

## Glitches as Fictional (Mis)Communication

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*It is 1911 and I am in the Wild West, casually wandering towards MacFarlane's Ranch on horseback. Suddenly, I spot something strange in the air: cowboys, hats on their heads, soaring through the sky while flapping their arms. One of these birdmen lands on a fence in front of me, and starts to happily whistle a song. His legs are strangely retracted beneath his body, his arms folded behind his back, and his head twitches from left to right. When I approach, he hurriedly flies away.*

The so-called ‘manimals’ described above are a glitch phenomenon encountered by players of an early version of *Red Dead Redemption* (Rockstar San Diego 2010). Due to an unknown coding malfunction, some of the virtual animals that populated the game’s world, most infamously the birds, were inexplicably replaced by human-animal hybrids. Specifically, while the bird-behavior stayed intact, the 3D-models of small feathery birds were replaced by 3D-models of full-sized men wearing cowboy hats. Any player seeing these birdmen would likely conclude that there were flying cowboys in the fictional world of *Red Dead Redemption*.

However, game scholars and philosophers of fiction would likely deny that *Red Dead Redemption* depicted a fictional world in which there are flying cowboys. Instead, they would treat the manimals as *mistakes in the presentation of said world*, unintentionally brought about by a malfunction when rendering it, as evidenced by the fact that the glitch was removed in an early patch.

More generally, within videogame studies, glitches are often described as an interesting part of the player experience, for example as possibilities to gain unfair advantages in games (Bainbridge & Bainbridge 2007; Newman 2008; Meades 2015), expressive tools to create humorous effects (Jaroslav Švelch 2014), jarring confrontations with forms of non-human agency (Janik 2017; Gualeni 2019), or as ways to create glitch-art (Menkman 2011). But when it comes to the specifically *fictional* experience of videogames, there seems to be a consensus that glitches have no role to play except for *breaking* the players’ feeling of immersion and the reality effect of the game’s fictional environment (cf. Holmes 2010: 261; Kubiński 2014: 135; Janik 2017: 75).

Here, we focus on the underexplored *fictional relevance* of videogame glitches.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, we will make use philosophical theories on fiction, as well as standard suggestions about how best to deal with unintended errors within fiction. Focusing on glitches like that of *Red Dead’s* manimals, we argue that glitches, more than any kinds of mistakes in traditional, non-interactive fictions, can actually have a significant influence on the fictional worlds of the work in which they appear. In particular, we will show that some glitches generate new fictional content without this content being intended by a videogame’s creators, and will offer practical ways for dealing with the inconsistencies that inevitably accompany such glitch-generated fictions.

### Background: fiction as intentional communication

Within contemporary philosophy of fiction, fiction is often characterized as ‘originating in a particular kind of authorial intention: an intention that story content be imagined’ (Stock 2016: 206). More specifically, the core idea, which originates in Currie (1990),<sup>2</sup> is that fictions are works consisting of *fictive utterances*, which are

characterized as the sort of utterance where, if a sufficient number are present in a text, the whole counts, for that reason, as a fiction. That is, it’s what we might call a “fiction making unit” [...] These accounts offer at least one necessary condition upon fiction, as a whole: it must contain fictive utterances. (Stock 2016: 205)

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<sup>1</sup> We focus on glitches for the sake of brevity, but our discussion applies equally to game bugs. This is mostly because the glitch/bug distinction is not always clear. After all, errors that are perceived as consequences of unexpected system failures (and thus as *glitches*), are often the result of mistakes made by the programmer (and are thus *bugs*). Moreover, bugs caused by programming errors are often lumped together with glitches in popular discourse (Janik 2017, 77-78).

<sup>2</sup> Though see also Davies (2007: 43-8) and Stock (2016: 213-5).

In turn, fictive utterances require a fictive *intent* (Currie 1990: 35). That is, a fictive utterance ‘*prescribes imagining*: in uttering, its author intends, and intends to communicate her intention, that the reader (or hearer) should imagine the utterance’s content, as a response to understanding it’ (Stock 2016, 205-206). More precisely, Currie defines fictive utterances<sup>3</sup> in the following broadly Gricean manner:

U's utterance of S is fictive if and only if (iff) U utters S intending that the audience will

- (1) recognize that S means P;
- (2) recognize that S is intended by U to mean P;
- (3) recognize that U intends them (the audience) to make believe that P;
- (4) make believe that P.

And further intending that

- (5) (2) will be a reason for (3);
- (6) (3) will be a reason for (4)

(Currie 1990: 31)

On this understanding, fiction is built up out of fictive utterances, which are made with the intention that their content be imagined.

This characterization of fictional utterances also helps address questions about what is (or is not) part of the content of a given fiction. For the intention-based definition of fiction is often dismissed as being an instance of the *intentional fallacy* (originally introduced in Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946). When it comes to fiction, the worry is that something (and anything) can become fictional as long as the author intends it to be true in his work of fiction. However, even if Conan Doyle had the firm belief and intention that (say) Sherlock Holmes was a member of a peculiar race of aliens, ‘we would go wrong in concluding that it was true in the story that Holmes is an alien being’ (Currie 1990: 109). This is because, to make something fictionally true (and hence part of a fiction’s content), authors must not only have the intention that the reader imagine what they utter, but also that the reader can *recognize* this intention (Currie 1990: 109-110). Only that which is uttered with the intention that the reader will (be able to) imagine it is genuinely a fictive utterance. In this way, while the intention of the author is essential when it comes to making a text a fiction, mere authorial intention does not (fully) settle what is fictionally true in the work.

Finally, to rule out exceptional cases in which authors might prescribe imaginings about content that is actually true, philosophers have added different extra conditions to the intentionality requirement. For example, Currie adds the condition that ‘if the work is true, then it is at most accidentally true’ (Currie 1990: 46), Davies that a proposition can be fictional even if it is true, provided its truth is ‘not the *reason* for its inclusion in the narrative’ (2007: 46), and Stock that true utterances are part of the fictional content if they are connected to utterances the content of which is invented and intended to be imagined (2016: 213). In the end, however, these extra conditions are all minor additions to the overall conception of fiction as a special kind of intentional communication.

The general idea then, is that any content communicated with the intent that the audience imagines its truth is fictional, and a fiction is a collection of such fictive utterances.

### Dealing with mistakes: charity and disregarding

One direct result of treating fiction as originating in the intentions of a creator (or creators) is that, whenever an error sneaks into a work of fiction, it should have no repercussions for the associated fictional world. Whenever something is not perceived as being intended by the work’s creator, for example because it is an obvious error or causes glaring inconsistencies within this work, it will not be a part of the fiction. Typical examples are typos in novels, like Rowling’s repetition of ‘1 wand’ when listing the required Hogwarts school supplies in the first edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*:

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<sup>3</sup> The focus on ‘utterances’ does not mean that the intention-based fiction definition only applies to spoken or written texts; visual representations can equally be characterized by a fictive intent (Currie 1990: 39).

- Other equipment
  - 1 wand
  - 1 cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)
  - 1 set glass or crystal phials
  - 1 telescope
  - 1 set brass scales
  - 1 wand
- Students may also bring an owl OR a cat OR a toad  
(Rowling 1997: 53)

Recognizing that Rowling did not intend to write ‘1 wand’ twice, it would be wrong for readers of *Harry Potter* to imagine that all students of Hogwarts need *two* wands. The same goes for cinematic inconsistencies like crewmembers walking into the frame or historical characters wearing modern watches because actors forgot to remove them. In *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Verbinski 2005), for example, a crewmember in a cowboy hat can be seen standing in between the pirates when Jack Sparrow takes the helm of the *Black Pearl*. In this case, viewers should not imagine that this man is on Jack’s ship at all, because he is unintentionally there.

The main strategy to deal with inconsistencies and incoherencies in fiction is to quite simply *ignore* them, disregarding the consequences they would have within the fictional world. Matravers refers to this as the *disregarding strategy*: the reader simply ignores or puts aside as a flaw the contradictory part of the narrative, and tries to make sense of the rest of the story without it (2014: 131). Walton describes this as ‘the charity principle’ (1990: 183), referring to the fact that fiction appreciators should be charitable towards fiction creators, and not dwell on parts of works that might cause fictional inconsistencies. Finally, Currie suggests that the most desirable thing the reader can do upon encountering inconsistencies in fiction is simply not use the inconsistent descriptions to infer anything about the fictional world (Currie 1990: 87).

### **Fictional (mis)communication in videogames**

While the previous sections discussed fiction in general, from here onwards we will focus on *videogame* fiction. Both within philosophy of fiction and videogame studies, scholars agree that most videogames are works of fiction (cfr. Tavinor 2005, 2009; Meskin and Robson 2012; Robson and Meskin 2016; Cova and Garcia 2015).<sup>4</sup>

Connecting this with the more general approach to fiction described earlier, it is natural to say that, insofar as videogames are fictions, they are so because they involve a specific kind of communication. The creators of a videogame – i.e., the entire creative team of designers, artists, and programmers – create certain content with the intention that players imagine this content upon seeing it virtually represented when playing the game. For example, when creating the game *Assassins Creed Unity* (Ubisoft Montreal 2014), code was written that, when interpreted by (say) the *PlayStation 4* system, caused specific visual and auditory representations to be displayed by a connected TV. This was done by the creators of this game, who had the intention that, when players perceived and interacted with these representations, these players would imagine being an assassin in Paris during the French Revolution. As such, *Assassins Creed Unity* is a work of fiction (in the sense characterized previously), presenting its players with a fictional world.

Due to the nature of communication within the virtual realm, however, many things can go wrong when creating videogame fiction, including programmers making mistakes when writing the game’s code and gaming systems wrongly interpreting said code.<sup>5</sup> Unintentional and unexpected noises introduced to signals or messages communicated within the digital realm are often called ‘glitches’

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<sup>4</sup> Aarseth (2007) contends that video games are virtual, rather than fictional. However, there is no obvious incompatibility between Aarseth’s conception of virtuality and the notion of fictionality employed here. Further, the ‘most’ qualifier is required because there are some videogames, e.g. *Tetris* (Pajitnov 1984), *The Chessmaster 2000* (Software Toolwork 1986), and *Puzzle Bobble* (Taito 1994), whose status as fiction is questionable. As this issue is irrelevant to our present concern, we here focus on those videogames that are fictions, setting aside the potentially problematic cases.

<sup>5</sup> See Höltgen’s chapter ‘From Bugs to Features’ for a detailed overview of various possible errors, bugs, and glitches in videogames.

(Menkman 2011: 26-28). Such distortions are quite common in videogames. While playing *Assassins Creed Unity*, for example, many players encounter characters whose heads disappeared, or who had partly missing faces. Players of *Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios 2011) are often confronted with texture glitches, in which surfaces of the represented environment became blurry or pixelated. *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Game Studios 2015) has numerous ragdoll glitches, in which the supposedly lifeless bodies of defeated enemies start spinning around and flailing their limbs. Glitches like these originate in faults of the underlying mechanisms that are responsible for the rendering of the fictional world, and they typically reveal the workings of these mechanisms to the player (Menkman 2011: 30; Janik 2017: 70).

Notably, developers sometimes deliberately introduce *pseudo-glitches* (or ‘glitch-alikes’, cf. Moradi 2004, 10) in their games. For example, in *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (Rocksteady Studios 2009), when players approach the character of Scarecrow, who is known for incapacitating his enemies by showing them their biggest fears, the screen suddenly freezes and the videogame seems to glitch. This ‘freeze’ is, however, a scripted event that the developers intentionally put in the game. Similarly, *Fex* (Polytron, 2012) appears to glitch, reset, and reboot at several points in the game. This is merely the game working as intended, indicating that something is deeply *wrong* in the fictional world, which the player must put right.

By intentionally bringing these pseudo-glitches about, developers can comment on the media-fiction relationship inherent to videogames by *consciously* foregrounding the medium through which the videogame fiction is given. In this way, pseudo-glitches are quite similar to metafictional elements in more traditional fictional media, in that they are deliberately integrated within the fiction, but also highlight the videogame’s status as an artificial construct, revealing and emphasizing its fictionality and mediated nature (Nicol 2009: 35). Although pseudo-glitches are, strictly speaking, not glitches (as nothing is unintentionally going *wrong* in the game), players, at least in the first instance, tend to interpret them and treat them in the exact same way as real glitches.

From the perspective of videogame’s fictional worlds, glitches are both unintended by this world’s creators and the cause of inconsistencies within this world. As such, they are prime candidates for the disregarding strategy: they should simply not be taken into account when reconstructing what is fictional within the videogame world. Videogame scholars seem to agree. Kubiński describes glitches as ‘elements which reveal mediated character of the virtual reality’ (2014: 135), and McMahan calls them ‘poor design elements that jar the user out of the sense of “reality” of the [game-world]’ (2013: 76). Holmes says that ‘[g]litches are ruptures and irruptions in this reality-effect, and are, therefore, in the context of the virtual worlds in which they appear uncanny’ (2010: 261). And Janik concludes that ‘[a]s a result of this, the player is no longer playing inside the video game environment, but rather with the digital object itself’ (Janik 2017: 75). Indeed, rather than as parts of the fictional worlds of games, glitches are taken to be distortions of the presentation of this world that reveal the mediated character of a game’s fiction and ultimately destroy the player’s fictional experience of the game world. The consensus seems to be that, when engaging in videogames’ fictional worlds, the presence of glitches must be disregarded.

In this way, like typos in novels or crewmembers that accidentally wandered into frame in a movie, glitches are unintended by fiction creators and prone to cause inconsistencies within the fiction. Consequently, it is natural to think that glitches have no fictional relevance. This is not the whole story, however: some glitches actually *do* generate novel fictional content.

### **Generative glitches and unintentional fiction**

Consider again the manimal glitch. Every player seeing the manimals would be motivated to interpret them as just as fictional as the non-malfunctioning animals in *Red Dead Redemption*: they cause the player to imagine certain states of affairs in the exact same way as well-behaving 3D-models in the game would. Alternatively, take MissingNo., a glitch pokémon that would appear in GameFreak’s *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Blue* (1998) if players overloaded the game’s memory in a particular manner. Nintendo’s official line is that MissingNo. is a ‘programming quirk, and not a real part of the game.’<sup>6</sup> However, many players have interacted with MissingNo. within the fictional world of the game, even including it as part of a team used to beat the Kanto region’s Elite Four. In this way, when the glitch occurs, MissingNo. is a part of the game, despite Nintendo’s proclamation otherwise.

Other similar glitches include the corrupted blood incident in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004), the minus world in *Super Mario Bros.* (Nintendo 1985) and Gandhi’s predilection for

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.nintendo.com/consumer/systems/gameboy/trouble\\_specificgame.jsp](https://www.nintendo.com/consumer/systems/gameboy/trouble_specificgame.jsp) (accessed on July 20th 2019).

nuclear weapons in the *Civilization* series (MicroPose 1991). In all these cases, the relevant glitch seems to *prescribe an imagining*, even though they were not meant to occur. And the way players and scholars talk about these glitches already betrays their fictional relevance; for example, MissingNo. is described as a ‘Pokémon’ and the manimals as ‘human-animal hybrids’ which could be found ‘during exploration of the wilderness’ (Janik 2017: 74).

Let us label these glitches *generative glitches*, because they generate completely new fictional content in a way unanticipated by game developers. When a generative glitch appears, something is fictionalized without an author-driven mandate to imagine it. As such, generative glitches are in contradiction with the earlier discussed account of fiction: how can a glitch, an *unintentional error*, be an instance of fictional communication? In other words, how can some states of affairs in videogames be *unintentionally* fictional?

### Dissolving the contradiction

The key to dissolving this apparent contradiction requires being clear about the specific nature of fictional communication in videogames, something that has not been adequately accounted for by philosophers of fiction. As *interactive* fictions, videogames generate fictional truths in a different way than non-interactive fictional media like literature and film. This has important consequences for the fictional relevance of errors in videogames, which are more likely to be interpreted as generating fictional events than typos in novels and goofs in movies.

First, unlike typos and movie goofs, videogame glitches do not merely manifest in the way the fiction is presented, nor are they mere background events that can be easily isolated from the official fictional goings-on. This is because when a manimal or MissingNo. appears in a game, the player, who takes on the role of a character within the fictional world, is already interacting with it, either spatially (as players are inevitably located somewhere in the fictional world relative to the glitch) or in more substantive terms (e.g., by fighting the manimal/MissingNo.). Generative glitches are intimately intertwined with unambiguously fictional events: namely, the actions the player-character undertakes. Thus, because they are interacted with at least by one fictional character (specifically, the player-character), generative glitches impact the fictional world.

Contrast this with what would happen were, for example, Harry Potter to remark on how strange it is that all students need two wands, or if Jack Sparrow were to ask the strange man in the cowboy hat what he is doing on the *Black Pearl*. In these cases, the relevant mistake – Rowling’s typo and the crew’s mislocation – would make certain things true in the relevant fictional world; e.g., it would be true that Hogwarts students are required to get two wands, and that there was a strange man in a cowboy hat roaming the high seas. However, this would also render the ‘mistake’ no longer a mistake; instead it would indicate that something ‘funny’ – e.g. a bit of meta-textual commentary – is going on. This is not what happens with generative glitches. Players acknowledge that a mistake has happened, but this mistake engenders new fictional truths.

Second, due to the specific, mediated way in which videogames generate fictional events, players are likely to take representations in videogames as generating fictional truths regardless of their unintentional nature. Videogame designers simply do not have the same control as creators of novels and films do over which events become fictional in the world they create. Videogames are interactive fictions because they give *players* the power to make certain things fictional within videogame worlds (Wildman and Woodward 2018). When playing *Dark Souls 3* (FromSoftware 2015), for example, it might be true in one player’s game that Siegwald of Catarina dies while fighting the giant Yhorm, while in another player’s game, Siegwald never even meets Yhorm. In other words, players are only prescribed to imagine Siegwald dying by Yhorm’s hand when, based on the choices they made, the game *shows* them a representation of Siegwald’s death. More generally, whatever players are prescribed to imagine when playing videogames is highly dependent on the representations they are shown while playing. And which representations they are shown is partially determined by the games’ creators, partially by the player’s actions, and partially by the game system’s processing of the code/player inputs.

The upshot is that although game creators create a framework of many potential fictional events, they alone are not doing the ‘fictive uttering’. Instead, the game system shows the player which events they are prescribed to imagine to be true in the game’s world based on the choices these players have made (which are constrained by the framework). For this reason, one can say that the *narrator* of the fictional content of videogames is not the game’s creative team, but rather the set of player and game system (Thabet 2015, 43). In a way, it is the game system prescribing players what to imagine by rendering certain

virtual representations. Thus, when a malfunctioning game system shows a player glitched representations, these representations generate fictional events in a way that typos in novels or goofs in movies do not.

In conclusion, some glitches seem to provide novel prescriptions for imagining. Due to their nature and the way they appear in the game, these generative glitches are not mere mistakes in the way a game's content is presented, but rather part of this very content. In other words, generative glitches are expressions of the ontology of the fictional world: if they appear in a game, they express how things are in that fictional world. As a result, players should not ignore their presence in the game's fiction, but rather take them as generating or constituting real events within the world of the fiction.

### Dealing with fictional inconsistencies

However, not ignoring the fictional events caused by such glitches means allowing strange, uncanny, and often problematical inconsistencies to enter the fictional world of the game. Remember that the disregarding strategy implied that fictional events should be ignored not only when they *unintentionally* entered a work of fiction, but also when they would render the fictional world of this work *inconsistent* (Walton 1990: 183; Matravers 2014: 131). As generative glitches are, by definition, glitches that should not be ignored when it comes to a game's fictional content, we cannot use the disregarding strategy to deal with the inconsistencies they bring along. There is no disregarding the flying cowboy manimals, no matter how otherwise realistic the depiction of the Wild West is. So how then should we deal with inconsistent fictional events caused by generative glitches?

Moreover, even without taking into account glitches, inconsistencies are ubiquitous within the videogame medium, as the incorporation of gameplay elements within the fictional world often makes for strange fictional representations (Juul 2005; Hogenbirk et al. 2018). Think, for example, of the fact that Mario has three lives and keeps dying and reincarnating (Juul 2005: 123-130), the fact that health bars fly over characters' heads but should not be imagined to *fictionally* be there (Van de Mosselaer 2019: 200-201), or the fact that complete videogame worlds come to a standstill whenever players press the pause button (Hogenbirk et al. 2018: 3).<sup>7</sup>

Thankfully, there are multiple ways to handle these situations. Specifically, Matravers details a number of strategies for dealing with inconsistencies in literary fiction (2014: 131-135). In the remainder of the paper, we will discuss how each of these strategies are often already applied to videogame fictions and how they can be especially useful for dealing with glitch-generated, inconsistent fiction.

Firstly, there is the *weird world* strategy (Matravers 2014: 132). Here, the reader pretends the story takes place in a 'weird' world, in which the described seemingly inconsistent events are actually perfectly possible and normal. Players of videogames regularly apply this strategy, accepting that the fictional world of the game is one in which people, for example, can take multiple bullet hits and heal of all injuries after hiding for a few seconds, or in which people can pick up and put objects in their backpack, even though the relevant object is far too big to fit.<sup>8</sup>

The weird world strategy is extremely useful when it comes to making sense of various glitches. For example, *Goat Simulator* (Coffee Stain Studios 2014) is packed with glitches, because, when an early, unfinished version of it full of bugs and glitches was shown on *YouTube* during early development, the designers realized players actually *liked* the glitches. So they left them unfixed in the final version of the game (Farokhmanesh 2014). As a result, the main character (a goat) constantly warps and extends in outrageous ways, flies away without reason, sinks through the ground, and ragdolls. Playing *Goat Simulator* inevitably involves accepting that the fictional world of this game is one in which goats are elastic and gravity frequently fails. The weird world strategy might also be used to incorporate the manimal glitch within the fictional world of *Red Dead Redemption* by interpreting this world as a freaky version of the Wild West in which human-animal hybrid species roam the prairies.

A second option is the *reconciliation strategy*, which consists of finding 'a way in which the narrative could be made coherent' by reasoning (Matravers 2014: 131). Players can employ this strategy by adding their own fictional information to the game's world in an attempt to explain away/re-contextualize encountered inconsistencies. For example, the *Dark Souls* games (FromSoftware) are famously laced with inconsistency and incompleteness; characters die out of nowhere, suddenly turn out to be mere illusions,

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion about such 'incoherence' in videogames, see Van de Mosselaer and Wildman (ms).

<sup>8</sup> *Space Quest 3: The Pirates of Pestulon* (Sierra On-Line 1989) has a gag about this phenomenon, with the main character storing a massive stepladder in his trouser pocket.

and dragon tails turn into swords when shot with enough arrows. Yet, *Dark Souls*' fans are quite skilful at reconciling these inconsistencies via careful application and interpretation of known history and lore.<sup>9</sup>

This strategy can also be effective for making sense of fictional inconsistencies caused by generative glitches. For example, take the many (unofficial) narratives that have sprouted around *Pokémon*'s MissingNo. (Janik 2017: 76-77). Players often tried to explain MissingNo.'s existence by making up backstories and by treating the glitch as just another, albeit somewhat weird, Pokémon.<sup>10</sup> Newman describes how the Pokémon community reconciled the unintentional Pokémon's existence with the official fictional world of the game:

[G]aming communities around Pokémon have made these 'glitch Pokémon' real. Giving them a category of their own to sit alongside the Fire, Water and Leaf monsters is just the beginning of the assimilation. Fanart and fiction abounds. Rita Buuk (n.d.) and Mandy Nader (2004), for example, have both written narratives that attempt to detail the backstories of MISSINGNO and 'M while hand-drawn sketches, computer-generated artwork and even cookies inspired by the likeness of 'M bestow upon the characters a reality and position within the canon of the game regardless of Nintendo's official protestations to the contrary.<sup>11</sup> (Newman 2008: 118)

As such, some gamers succeed in reconciling the glitch with the official game narrative, so that, in their make-believe game, MissingNo. unproblematically is part of the fictional world.

Lastly, there is the *rejection strategy*, in which story incoherencies are taken to be misreports by the narrator (Matravers 2014, 131). This strategy is not to be confused with the disregarding strategy. When playing Mario, for example, we *disregard* some parts of the interface – we simply do not imagine that our high score is really floating in the sky – but we do not disregard Mario's (apparent) in-game death. Instead, the death is *rejected* as a mistake in the telling of the story, caused by our failure while playing the game. In other words, the death happens in a certain (fictional) telling of Mario's adventure, but this telling misrepresents what *really* happened in the fictional world.

Generative glitches can also be understood in this way; for example, we might say that *Red Dead*'s John Marston only sees the manimals because he had too much to drink. Notably, the rejection strategy is especially useful when it comes to inconsistencies caused by *pseudo-glitches*, which can be interpreted as representations of the unstable mental or epistemic state of the characters through which these events are focalized. In *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, for example, players can seamlessly integrate the (pseudo-)glitched scene within the game's fictional world by interpreting the glitch as Batman's hallucination under influence of Scarecrow's terror drugs. Similarly, players can treat reboot sequences in *Fez* as representing the player-character's way of coming to terms with the tears in the fabric of space and time occurring in his world. In this way, the rejection strategy allows integrating incoherent scenes in which (pseudo-)glitches occur into the fictional world without this world becoming inconsistent.

In conclusion, there is no reason to say glitches should be ignored when it comes to fiction because they cause inconsistencies within the game's fictional world. Such inconsistencies are ubiquitous in videogame fiction, and we are both used to and well equipped to deal with them, as there are a number of potential strategies to make sense of them available to us.

## Conclusion

We have argued that some glitches can have fictional relevance as unexpected influencers of the intentional fictional communication between game developers and players. Glitches like the manimals in *Red Dead Redemption* and the glitch Pokémon MissingNo. in *Pokémon Red and Blue* generate fictional content without there being an author-driven mandate to imagine this content. Although these glitch-generated fictions are often inconsistent, there are several strategies for dealing with these inconsistencies. These

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. the video's and comments on VaatidiVidya's *Youtube* channel.

<sup>10</sup> Although we here call MissingNo. a 'weird' Pokémon, the newest generations of Pokémon games introduce (officially fictional) Pokémon that are arguably at least as weird as, if not much weirder than, MissingNo. (e.g., Mimikyu, which looks like a badly drawn Pikachu, Klefki, which looks like a ring of keys, and Garbador, which closely resembles a pile of trash). This makes incorporating MissingNo. into the official Pokémon world significantly easier.

<sup>11</sup> Note that Newman uses the word 'real' to describe the fact that fans were making MissingNo. a 'real' *fictional* character, and part of the fictional narrative of the Pokémon universe.

strategies are, moreover, quite natural for players of videogames to use, as they already play important roles within the experience of videogames which operate perfectly as intended. In the end, both the unintentionality of glitches and the inconsistencies they cause within the fictional world are no reason to completely disregard them when it comes to videogame fiction. Indeed, as events that take place within the fictional world of the game, many glitches should simply be taken to be fictional events themselves. In so doing, we hope to have shown the fictional relevance of videogame glitches and, above all, to have initiated a broader exploration of glitches as significant components of the fictional experience of video games.

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