

## Comedy of Contingency: Making Physical Humor in Video Game Spaces

JAROSLAV ŠVELCH<sup>1</sup>

Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic

Although mediated humor is pervasive in our media cultures, media studies have largely glossed over the role of technology in the process of making humor. This article brings that topic into focus, while examining the Machinima-related subgenre of gameplay mischief video—the video montages of physical humor captured or staged in the simulated spaces of video games. Based on close reading of videos from three contemporary 3D action titles, interviews with the makers of these videos, and an analysis of humor techniques they employ, I argue that this vein of humor arises from the interaction between the player and the game. I also claim that the capacity of games to generate unexpected and contingent events is instrumental to this process.

*Keywords: video games, humor, comedy, slapstick, machinima*

### Introduction

“It's like *America's Funniest Home Videos* without the schadenfreude.”

— User comment in response to the YouTube video,  
“*Skate 3 funny stuff compilation part 1*” (Helixsnake, 2012a)

The performance of physical humor is no longer limited to physical spaces. Since the 1990s, players of video games have been capturing and sharing video clips of funny things happening to simulated bodies in simulated spaces. Taking advantage of the capacity of video games to generate unexpected coincidences, collisions, and nonsensical situations while utilizing them for comical effect, these videos have become a popular form of entertainment for millions of viewers. As prime examples of humor that has been co-created in an intimate interplay between performers and digital technology, they represent a new vein of physical humor enabled by the video game medium.

---

Jaroslav Švelch: jaroslav@svelch.com

Date submitted: 2014-01-12

<sup>1</sup> I conducted the research for this paper during my PhD internship at Microsoft Research New England in the fall of 2012. I would like to thank Mary L. Gray, Nancy Baym, T. L. Taylor, and Megan Finn for their advice and feedback. Further work on this paper was supported by the Charles University PRVOUK P17 research development program.

Copyright © 2014 (Jaroslav Švelch). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

The 2012 YouTube hit by the user *HelixSnake*, a compilation named “Helix Snake’s top 50 favorite Skate 3 clips,” (Helixsnake, 2012b) collects the recordings he had made over the past year in *Skate 3* (EA Black Box, 2010), a skating simulation game notorious for its whimsical physics engine. In the course of 10 minutes, we witness a series of collisions, glitches, and slapstick gags that we could hardly expect from live-action skating footage.

In one of the clips, we watch *HelixSnake*’s avatar, dubbed “Red Skater” by one of the viewers (see comment in HelixSnake, 2012a), plummet off a skyscraper in a shopping cart; in another, he bumps into a passerby while falling off his skateboard, both struggling to get up, as if paralyzed.



**Figure 1. Red Skater bumps into a passerby.**

Then, the game’s physics and collision detection algorithms start to misbehave. Red Skater falls through a polygon on the surface of the skate park and finds himself suspended in the air, limbs contorted in ways contradicting human anatomy. After he is released, an unseen force hurls his body against a fellow skater, and both tumble to the ground.



**Figure 2. Red Skater's contorted limbs.**

Viewers love *HelixSnake's* work. One of them confesses, "I'm gonna watch this video whenever I'm sad." Another comments, "This video is just amazing just so amazing im definitely a fan of random bullshit, Best video 2012 for me" (appended YouTube comments in *Helixsnake*, 2012b). It took only one month from its release on October 16, 2012, for the video to garner more than two million views, while similar compilations made in the game *Grand Theft Auto IV* (Rockstar North, 2008) had reached over nine million views.

The compilation echoes some of the techniques of humor employed in slapstick comedy or reality television shows like *Jackass*. Its absurdist gags resonate with the poetics of television shows like *Robot Chicken*, as well as with the numerous contemporary Internet "fail" memes (see Milner, 2012). But at the same time, these videos highlight the nature of the underlying technology—both its possibilities and its perceived failures. As I will demonstrate later, in many of the jokes, it is the game, not the player, who delivers the punch line. This article will thus examine the interplay between the creators of these videos and the relatively "new" gaming technology in the process of creating humor that is built on familiar foundations.

### **Humor, Slapstick, and Technology**

Videos like *HelixSnake's* are deeply embedded in the traditions of video game culture, popular entertainment, and humor. As a research interest, they thus occupy an intersection of several fields of scholarship.

Philosophy, and later the discipline of humor scholarship, has spent centuries investigating the reasons why people laugh, the outcome of that effort being that “no single theory can hope to explain the complexity of humour” (Billig, 2005, p. 175). The discussion has, however, converged around three major (and, to some extent, complementary) explanations: *incongruity theory*, which claims that people laugh at what is surprising or unexpected (Koestler, 1989; Morreall, 2009); *relief theory*, according to which people laugh to relieve psychological tension (Freud, 1963); and *superiority theory*, which asserts that we laugh when we feel superior to someone (Bergson, 2008; Billig, 2005). Physical humor specifically occupies an important position in Bergson’s superiority theory of laughter. In his view, we find it funny whenever a human loses control of his or her body, including the moments when someone’s body becomes inflexible or “reminds us of a mere machine” (Bergson, 2008, p. 18). Based on these theories, as well as inductive research, humor scholars compiled several typologies of *humor techniques* (Berger, 1998; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004), which I will build upon in my research.

Despite its prominence online, surprisingly little has been written about humor in digital media. Most of the existing work has focused on its social, political, and community-related aspects. The literature tends to treat digital technology as a distribution *platform* that allows humor to spread in online communities, while remaining mostly silent on the role the technology can play in the process of creating humorous content (Baym, 1995; Kuipers, 2006; Phillips, 2013; Shifman, 2012).

Literature on humor in video games is also rare. Dorman and Biddle provide a classification of humor in games, observing that “humor in games seems mostly connected to slapstick comedy and nonsense humor” (2009, p. 809). The most comprehensive application of a humor theory on games comes from Kirkpatrick, who argues that “gameplay involves an attitude that is cynical and humorous” (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 41). In his view, the Bergsonian joke is central to the aesthetics of the video game as a medium because of the irreconcilable discrepancy between the player’s physical performance and the on-screen action.

None of these authors elaborate on the role of technology in the creation of humor. Scholarship on silent comedy and slapstick has, on the other hand, dealt with this topic quite extensively. Garin (2012) points out that the layouts of playgrounds for gags in film, reality television, and video games are strikingly similar, and Lombana (2008) elaborates on the role of sound design in animated slapstick. But it is Gunning’s work on *mischief gags* in early cinema (Gunning, 1995) that will provide the most immediate cues for my study.

In typical mischief gags, such as the Lumières’ *L’arroseur arrosé*, the rascal (usually a boy) spots a *mischief device* (such as a garden hose) and proceeds to use it against a victim:

Although the human actants of rascal and victim are certainly essential to the gag, a detour is taken through an inanimate object, or an arrangement of objects. As a mediatory visual element which takes some time to operate, the device possesses its own fascination. . . . The enjoyment of the gag lay at last [sic] partly in watching the device work. (ibid, pp. 90–91)

The focus on the mechanics that mediate the relationship between cause and effect was later elaborated by the likes of Buster Keaton, who was a “consummate engineer” of complex contraptions (ibid., p. 99).

Performers like *HelixSnake* use video game engines to similar ends—to create mischief in the simulated world of the game—although it is often their avatars who end up being the victims. Their gags likewise provoke fascination with the underlying technology, by showing what the game can do. To underline these similarities, I will, from this point, call them *mischief makers*. Also, as the genre they are working in does not have a definitive name (it is being labeled “funny moments,” “funny stuff,” “silly stuff” or “bloopers”), I will call it the *gameplay*<sup>2</sup> *mischief video*.

### Who Performs Humor in Video Game Spaces?

Gameplay mischief videos are produced on the platform of video games. Video games have been examined from two major perspectives. They have been studied as artifacts, with focus on rule systems and narratives (Juul, 2005; Murray, 1998), parallel to which has run an interest in players and play as social activity (Carr, 2005; Taylor, 2009a). But the comedic appeal of the examples above does not reside solely within the game’s rules and narrative, nor does it lie exclusively with the player as a social actor. The events were not scripted, and neither the game designer nor the player were fully in control. This study must thus find an alternative approach that integrates both types of action, as well as the spaces in which they unfold.

According to Kirkpatrick (2011), the player engages in repetitive movements that may seem ridiculous—and therefore, funny. But instead of becoming a victim of the Bergsonian joke, the mischief maker transforms play into an intentionally comedic performance. This performance has three dimensions. First, it is a situated humorous performance aimed at spectators. It becomes objectified (recorded, edited, and posted) and open to “scrutiny by an audience” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 73). Second, it is an embodied performance within a simulated physical world. As Taylor claims:

[It is] through a performance of the body, in this case via the avatar, that one is rooted in the virtual environment. There is a material thing (albeit a digital one) that finds itself located in a space and moves through it, engaging in some way with objects and with others it encounters. (2002, p. 44)

Finally, it is also a performance of creative play with the game’s engine. In this respect, mischief makers are akin to “high-performance” players (Lowood, 2006), even if they aim at different goals.

The humorous events in our examples were *co-created* by the game. In order to investigate the role technology plays here, we must acknowledge the agency of simulation (Giddings, 2005), which runs

---

<sup>2</sup> By *gameplay*, I mean the game as it is being performed by the player. In Mäyrä’s words, “Gameplay is what you do” (2008, p. 16).

the game world. Non-player characters walk around, and the simulated physics exert force over simulated objects—the game “performs,” too.

The results of the co-creations are undetermined and unforeseen by the game’s designers. They can, but need not, happen. The simulated environments in which mischief makers work must thus be conceptualized as spaces of uncertainty (see Costikyan, 2013). According to Malaby, a game is a “domain of contrived contingency that generates interpretable outcomes” (2007, p. 106), contingency having been defined in philosophy and social sciences as a property of that which “is neither necessary nor impossible” (Luhmann, 1998, p. 45). Games are therefore “distinctive in their achievement of a generative balance between the open-endedness of contingencies and the reproducibility of conditions for action” (Malaby, 2007, p. 106). In other words, they allow for things to happen, and give us a chance to try and make them happen again.

Contingent events in contemporary 3D games are usually generated by the aptly named game *engines*, “component-based software systems useful not only for rendering background effects like physics, but also for orchestrating the crucial functions of the gameplay itself” (Bogost, 2006, p. 55). Although the production of moving images within video game engines has usually been filed under the category of *machinima*, its relation to my topic is in no way straightforward. Machinima has been defined as “digital performance that controls procedurally animated moving images” (Nitsche, 2011, p. 121). Gameplay mischief videos manifest a similar emphasis on real-time performance. However, much of the discourse surrounding machinima has been framed in terms of the promise of a “production method heading toward a cinematic ideal” (ibid., p. 120), this ideal conforming to the established format of *narrative cinema* (Lowood, 2006; Salen, 2011). Gameplay mischief videos, on the other hand, resemble early pre-narrative *cinema of attractions*, concerned with “showing and exhibition” (Gunning, 2006, p. 381), rather than with storytelling. While the promise of machinima is yet to be fulfilled, video games already play larger and more nuanced roles in the creation of audiovisual content than those of mere filmmaking tools.

### **Material and Methodology**

In order to gain an understanding of the interplay between the player and the game in co-creating physical humor, I conducted a multi-method qualitative study driven by the following research question: “How does the technology behind simulated spaces affect the ways in which techniques of physical humor are deployed by the creators of gameplay mischief videos?”

The study had two complementary parts, focusing on both the *products* and the *processes* of the mischief makers’ work. The investigation of the former was comprised of close reading of the videos themselves, while I gained insight into the latter by using open-ended interviews with five of their creators. I opted to conduct the research on the platform of YouTube, which is, at the time of writing, the major platform for both gameplay videos and humorous video content in general.

I focused on three particular game titles: *Grand Theft Auto IV (GTA IV)*, *Red Dead Redemption (RDR)*, and *Skate 3*. This choice was informed by five interrelated factors. To show the popular appeal of gameplay mischief videos, I took into consideration the number and view counts of mischief videos made out of the particular game. The second concern was the game's emphasis on physical action in a three-dimensional space, thus foregrounding the physicality of the humor.<sup>3</sup> Third, I chose from "open world" games (Morgan, 2012), which are designed to offer ample space for player experimentation and generate plenty of contingent events. Fourth, I focused on titles that are primarily single-player games, as the study is looking at the interaction of the player with the game, as opposed to with other players. My last concern was to only include games in which the camera follows the game's avatar by default, thus making the player's performance and the physical interactions within the game world readily observable. Although it was not a fact that influenced my choices, it is important to note that *Skate 3* and *GTA IV* come with in-game video editors (although the latter only includes the editor in the PC version) that make capture and editing of in-game video considerably easier.

The three games provide variety in both narrative and action. *GTA IV* is an action game taking place in Liberty City, a fictionalized version of contemporary New York City. Its storyline follows the adventures of Niko Bellic, an Eastern European immigrant in pursuit of the American dream, while its gameplay emphasizes vehicular action and shootouts (Rockstar North, 2008). Set in the 1910s American West, *RDR* tells the story of John Marston, a tough and sullen Western hero on a quest to confront his former gang members, its action featuring horse riding, exploration of wilderness, and also a good amount of shooting (Rockstar San Diego, 2010). The skating simulation *Skate 3* follows the goal of the customizable protagonist (male or female) to dominate the skating scene in the contemporary city of Port Caverton (EA Black Box, 2010).

While building the corpus of videos from these three games, my aim was to highlight their impact as popular and accessible entertainment content. As such, I selected material that garnered the most views, while also ranking among the top results of YouTube's default "most relevant" search method. I ran two YouTube searches for "most relevant" videos (October 3, 2012, and October 12, 2012). Both times, the search queries consisted of the title of the game and one of the words "funny," "hilarious," or "silly"—the latter two being the most commonly used synonyms of the first one, a finding based on preliminary searches. Among the first 200 results for each search, I manually selected each video with over 100,000 views, while omitting video game reviews and walkthroughs.<sup>4</sup> I only included the most viewed video by each user to ensure variety.

I arrived at a total of 57 videos, 33 from *GTA IV*, 14 from *Skate 3*, and 9 from *Red Dead Redemption*. Due to the proprietary nature of YouTube's search algorithms, it is impossible to determine how representative these searches were of all gameplay mischief videos on YouTube, but the searches suggest that they probably number in the hundreds in the cases of *Skate 3* and *RDR*, and thousands in the

---

<sup>3</sup> Developed by two branches of the same company, *GTA IV* and *RDR* share at least a part of code, specifically the Euphoria engine. While this might mean less variety in the sample, the marked difference between the possible actions and resulting events and collisions justifies the inclusion of both games.

<sup>4</sup> Walkthrough is a video guide to a game, usually showing how it can be completed.

case of *GTA IV*. Out of the 57 videos in my sample, montages proved to be the prevailing format (with 54 entries), though two were single-scene videos, and one was a commented gameplay video. Most of the videos from *GTA IV* and *Skate 3* were created in these games' built-in editors, while the rest, along with the *RDR* videos, were recorded using dedicated hardware and software.

The authors of the videos come from different parts of the Northern hemisphere, including the United States, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and Russia.<sup>5</sup> Some of the authors have made videos from more than one of these games, among these the Machinima.com director(s)<sup>6</sup> Ben Buja, whose videos from all three games ranked as the most viewed (with the *GTA IV* one receiving over 9 million views), partly due to the 5 million-strong subscriber base of Machinima.com's YouTube channel.<sup>7</sup>

Among the creators of the videos in the sample, I identified 11 users who were working actively within the genre,<sup>8</sup> and I contacted them with interview requests. Five users agreed to be interviewed: UK-based *bobisuruncle54*, creator of the popular *100 ways to die in GTA 4* video, as well as montages from other games; *flatbryan112gametube*, who is from the Netherlands and has produced clips from *RDR* and *Skate 3*, and later, the fifth instalment of *GTA*; and *HasenFreak1995*<sup>9</sup> from Germany, author of a series of *GTA IV funny stuff* videos, who has recently switched to *League of Legends*. The other two are *HelixSnake* from the United States, who has, besides his work in *Skate 3*, also produced several *GTA IV* and later also *GTA V* videos; and *theninjacowboy*, also from the United States, who has made a couple of physics-based *GTA IV* montages, as well as *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion* comedy machinima. All of them are males who were between 17 and 26 years of age. In order to emphasize their status as authors and pay respect to their individual creative abilities, I decided to refer to them by YouTube usernames, rather than pseudonyms.

In fall 2012, I conducted semi-structured interviews remotely using Skype, with the exceptions of *theninjacowboy*, who was interviewed in person, and *flatbryan112gametube*, who preferred an email interaction. Interview questions focused on the process of creating and publishing humorous montages, and on the respondents' personal histories of working within this and related genres. The interviews were conducted in English.

For close readings, I created a subsample of the top five videos for each game, to which I added—if they had not already been included—the top three videos by each respondent. As supplemental

---

<sup>5</sup> Based on YouTube user profiles.

<sup>6</sup> This pseudonym is actually used by two German brothers (SimpsonsFan007, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Machinima.com is a commercial company that produces game-related audiovisual content.

<sup>8</sup> All five produce other kinds of video outside this genre, but gameplay mischief videos have brought them initial exposure. Each of them approaches their work in a slightly different way. *HelixSnake* focuses on exploration and individual skits. Both *bobisuruncle54* and *theninjacowboy* are geared in the direction of machinima, as they are more concerned with image quality, temporal structure, and thematic unity. *Flatbryan112gametube* and *HasenFreak1995* fall in between, showing a variety of funny events while setting them to light music.

<sup>9</sup> Since the interview, he has changed his YouTube user name to *Hazzafakka*.



material, I also sampled at least 300 user comments to each of these videos, which served as pointers to the scenes or qualities of the videos that are relevant to the viewers.

The first step of analysis aimed to extract general formal and content-related features, which will be discussed in the next section. In the second step, I identified the kinds of humor employed in the material. Taking Buijzen and Valkenburg's (2004) typology of 41 humor techniques as the starting point, I identified four main techniques of humor: *incongruity*, *coincidence*, *slapstick*, and *nonsense*. I followed with the iterative process of matching these kinds of humor with the respondents' accounts of their work, focusing on the patterns related to the interplay between player and technology. While the idea of co-creation was the premise with which I had entered the research, two more patterns emerged in the research: the importance of *contingency* and shifts of *control*. In the following sections, I will provide a description of the formal and content-related properties of the material, before going on to analyze the mischief makers' deployment of humor techniques.

### **Genre Conventions in Gameplay Mischief Videos**

Most videos in my sample follow enough formal and thematic conventions to justify calling them a genre; they are also viewed and produced on the particular platform of YouTube, mostly in the context of core gamer culture (see Ito, 2011). The work of mischief makers is informed by the genre's structural and contextual frameworks. The gameplay mischief video's closest relatives are the "stunt" video, in which the player performs extraordinary skill-based feats, the "fail" video, which features gameplay failure that is not necessarily framed as funny, and the "griefing" video, in which a player harasses other players in a multiplayer environment.

The history of the gameplay mischief video can be traced back to the late 1990s demos made in the game *Quake* that captured the "high-performance play" of top players exploring the boundaries of the game's engine (Lowood, 2006). A few years later, 2002's "Halo physics experiment" *Warthog Jump* was one of the first widely popular videos of an expert player messing around with game physics (Salen, 2011).

The now common format of a 3- to 10-minute *montage* of short gameplay *clips*, as popularized by the influential machinima director Ben Buja,<sup>10</sup> shows blatant disdain for narrative. The videos omit dialogue almost entirely, often set instead to light comedic music. They do not *tell* a story; instead, they *show* a sequence of physical gags and accidents that happen in the game world. The key elements of this genre are *variety* and *novelty*.

The very titles of gameplay mischief videos tend to suggest a hodge-podge of unrelated bits, similar to the genre of variety show: *GTA 4 - Bloopers, Glitches & Silly Stuff 2*, or *Grand Theft Auto IV: Funny Crashes, Stunts and Fails!* Their seemingly haphazard format bears similarities to the "plotless, but not meaningless structure" of America's Funniest Home Videos, a program that likewise featured

---

<sup>10</sup> Two of my respondents admit direct inspiration from *Ben Buja*.

collections of accidents (Fore, 1993). It also echoes the make-up of “the multishot mischief film,” the gag compilation format typical of the early silent cinema (Gunning, 1995), and the vaudeville show (Jenkins, 1992, 2006).

*Novelty* is one of the core values of comedy. As Buster Keaton put it in his autobiography, “The unexpected was our staple product, the unusual our object, and the unique was the ideal we were always hoping to achieve” (Keaton & Samuels, 1982, p. 207). The novelty of mischief videos resides in showing things that do not come up frequently in gameplay, the “rare occurrences that happen that make things even more fun—because of how unlikely they seem to happen,” as *theninjacowboy* put it.

The genre also comes with a set of conventions regarding the videos’ function. One of the primary goals of mischief makers is to *entertain*. Rather than posting for a close circle of friends, my respondents identify themselves as entertainers addressing a wider audience. *Theninjacowboy*, for instance, wants to have a “positive effect on the world” by making videos that “make [the viewers’] day.” Although the use of cinematic language is not the focus of this article, it is important to note that all my respondents use editing and camera angles in ways that clearly distinguish their output from raw recordings of gameplay.

Entertainment is also seen as a way of receiving exposure. While considering his work a gift to his viewers, *flatbryan112gametube* also adds: “I was a great fan of Ben Buja. . . . I was really looking forward to his videos and I could imagine how it will feel to have lots of fans and become a YouTube star.” One of *bobisuruncle54’s* inspirations for the *100 ways to die* video was the fact that the phrase was “a very popular search on YouTube.” Having hoped for a million views, he ended up getting over two million.

With view counts this high, popular montages can also generate substantial ad revenue. This explains why, soon after the success of his (or their) early videos, Machinima.com hired Ben Buja as one of their “machinima directors.” Mischief makers are well aware of the trappings of the YouTube system, but while the economic circumstances surrounding production are of concern to most creators, their investigation would require a paper of its own.

Although skewed—like *America’s Funniest Home Videos*—by selection and editing, gameplay mischief videos are also documents of what the game and the player are capable of (Lowood, 2011). They are an outlet for demonstration and sharing of specialized skills and knowledge, the major components of one’s gaming capital (Consalvo, 2009). The audience learns tricks from the mischief makers, often through inquiries in the comments section.

My respondents believe that the majority of their audience consists of gamers familiar with the source titles. While fellow players can appreciate the nuances of their performances, they can also be hard to please. Snarky comments like “I do better than that accidentally” ([appended YouTube comment in DDCommentaries](#), 2010) are not uncommon. This puts considerable pressure on the mischief makers to outdo themselves and find new ways of making funny things happen. At the same time, they remain faithful to the original title and do not alter it in any major way:

[When you are] doing things in the game that people will recognize from playing it themselves they will appreciate it more, because they'll feel more of a connection to it as opposed to doing something that has almost nothing to do with the original content.  
(*theninjacowboy*)

Within the genre in question, the job of the mischief maker is then to innovate or improve upon the existing practice of advanced play, and to dig for the unexpected within the familiar game world.

### **Incongruity: Highlighting and Creating Discrepancies**

While looking for humorous potential within pre-designed worlds, mischief makers engage with the rich semiotic material of video games. They do so in two interrelated ways: by pointing out the incongruities in the games themselves, and by performing actions that clash with the games' narratives and objectives. In doing so, they take advantage of the games' *semiotic contingency*, or "the unpredictability of meaning that always accompanies attempts to interpret the game's outcomes" (Malaby, 2007, p. 108). The resulting incongruity humor is based on the effect of "perceiving of a situation . . . in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (Koestler, 1989, p. 35).

A considerable part of the incongruity humor in my material stems from failures of "realistic" representation. There are two main systemic reasons for these failures. First, the very concept of realism is deeply problematic, because the perceived verisimilitude it strives to achieve is dependent on a number of social conventions that may change across time, space, and genres (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Second, due to the multimodal nature of the video game medium, different parts of the game are "realistic" in different, often conflicting ways.

All three games feature graphics that correspond to the current notions of "realism": Their characters and environments have lifelike proportions and are rendered in reasonable detail. But the mechanics of the simulated spaces are adjusted for the entertainment function of the video game, which is associated with action and motion. Thus, in *GTA IV*, one can fly through the windshield of a car after a head-on collision, although this would not happen in real life. Mischief makers are well aware of the interplay of the real and unreal. As *bobisuruncle54* says of *GTA IV*:

I think it's just the right blend of kind of reality and complete non-reality. . . .  
Particularly the physics engine, because it's a representation of real life, but it's nothing like real life, in reality. And I think that's why people find these videos funny. . . . It kind of . . . it's exactly like a cartoon.

Viewers delight in pushing the jokes even further by interpreting the events on screen using the reference frame of real-world experience. *Bobisuruncle54's* video *100 ways to die in GTA 4*, for instance, provokes numerous comments about the doctors in Liberty City being "the best," as they always manage to put the main characters back on their feet (appended YouTube comment in *Bobisuruncle54*, 2010).

But while some of these incongruities stem from structural features of the games, the players also trigger incongruous situations by their performances. Much of the perceived comedy value resides in the mischief makers' blatant disregard for the game's goals. *HelixSnake*, whose *Skate 3* videos contain surprisingly little skating, notes:

It wouldn't be quite as funny if it was a game designed to do this sort of things. But the fact that it's a skateboarding thing and that you can do all of these ridiculous things that have almost nothing to do with skateboarding . . . adds to some of the humor.

Many of these things that "you can do" are not recognized or explicitly facilitated by the game. In his *Red Dead Redemption Funny Moments 7: Drunk As A Skunk* video, *flatbryan112gametube* used the "Hic" cheat that enables John Marston to get instantly inebriated anywhere in the game world (otherwise, this can only happen in bars) (Flatbryan112gametube, 2010). As soon as this happens, the character starts to slip out of the player's control, stumbling and falling on top of tables, under tables, and off roofs.



**Figure 3. John Marston is "drunk as a skunk."**

One particular scene has elicited hosts of comments: the one in which Marston collapses on a park bench, his hand ending up behind a Mexican character's back. It has been repeatedly interpreted by commenters both as Marston pickpocketing him, and as Marston (portrayed by the narrative as a straight male) being "gay" and touching the man's bottom—neither of which are actions recognized by the game mechanics. Although a part of the scene's humorous appeal resides in the potential sexual subtext of the event, semiotic contingency, deftly hinted at by the mischief maker, allows for these multiple interpretations. In this case, like in many others, it is the *incongruity* between the frame of reference

provided by the game on the one hand, and the player's actions on the other, which generates the comedic effect.

### **Coincidence: Making Stuff Happen**

None of the examples of physical humor I have described would be possible if the game world was a static space. Instead, the game worlds in question are lively environments ripe with contingency. The makers do not and cannot assume full directorial control over the unfolding events; instead, they must practice the art of the mischief maker—the balancing of contingency and control.

This contingency bothers machinima directors who are often aiming to make well-structured, pre-scripted stories (Cameron & Carroll, 2011). Mischief makers, on the other hand, take advantage of the funny coincidences games can produce. As *bobisuruncle54* says of other mischief makers' work:

[S]ome videos have extremely—kind of ridiculously fluky kind of things have occurred, like someone . . . getting hit by a car, flying out, landing on someone else as if they're hugging them, but it's 100 miles an hour, and it's just ridiculous. That can only happen by chance.

In fact, a game's capacity to generate unexpected coincidences is a major factor for picking it to work in. This way, *HelixSnake*, inspired by Ben Buja's older videos, picked up *Skate 3* because of its "screwing around element." The freeform exploration is an essential part of a mischief maker's work: "[A] lot of the time I'm just screwing around and something funny happens that I'm not even planning."

But basing one's career as an entertainer purely on chance is hardly a viable strategy. In order to produce enough humorous material for their montages, mischief makers have to incorporate contingency in their practice. They use two basic strategies: generating contingency to trigger coincidences and streamlining contingency to achieve gags of their own design.

The former begins by working closely with the game's engine. *Flatbryan112gametube* sees mischief making as pushing boundaries: "First of all I just play the game and try to feel the game engine. After that I try to push the engine to its limits and see what comes out."

In *GTA 4 Carmaggedon gone Yakety, theninjacowboy* has even transcended the engine's limits. Inspired by a simple game file hack circulating around YouTube, he manipulated the physics engine by setting the car friction to negative nine. This turned Liberty City into a "carmaggedon," where cars fly, unrestricted by gravity, around the fictional world of Liberty City and crush whatever comes in their way, including the main character (Theninjacowboy, 2011). He recorded hours of footage and edited them into what he considered a "good edited video." In his view, out of the contingency arises comedy:

When you have chaos, you know, something will happen. . . . [T]here's this one scene where I'm just walking my character through the park and this car just comes at me

from the side, but I'm just walking anyway expecting it to hit me—but at the last second it misses me and actually hits another pedestrian. And it almost looks like I was in complete control of that situation . . . [but] in fact, it was by the physics of the game that worked in my favor.

Besides generating contingency, mischief makers also tame and streamline it, so that it works according to their plans. *HasenFreak1995* described this process most candidly:

[W]hen I started . . . I just saved what I was playing and what happened by accident. But later, when I wanted to make new things, I was just sitting on my chair and thinking about what can I do, what's funny, what didn't I do, what could I do, what could I do better?

The range of things one can do expands with skill. Many of the spectacular deaths on display in *bobisuruncle54's GTA IV* video require considerable prowess: "In *100 Ways to Die*, a lot of my favorite shots are kind of skill based. They're not necessarily easy things to do." *HelixSnake* is especially proud of the scenes that took a long time to accomplish, like "the one where you lay down your board but then I go between those two pipes. That one took hundreds of tries."

The technique of creating comical coincidences thus combines two complementary processes: "screwing around," and informed poking at the game engine, along with a comedic virtuosity that requires effort, perseverance, and motor skills.

### **Slapstick: Controlled Loss of Control**

Slapstick is an essential element of gameplay mischief videos, its prevalence being derived from the games' emphasis on physical action. Lombana's definition of it as "a mode of comedy characterized by the use of physical violence, acrobatics, knockabouts, collisions, and horseplay" (2008, p. 18) reads like a description of most of the mischief makers' gameplay. But gameplay is not automatically funny. In this section, I will argue that mischief makers achieve the humorous effect of slapstick through a controlled loss of control over their avatars.

According to Bergson, "we laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing" (2008, p. 30). This happens when we act in a machine-like fashion, or when gravity takes over our bodies and we fall to the ground like "wooden dummies" (*ibid.*, p. 18).

Video games are, indeed, populated with machine-like bodies, and the extent to which non-player characters resemble barely functioning automatons can be comical. As *Helixsnake* adds:

And they behave bizarrely too, the pedestrians do. I mean they'll attack you if you attack them but just the animation system for the pedestrians . . . is just very silly. It's very silly prebaked animations that get really messed up when they collide with props or whatever.

But while pedestrians do partake in the comedy, it is the game's protagonist who is the most frequent focus of attention. While the mischief maker nominally controls him, the majority of clips show his falls, crashes, and bails—the moments at which the mischief maker has, at least partially, given up control. Like Keaton's characters, the avatar becomes "a projectile in thrall to the laws of mechanics" (Gunning, 1995, p. 99), or, in the case of video games, to the physics engine.

Gameplay mischief videos tend to emphasize these orchestrated failures, turning them into a spectacle (Juil, 2013). For *flatbryan112gametube*, his work in *Skate 3* "is all about falling off your skateboard as hard as possible." *Bobisuruncle54's 100 ways to die in GTA 4* montage shows more occurrences of being played by the game than playing it. Out of the 100 clips, only 18 clearly depict the protagonist as an active perpetrator of manslaughter, whereas more than 50 show him being thrown about Liberty City (Bobisuruncle54, 2010).

Very often, the slapstick effect is achieved with the help of *ragdoll physics*, an element commonly used in most big-budget contemporary 3D titles. In these games, regular characters animations are hand-made, usually based on motion capturing. However, as soon as a character dies or otherwise loses muscle control, a procedural physics simulation takes over (Hertzmann & Zordan, 2011). The previously living body becomes a collection of rigid bodies and, in most cases, falls or collapses to the ground, often into unlikely and comical positions.

Mischief makers play with ragdoll physics extensively. As *bobisuruncle54* says of his work in *GTA IV*, "It's about cars, it's about ragdoll physics and things like that. So it's about timing and physical interactions." In *Skate 3*, *HelixSnake* makes use of the built-in "ragdollization" command, which he explains in a post in the comments section of one of his videos.<sup>11</sup> *Flatbryan112gametube's drunk as a skunk* video similarly exploits the "hic" cheat to "ragdollize" John Marston. In all of these cases, the privileged position of the player-controlled avatar is compromised, as he or she is becoming a thing—an unwitting puppet in slapstick comedy.

### **Nonsense: Setting off Glitches**

In the previous sections, we have seen mischief makers poking at game engines to generate contingent events. This section will deal with the technique of poking at engines where they are most vulnerable—with the systematic exploration and utilization of the game software's perceived malfunctions, or *glitches*.

Outside of computer science, the notion of "glitch" has been studied as a means of subversion or artistic intervention (Krapp, 2011; Nunes, 2011); even in the pre-digital era, animator Chuck Jones admittedly based some of the trademark Wile E. Coyote's gags on a faulty animation (Bogdanovich, 1997). In gamer communities, on the other hand, glitches tend to be abused by players in order to gain

---

<sup>11</sup> A more complete portion of HelixSnake's comment: "You can 'ragdollize' (bail) at any time by pressing R2+L2+R3+L3" (appended YouTube comment in HelixSnake, 2012a).

unfair advantage (Consalvo, 2009). Mischief makers stand between these two poles, as they actively seek out glitches that promise the advantage of triggering unexpected contingent events. *HelixSnake's* Red Skater falls through the ground; driving a car into a swing set in *GTA IV* ejects the avatar into the air. Just like linguistic nonsense jokes expose the arbitrary and fragile nature of language (Purdie, 1993), glitches expose the fragility of the simulated world and the arbitrariness of its rules. According to Bataille, the resulting step into the unknown induces laughter:

We laugh, in short, in passing very abruptly, all of a sudden, from a world in which everything is firmly qualified . . . into a world in which our assurance is overwhelmed, in which we perceive that this assurance was deceptive. (1986, p. 60)

*HasenFreak1995*, himself a purveyor of glitch-based humor, notes the glitches' disorienting quality: "There's no real joke that you can laugh about, but . . . you must laugh, because you just think, what the fuck is happening now?"

But glitches are not just rare moments of existential instability. Many of them are reproducible—these tend to be named and circulated within the community. One of the most famous ones is *GTA IV's* "swing set of death" glitch. One of the playgrounds in the game's city contains a swing set that, if approached in the right way, will hurl the player's car into air. This allows the player to reach inaccessible places and send the avatar into extreme stunts. It has been used as a contingency generator in the mischief videos by both *bobisuruncle54* and *HasenFreak1995*. In *Skate 3*, the essential glitches include the "ramp glitch," which allows the player to jump up to high places, and the "superdude glitch," which can make the skater fall through the ground.

Skillful use of glitches has become one of *HelixSnake's* trademark tricks in *Skate 3*. Glitches help him discover more anomalies in the game world and spin the wheel of contingency:

[U]sually in areas that you're not supposed to get to because they're hard to build up to . . . there will be anomalies because they don't throw up invisible walls in *Skate 3*. They just build a little bit past an area you can't get to, and it's just the end of the world and you can jump off or whatever. But there's usually a lot of anomalies like weird physics with certain missing roofs. . . . And you can make some funny stuff happen with those.

Like coincidences and ragdoll physics, glitches highlight the agency of the simulation. But whereas ragdoll physics involve humans becoming things, glitches animate the inanimate. This is jokingly reflected in the viewers' comments reacting to the mishaps of *HelixSnake's* avatar: "Our hero, Helix Snake spends a hot summer day in Port Carverton exploring the rooftops only to stumble into the city's seedy upperbelly and its villains, consisting of priorly inanimate objects." Others personalize the game engines, saying "Developers must have put a very angry poltergeist in the game instead of physics" (of *Skate 3*) or "Thank you Euphoria" (of *RDR*, Euphoria being the physics engine employed in that game) (appended YouTube comments in *HelixSnake*, 2012b; *HelixSnake*, 2012a; *Flatbryan112gametube*, 2010).



While viewers of *Skate 3* mischief videos appreciate the glitches' capacity to generate funny events, they also note that the number of glitches on display may compromise the quality of the game as software product. This is countered vehemently by *HelixSnake* in the description of one his videos: "I'm seeing a lot of people criticizing this game, saying it wasn't tested properly, etc. That isn't true. These glitches mostly have to be done on purpose, and glitchy areas are mostly out of the way." (appended YouTube comment in *HelixSnake*, 2012a)

Once again, we are reminded of the symbiosis of the game and the mischief maker in creating humor: The malfunction of the game software generates contingency, but it can only be made into a vital comedic practice by an expert machinist.

### Conclusions

We have seen that the humor of mischief gameplay montages originates in the interplay of the mischief maker and the game. Mischief makers set the engine into motion with their play activity. But their play is not oriented toward the game's goals or narrative, but toward the game engine. They turn the game engines—the largely inconspicuous machines that support the gameplay and storytelling—into *mischief devices* that generate funny mishaps.

Not everybody can accomplish this. A viewer of an *RDR* gameplay mischief video wonders, "Why can't this much weird shit happen to me when I play this game?" (appended YouTube comment in *Machinima*, 2010) Indeed, weird things do not happen as frequently in normal gameplay. Mischief makers collect rare and bizarre occurrences and compress them into the short duration of a montage video, highlighting the fact that video games can be unpredictable and funny places. Knowing how to pull their strings, mischief makers are granted access to some of the most peculiar sights games have to offer. Mischief makers are technically adept, consummate players who speak in the vocabulary of "engines" and "ragdoll physics."

Mischief makers approach games less as resources and tools (like machinima creators do), and more as lively spaces in which things can happen. Their humor-making techniques converge around the dialectic of control and the giving up of control. They co-create coincidences by generating and streamlining contrived contingency; they purposefully seek out situations in which in-game characters become ragdolls, subject to the whims of the game's physics engine. They explore and exploit glitches, cheats (and sometimes modifications, or "mods") that make the engine do strange and hilarious things. They make jokes not only *of* games or *in* games, but also *with* games.

This article has investigated a very limited sample of games, all of which are based on a single design approach. As a result, its findings cannot be generalized to the whole domain of video games, virtual worlds, or even digital media in general. However, the brand of comedy found in gameplay mischief videos is related to a broader trend in video game culture. By letting players fool around in simulated environments, video games allow people to experience (simulated) physical space in new ways, thus reinvigorating physical humor. Several popular titles are in on the Bergsonian joke. The popular browser

game *QWOP* (Foddy, 2008) employs an excessively difficult control scheme to achieve the relatively simple action of running, purposefully generating physical comedy based on ragdoll physics. The recent indie hit *Goat Simulator* (Coffee Stain Studios, 2014) involves little more than knocking things and people about while controlling a goat. Like gameplay mischief videos, these games can be seen as satirical explorations of digital technology, a realm often perceived as neutral, precise, and objective, yet funny and ridiculous when steered in the right direction.

### References

- Bataille, G. (1986). Un-knowing: Laughter and tears. *October*, 36, 89–102. doi:10.2307/778556
- Bauman, R., & Briggs, C. L. (1990). Poetics and performances as critical perspectives on language and social life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19(1), 59–88. doi:10.1146/annurev.an.19.100190.000423
- Baym, N. (1995). The performance of humor in computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 2(1). doi:10.1146/annurev.an.19.100190.000423
- Berger, A. A. (1998). *An anatomy of humor*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Bergson, H. (2008). *Laughter: An essay on the meaning of the comic*. Rockville, MD: Wildside Press.
- Billig, M. (2005). *Laughter and ridicule: Towards a social critique of humour*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.
- Bobisuruncle54. (2010, July 3). *100 ways to die in GTA 4* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyWce1fkITw>
- Bogdanovich, P. (1997). *Who the devil made it: Conversations with legendary film directors*. New York, NY: Knopf.
- Bogost, I. (2006). *Unit operations: An approach to videogame criticism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Buijzen, M., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2004). Developing a typology of humor in audiovisual media. *Media Psychology*, 6(2), 147–167. doi:10.1207/s1532785xmep0602\_2
- Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2011). *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Cameron, D., & Carroll, J. (2011). Encoding liveness: Performance and real-time rendering in machinima. In H. Lowood & M. Nitsche (Eds.), *The machinima reader* (pp. 127–141). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Carr, D. (2005). Contexts, gaming pleasures, and gendered preferences. *Simulation & Gaming*, 36(4), 464–482. doi:10.1177/1046878105282160
- Coffee Stain Studios. (2014). *Goat Simulator* [PC game]. Skövde, Sweden: Coffee Stain Studios.
- Consalvo, M. (2009). *Cheating: Gaining advantage in videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Costikyan, G. (2013). *Uncertainty in games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- DDCommentaries. (2010, May 27). *Top Ten Skate 3 Bails* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruxrj8eo1bg>
- Dormann, C., & Biddle, R. (2009). A review of humor for computer games: Play, laugh and more. *Simulation & Gaming, 40*(6), 802–824. doi:10.1177/1046878109341390
- EA Black Box. (2010). *Skate 3* [Video game]. Redwood City, CA: Electronic Arts.
- Flatbryan112gametube. (2010, July 5). *Red Dead Redemption Funny Moments 7: Drunk As A Skunk* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DekGrnGJxIA>
- Foddy, B. (2008). *QWOP* [Online game]. Oxford, UK: Foddy.net.
- Fore, S. (1993). America, America this is you: The curious case of America's funniest home videos. *Journal of Popular Film and Television, 21*(1), 37–45. doi:10.1080/01956051.1993.9943974
- Freud, S. (1963). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Garin, M. (2012). *El gag visual y la imagen en movimiento* [The visual gag and the moving image](Dissertation). Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain.
- Giddings, S. (2005). Playing with nonhumans: Digital games as technocultural form. In *Worlds in play: DiGRA 2005 Proceedings*. Retrieved from <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/241>
- Gunning, T. (1995). Crazy machines in the garden of forking paths: Mischief gags and the origins of American film comedy. In K. B. Karnick & H. Jenkins (Eds.), *Classical Hollywood comedy* (pp. 87–105). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gunning, T. (2006). The cinema of attraction[s]: Early film, its spectator and the avant-garde. In W. Strauven (Ed.), *The cinema of attractions reloaded* (pp. 381–388). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press.
- HelixSnake. (2012a, March 12). *Skate 3 Funny Stuff Compilation #1* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf133Tn0pYc>
- HelixSnake. (2012b, October 16). *Helix Snake's top 50 favorite Skate 3 clips* [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaUR6u8nHoM>
- Hertzmann, A., & Zordan, V. (2011). Physics-based characters. *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications, 31*(4), 20–21. doi:10.1109/MCG.2011.61
- Ito, M. (2011). Machinima in a fanvid ecology. *Journal of Visual Culture, 10*(1), 51–54. doi:10.1177/1470412910391557

- Jenkins, H. (1992). *What made Pistachio nuts? Early sound comedy and the vaudeville aesthetic*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2006, November 20). YouTube and the vaudeville aesthetic [blog post]. Retrieved from [http://henryjenkins.org/2006/11/youtube\\_and\\_the\\_vaudeville\\_aes.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2006/11/youtube_and_the_vaudeville_aes.html)
- Juul, J. (2005). *Half-real: Video games between real rules and fictional worlds*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Juul, J. (2013). *The art of failure: An essay on the pain of playing video games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Keaton, B., & Samuels, C. (1982). *My wonderful world of slapstick*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press.
- Kirkpatrick, G. (2011). *Aesthetic theory and the video game*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Koestler, A. (1989). *The act of creation*. London, UK: Arkana.
- Krapp, P. (2011). *Noise channels: Glitch and error in digital culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Kress, G. R., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Kuipers, G. (2006). The social construction of digital danger: Debating, defusing and inflating the moral dangers of online humor and pornography in the Netherlands and the United States. *New Media & Society*, 8(3), 379–400. doi:10.1177/1461444806061949
- Lombana, A. (2008). *The new sounds of the slap-of-the-stick: Termite terrace (1937–1943) and the slapstick tradition* (Master's thesis). Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.
- Lowood, H. (2006). High-performance play: The making of machinima. *Journal of Media Practice*, 7(1), 25–42. doi:10.1386/jmpr.7.1.25/1
- Lowood, H. (2011). Perfect capture: Three takes on replay, machinima and the history of virtual worlds. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 10(1), 113–124. doi:10.1177/1470412910391578
- Luhmann, N. (1998). *Observations on modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Machinima. (2010, June 14). *Bloopers, Glitches & Silly Stuff - Red Dead Redemption Ep. 1* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DC0IKwttOj0>

- Malaby, T. M. (2007). Beyond play: A new approach to games. *Games and Culture*, 2(2), 95–113. doi:10.1177/1555412007299434
- Maÿra, F. (2008). *An introduction to game studies: Games in culture*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Milner, R. M. (2012). *The world made meme: Discourse and identity in participatory media* (Dissertation). University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS.
- Morgan, B. (2012, September 28). Open world gaming. *inMotion Gaming*. Retrieved from <http://www.inmotiongaming.com/open-world-gaming>
- Morreall, J. (2009). *Comic relief: A comprehensive philosophy of humor*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mulkay, M. (1988). *On humor: Its nature and its place in modern society*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Murray, J. (1998). *Hamlet on the holodeck: The future of narrative in cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nitsche, M. (2011). Machinima as media. In H. Lowood & M. Nitsche (Eds.), *The machinima reader* (pp. 113–125). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Nunes, M. (2011). *Error: Glitch, noise, and jam in new media cultures*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Phillips, W. (2013). The house that Fox built: Anonymous, spectacle, and cycles of amplification. *Television & New Media*, 14(6), 494–505. doi:10.1177/1527476412452799
- Purdie, S. (1993). *Comedy: The mastery of discourse*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Rockstar North. (2008). *Grand Theft Auto IV* [Video game]. New York, NY: Take-Two Interactive.
- Rockstar San Diego. (2010). *Red Dead Redemption* [Video game]. New York, NY: Take-Two Interactive.
- Salen, K. (2011). Arrested development: Why machinima can't (or shouldn't) grow up. In H. Lowood & M. Nitsche (Eds.), *The machinima reader* (pp. 37–50). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Salen, K., & Zimmerman, E. (2003). *Rules of play: Game design fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Shifman, L. (2012). An anatomy of a YouTube meme. *New Media & Society*, 14(2), 187–203. doi:10.1177/1461444811412160
- SimpsonsFan007. (2008, August 20). Interview with Ben Buja. *GTA Hood*. Retrieved from <http://grandtheftauto.ign.com/articles/features/1192/Interview-with-Ben-Buja>

- Taylor, T. L. (2002). Living digitally: Embodiment in virtual worlds. In R. Schroeder (Ed.), *The social life of avatars: Presence and interaction in shared virtual environments* (pp. 40–62). London, UK: Springer.
- Taylor, T. L. (2009a). *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Taylor, T. L. (2009b). The assemblage of play. *Games and Culture*, 4(4), 331–339.  
doi:10.1177/1555412009343576
- Theninjacowboy. (2011, February 20). *GTA IV Carmageddon gone Yakety* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifTIuA8Dq58>