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Ludicity has long been a nebulous concept. Whilst Johan Huizinga (1949) associates the ludic with play, creativity, and freedom, theorists such as Roger Caillois (2001) alternately conceptualize the ludic (or *ludus*) as game, skill, and structure. Later work, such as that by Conceição Lopes (2005), situates ludicity firmly within the field of communication studies.

This article takes the concept of the ludic back to its etymological root, as the Latin term for “play.” I invoke the term “ludicity” to articulate the degree to which digital games allow play, “play” here being defined as the possibility to act or have an effect upon the gameworld. This includes the player-as-avatar, weapons, objects, items, or the environment itself—each maintain varying degrees of ludicity that, as I will show, can exist across a spectrum, the extremes of which are contra and hyper-ludicity.

Consider the time-honoured schoolyard game of *Rock, Paper, Scissors*. The rock always beats the scissors, the scissors always beats the paper, the paper always beats the rock. Therefore, each game object (rock, paper, scissors) maintains the same degree of ludicity throughout the game; rock can never beat paper, paper can never beat scissors. Yet certain games, and especially digital games, commonly deviate from a consistent ludicity, either imbuing certain characters, items, objects, or environments with heightened ludicity, or conversely lowering their ludicity, resisting the capability for action, and thus in many cases the ability to be an effective agent within the gamespace.

Tetris (Pajitnov 1984) provides a clear example of contra-ludicity. The game begins and the player takes control of each tetromino as it moves towards the bottom of the screen. The objective is to form complete lines of blocks so they delete themselves, creating new space for more tetrominoes. The more successful the player is at this task, however, the more the game becomes contra-ludic, attempting to resist the user and to stop play. As the levels progress, the tetrominoes fall faster and faster until even the most skilled player cannot continue. The escalating contra-ludicity of the system reaches its final state of complete resistance where interaction on the player's part is nullified by the insubordinate system.

This game design paradigm was extremely popular in the arcade games of the late 1970s and early 80s, with *Space Invaders* (Taito Corporation 1978), *Pac-Man* (Namco 1980), and others adopting a similar schematic. Contra-ludicity is no mere relic of game design, however; it can be seen today in multiplayer scenarios such as *Halo 3: ODST's* (Bungie 2009) “firefight” mode and *Gears of War 2's* (Epic Games 2008) “horde” variation, where waves of enemies continuously attack the players until they are inevitably overwhelmed.

Of course, this is not to say that contra-ludic games cannot also contain hyper-ludic elements. The “power pellet” in *Pac-Man*, for example, is a hyper-ludic item that provides the user with new possibilities (e.g., the ability to eat the ghosts that terrorize the user). Yet knowing when to activate these possibilities for the largest gain is a significant part of the pursuit of “perfect play,” and thus the implementation of hyper-ludic features can broaden a game's learning curve as the use and implications of these features must be fully understood in order to achieve the highest score.¹ Therefore it should be remembered that, though hyper-ludicity and contra-ludicity are always firstly design features implemented by the game developer, they should also be understood as contingent upon the player's expertise with and knowledge of the game.

The pleasure of hyper and contra-ludic design can be broadly corroborated with two of the four tenets of game design Caillois outlines, *agon* and *ilinx*. The joy of competition, *agon*, involves “a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created, in order that adversaries should confront each other under ideal conditions, susceptible of giving precise and incontestable value to the winner's triumph” (Caillois 2001, p.14). *Agon* is paramount to the pleasure of many contra-ludic games. The high-score board serves to clearly demonstrate the “incontestable value” of the victor's prowess, providing a favourable form of self-conception (“I'm the best at this”) and gratification, alongside the accompanying social rewards (Stebbins 1992).

Ilinx, which Caillois describes as “based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist[s] of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind” (2001, p.23), is evident in the audio-visual signification of contra-ludicity: enemies become more numerous and may move faster, the music adopts a higher tempo, colours may begin to transform or develop mercurial properties, and so on. This destabilisation of the player's sensory perception is a joy in itself, attested to by anyone who has experienced the visceral thrill of a fireworks display.

Digital games that enter the hyper-ludic state commonly initiate a similar set of audio-visual stimuli to alter and unbalance the gamer's perception. The *Pac-Man* power pellet mentioned above has an accompanying visual effect, signifying the player's elevation to hyper-ludicity. The “gamebreaker” mode in the *FIFA Street* series (EA Canada 2005-2008) similarly adopts a hallucinogenic colour scheme to communicate the new possibilities of the hyper-ludic football, which is capable of knocking down avatars and winning the match outright with a single shot. Such rare moments of *ilinx* excite the user not only due to their audio-graphical spectacle or their enhancement of effect, but also because they are, in the appropriate circumstances, a social communiqué to other players, instilling a sense of awe or—if playing as the opposition—fear of the newly-acquired potency. It is in such moments that multiplayer games reach their social zenith, as players excitedly cheer one another on, or if competing, plead for mercy (with an appropriately self-conscious irony). As I will show in the examples below, hyper and contra-ludicity can often be utilised by players as social lubricant.

I will now provide an overview of the common implementations of hyper-ludicity and contra-ludicity within three genres; the televisual sub-genre of the football (soccer) game, the role-playing game (RPG), and the first-person shooter (FPS). These

genres have been chosen primarily because of their mechanical dissimilarity to one another (the ludic system of the football videogame is enormously different from that of the FPS, yet close to the platformer, for example), thus illustrating the wide-ranging implementation of hyper and contra-ludic elements across play styles and interfaces.

Hyper-Ludicity, Contra-Ludicity, and the Football

In this section, I will refer mainly to the *FIFA* series by EA Sports (1993-present) and the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series by Konami (2001-present). I categorise these games as part of the “televisual” sub-genre of videogames as they stringently remediate (Bolter and Grusin 1999) various conventions of televisual broadcasting: the broadcast camera view, audio commentary, action replays, half-time and full-time highlight reels, lens flare, and so on. Recalling Marshall McLuhan's famous quip, “we don't know who first discovered water, but we know it wasn't the fish” (McLuhan 1966, p.70), media consumers have become so accustomed to the vicarious experiencing of events through television and film that they are oblivious to their semiotics. Lens flare, broadcast angles, and other features seem natural and correct, and their overt meaning, as a sign of mediation (and therefore, to a degree, *simulation*), is overwritten and negated. In a media saturated culture, where mass media are a substantive component of everyday experience, lens flare does not signify a *lack* of reality, but rather an *excess* of reality.

In the same way, the ludic system of the televisual sports game can be seen to perpetuate the media consumer ethos of entertainment, individuality, and spectacle, as opposed to the sporting ideals of equality, team work, and labour. To this end, these products are rife with hyper-ludicity that increases the potency of the attacking player—so that the spectacle and entertainment of the game are increased—whilst the defensive player is admonished with contra-ludicity as punishment for not offering sufficient entertainment. Quite simply, the ball itself acts as the harbinger of hyper-ludicity; with it the ludic system expands and becomes open to the possibility of hyper-ludicity. With hyper-ludicity, the prospects for play go beyond the regular limitations of the game mechanics as especially effective actions become available to the user or the game objects. Sometimes even the environment itself increases in ludicity.

Such interface design illustrates a gross bias toward the offensive style of play; the gamer should always be in possession of the ball, always passing and shooting if they are to be successful, or indeed enjoying the experience on any autotelic level. Defensive play is designed in turn as ludic punishment, as a lack of ludicity that teaches the user that defensive play is inherently *wrong* and offensive play inherently *right*. Thus offensive play provides the user's only access to hyper-ludicity, whilst defensive play is refused hyper-ludicity entirely. It is important to remember, however, that play is a structuring activity whereby the player comes to comprehend certain principles (Hans 1981). As Andrew Rollings and Ernest Adams state:

[W]hen [designers] tell a player that he must perform certain actions to win the game, we are defining those actions as good or desirable. Likewise, when we say

that the player must avoid certain actions, we are defining them as bad or undesirable. (Rollings and Adams 2003, p.77)

The attacking design-ideology, the “procedural rhetoric” of the game mechanics as Ian Bogost terms it (2007), is visible in today’s football videogames through the implementation of both sport and interface rules (Frasca 2003) that instruct the user in how to comprehend and play not only the videogame, but the sport itself. As Ken McAllister remarks, “computer games may be exerting instructional force at the quotidian and implicative levels, defining the logic by which players interpret the real world...since instruction necessarily reveals the values of both teacher and student’ (2004, p.55).

This offensive bias is also present in other sports genres. In EA Sport’s boxing simulation *Fight Night Round 2* (2005), hyper-ludic features such as signature punches and special haymakers are made available, but there is no comparable form of defensive play. Analysing the game’s control scheme (known as the “Total Punch Control” system), Andrew Baerg notes:

[the interface] renders attacking offensive fighting natural and transparent while readily ignoring the defense and protection of the body. It appears impossible to succeed in the game by imitating a successful defensive fighter like Pernell Whitaker given that EA’s patented control set clearly privileges the pleasure of punching as opposed to that of deft defense. (Baerg 2007, p.30)

In the televisual football game, overt hyper-ludic inclusions come in the form of hidden, unlockable players and teams from football’s past, including characters with a mythological status comparable to boxer Muhammad Ali or track star Jesse Owens (Whannel 2002). These avatars, including Péle, Maradona, and Zidane, have abilities and attribute ratings that are far beyond those of the regular squad member within the game, and thus these sporting heroes cannot help but consistently demonstrate their heroism. This also applies to contemporary football celebrities such as Barcelona’s Lionel Messi and Real Madrid’s Cristiano Ronaldo, each of whom maintains a roster of special tricks to beat the opponent. Other stars are given special concessions, such as England’s Wayne Rooney who has the “tackling” special ability in *Pro Evolution Soccer 2010* (Konami 2009), which allows the avatar to legitimately perform tackles that would normally receive punishment. In this manner, hyper-ludicity expands the game mechanics to overcome the very rules of the sport they are designed to simulate. By doing so, they empower gamers, increasing their effectance—the degree of impact they can have upon the gamestate—above the usual limitations imposed upon the non-celebrity footballer.

Such implementations make these hyper-ludic avatars rare collectibles for the gamer, as both ludic tool and gaming capital (Consalvo 2007). As Masuyama explains, this follows the Japanese trend towards the “not-closed” product:

The most significant aspect of the Pokemon concept is the fact that it is not a [closed] product. Take film: we see a beginning, an end, and finally, the credits rolling. That is a ‘closed’ product. The Game Boy title Pokemon also has a beginning and an end, and even credits.... [But] that hardly means the game is over. At the end, in order to complete the Monster Encyclopedia, the player sets

out once again...in search of Pokemon. Also, a player may use a cable to trade Pokemon with other players. (2002, p.41)

Thus hyper-ludicity can act as a point of socialization, a locus for players to discuss, trade, and search for these hidden hyper-ludic features. As Richard Garfield (2000) discusses, such features are introduced with metagame characteristics in mind. In doing so, the longevity of the product is immeasurably increased; without a formal end, the game's shelf life is only definable through its subsequent popularity within game communities.

Hyper-Ludicity, Contra-Ludicity, and the One Ring

Many RPGs find their thematic roots in the literature of J.R.R. Tolkien and his fictional universe of Middle-Earth. These works, drawing upon Anglo-Saxon and Norse literature and mythology, are rife with supernatural characters and items that acted as powerful magical relics with both good and evil effects. It is therefore no surprise that the hyper-ludic structure of the RPG is largely item-based, whilst contra-ludicity occurs through the forced removal of these items, stripping users of their enlarged potential for effectance and demanding instead an adoption of a contra-ludic playing style that emphasises as little effectance as possible.

The RPG tends to begin in a state of contra-ludicity, commonly explained in narrative terms through initial imprisonment (e.g., *Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn* [Bioware 2000]; *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* [Bethesda Softworks 2006]), memory loss (e.g., *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* [Bioware 2003]), or poverty (e.g., *Neverwinter Nights 2* [Obsidian Entertainment 2006]). In such instances, the user's options are at first severely limited, both in terms of gameplay (e.g., only being able to perform a few tasks and having very few items) and exploration (e.g., the opening act of the RPG is often extremely linear).

The task of the user is to overcome these opening difficulties in order to find the numerous items within the gameworld that provide the hyper-ludicity to face the challenge of the ludic system. Once the user has sufficiently advanced an avatar's attributes through "levelling up," the avatar may, in conjunction with the correct items, become a hyper-ludic tool in itself, depending on various factors including player knowledge of the rule set and balancing issues within the game's mechanics.² For example, the expert player may be extremely familiar with the ludic system's rules and limitations, and thus able to exploit the game mechanics in a manner not available to the novice user.

This feeds into the sociability of the product, as items, abilities, and optimum "builds" are debated and discussed.³ Whilst the beginner may be limited to ruminating upon the merit of certain weapons, rings, amulets, or helmets in relation to one another, the more advanced player takes a holistic perspective in gauging avatar effectiveness in terms of their statistics and the purpose for which a given avatar is built. As there are two separate yet intertwining systems of ludicity at work (that of the avatar and the items), knowledge is required not only of the game mechanics, but also of every item within the fictional world and its ludic properties. This explains the importance of "loot" as a concept and term in digital game culture (Yee 2004):

attaining a higher degree of ludicity is often the goal of the dedicated player, hence the existence of “gold farming” as a viable practice.⁴ Again, as illustrated in the above example, it should be reiterated that hyper and contra-ludicity are always in part reliant upon the player's skill and knowledge.

Of course, as gold farming became commercialized, digital game developers began to realise the potential of hyper-ludicity to act as commodity. Therefore the pre-order bonus associated with a game purchase has rapidly evolved, from paratextual items (e.g., art books, cloth maps, and steel packaging) to in-game items (e.g., weapons, armour, and character bonuses) that elevate the avatar above others, with the objective of providing a sensation of superior effectance in comparison to the standard version. Hence games such as *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware 2009) offered numerous different pre-order bonus packages dependent upon country, retailer, and delivery system. The most powerful items in the game were only available as pre-order bonuses, or as paid-for downloadable content. One of Bioware's most recent games, *Mass Effect 2* (2010), had promotional tie-ins with soft drinks such as *Dr. Pepper*, providing codes that could be input into the game to unlock exclusive armour pieces. Whether this sets a dangerous precedent for merchandising ludicity remains to be seen.

Hyper-Ludicity, Contra-Ludicity, and the BFG

The FPS has an established history of famous hyper-ludic weapons capable of destroying or interacting with the game environment in often spectacular and creative ways. The first iconic weapon to provide the exhilaration of supreme efficacy was *Doom's* (id Software 1993) BFG 9000, which provided the user the ability to destroy almost any enemy in the game—and other players in multiplayer mode—with a single shot. This excitation of superior power (on behalf of the weapon holder) and fear (on behalf of all other players) was formalized in Rareware's 1997 *Goldeneye*, which supplied a multiplayer mode titled “The Man with the Golden Gun.” No matter the number of players (up to four) in this mode, there was always only a single golden gun. The fortunate player to collect it became hyper-ludic and was granted one-shot kills. All other players, depending on their rationality (for more see Smith 2007), were forced to simply hide, fight amongst themselves, or temporarily ally with one another. In this instance, hyper-ludicity was used by the developer as social lubricant.

Whilst the BFG 9000 enhanced ludicity through destruction, later games such as *Half-Life 2* (Valve Corporation 2004) increased ludicity through manipulation, setting the standard for hyper-ludicity in not only numerous FPSs, but also games within other play styles such as the adventure and puzzle milieu. During the course of *Half-Life 2*, the player acquires the “zero-point energy field manipulator,” informally named the “gravity gun.” This tool advances interaction with the environment enormously, allowing the player to dismantle barriers, pick up and fire items (from oil barrels to traffic cones), build barriers, and toward the end of the game, when the gun becomes infused with dark matter, to pick up and manipulate large entities such as the enemies themselves. With this gun, Valve empowered the gamer to solve puzzles, overcome obstacles, and resolve firefights in an almost infinite number of ways, as the laws of physics themselves could be weaponized.

This kind of hyper-ludicity differs significantly from the previous iterations evident within the FPS genre, as those were predicated upon termination. The gravity gun represents an inversion of this relationship: instead of destruction, it offers creation. Thus, the hyper-ludicity of the gravity gun depends largely upon the gamer's creative thinking and cognizance of genre conventions and environmental cues. With the gun, the user can create barriers to shield his or her avatar, make paths to access hidden areas or items, or concoct traps to capture or nullify threats. This form of hyper-ludicity is not simply binary, on or off, like *Pac-Man's* power pill. Rather, it is a heightening of the game's ergodic aspect (Aarseth 1997), as suddenly more paths are open to the user than before, and the player must work down a chosen path with varying creativity and focus.

This style of hyper-ludicity has been incorporated into the designs of many later influential games, such as the critically-acclaimed FPS *Bioshock* (2K Games 2007) and the survival-horror title *Dead Space* (EA Redwood Shores 2008). In these games, creative solutions are required to solve certain puzzles and to overcome particular enemies. Moreover, the realization that physics can be more than simply a graphical or otherwise trivial feature has had an enormous impact upon the design of digital games of all types. Recent products such as EA Digital Illusions CE's *Bad Company 2* (2010) and Media Molecule's *LittleBigPlanet* (2008) both utilise the laws of physics as the nexus of their ludic system, though they each reflect an opposite end of the classic hyper-ludic dichotomy: *Bad Company 2's* hyper-ludic moments centre upon vast destruction, whilst *LittleBigPlanet* is concerned with testing the limits of what can be created. Real-time strategies such as Lionhead Studios' *Black and White 2* (2005) represent the middle ground, offering both creation and destruction in equal measure, formalizing the user's tendencies towards one or the other as a moralistic choice between benevolence or tyranny.

Contra-ludicity is a simply implemented, yet rarely used feature within the FPS. Its most notable and influential presence is as expositional technique in the *Half-Life* series. In *Half-Life* (Valve Corporation 1998), the player begins the game in an extremely contra-ludic state as a passenger on a tram moving toward the Black Mesa laboratories. For the entire opening sequence of the game, the user is confined in terms of both movement and action; the avatar can only move a few feet within the carriage and has no weapon. This contra-ludic state continues as the player proceeds to the anomalous materials research lab, where an experiment goes wrong and, in time-honoured science-fiction tradition, instigates an alien invasion that must be stopped. Only then is the gamer finally supplied with the weapons to make the game a first-person *shooter*, and the contrast between the claustrophobic introduction and action-packed invasion is all the more pronounced because of this initial contra-ludicity.

Half-Life 2's inaugural scene pays homage to its predecessor by revisiting this formula. Once again, the player is restricted in movement and action, beginning the game as an unarmed traveller on a train carriage into the dystopian "City 17" before moving through a succession of events and being given access to weaponry. Again, the ludic juxtaposing of the ponderous, contra-ludic opening against the later fast-moving, hyper-ludic firefights is utilised by the developer to create a rhythm that adds impact to every combat set-piece. This is also true of RPGs, where the combat-intense dungeons are punctuated with towns, villages, and taverns in which the

primary mechanic is comparatively placid conversation via dialogue trees and the concomitant patient buying and selling of goods.

Hyper-Ludicity, Contra-Ludicity, and the Cheats

There can, of course, be too much of a good thing. Hyper-ludicity is something which, if over-exploited, can lead to a lack of challenge, a sense of boredom, and a disconnection from the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi 2002). If the developer abuses hyper-ludic contestation (*agon*), it becomes meaningless due to the dominant strategy of using a particularly powerful hyper-ludic resource, thus disinclining the user to continue play, especially in multiplayer scenarios where the player may be on the receiving end of an opponent's hyper-ludicity. For example, the "javelin glitch" in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* (Infinity Ward 2009) allowed the user to detonate his or her avatar upon dying, killing any other player within 30-feet of the blast radius. More often than not this resulted in a net gain in points received, and therefore was a popular tactic for quickly moving up in rank and unlocking perks. This unintended hyper-ludic feature had a dual effect, diluting the challenge for those enacting the glitch, and presenting too high a challenge for those unaware or refusing to use it. The exploitation was quickly remedied in a patch from Infinity Ward, but it remains a clear example of how hyper-ludicity can completely unbalance a game and ruin the user's enjoyment.

Another problem with hyper-ludicity is its tendency to overshadow a game's standard mechanics, both for the producer and player. If the developer team is focused on producing various kinds of hyper-ludic interactions, they will have less time to spend on other aspects of the system, such as the core mechanics. With less refinement, the central ludic experience may be undermined.

There is also the question of whether the increasing commodification of hyper-ludicity encourages unethical production practice, resulting in consumers ultimately receiving less value for their money. Clearly, to remove certain features from a product, only to offer them later as purchasable downloadable content or as limited to pre-orders or highly-priced special editions, is an ethically dubious exercise that preys upon the gamer's craving for hyper-ludicity. This has already caused controversy amongst certain sectors of the gaming public, such as the *Dragon Age: Origins* community, where Bioware was accused of purposefully removing certain items, abilities, and avatars only to offer them as exclusive to pre-orders and new copies. This meant that otherwise free downloadable content such as "The Stone Prisoner" would have to be purchased separately for pre-owned copies of the game, whilst some of the fictional universe's most powerful items were only available in the collector's edition. In these instances, the accusation could well be made that users are being held to ransom over their desire for hyper-ludicity.

Contra-ludicity remains a slightly more controversial design decision than hyper-ludicity, going as it does against the logic of effectance. Simple though it is, the point remains that too great an emphasis on contra-ludicity can frustrate the gamer as the challenge may be too high for the user's contra-ludic armoury, or at least his or her skill with it. This is avoided in games such as *Tetris* as the movement to contra-ludicity is deceptively gradual. *Tetris* was also introduced as a pack-in title with the

1989 Nintendo *Game Boy*, and was thus always an intrinsically mobile and therefore often *social* experience, as a shared challenge amongst friends and family. In such circumstances, contra-ludicity is crucial to the social event, providing an inevitable end to play whereby a new user is given the opportunity to prove prowess against the preceding user's score. This is, of course, still a cornerstone of the public arcade experience. Indeed, contra-ludicity has always been a favoured form of social and mobile gaming, evident also in the mobile phone's early adoption of digital games in the form of the ubiquitous *Snake* (a variant of Gremlin's 1976 *Blockade*).

The player's frustration with contra-ludicity may reach its zenith when ludicity, and especially hyper-ludicity, is suddenly reduced or removed. The once expansive, open ludic system is suddenly retracted and the many hyper-ludic abilities, once taken for granted, are suddenly taken away. As mentioned earlier, this is a notable trope in the RPG genre: the player-avatar is typically arrested and jailed at some point and his or her hyper-ludic items/abilities are confiscated/nullified, leaving the player to make do with only the game's core mechanics. This is also true of modern games that incorporate RPG character-building mechanics into their ludic system, such as *God of War 3* (SCE Santa Monica Studio 2010), where protagonist Kratos is stripped of his hyper-ludicity early in the game (extrapolated narratively through a detour into Hades and the apparent power of the River Styx to drain ludicity).

Sudden shifts between hyper and contra-ludicity can confuse and frustrate the user, as evidenced by *God of War 3*'s blocking mechanism. Whilst blocking is implemented quite consistently throughout the game, there are certain enemies who maintain a roster of unblockable attacks, such as the end-of-level bosses and the dual-axe wielding satyrs. This abrupt change to contra-ludicity may chafe against the player's sense of fair play, as this functional incoherence (Poole 2000) causes a loss of trust in the game mechanics. As a result, immersion is broken when surprise then annoyance is felt at the lack of forewarning.

Of course if crafted in a particularly innovative, creative, or focused manner, such shifts can also be extremely enjoyable for the user, as alternative skills are tested such as improvisation and originality. In *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* (Kojima Productions 2004), the player can escape the jail cell in various ways through imaginative application of the core mechanics, one of which is to simply enter the non-diegetic game menu and spin the three-dimensional model of the avatar, Solid Snake, until he vomits. The prison guard reacts to this, checking on the character, who is then able to incapacitate the guard and escape the cell.

Finally, a lack of ludicity may not only frustrate, but also bore the gamer, as the ergodic (Aarseth 1997) potential of the product narrows and many paths previously open to the user shrink or fall away entirely. If the core mechanics are insufficiently polished, or rely too much on hyper-ludic mechanics no longer available, this can evoke an immediate sense of disinterest and ennui.

Conclusion

Hyper-ludicity is empowerment. It is an enlargement of effectance and expansion of play, though of course this is always contingent upon the player's cognizance and

employment of these features. Contra-ludicity offers a different form of stimulation based upon pressuring the user, increasing tension, and often removing actions, powers, items, or environmental interactions that the user has become accustomed to, either through experience with that particular game or that particular genre. This is an inherently social form of play, inviting as it does contestation amongst the group to discover who is the most able to perform well under pressure, to think creatively, and to innovate with the instruments at his or her disposal. Once more the concurrent alteration in audio-visuals invokes the pleasure of *ilinx* (Caillois 2001).

Though hyper-ludicity remains the more risk-averse of the two ludic extremes (providing as it does a pleasurable excess of effectance), both retain a degree of volatility in the potential they have to disrupt the player experience. Whilst hyper-ludicity can add enormously to the enjoyment of the product, and is essential to many digital game play styles, over-indulgence or misapplication can unbalance the product, concluding in a lack of challenge that bores the gamer. Conversely, contra-ludicity can frustrate players by not equipping them with the ludic tools to overcome challenge in a satisfactory manner, or by destabilising the playful experience through accelerating a contra-ludic feature too quickly, such as suddenly spawning an overwhelming number of obstacles (enemies, walls, tetrominoes) that may confuse or irritate players.

It is also important to attend to the potential of hyper-ludicity to act as commodity; contra-ludicity, as an inherent absence or removal is not as marketable a product. As something which can add to the digital game—for example, extra avatars, powers, weapons, items, environmental tools—hyper-ludicity is an obvious avenue for financial exploitation of the ludicity-hungry, competitive consumer who desires an edge over peers or the game itself.

By articulating hyper and contra-ludicity, the field of Game Studies can move a step closer to addressing the numerous issues that arise from their various formulations and implementations. We can also begin to apprehend the rationale behind both the successes and failures of these play possibilities.

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Notes

- ¹ Perfect play is when the player achieves the maximum possible score on the first 255 levels of *Pac-Man* without losing a single life, before scoring as many points as possible on the incomplete 256th level.
- ² This is a process whereby the user gains experience points, which can then be spent on new abilities and character traits.
- ³ A “build” is a recommended character configuration assembled for a particular purpose, e.g., “a good archer build,” “a good tank build,” “a good beginner build,” and so on.
- ⁴ This is where the player repeats the same (often mundane) action over and over to collect (“farm”) resources which may then be traded in-game for currency/items, or sold outside the game for real money.