Embracing possibility:
A playful attitude towards the creation of playful objects

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that the submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by any other person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other masters, degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in referencing.

Signed

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Abstract

This exegesis documents a sketch-based methodology to explore ludic creation, expression and experience. Sketched artefacts of ludic expression and ludic experience are positioned within two frameworks: 1) the Absurd, signifying a rebellious embrace of a chaotic world; 2) the Database, a new media structure for collecting, thinking and producing. Linked by the themes of possibility and meaning, these two frameworks uphold a tension between exploration and order, presenting a post-disciplinary approach to creation.

Design research permits a practical and theoretical investigation into ludic creation and experience. The making of sketch-based artefacts generates new knowledge, bringing to light the notion of a playful and interactive absurd sensibility. The artefacts demonstrate the possibility at the core of creativity and the game medium. They also demonstrate a personal and emotive approach to game design.

This research puts forward an alternative perspective from which to view the ludic sphere and the practice of game design.

Introduction

This exegesis presents practice-based research that explores creative expression and playful interaction. There are multiple aspects to this research:

- exploring creative possibilities and idea generation through sketch-based practice;
- identifying and constructing two frameworks in which to situate these explorations;
- using the frameworks to discuss an alternative approach to creating within the medium of games.

Recognising an internal need for expressing through creative making, I have adopted a sketch-based practice. Sketching allows for the quick capture of an idea or impression, without the need for planning or goal-oriented intention. While maintaining unfinished 'edges' that leave room for developing the expression in many possible directions, the act of sketching generates a body of work that reveals common themes and a personal style. Both the act of sketching and the generation of a collection assist in identifying patterns and possibilities.

An interest in the concept of possibility and a lifelong interest in play have propelled me to create with the game medium in mind. From the *sense of amusement* present in my work (a playful attitude towards the creation of playful objects), the theme of absurdity has emerged. Fuelled by the fiction of Jorges Louis Borges and the essays of Albert Camus, absurd notions have evolved into a conceptual framework that structures my research.

The notion of the database is strongly evident in this work. The act of cataloguing my artefacts illuminated the database compulsion (Manovich, 2007), the "impulse to order, classify, name, and systematize relations of meaning" (Daniel, 2007, p. 151). Not only do my artefacts present themselves as a collection, they each manifest as collection systems via the repetition of units, actions and/or rules.

In this exegesis, I develop the absurd and database as parallel frameworks through which to explore the boundaries and structures of game design. Both the absurd and database resonate possibility: through variation, repetition, quantity of experience, ordering and re-ordering, and the shear overwhelming nature of the universe. Possibility is exciting. Is it any wonder that we want to seek it, capture it and live it?

Aim, Methodology and Outcomes

The aim of this research is to explore, describe and document creative expression through playful interaction and design. Specific goals are:

1. To present and apply an absurd point of view to creativity and the game medium;
2. To frame sketch-based creative generation through the concept of the database;
3. To explore the creative possibilities of designing in the game medium.

Framing these goals as a single research question, I ask:

> *How do the concepts of absurdity and database illuminate ways of creating and playing?*

I have employed a design research approach, incorporating a sketch-based practice in order to produce artefacts. This research is aimed at exploring possibilities and idea creation, through both theory and practice. Sketching is an effective methodology for generating multiple and varied artefacts, that enables reflection on new design ideas. This research is interdisciplinary in its approach, incorporating the fields of arts practice, game design, philosophy and new media theory.

Ultimately, this research seeks an alternative perspective from which to view the ludic sphere and the practice of game design. It is not the purpose of this research to evaluate the answers to this question empirically, but rather to suggest, through demonstration and dialogue, concepts and design strategies that inform creative fields of study.

Chapter One: Literature Review

This literature review covers the subject matter of database, absurdity and game design. Its purpose is to indicate the relevant literature that informs and supports this research.

Rather than explore the breadth of game-related literature, this review provides an assessment of content highly-relevant to my specific focus. Of particular interest are game design approaches. My research seeks an alternative and more phenomenological perspective to the design of games, elevated above content-driven or technologically-driven methods. I will note that although it is a valuable exercise to reflect on the design of canonical games, I have not developed such an investigation in this exegesis.

Regarding databases, I have only included literature that touches on the aesthetic and human qualities of the subject matter. Excluded is literature that focuses purely on technical problems and solutions, as I am interested in the human experience of the database. Excluded also is literature addressing the interaction between human and computer (HCI), such as tangible computing, since the scope of my research cannot feasibly cover physical interaction devices between human and computer. Furthermore, I am not able to cover the psychology of human interaction with regards to new media and creativity.

Database Literature

Academic literature on the subject of the database remains focussed on the information systems field. Victoria Vesna (2007) compiled a comprehensive collection of essays that serves as an exception to the technically focussed literature. *Database Aesthetics* focuses on the aesthetic that "emerges when artists take on the challenge of creating work using the vast amount of information that bombards us daily" (p. ix). Included in this collection is a piece of literature by Lev Manovich titled "Database as Symbolic Form" (2007). Manovich questions why new media favours the database form. He defines 'database', documents the proliferation of the database form, as well as the common elements and functions of the database form. In the same collection of essays, Sharon Daniel's "The Database: An Aesthetics of Dignity" (2007) provides insights into the social aspects of organisation, representation and collection, as well as the dynamic form of database.

In an article published in *AI & Society*, Daniel (2000) suggests that dynamically interactive models present a "paradigm shift for art practice from the 'pursuit of truth' to

the preparation of a "conditions of possibility"" (p. 196). Poster (2002) posits the term 'underdetermination' to suggest an unsettling of culture brought about by networked computers. This 'networked' art highlights "future transformation rather than confirming the completeness" of the work. *The Art of Database* (2005) is a piece of online literature by experimental installation and performance artist G.H. Hovagimyan. Hovagimyan describes database art as having a ruleset of "assemble, disassemble, reassemble" and an aesthetic tension resulting from disjunctive flow and seamless assembly.

The aforementioned texts are useful for providing a context in which to situate my own creative artefacts. These sources suggest that new media is inherently a database form occupied by pluralities, possibility and non-linearity. There is therefore the suggestion of inherent tension and contradiction within new media.

Absurd Literature

There is no shortage of literature on the concept of the absurd, whether political or philosophical, or within the fields of art and literature. I employ original works by Albert Camus such as the *Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (1955) as a basis for absurd principles, but also draw heavily on Steve Hodges' *The Digital Absurd* (2010). Hodges builds a “conceptual bridge between ideas of the absurd and the digital” (p. 157). He realises that the notion of the absurd is not a well-defined concept, but nonetheless establishes parameters by which to evaluate absurdity. Specifically, Hodges examines what he has categorised the ‘philosophical absurd’, the ‘linguistic absurd’ and the ‘logical absurd’, and uses these notions to develop the concept of the 'digital absurd'.

Game Design Literature

Arjoranta (2014) describes a common core approach to game definitions: what is defined as a game is bounded by a limited number of common attributes. For instance, McGonigal (2011) describes four universal properties of games: the goal, the rules, the feedback system, and voluntary participation. In their book *Rules of Play* (2004), Salen and Zimmerman dedicate an entire chapter to figuring out the essential qualities of a game. They compare many different definitions and come to their own conclusion that a game "is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (Chapter 7, p. 11). According to Dormans (2011), games are "rule-based artefacts designed to be experienced by one or more players, in which they strive to accomplish some sort of goal" (p. 611).

Wittgenstein, in his work Philosophical Investigations (first published in 1953), affirmed, "the concept of a game is a concept with blurred edges" (2009, p. 38e). Arjoranta (2014) expands with a "Wittgensteinian approach to discussing game definitions". Agreement on a single encompassing definition is not necessary, and may not be particularly desirable. Boundaries can be drawn to frame things for specific purposes, but to define the meaning of a game so exactly is to try to resolve changing and evolving cultural phenomena.

Other than natural language and paper prototyping, conceptual and concrete tools for game designers are in limited supply, and Neil (2012) suggests a lack of documented evaluation. One conceptual tool is the MDA (Mechanics, Dynamics, Aesthetics) framework, which "formalizes the consumption of games by breaking them into their distinct components... and establishing their design counterparts" (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek, 2004, p. 2). The devision of game qualities into separate parts is a common strategy of game design.

In the paragraphs below, I have sampled academic literature that advocates for alternative and forward-thinking approaches to game design. The pieces I have chosen express a desire to improve the player's experience with games.

Fullerton et al. (2006) begins by surveying the current landscape of video games and finding a lack of emotional diversity. Similarly, Rusch and Weise (2008) cite Salen and Zimmerman's 2004 *Rules of Play* to disapprove of current video game offerings. While I appreciate that a number of years have passed since these articles were written (giving the

digital and tabletop game mediums more time to diversify), it remains a valid assertion that more emotional and cultural development needs to occur with respect to game design.

Jane McGonigal is one such voice that advocates gaming for positive social and cultural change. In her book *Reality is Broken* (2011), she documents the ways in which games are being used in novel ways to promote real-world change. These are games that explore challenges outside of the virtual environment, through the use of conventional techniques: a clear goal; obvious next steps; and instant feedback systems.

Rusch and Weise (2008) present the assumption that digital games fail to present a mature medium, because they address "physical rather than abstract concepts" (p.92). Fulleton et al. (2006) express that "technology and content are key innovation goals for industry and academia" (p. 51), yet emotional and experiential game aspects are disregarded as being 'too risky'. Dormans (2011) states that many developers aim for complex simulations and ever more realistic and accurate models, and that "although these developments advance our understanding of the medium of games, few developers show an active interest in alternative approaches to games" (p. 610). Wilson (2012) advocates one such alternate approach: intentionally designing for disruption and confrontation.

My approach is to cast technology innovation and concrete tools aside, instead preferring to undertake a creative, conceptual and personal exploration of game design. As indicated, such an approach is sorely lacking and will therefore serve as a valuable contribution to the field of game design.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Definitions

"The awareness comes in the doing" (Downton, 2003, p. 104)

This research incorporates the disciplines of art, design, philosophy and technology. I have chosen a sketch-based methodology around which to centre design research. Downton (2003) asserts that design discovery takes place mostly in the *practice* of designing; and I have chosen an approach in which creative practice parallels theoretical assertions. Below, I define my interpretation of sketching, discuss design research and my own process of making, and address the related elements of creativity and meaning.

Sketch-Based Practice

Although traditionally defined as a freehand drawing method (Kavakli, Scrivener et al., 1998), I have chosen to interpret sketching as a multimodal practice of visual and interactive expression, while still maintaining vagueness, incompleteness, ambiguity and fluency. A sketch may comprise materials, code, electronics, drawing, writing or any combination thereof. Not limited by medium, a sketch is therefore any activity that captures the essence of an idea and rejects the perfection of a finished product.

The benefits of the sketch method are two-fold: 1) it enables effective communication for identifying characteristics (Kang, He et al., 2005); 2) it provides an opportunity to restructure elements for the sake of creative discovery (Verstijnen, van Leeuwen et al., 1998). Design decisions are executed during the processes of making and reflecting-while-playing. Sketching is part of the cognitive design process, along with visuospatial thinking (Barkowsky, Bertel et al., 2006) and is able to produce "previously unseen and unexpected connections" (Langley and Jones, 1988, p. 177), defined as *insights*.

My sketch generation has involved the use of creative writing, brainstorming techniques, as well as aleatory techniques (the incorporation of chance). Some sketches naturally arose from the spaces and people with whom I interacted; others were generated from my own personal philosophies and life experience. The content of many sketches focuses on "stimulation over simulation", that is, the creation of something that stimulates imagination, rather than something that simulates or depicts a concrete reality. Aversion to realism is something I will discuss in more detail as I explore the absurd in relation to art and games.

Design and Design Research

What do designers do? "Designers explore, experiment and test by using the activities that go to make up what we call *designing*" (Downton, 2003, p. 94). They devise a set of actions in an attempt to "create desired outcomes" (p. 95). Edelson (2002) describes design as "a sequence of decisions made to balance goals and constraints" (p. 108). It is a complex process, and "its open-endedness and reliance on creativity have made it a challenge for researchers to characterize and explain". There are parallels here to the difficulty of defining what a game is. The task of researching into game design is a somewhat unstable venture, and if nothing else requires a back-and-forth between practice and theory to make new gains in understanding.

Edelson (2002) confirms that design plays a critical role in the development of theories. Designing produces 'new knowing' through *action*, and when remembered or recorded, becomes new knowledge (Downton, 2003). Design research is the parallel pairing of practice with theory. Edelson (2002) succinctly describes the objective of design research:

> *The goal of design research is the generation of new, useful theories. Thus, two important evaluation metrics for design research are novelty and usefulness. A design research program should yield new theories that have utility for resolving important problems. The point of design research is to generate theories that could not be generated by either isolated analysis or traditional empirical approaches (p. 118).*

In establishing that I am conducting design research, I assert I am less concerned with the worth of the produced outcomes than with the potential possibilities and observations that arise from ways of operating. As per Downton's (2003) assertions, for a theoretical paper *about* design, "there is no realistic expectation [to] exemplify a theory in giving an account of it" (p. 81). While the sketches documented in this exegesis aid in discovering and illuminating ideas, they cannot be artefacts that fulfil all theoretical speculations. This is best left to a future piece of research. Further, the concepts I present are focussed on the craft of making, not scientific explanation, and therefore I am not evaluating the ideas or artefacts empirically.

What is Creativity?

> *The experience of creativity; glimpsing unknown potential to understand something about existence in and [to] relationship with the rest of the world, happens through the simultaneous exploration of individuality and the discovery of unity (Bellingham, 2008, p. 55).*

Much like the concept of design, creativity is a slippery beast. It is dichotomous, with definitions hijacked by discipline and ideology, and lacks a common understanding in academia. In her thesis presenting a personal phenomenology of creativity, Bellingham presents two personal insights: 1) that the experience of creativity "happens through a simultaneous bid for freedom and an application of discipline" (p. 56); 2) that the experience of creativity "happens through a combined use of intellect and intuition" (p. 57). Creativity is conscious thought and action that connects the self and existence: "seeing the offer of possibility in everything" (p. 60).

What is Meaning?

Something that has meaning has a definition, an interpretation. Something with meaning is something of significance, whether implied or explicit (Oxford English Dictionary). Throughout this document, I am using the term 'meaning' in this general context, rather than a formal semantic or semiotic context.

Overview of the Making Process

Sketching, without refining and without predefined intention, allowed me freedom from user-informed and best-practice design methods. Embracing a ludic attitude, I was able to playfully create, and create playful artefacts. Although I can make a distinction between idea generation and game design, in practice I allowed myself the impulse of sketching from one end of the spectrum to the other. Ideas and sketches inform other ideas and sketches, and I was not prepared to dismiss any creative expression in favour of strictly defined "games". Each sketch has the capacity to generate emergent meaning and worthwhile reflection for both designer and participant.

> *Through a parallel and retrospective process of reflection upon the design and its outcomes, the design researchers elaborate upon their initial hypotheses and principles, refining, adding, and discarding—gradually knitting together a coherent theory that reflects their understanding of the design experience (Edelson, 2002, p.106).*

True to Edelson's (2002) descriptions, the parallel frameworks of absurdity and database arose after I had considered the produced artefacts as a whole. This 'new knowledge' then informed the production of more artefacts.

Through formal exhibition, I presented my sketched artefacts as a body of work, i.e., a database. The sketches each serve as individual statements, stories and objects, but also belong in a collection, together. Presenting my artefacts as not framed by a single new media construction, but as separate pieces of a collection, I invited the participants of the exhibition to create their own unique narrative, their own trajectories. By giving participants direct access to the items in the collection, they accept the possibility of constructing their own meaningful experiences. The collection is not without hidden structures and themes; however, like any absurd piece of work, it cannot offer resolution or unification.

I have documented my body of work throughout this exegesis with representative images and descriptions. Admittedly, visual and textual descriptions cannot provide the interactive dimension of the collection, but will go some way to illuminating the design process, as well as the qualities of database and absurdity.

Chapter Three: An Absurd Attitude

Typically, the notion of the absurd is understood as a logical impossibility (Hannay, 1991). Proposed by Albert Camus (1955), the philosophy of the absurd presents a rather larger human impossibility: the universe is chaotic and nonhuman, yet we seek truth, order and meaning from it. Hodges (2010) articulates that absurd principles (both the logical and philosophical) provide "an unusual and helpful perspective from which to view the emerging field of digital media" (p. x). An absurdist attitude allows us to take nonsense seriously and to accept multiple meanings (and indeed, no meaning) arising from artefacts and events. It provides a creative and humorous outlet for expressing the confusing, fantastical, contradictory and the frustrating.

In Camus' work, there are several types of experience that trigger the absurd sensibility of modern life: the everyday, mechanical repetition and prosaic routine, awareness of time and mortality, contemplation of nature, other people, and the ethereal (Hodges, 2010).

Bridging Absurdities

This chapter draws heavily on *The Digital Absurd* (2010), a doctoral thesis by Steve Hodges. His text bridges the philosophy of the absurd with the aesthetics of the linguistic (literary and dramatic) absurd, as well as the logical absurd.

The linguistic absurd "creates a sense of discomfort with language" (p. 11), with many works labelled as such foregoing clever language, structuring, character and plot development. Counter to this, the logical absurd employs algorithmic or mathematical techniques, or other non-signifying practices to structure an absurd sensibility. The mechanisms of the logical absurd may be subtle or explicit, "[but] nonetheless ... seem to have the capacity to create an odd feeling" (p. 12); this happens because the underlying structure unsettles the meaning of the content that sits on top. Hodges thus establishes the linguistic and logical absurd to put forward the notion of a contemporary absurdity: the digital absurd.

The Linguistic Absurd

In the 1960s, Martin Esslin coined the term "Theatre of the Absurd" to describe plays that, at first glance, appeared absurd, that is, they signalled no purpose, goal or objective (Esslin 1960). Regarding Beckett, Adamov and Ionesco's work, Esslin observed a "deep sense of human isolation and of the irremediable character of the human condition" (p. 4). Esslin noticed that in a conventional play, "the action always proceeds towards a definable end" (p. 14). The audience is curious as to what will happen next. The framework for understanding conventional works relies on a rational, popularly accepted view of life. In the Theatre of the Absurd, however, the purpose of the work is not clear or singular. In this instance, the audience is instead curious about "*what* the play *may mean*" (p. 14). The audience is:

> *[C]ompelled to puzzle out the meaning of what they have seen. Each of them will probably find his own, personal meaning, which will differ from the solution found by most others. But [they] will have been forced to make a mental effort and to evaluate [an experience] (Esslin, 1960, p.14).*

The absurd play is a complex, multi-dimensional and contradictory work. It invites interpretation from multiple perspectives and demands intellectual attention. It does not spoon-feed answers to its audience. Absurdist literature and drama questions and undermines meaning, demonstrating meaninglessness of language that challenges the common ground of a shared reality. There is a lack of resolution and clarity in Beckett's absurd literature, thereby rendering it a source of outright contradiction and unreliable narration.

A barrage of nonsensical language mirrors the barrage of the inexplicable universe that humans experience. Not only does the universe overwhelm us, our self-induced information age also overpowers us with volumes of communication and information. We reach a point where language "serves to destroy rather than impart meaning" (Hodges, 2010, p. 67). Repetition holds a strong position in the absurd; it exasperates us, entertains us and creates a sense of vastness and emptiness.

The sketch *24 Reasons* consists of an original poem and a companion piece. The original piece was written as an exhaustive list of all possible reasons for a personal scenario; the companion mimics and fantastically abstracts these possibilities for public interpretation.

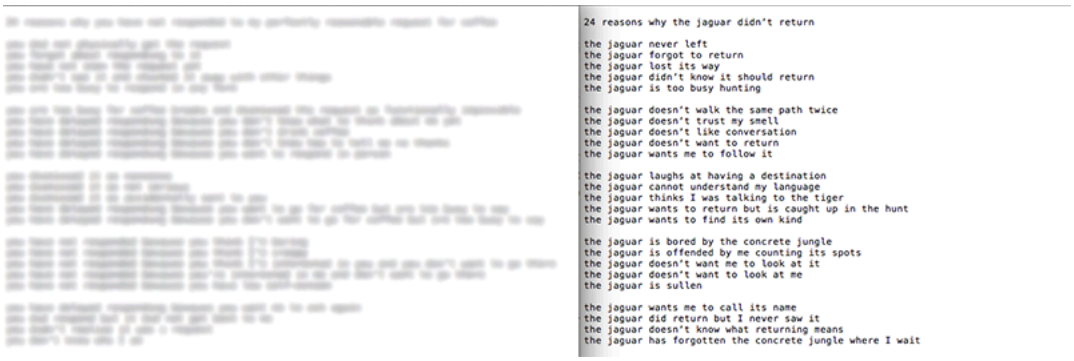

Figure 1: 24 Reasons.

The Logical Absurd

There are glimpses of a more logical absurd within Beckett's work in the form of patterning and structure, specificity and optimism. The logical absurd contains repetitious elements, but avoids the overt approach of the linguistic absurd that invokes weariness and pessimism. Logical structures and "geometric arrangements" (Hodges, 2010, p. 109) hint at an underlying pattern or structure that may be present within the work, inspiring in us the hope of finding meaning. "With our sense of pattern activated" (p. 100), we seek out an ordered resolution that the repetition appears to be implying.

The Digital Absurd

Using Camus' original absurdist philosophy, Hodges (2010) appropriates "this very broad notion to the more specific experience of the digital, translating the gap between human and world into a more specific form [i.e.] the gap between meaning and code" (p. 204). Hodges' focus is on the relationship between code and *written* language; however, I do not rule out the role of visual language in my interpretation of the digital absurd.

When experiencing absurd works of digital media, we are aware of the linguistic and visual surface phenomena, as well as of the underlying code that structures and dictates the digital experience. Our attention is initially occupied by the surface presentation (and the meaning we garner from it); however, following multiple interactions, absurd works tend to generate repetitions and possibilities that both "create and drain meaning away" (Hodges, 2010, p. 202). As we tire of the repetition, "we are struck by the urge to know the text in a different dimension, to get at the heart of its productive capability and its potential to produce meaning (or not)" (p. 185). In other words, after reacting to the work's 'surface' meaning, we begin to interrogate the structure or composition of the work in a bid

to find patterns and function(s). However, the discovery of rules and logic, while providing us interim pleasure and understanding, will ultimately fail to explain or unify the meaning of the whole. The tension remains.

Absurd Humour

Absurd humour, or surreal humour, relies on the nonsensical, the illogical and the bizarre. Hodges (2010) recognises that Camus' absurd philosophy does not particularly address humour. Nonetheless, it is clear that a sense of amusement is central to an absurd attitude. Not only does the linguistic absurd embrace comic failure, the logical and digital absurd present ironic dissonance. Ironic humour is a staple of contemporary Western culture; it is interesting for its oppositional and discordant nature, which tends to highlight an idea by explicitly and obtusely expressing the opposite of said idea. Examining aspects of the digital experience, Hodges proposes that absurd humour emerges within the comical and ironic nature of logical contradiction. Hodges recognizes that the despair and frustration of the digital user's experience becomes absurdly funny.

Chapter Four: A Database Compulsion

Outside of the current context of computing and information technology, the term database (*data base* or *data-base*) is defined as "a collection of entries containing item information that can vary in its storage media and in the characteristics of its entries and items" (Oxford English Dictionary). Originally the Greek *datum* meant, "that which is given" (OED). In modern use, datum refers to an "item of information". Embracing both current and past definitions, we can arrive at a fluid use of the term datum: an item that varies, gives and informs.

The database is a technological manifestation of the human compulsion to collect; to possess; to know. It is a form of cultural and human collecting, as well as the ordering (and reordering) of items of significance. Leveraging these qualities, one may proceed to design games with a new media mindset.

With an influx of new media, the database form has become a dominant part of current culture that permits "the projection of the ontology of a computer onto culture itself" (Manovich, 2007, p. 42). Data structures (units) and algorithms (rules) make up this ontology. The computer and its users, in their binary way of understanding and ordering, reduce the world to discrete objects and qualities that can be modelled by data structures, created and accessible by algorithms. Thus impressions of the world are abstracted, simulated, duplicated, distorted, recorded, stored and recalled.

A Collection of Things

> *The list is the origin of culture. It's part of the history of art and literature. What does culture want? To make infinity comprehensible. It also wants to create order – not always, but often. And how, as a human being, does one face infinity? How does one attempt to grasp the incomprehensible? Through lists, through catalogs, through collections in museums and through encyclopedias and dictionaries (Umberto Eco, 2009).*

Umberto Eco (2009) describes a compulsion to collect and to list. Doing so is a way for us to make sense of various aspects of our world. We keep these things in a state of 'known' or 'possessed', grouping them to create our own knowledge or impose property boundaries upon the world. We also use the collection impulse to tell and remember stories (Bal, 1994).

Designing through the possibilities of database

I suggest, through reflection on my own production, that there are a number of design methods that embrace a database compulsion:

- The process of sketching many rough ideas (instead of perfecting a single idea);
- The creation of a toolbox of general components, expressions and universal units;
- The creation of work that is non-linear, repetitive and/or random.

Such methods do not lend themselves well to fully realised game concepts, although I am not ruling this out. Their strength is in the design possibilities they generate, and the imaginative threads they offer to the designer or the participant.

I began my sketch endeavours by exploring tabletop board game mechanics. I played with paper, card and wood components, specifically without the purpose of creating a game; instead creating abstract actions and movements that seemed "board game-like". The result is a collection of abstract actions that are available to employ in specific game ideas. Rough sketching generated a collection of universal units.

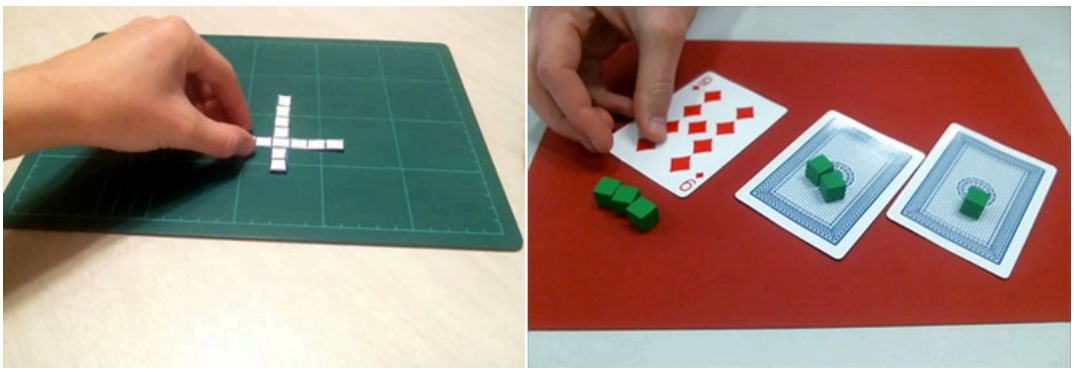

Figure 2: Tabletop Game Actions - General.

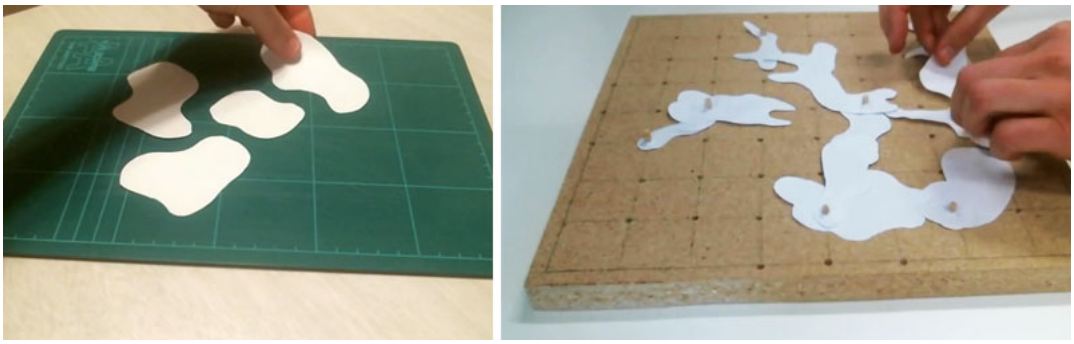

Figure 3: Tabletop Game Actions - Puddles.

The purpose of the above design experiments was to establish a utility-box of mechanics that could be applied to future game inspirations. This was a straightforward approach to enhancing my game design brainstorming toolbox, although I was unaware of my own database tendencies at the time of designing. In the brainstorming experiment described below, I was largely aware of the collection I was creating, although the purpose was less clear. The inspiration for the collection of drawings I made came from playing with an automatic art method. I allowed my hand to move freely and repetitively while drawing abstract lines on paper.

Figure 4: Automatic Art Sketches.

Initially, and without any more purpose than to automatically, intuitively sketch, I sat and drew a picture on a page of a notebook. Continuing the habit over the course of a month, I wound up with a collection of pencil and pen drawings. I began to see the drawn sketches as idea generators. They were spaces, places, emotions, mood, architecture.

Figure 5: Drawings on Notebook Paper.

Mesh is an attempt to create traversable digital environments from drawn sketches. Following an OpenFrameworks tutorial by Michael Hadley, I was able to create vector meshes based on the colour data of a sketch from the drawn collection I had made. I was able to move around inside a virtual 3D environment that was created by a completely different 2D landscape. This process, of manipulating and re-ordering sketches to create new sketches, is capable of generating new possibilities and moving between mediums.

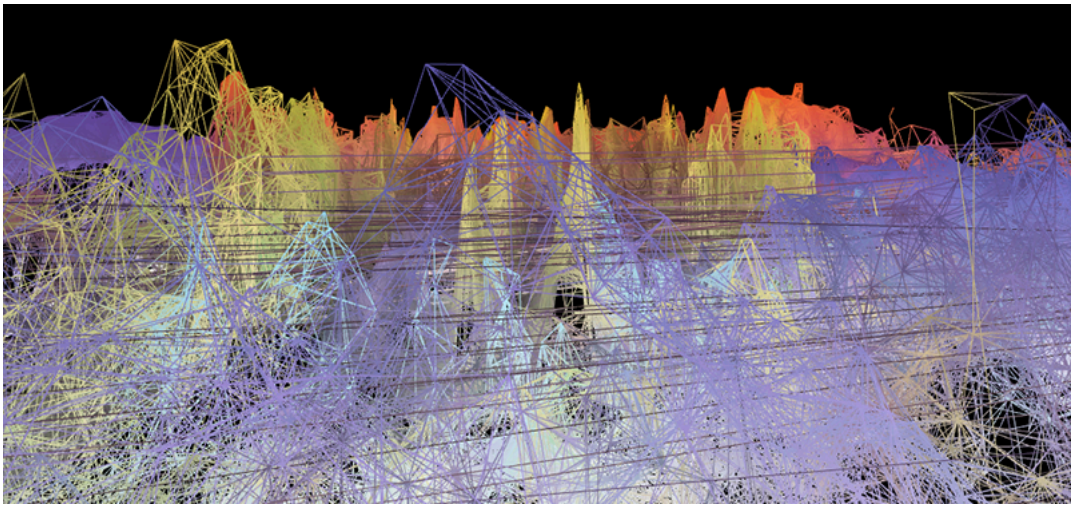

Figure 6: Mesh.

Narrative and Non-linearity

The database presents an order that can be read, like a narrative, in multiple ways. Traditionally, narrative is a linear, cause-and-effect sequence of events that is not ordered by anything but a timeline. Database supports narrative, but is not narrative in and of itself.

Manovich (2007) reasons that database and narrative forms emerge as humans strive to make meaning from the world. They are "two competing imaginations, two basic creative impulses, two essential responses to the world that have existed long before modern media" (p. 51). New media favour database forms. These may be complex data structures, but Manovich suggests that from a user's point of view, databases simply "appear as collections of items on which the user can perform various operations: view, navigate, search" (p. 81). If we redefine our understanding of narrative to accommodate new media, the experience becomes "the sum of multiple trajectories through a database" (p. 46).

However, Manovich (2007) maintains as an erroneous assumption the notion that "users construct their own unique narrative" by making their own path through database records (p. 46). The designer of the new media interface drives the narrative by crafting rules that link elements in a particular order. In new media, the database is the centre of the creative process and multiple interfaces can be constructed to interact with it. This opens up possibility, what Manovich terms "variability".

Roots is an rudimentary Processing sketch modelled on plant roots. The roots split and grow themselves to create a complex mess of lines. Each line has a random downward trajectory, which creates a unique sketch on every occasion. Admittedly, the "interface" and content is too simple to allow for proper narratives to emerge.

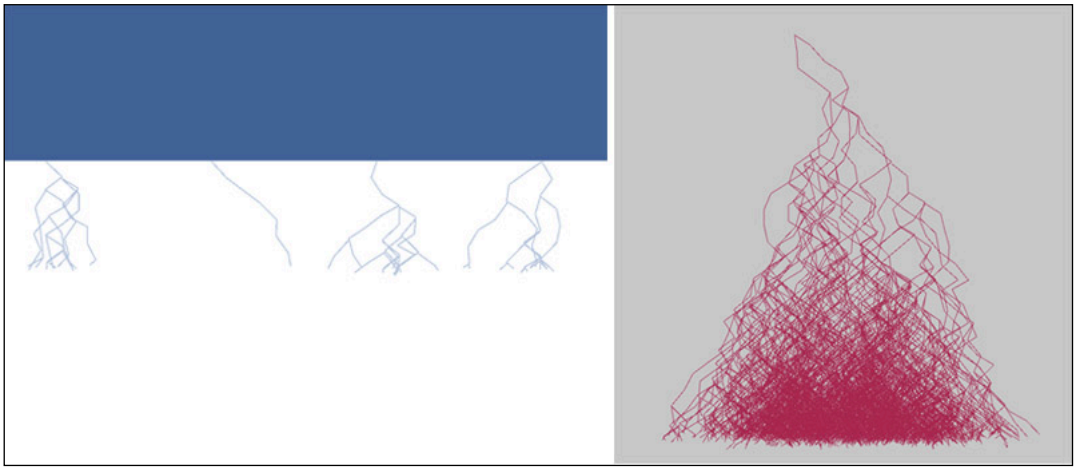

Figure 7: Roots - Early explorations.

Closer to Manovich's (2007) descriptions are the next set of sketches, which expose the database structure and permit (absurd) narratives to emerge.

Exposing the Database Structure

Expanding on the initial *Roots* sketch, I built a basic navigation system on the root lines, which the participant can use to produce words that create a spatially related and randomly generated poem. The text to construct the poem is extracted from the original *24 Reasons* poem.

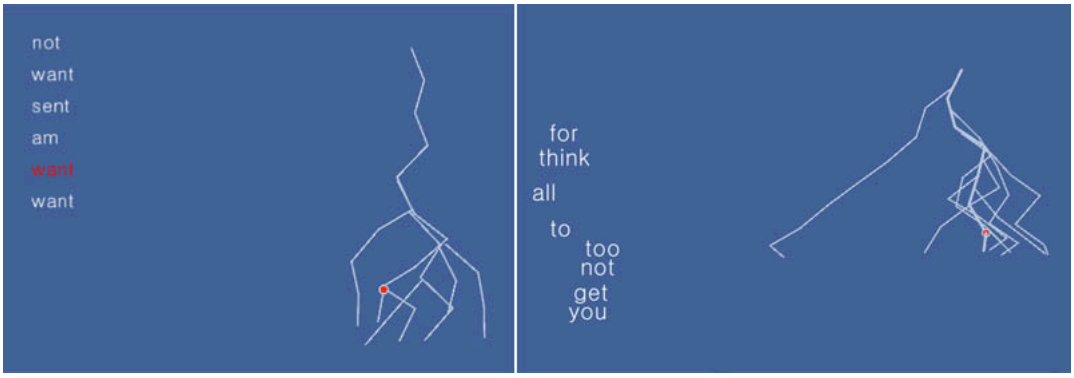

Figure 8: Roots - Poem explorations.

Food Pairings is an OpenFrameworks application that presents pixel manipulation with combinations of foods and flavours. It plays with possibility to generate a sensory scene in the user's mind. With repeated use, its structure is revealed as an obvious interface over database elements. Each time the space bar key is pressed, a new story is generated, by changing the vegetables, odour and country. The stories have the potential to evoke a meaningful response from the user, as she imagines the particular sentences in her mind.

Figure 9: Food Pairings.

Wisdom is a Processing application that generates a simple sentence of "advice". It is structured in the mode of online generators that produce, for example, random names, insults and "tweets". *Wisdom* draws on three lists: imperative; action; object. The idea arose from a conversation with a friend over dinner. The intention is that the user may garner a personal meaning from the randomly generated phrase, hopefully with a reflective perspective.

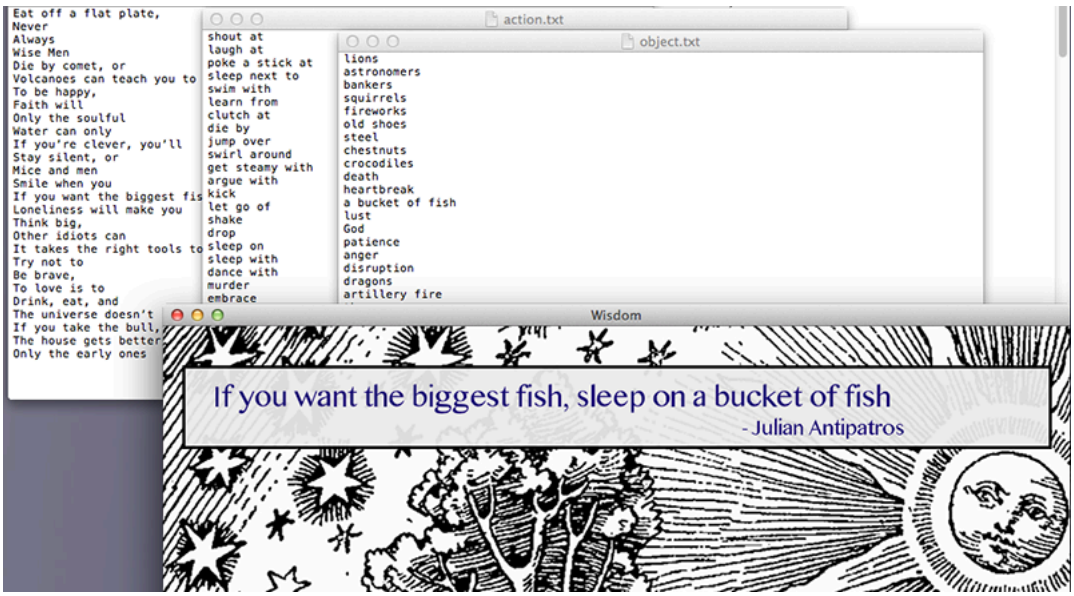

Figure 10: Wisdom.

Chapter Five: Games as Possibility Spaces

Defining and Designing Games

The intention of this research is not to redefine or explore in depth the definition of a game, which has been covered in the literature review. I tend towards the Wittgensteinian approach to defining games: rather than confine my ludic-based creative output to a strict definition, it is helpful to instead establish a fuzzy boundary within which to work. Broadly, I suggest that a game arises from the laying down of a challenge. The challenge can be mental, social or physical, or a combination of the three. A game can only be played if the player accepts the challenge and takes on a "lusory attitude" (Suits, 2005). Going further, I suggest that rules serve as modifiers of the original challenge, for the sake of fairness, balance, stimulation and/or enhancement. Rules create unique complexities and strategies, and exhibit qualities that reflect the culture of the players and designers.

The Space of Possibility

A game design implies future action in the form of possibility. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) define the space of possibility as "the space of all possible meanings which can emerge from a game design" (Chapter 6, p. 11):

> *The concept of the space of possibility not only bridges the distance between the designed structure and the player experience, but ... also combines the key concepts we have presented so far. The space of possibility is designed (it is a constructed space, a context), it generates meaning (it is the space of all possible meanings), it is a system (it is a space implied by the way elements of the system can relate to each other), and it is interactive (it is through the interactive functioning of the system that the space is navigated and explored) (Chapter 6, p. 11, Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).*

The space of possibility is designed, systematic, interactive and meaningful. Having solidified the definition of *meaning* as something interpreted, something of significance, in the next section I explore *how meaning can be designed* within the *interactive system* of a game.

What is meaningful play? Salen and Zimmerman (2004) approximate it to be "the emotional and psychological experience of inhabiting a well-designed system of play" (Chapter 3, p. 4). Meaningful play, therefore, stands to be extremely subjective and contextual. Breaking it down into a more concrete form, one may argue that meaningful actions lead to meaningful play.

What is a meaningful action? Salen and Zimmerman determine that meaningful game actions are *discernible* and *integrated*. Discernible game actions provide immediate audio-visual feedback. Integrated game actions, on the other hand, have an effect on the rest of the play experience. We can understand that in the conventional sense, a well-designed game action delivers immediate feedback and a noticeable, lasting effect. The meaningfulness of the experience is therefore created *inside* the game and taken by players beyond the game.

Emergence

Game designers can never fully predict or control the experience and actions of players, and not only because games exist in a real-world context. Fullerton et al. (2006) explain that game design has unpredictable results, due to what Salen and Zimmerman (2004) refer to as a "second-order design problem". In other words, complex systems create emergent, unforeseen behaviours. To counter this unpredictability, Salen and Zimmerman recommend an iterative design process that includes prototyping and playtesting. If one is to publicly present a game and expect it to be balanced, iterative design is essential.

Dormans (2011) acknowledges that designing for emergence is a complex process. He suggests using simpler rules, ones not designed to simulate a complex reality, but rather to capture the essence of a system. Rusch and Weise (2008) advocate for *complex ideas* to be designed into games in *abstract ways.*

Abstraction, Realism and Perfection

> *To abstract is to express the virtuality of nature, to make known some instance of its manifold possibilities, to actualise a relation out of infinite relationality (Wark, 2004, p.2).*

As with sketching, abstraction in game design distils an idea into identifiable characteristics. When a designer sets out to create a game *about something*, the game mechanics become a representation of the actions being simulated or modelled. Game designers are compelled to consider abstraction due to the nature of their medium. Looking at game design through an artistic lens provides valuable insights into the concept of abstraction. Art scholars understand that abstraction is inherent in a work of art because it is a representation (Zimmer, 2003). A piece of art is a subjective expression of reality, a human extraction, a bridge. Fundamentally "a work of art functions as a merging agent between a known world and a perceived world" (Gortais, 2003, p. 1248). In terms of abstraction in art, Zimmer asks: "how can you decide what features should be

exaggerated? The answer is: find the things that sum up the essence of your subject. And these are, as it is in all caricature, the things that are furthest from some sense of normality, some anchor point" (p. 1288).

The above sentiment is also applicable to game design. The game designer can step away from realistic (iconic) representation and focus on the essentials of the experience. By abstracting, using *indexical* and *symbolic* representation, "games will have fewer details and thus usually fewer inconsistencies to distract the players. Players will have more room for personal interpretation making the experience more relevant" (Dormans, 2011, p.627). Not only do players have more room for personal interpretation this way – the game designer as artist also has more room for personal expression.

Cuckoo is a sketch that is representative in nature. It consists of a collection of cards intended as the basis for a tabletop game. The inspiration for this set of cards came from wanting to design a game about the cuckoo bird as a brood parasite. The main idea that I wanted to represent was the stealthy attempt to disguise a cuckoo egg in a nest full of other eggs. I imagined the game would include varied visual elements on eggshells. Each egg card is unique, but consists of the same types of shapes and lines: triangles, squares, hexagons, zig-zag lines, straight lines, curves and circles.

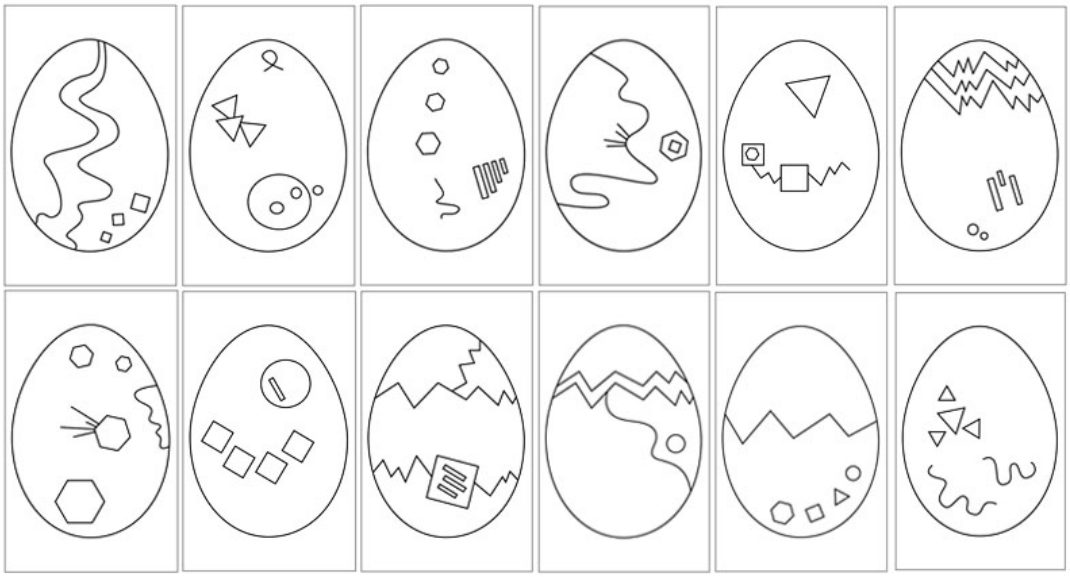

Figure 11: Cuckoo Cards.

Another example of abstracted work is *Sea Sketch*, a Processing application developed from my impressions of a drawn sketch. The sketch evoked an ocean environment; I felt the player could be moving downwards through a sea. I began by capturing with code the lines and colours of the drawing. The design process was not guided by an imagined end product, but by the reflections and impressions I had while making.

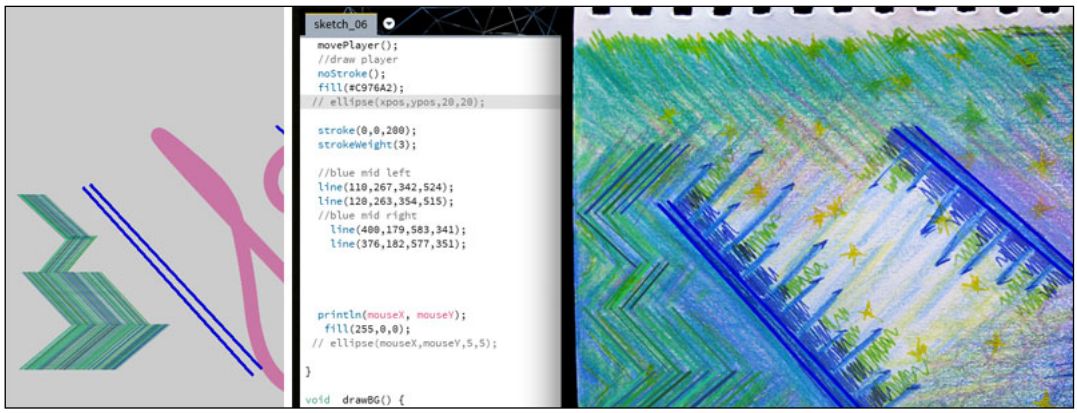

Figure 12: Sea Sketch - Initial construction.

The sketch has a frame, mechanics that affect the player's journey, and an end-state. It may be seen as a frustrating and seemingly purposeless interaction, nevertheless it remains a personal expression; abstract enough to provide a unique interpretation for the player.

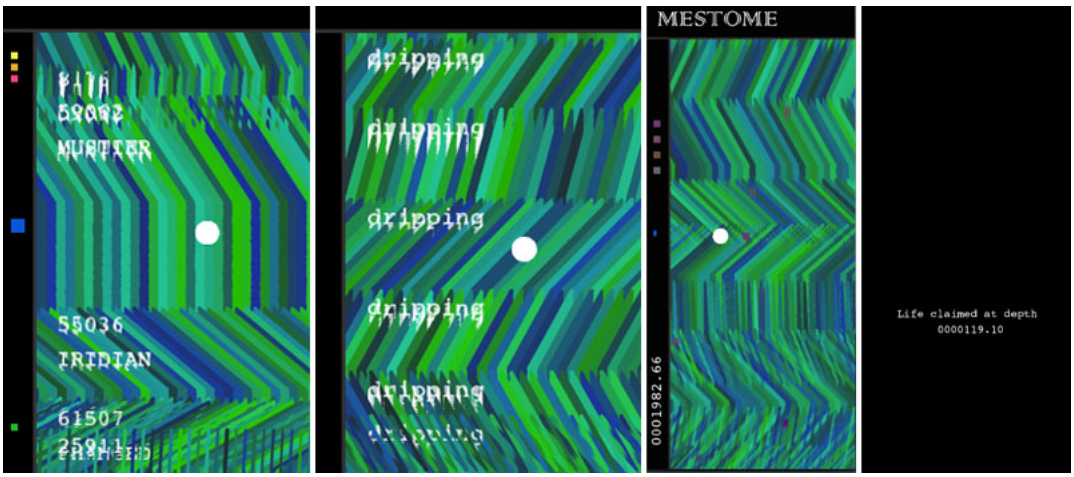

Figure 13: Sea Sketch - Development.

In trying to capture reality through a representation, “imitation is doomed to failure. Imitation is always disappointing because it is less than the real object” (Gortais, 2003, p. 1241). Striving for perfection and completeness does not sit well within an absurd and creative framework. Perfection is an extreme, conflicting with a moderate and balanced approach that can accommodate both suffering and beauty, the intellectual and the sensual, meaning and non-meaning. Bellingham (2008) applies a 'democratic approach' to creativity, which unites conflicting ideals without erasing their inherent contradictions. In recognising that perfection is an unreachable ideal, the designer is able to consciously turn to rebellion and disruption.

Chapter Six: Arcade of the Absurd

Building on the concept of the "Theatre of the Absurd", Sam Posner (2011) imagines for games an "Arcade of the Absurd". His article on the topic explains the concept of absurdist art and absurdist video games:

> *The lack of meaning to human existence does not mean that life is not worth living. Accordingly, absurdist artists believe that the struggle to perfect art to some ideal is absurd – as there is no intrinsic value, there is no "perfect art." Therefore, the absurdist artist strives not for unreachable perfection but to mirror the absurd human condition. Video games are a form of art particularly associated with a "perfectionist" approach to creation: their strong association with specific genres furthers the notion that there are ideal "perfect" games that should be worked towards. Consequently, absurdist games upset the evolution of typical games, twisting mechanics that [have been] accepted as part of a genre's progression toward perfection [and by doing so] challenge players' conception of a "well made game" [while furthering] a virtual absurdist philosophy: one should game for the sake of gaming (Posner, 2011).*

Like the absurd stage play, the absurd game is unclear and contradictory. The player is made to wonder *what* the game *may mean*. Thus, the game is open to interpretation; the rejection of genre and convention becomes an opportunity for cross-pollination, for both designer and player to explore boundaries and broaden experiences.

Struggle, Challenge, Revolt

The rejection of established game design rules is one step toward moving past the boundaries of the status quo:

> *[R]ule-breaking can be considered not just a way to play or design games, but a more general attitude about game design itself. If the conventions and genres of game design are the rules by which most designers "play," then the innovators are those designers that manage to break the rules. Games hold great promise, but only if we are bold enough to truly break the rules of our field (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004, Chapter .21, p. 16).*

The established rules of game design can be subverted in numerous ways. For instance, an iterative design process will refine the intended outcome of a game's design. I argue, however, that without iteration, a game designer may still capture an essential idea in a functional (albeit potentially flawed) form. In such a case, the core expression will be situated somewhere within a mix of theme, mechanics and rules. In sketch-based practice, *capturing* trumps *refining*. Indeed, a sketched game design *should* struggle with a new idea, as "sketching is about creating or capturing possibilities" (Newall, 2012, p.32). Employing a hacker mentality, Wark (2004) describes the creative impulse that produces "not always great things, or even good things, but new things" (p. 2). Thus, when

struggling with a new idea or a new thing, the initial experience may be difficult, boring, nonsensical or frustrating.

Furthermore, I suggest that difficult sentiments are an acceptable outcome when exploring ideas within the game medium. New ideas may necessarily disrupt or subvert the game medium's conventions of efficiency, usability and what might be considered "fun". In many of my interactive sketches, which I am comfortable describing as "game-like", I am playing with the conventional guidelines of good game design (in part, this is due to the very early development phase that the sketches represent). There is no clear goal, varying levels of instant feedback and instruction, no accommodation of ability level, and certainly no "sense of perfect and powerful control over a "microworld" on the screen" (McGonigal, 2011, p. 41).

Spy Game exemplifies some of the concepts I have now discussed, namely, abstraction and frustration. With the notion of making a small Flash game where a player avatar moves around a game space, I envisioned an abstract, comic environment in which to act as a spy. The impulse behind the sketch was to convey the feeling of being a spy: primarily the actions of sneaking or being hidden. The inspiration came from browsing through 1960's deco and patterns, using the idea of camouflage to bring pattern and sneaking together.

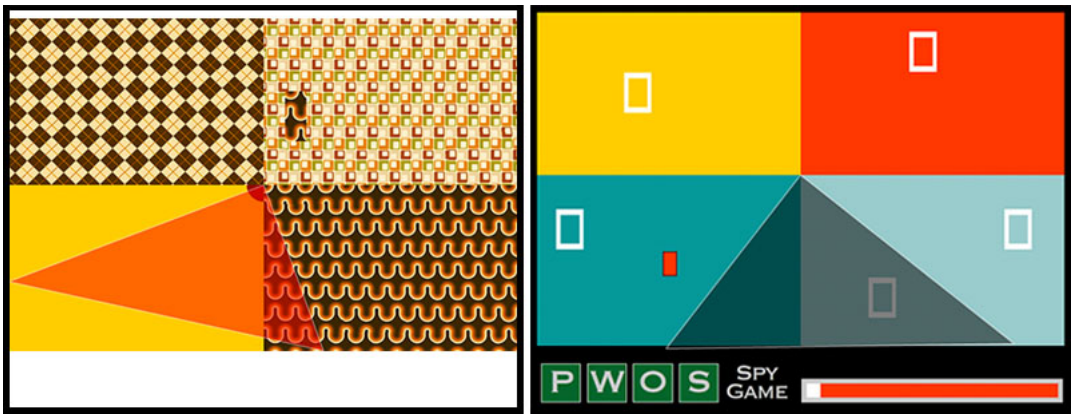

Figure 14: Spy Game - Development Screenshots.

I added a mechanic to *Spy Game* that I had toyed with previously: a changing key interface. Every game, the keys that the player uses to interact with change: the first key might be 'K' one time, and 'T' another. This mechanic makes the player experience a fumbling rush when needing to hide. It frustrates the player with an unpredictable, non-standardised interface.

Dialogic Game Design

In his work, Douglas Wilson (2012) suggests alternative possibilities for game design. Wilson states that "the product or thing that creates the occasion for bringing user and designer together is also the very entity that comes between [them]" (p. 54). Wilson suggests "dialogic design" as "an attempt to kindle challenges or dares *around* design objects" (p. 55). Wilson uses the art forms of crime novelist Agatha Christie and performance artist Marina Abramović to highlight his point:

> *If dialogic design can be understood as a battle of wits and willpower between creator and audience, then Christie and Abramović explore the two extremities of that confrontation – Christie's work as a confrontation of wits, Abramović's work as a confrontation of willpower (Wilson, 2012, p. 42).*

This attitude encourages the game designer to subvert, disrupt, frustrate, tease and confuse. It treats the audience as intelligent and curious; it invites the player into a universe, but does not spoon-feed them the rules and conventions of the universe. Like a Borgesian or classic piece of text that is challenging or difficult to read, the reward for the participant comes in persevering, uncovering meaning within both themselves and the work. The reward for the designer is the pleasure of crafting a meaningful and challenging experience.

There is an interesting intersection with the linguistic absurd here; dialogic design elements are discussed in Thobo-Carlsen's (2001) text on what he terms Beckett's "rhetoric of impotence". Thobo-Carlsen highlights Beckett's use of language, which is conventionally "supposed to serve as the medium of reconciliation, or communication, between the world of thoughts and the physical world" (p. 246). Yet Beckett uses language in such a way that mocks its own ability to communicate meaning. By failing to use language in its orthodox sense, Beckett develops self-awareness in the text, creating a dialogue between author and audience. Games, like absurd literature, are capable of a mocking and a light-hearted attitude. By rejecting convention and genre, by refusing to play by the medium's established rules, a game can become self-aware and open up a dialogue between designer and player.

I have engaged in dialogic game design with the sketch *Jaguar Returns*, a puzzle game built in OpenFrameworks. The work emerged from a digital, interactive expression of the *24 Reasons* poems, and continued as I found inspiration in *The God's Script* by Jorge Louis Borges (1964). I became aware that the logical, abstract structures of *Jaguar Returns* present a possibility space that can be moved through to form a narrative. The

sketch is thematically influenced by Borges, with a liminal mood, a symbolic, fantastical space, and a confrontational, mysterious attitude. The player can move between 14 different "dreams", each a separate sketch where I attempted a distinct game mechanic or puzzle. The dreams are comprised of simple geometric shapes, lines and movements. On a technical level, I was simply trying to create a variety of mechanics and game goals with very quick and rough code.

Figure 15: Jaguar Returns - Portal.

I found that by using simple shapes, not only is the process of sketching quicker, the abstraction allows for personal interpretation and personal expression. This virtual world has no instructions or explicit narrative: it does not explain itself. The player must seek out her own meaning and form her own narrative. These activities, to begin with, are a challenge for the player. Continuing with a confrontational attitude, I began actively attempting to create puzzles that would frustrate, tease and intrigue the intended player.

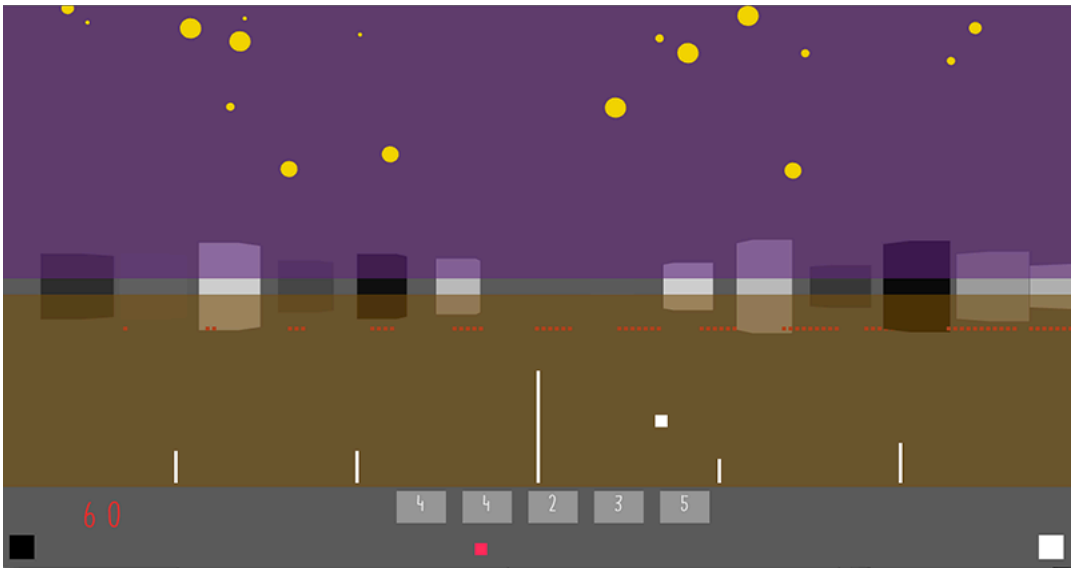

Figure 16: Jaguar Returns - Sky.

Exploring the Human Experience

Addressing difficult themes in her non-digital game series, Brenda Brathwaite (2010) had to step "beyond the commercial possibility space" (p. 313) in terms of game design. Using narrative and mechanics not to entertain, but to explore the human experience, she has instilled in her games a sense of artistic freedom comparable to that of other mediums. Brathwaite's co-author, John Sharp (2010), highlights Crawford's (1996) design intentions of clarity over reality, stating that, "when designed well, a game can frame the particulars of the human experience in strikingly clear ways without necessarily implying a single correct interpretation" (p. 323). In this way, the designer may choose to forego a universal, objective portrayal for the more poetically, subjectively personal. The designer creates a space that expresses personal meaning while concurrently challenging participants to derive their own appreciation and understanding from the game experience.

After reading Brathwaite's (2010) text, I wondered whether I could use the mechanics of board games to express an emotive and personal point of view. *History* is a sketched board game that emerged from the impression I had of cleaning up the overgrown backyard on my grandparents' old property. I currently live in the house, and occupy the spaces that my grandparents once lived in. I encounter the architecture that my grandfather built and the objects they collected and used. Cleaning the backyard and pottery workshop, I found numerous objects that had a history to them, but I would never be partial to the whole story. I (and subsequently the players of the game) can only imagine the stories.

Figure 17: History - Backyard Pool Area.

Two players move around a space, digging through weeds to collect items of personal history: pottery; "obscura"; junk. Birds of suburbia punctuate the space: tuis, blackbirds, fantails, kingfishers, mynahs. Each player has a Curiosity Cabinet that they have to fill like a bingo card: collect the items that correspond to the decade and the type of object.

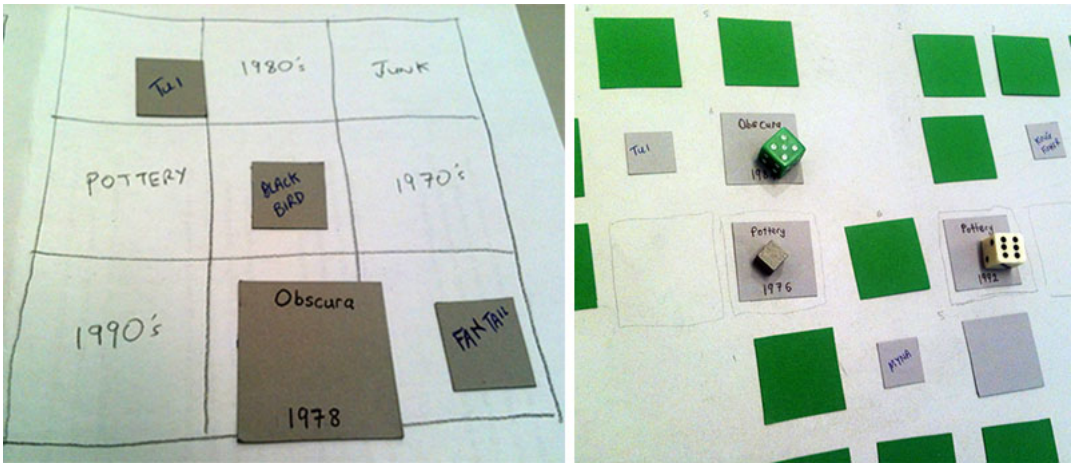

Figure 18: History - Game Sketches.

The outcome (including the balancing and playability of the game) is less important than the proof that it is possible to achieve something like this. It is possible to use the game medium to convey and preserve personal and cultural history. It may be slightly absurd to design not for the enjoyment of the player, but for the meaningful expressions of the designer. *History* is an unconventional take on the board game medium because I am using the medium to express a personal reality rather than an accessible, universal theme.

A Playful and Interactive Absurd Sensibility

In Chapter Three, I outlined Hodges' (2010) qualities pertaining to the linguistic, logical and digital absurd. Together with the game-oriented discussion in this chapter, I can now illustrate a more fully-formed picture of a *playful and interactive* absurd sensibility. Not only will I draw on Hodges' definition of the digital absurd, but additionally, also from the more general qualities of the philosophical, linguistic and logical absurd, as outlined by Hodges. Thereby, I suggest that the playful and interactive absurd work:

- does not strive for perfection, or to provide an absolute explanation
- does not express a conventional interpretation of reality
- may invoke frustration, intellectual thought, weariness and/or bewilderment
- may employ repetition, contradiction, the unconventional and/or the illogical
- holds an attitude of rebellion and disruption
- has a sense of humour and/or self-awareness
- lacks unification in terms of its linguistic or visual meanings and its underlying structure

Condensing the above into four broader absurd qualities that are present in the game medium, I propose the following merits as they pertain to game design: Unconvention, Frustration, Purposelessness and Repetition. In what follows, I provide an explanation of each category.

My sketched artefacts exhibit at least one of the four qualities described below. I am hesitant to label my artefacts *epitomes* of absurd works of art; rather, I rather propose that my artefacts exhibit *qualities* of the absurd. For the most part, assigning absurd qualities to my artefacts has been a retrospective process, as it had not been an intention at the outset of the study to produce within the genre of the absurd.

1. Unconvention

In what can loosely be termed a 'revolt' against the status quo of commercial game design, unconvention is an attempt to infiltrate new territory and push boundaries. This includes pushing against structural and thematic conventions.

2. Frustration

Frustration stands in opposition to "frictionless design". The consensus within the interaction design field is to render interactions and experiences efficient, smooth and transparent. However, to play is to intentionally embrace inefficiencies and artificial conflict (Salen and Zimmerman 2004, Chapter 7, p. 11); the struggle is not meant to be overcome, but to be embraced. The designer can enjoy frustrating a player's expectations of genre and interface. Challenges, puzzles and interactions should frustrate a player!

3. Purposelessness

A wider sense of frustration arises from a player's attempt to determine meaning and genre in a work that exudes, at least on the surface, purposelessness. Games are typically defined by an overarching goal, that is, a "quantifiable outcome". They typically follow popularly accepted conventions that aid in situating meaning. Some of my own artefacts can be regarded, with perceived purposeless, as no more than the smashing together of elements in order to create repeating iterations/possibilities.

4. Repetition

A staple in the literary absurd, repetition creates a sense of vastness and emptiness. It implies possibility and an underlying order, but also creates weariness and destroys suspension of disbelief. Sometimes, however, the absurd holds its pose for a fraction too long and the work reveals an outer discourse to the participant through its ridiculous repetition.

Chapter Seven: Possibilities

The Potential of Possibility

This exegesis documents and discusses creative output in relation to the absurd and database. These two frameworks explore and structure possibilities of meaning. Producing artefacts through a sketch-based methodology allows for unexpected insights and the illumination of new possibilities. My creative output intentionally seeks variation and the unconventional - for the generation of new ideas and combinations, and for the interesting experience that I can give to the participant.

Possibility is at the core of the game medium. Games need a possibility space in which they can be played. We enjoy possibility: finding the winning path, experiencing variation, being surprised. Game items, data and states can be seen as discrete "units" that contribute to the production of possibility. When not accompanied by mechanics or a system, a collection of units can function like a toolbox. As with a classic set of playing cards or dominoes, a multitude of games can arise from the same set. Thus, endless combinations begin to form when the designer starts adding actions and other objects to this set. As a game is played, it generates its own possibility through emergence.

With emergent systems and behaviours, games are able to capture the chaos of reality, despite their systematic, discrete and abstract nature. It seems an entirely paradoxical notion, but it is exactly this juxtaposition that renders the field of game design such an intriguing and exciting field of research.

Exploration and Order

Considering the parallel frameworks of absurdity and database, it may be helpful to draw from Kant's freeplay of the faculties; as Kovach (1993) explains: "two faculties of mind; that which explores the possible (the imagination) and that which orders the given (the understanding)" (p.X). Both the database and the absurd allow for exploration and order.

We can imagine that the database is the ordering of chaos created by the universe. Storing and structuring items in a database is a way to create meaning out of a seemingly meaningless world. Manovich's (2007) new media mindset implies we reduce the world to discrete objects and qualities; we categorise and simplify to make sense of a complex reality. The database is also a structure for exploring possibility. The units in a collection

(data) are items that vary, give and inform. Separately and as a whole, they allow for the construction of meaning, given an interface, rules or logic.

The absurd, in a way, is the disruption of an order created by society. Through the unconventional and the challenging, the absurd allows for an exploration of multiple interpretations and experiences outside of the status quo. The absurd orders itself with logic and repetition, offering hope of finding meaning in the underlying structure, but never delivering complete resolution.

The concepts of exploration and order are very applicable to games and game design. Games (by the common core definitions) are ordered by rules or constraints. Emerging from the ordered system of a game is a "space of possibility", that permits players to explore, to imagine, and to make meaningful actions that lead to different outcomes. Games allow players use of imagination and critical, ordered thought. Games make players do and think absurd things in the face of an orderly, ordinary existence.

Game designers must employ both imaginative and rational faculties to craft playful artefacts. Moving from one end of the spectrum to the other, a game designer explores and orders. As developed through practical sketches, I have shown that absurdity and database are useful frameworks for both exploring and ordering. Absurdity introduces a rebellious and boundary-pushing attitude into game design. Absurdity can encourage a playful embrace of the ordinary, the nonsensical, the purposeless and the fantastical. Database, meanwhile, offers a structure in which to generate possibilities, collect ideas, and record meaningful cultural and personal objects.

Meaning and Interpretation

"If the world were clear, art would not exist" – Albert Camus

Embracing the absurd sensibility through revolt, freedom and passion is the artist. The artist creates in response to the world: connecting, communicating and sharing. The artist expresses a human experience of a wildly complex and inhuman world, capturing absurd suffering and beauty. If all artists are inherently absurd, what makes an artist *outrightly absurd*? The absurd artist is mindful that concrete expressions will not reveal a deeper meaning to the universe. The absurd artist aims not to capture or explain the entire experience, but merely to imply the experience. There is intelligent drama *behind* the creation of the absurd work that cannot be seen *clearly within* the work.

Game designers can create meaningful interactions that have fewer details and complexities, through an injection of artistic abstraction. Games can be representations of ideas and objects, using symbolism and abstraction that convey essential qualities.

The absurd piece of literature is a complex and multi-dimensional work. It can be approached from multiple perspectives, inviting interpretations. The absurd revels in the tension between meaning and non-meaning, embracing the chaotic and challenging the participant to think. A game invites multiplicity of meaning and outcome. One way is by abstracting; creating symbolic and indexical representation. Another way is through possibility of action, in what could be described (in database terms) as "multiple trajectories". There is emergent meaning through gameplay; that is, the player can find meaning through actions and encounters, not simply in achieving the goal of the game.

Present and Future Thoughts

Games convey and preserve personal and cultural history. Salen and Zimmerman (2004) state, “all games reflect culture to some degree, as they are objects produced and played within culture at large” (p. 507). While all games inherently emit cultural markers, it is possible to intentionally use the medium to portray a personal reality, rather than one that attempts "universal" appeal. The author/maker can contribute a unique and local perspective to a work: a valuable contribution to any medium.

This exegesis details a personal exploration of game design, but I hope that it proves valuable to anyone looking for alternative and more absurd approaches to creative making. Diversity of thought can only have a positive impact on the game medium and its future development. I am not suggesting that the crafting of purposeless, frustrating and unbalanced "game-like" artefacts is a model for popular success. I do however believe that these types of endeavours deliver meaningful experiences, generate original thoughts and ideas, and provide a foundation for new syntheses. What is intriguing to me, as a creator looking for the new and the novel, is the blurring of lines between forms and fields; an interdisciplinary approach.

Creating new things always requires inspiration. I have been influenced by the people and places in my life, the conversations I have had, the books, music and works of art I have encountered. I hope that my work may provide inspiration for others. I am hopeful that design tools and processes will become more accessible and flexible to more communities, so that local and unique perspectives are further expressed and explored.

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