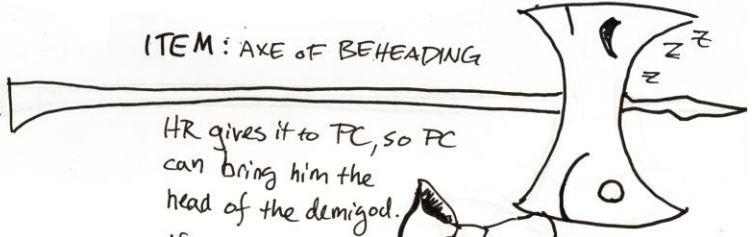
RESOURCE: Meeting cards.
Can be used to bribe interns.



TASK: FEED PLANTS



ITEM: AXE OF BEHEADING



HR gives it to PC, so PC can bring him the head of the demigod.
If PC's score with HR drops too low, it attacks the PC.



PC starts the game in a too small crib dressed in a sheet. He can find clothes, but they just lead to worse situations.

TASK: CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Find conflicts in the mortals' wishes.

COMBINABLE QUESTS

1] Get rid of the real inten.

2] Bring someone's head to HR.

SELF-ACTUALISATION



QUEST: Steal someone's lunch, Golden apples that provide temporal immortality.



SECURITY GUARDS

mythological monsters, both threats and opportunities. Can transport the PC to places.



