

GAT 315

3D Game Design I

Instructor

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Office Hours

- Tuesday 3pm-4:30pm
- Thursday 1pm-3pm



Comedy in Games

- ☐ Comedy Defined
- ☐ Comedic Techniques
- ☐ Comedy Sub-Genres

**PLEASE SILENCE
ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

THANK YOU





COMEDY

Grönroos (2013) Humour in Video Games: Play, Comedy, and Mischief

https://aaltodoc.aalto.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/10347/optika_id_792_gr%C3%B6nroos_anne-marie_2013.pdf

What is Comedy?

In short, comedy is that which makes one laugh. But what is it that makes one laugh? There are three main theories (and many minor theories) around what makes something humorous, studied by psychology, philosophy, and linguistics.

Relief Theory

- Laughter is a homeostatic mechanism by which psychological tension is reduced. Laughter comes from the removal of restraint or the release of nervous energy. Freud was a primary proponent of this theory.

Superiority Theory

- People laugh at the misfortunes of others, because these misfortunes assert the observer's superiority over the background or shortcomings of others. This theory traces back to Plato and Aristotle, and Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan.

Incongruity Theory

- People laugh at the violation of our normal mental patterns and expectations. Incongruity is often identified with "frustrated expectation," a concept we owe to Immanuel Kant (1724-1824).

Incongruity Theory

Incongruity theory is the dominant theory in both psychology and philosophy.

Koestler (1996) conceived the term “bisociation” that means the simultaneous perception of a situation or an idea within two contrasting frames of reference as a way to explain why humor arises rather than confusion.

There are four main forms of incongruity:

Literalization

- Take a figure of speech and then perform it literally (e.g. give me a hand).

Reversal

- Take what is normal and expected and do or say the opposite.

Exaggeration

- Take what is normal and blowing it out of proportion.

Taboo Violation

- Violate societal taboos for polite conversation, such as sex, death, bodily functions, etc.

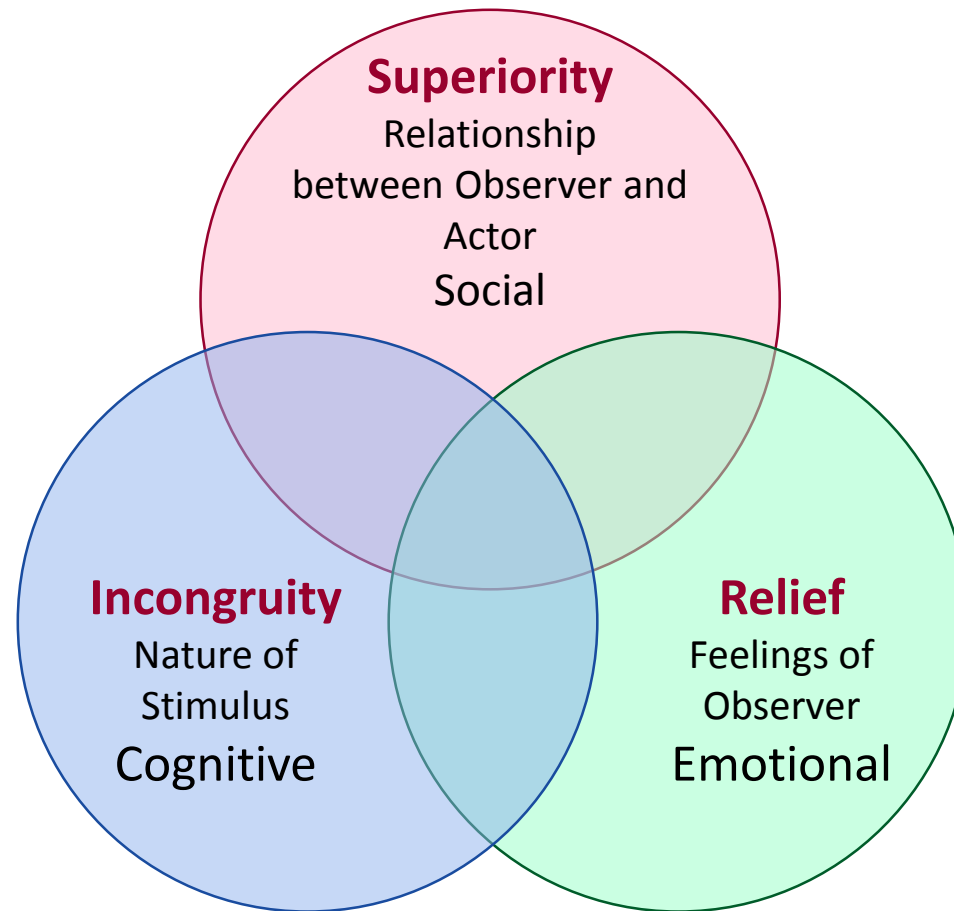


“Nothing goes over my head...! My reflexes are too fast, I would catch it.”

<http://public.wsu.edu/~taflinge/theory.html>

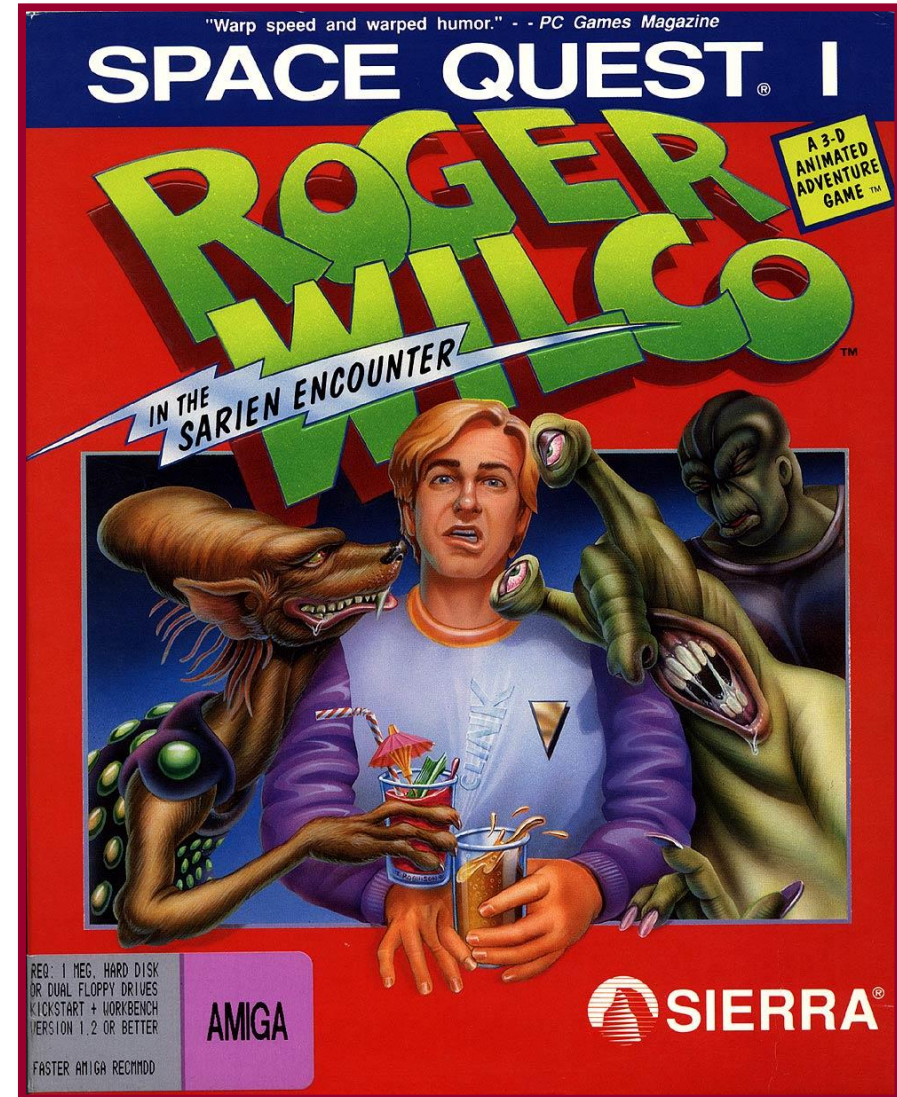
What is Comedy?

These theories are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary in that they approach humor from different angles.

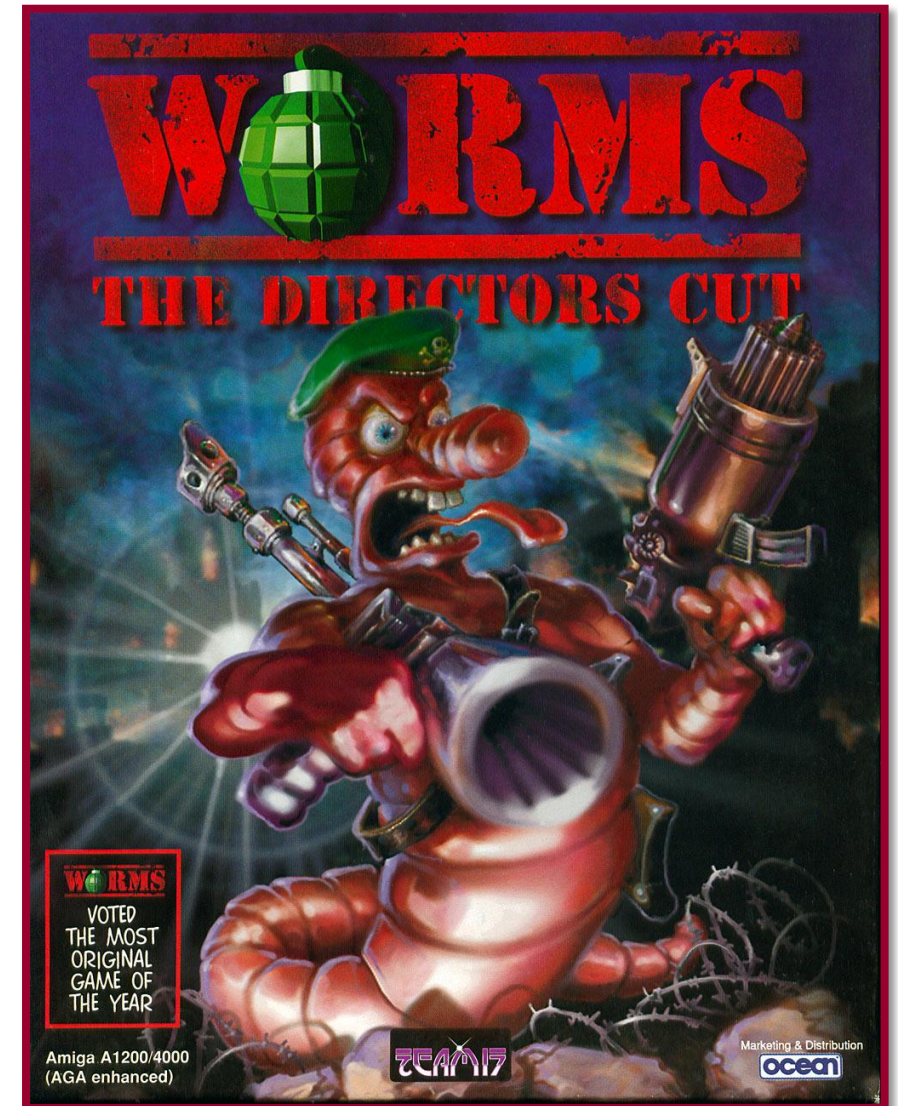


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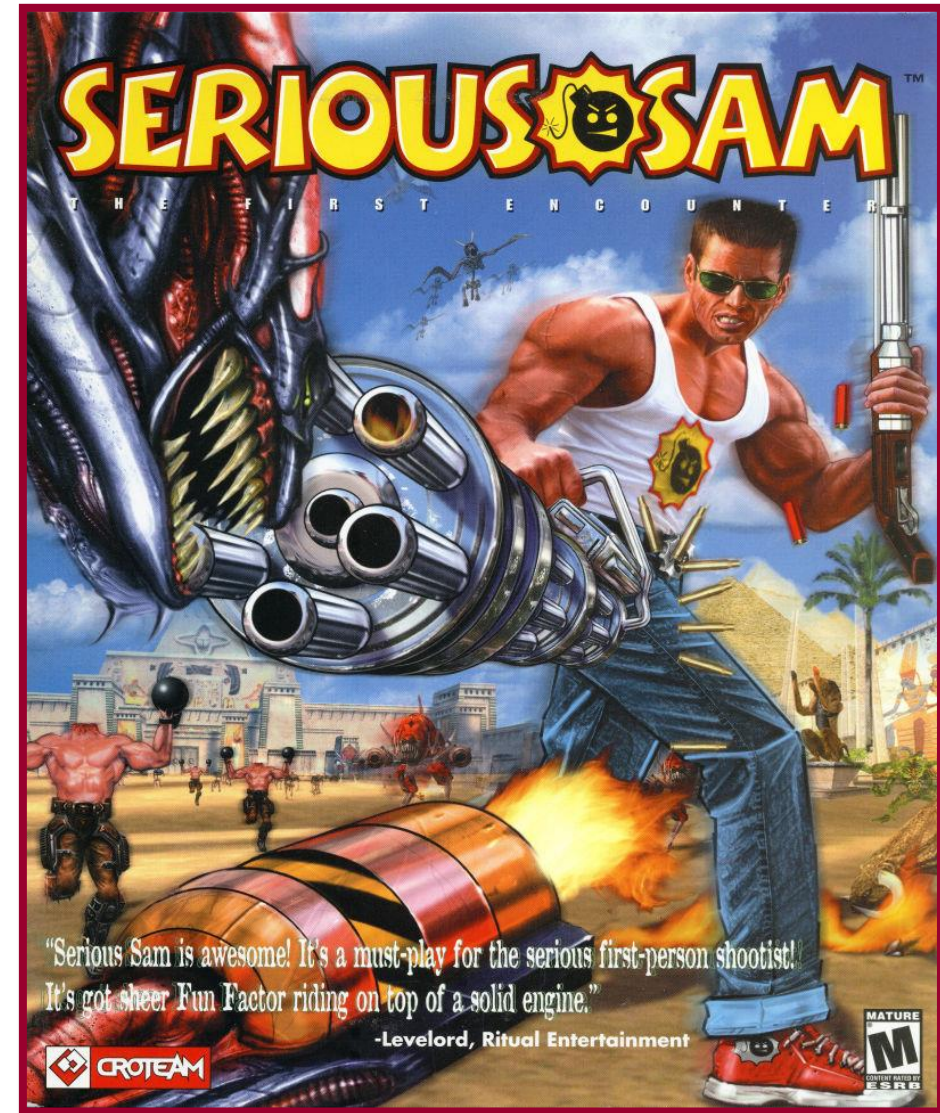
Games with Comedy



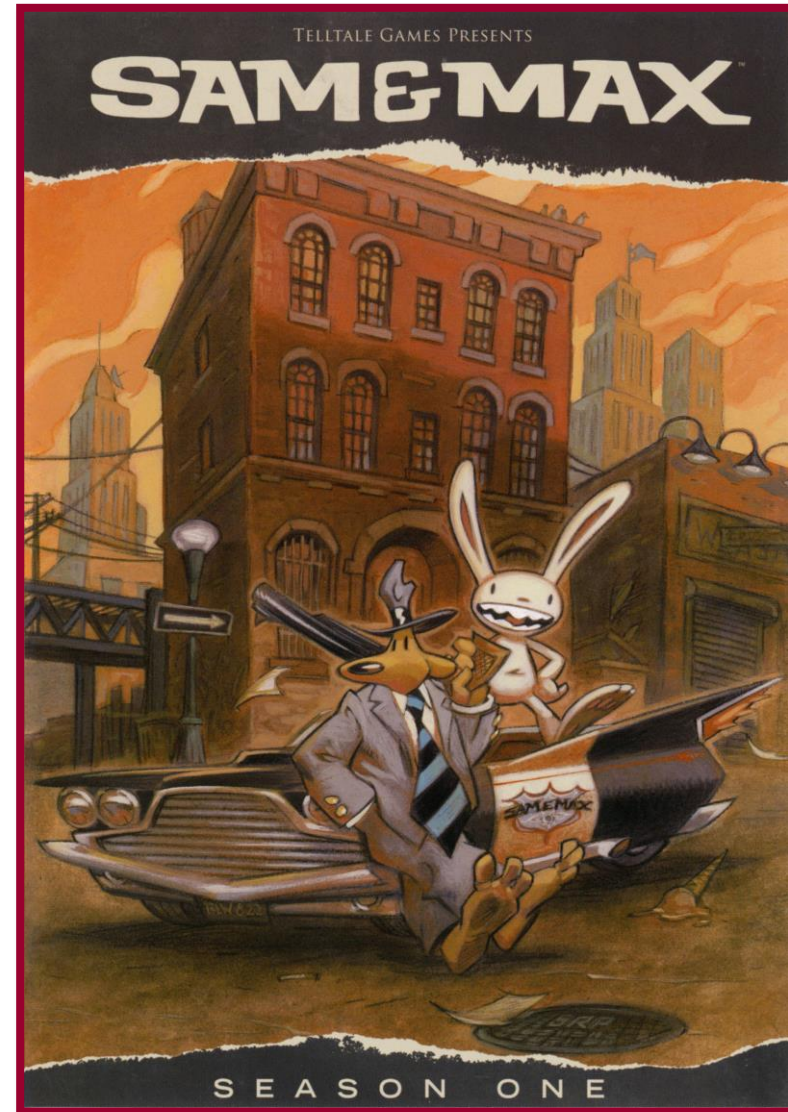
Games with Comedy



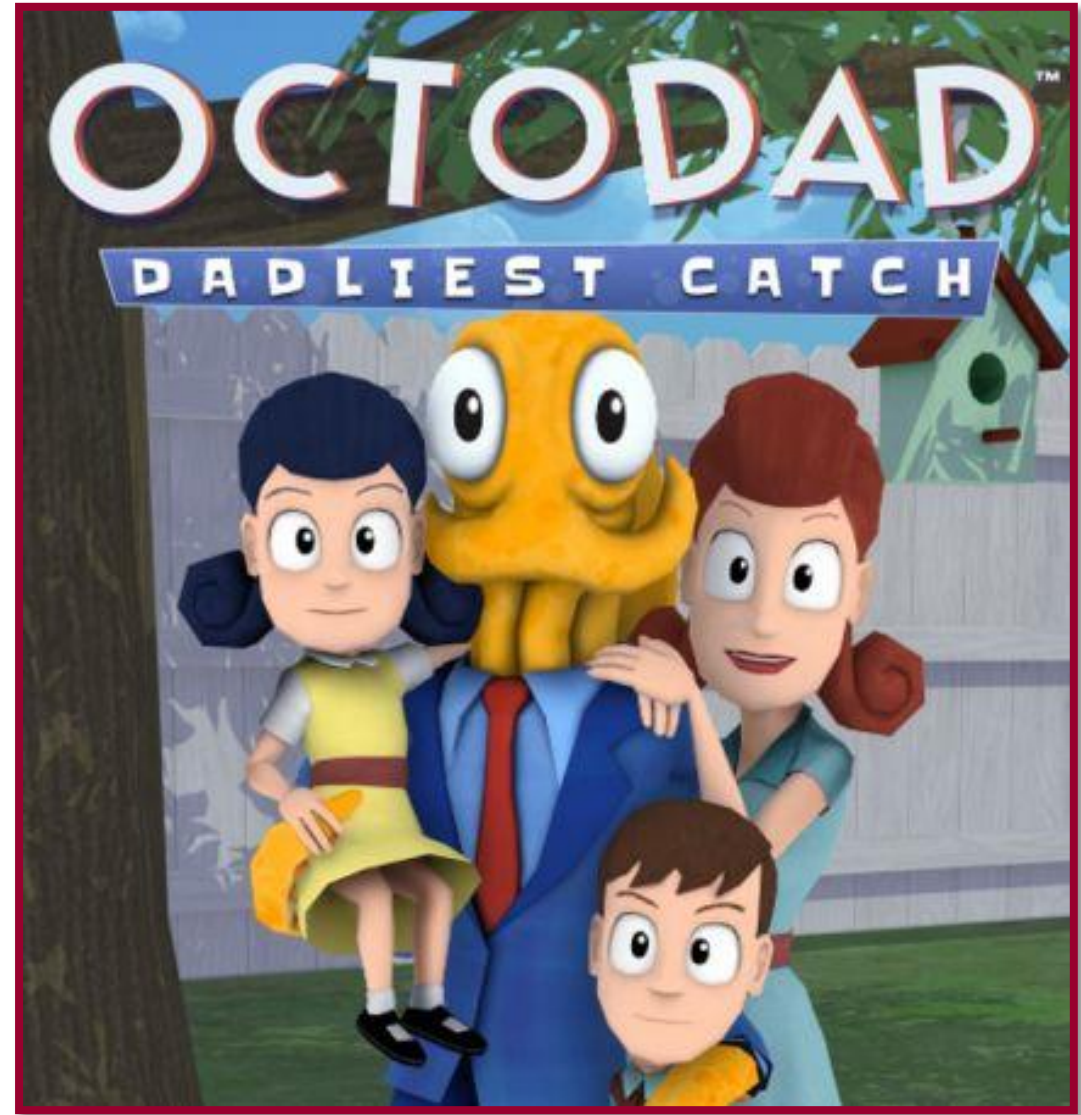
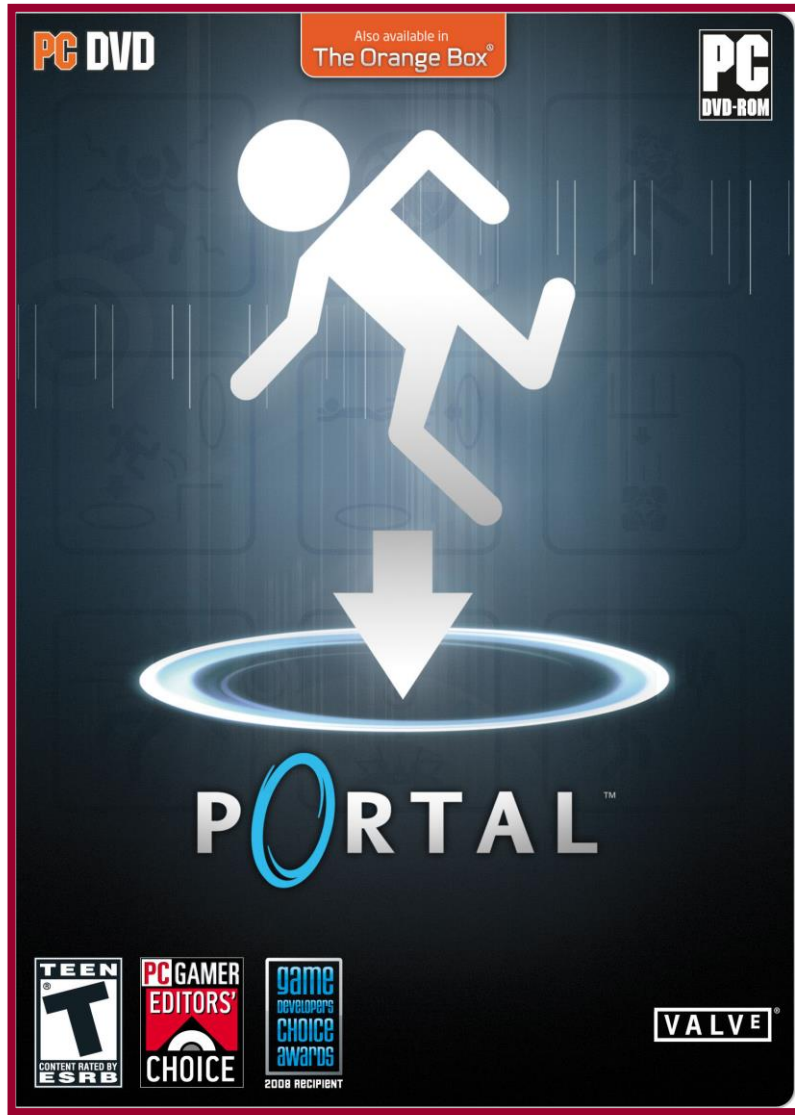
Games with Comedy



Games with Comedy



Games with Comedy



Games with Comedy



Role of Humor

The role of humor in video games is not well defined, nor has it been the focus of much academic analysis. Academic research of humor has concentrated on jokes and other prepared texts, neglecting spontaneous, real life humor, often because spontaneous humor is more situation-dependent and less suitable for analysis.

Dan Cook proposes two main types of humor in games:

- **Humor Through Storytelling**
 - Prepackaged jokes, consumable content like cut-scenes and dialogue that is mastered in a single loop.
 - This type of humor is more like what we see in non-interactive media.
- **Humor Through Mechanics**
 - Cook calls “laughter-generating systems” those 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.
 - We lack the language to talk about these because the experience is so localized and transient.

Superiority Humor Mechanics

Superiority humor is often associated with competitive multiplayer games.

- **Avatar Deaths**
 - Laughing at the target's incompetence or emphasizing the winner's superiority
 - Practical jokes through experienced players tricking new players into killing themselves
 - Exaggerated/ridiculous death animations
- **Taunts**
 - Mocking other players
- **High Risk Maneuvers**
 - Killing opponents in an impractical way (or failing spectacularly)

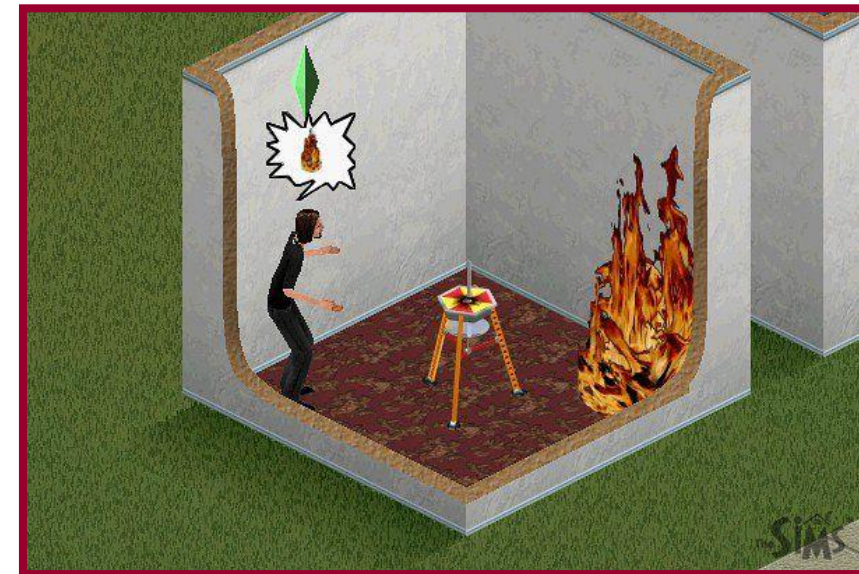


Relief Humor Mechanics

Relief humor occurs much less frequently and often in conjunction with superiority humor as a way for the victim to laugh with the victor, such as with humorous death sequences.

This could partially explain the appeal of particularly difficult or unforgiving games where the player dies frequently.

- **Avatar Deaths**
 - Replaying all the terrible ways in which the player died at the end of the game, such as in Super Meat Boy.
- **Destructiveness**
 - Running over pedestrians in GTA
 - Torturing characters (instead of nurturing them) in The Sims or Black & White



Satire vs. Parody

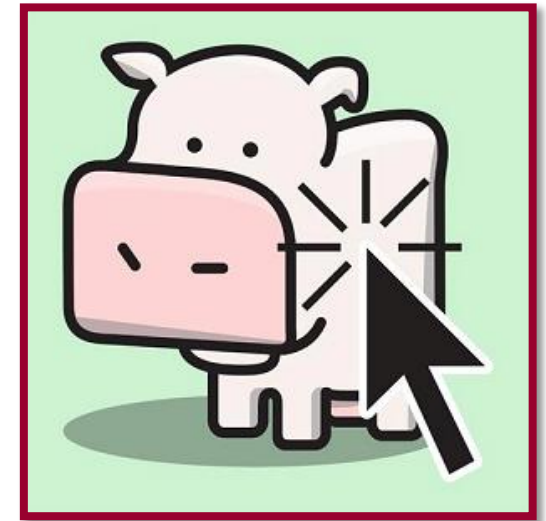
Satire is often confused with parody.

- **Satire**
 - Draws on and highlights social conventions.
 - Satire can represent aspects of life that could not otherwise be shown and offers a way to discuss serious socio-political material.
 - Often used for communicating ideas rather than playing recreationally and can handle serious subject matters.
 - A satirical game makes the player both its willing participant and victim.
- **Parody**
 - Draws on and highlights aesthetic conventions.
 - Uses deliberate exaggeration for comic effect.
 - Can be used for satirical purposes.

Abusive game design is fairly common for both satires and parodies (e.g. the never released *Desert Bus*).

Satire Game - Cow Clicker

- Ian Bogost's Cow Clicker was an 18-month-long social experiment.
- It was meant to embody the worst aspects of social games:
 - Wasting the player's time even when away from the game
 - Turning the player's friends into resources
 - Options to pay to skip the tediousness of the gameplay
 - 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.
- In the end he removed all the cows in the *Cowpocalypse*, leaving only empty grass that can still be clicked for points.
- In the end, Bogost was unsure whether it was his greatest success or most tragic failure.



Parody

Harries 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. Literalization 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.

Parody Game - Progress Quest

- *Progress Quest* 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



Other Forms of Comedy

- **Slapstick**
 - Slapstick is about physical humor and visuals.
 - Widespread in games with a light-hearted tone, especially ones that include some kind of physical actions in the gameplay.
 - Mario games, Wario games, Angry Birds, The Sims, Octodad
- **Dark Comedy**
 - Dark comedy (or black comedy) has disturbing shifts in tone that keep the viewer unsafely imbalanced.
 - 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.
 - Films like Pulp Fiction or American Psycho
 - Fallout games, Psychonauts

Other Forms of Comedy

- **Gross-Out Comedy**

- Gross-out comedy is a relatively young subgenre of film comedy based on crude transgressions of good taste.
- It is more controversial in games than in films and presented mainly in games with higher age ratings.
- Leisure Suit Larry, Conker's Bad Fur Day, The House of the Dead: Overkill

- **Romantic Comedy**

- Almost nonexistent in games, and yet perhaps the dominant form of situational comedy in film.



CLASS DISCUSSION

Comedy in Games

A background image of red stage curtains with a scalloped top edge. The curtains are closed and have a rich, deep red color with some vertical creases and folds.

See You Next Class