"Mark Matthews stars in 'Anatomy is Hard!' A struggling student tries to make the grade with his professor": Sexual Humour and Queer Space in *Coming Out on Top*

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Abstract: Despite an increase over the years in the number of video games with queer content, queer characters in most games continue to be tragically framed. *Coming Out on Top* (*COOT* hereafter; 2014), a gay-themed visual novel and dating simulator, contrasts with these games for its comic and fun depiction of the life of gay men. While the game has been criticised for reinforcing the idea of consumable gay male bodies, a quick look at player review figures on Steam reveals that most players enjoyed the game. This research uses the tools of netnography and close reading to analyse sexual humour in *COOT* and aims to create a dialogue between my own gayming experience, the experience of other players, and previous scholarship on humour. I ultimately argue that *COOT* leaves a positive impression on queer players because it offers them something relatively new in the world of video games: the possibility to laugh and imagine their lives in a positive and fun way.

Keywords: sexual humour; incongruity theory; pornography; sexuality studies; visual novel; dating simulator; netnography; close reading.

There is in my living room, next to my work desk, a poster with a rainbow triangle, which reads: "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ Positive Space." I have carried it with me from my student residence in Toronto, to my bedroom inside my parents' house in Châteauguay, to the apartment in which I now live with my boyfriend in Tampere. I love this poster. I use it to transform the space in which I live, to clearly state that my room and my workspace are safe environments for members of my community. I find that powerful. I have similar feelings about the video game I analyse in this chapter. It has the power to transform the virtual environment and create a safe space, and it mostly does so through humour and fun.

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We have observed over the years an increase in the representation of queer video game characters. According to the LGBTQ Video Game Archive (n.d.), the number of video games with queer content went from 20 video games in the 1980s, to almost 170 video games in the 2000s, to more than 900 video games in the 2010s (see also Shaw et al. 2019). Although this can partly be explained by the exponential growth of the video game industry and the indie game scene, we can still say quite safely that queer characters are more visible than before in video games, including in mainstream games such as those of the industry giant BioWare (Greer 2013; Holmes 2016; Ruberg 2020).

Nevertheless, despite the rising number of queer characters in video games, these characters often continue to be tragically framed. Whereas Sam in *Gone Home* (2013) lives a secret love story and must face the homophobic reaction of her parents, Dave in *Firewatch* (2016) has unrequited feelings for Ron and gets badly beaten at a bar for being gay. As Heather Alexandra (2018) puts it: "while games allow us to be many things—space marines, mages, and tenacious heroes—they rarely allow queer people to be happy" (para. 1). Some games go further than others in employing the now infamous "bury your gays" trope.[1] In "Let Queer Characters Be Happy," Alexandra gives several examples of this trope: Anders, in *Dragon Age II* (2011), escapes the Circle of Magi and ends up killing Karl Thekla, his ex-lover, whose mind has been magically lobotomised; Riley and Ellie, in *The Last of Us: Left Behind* (2014), are attacked by a horde of Infected during an intimate moment, get bitten, and Riley dies; and Chloe, with whom Max falls in love in *Life Is Strange* (2015), can die in countless ways, the most memorable one probably being sacrificing herself to

save Arcadia Bay from a hurricane. As these examples show, in the world of video games, not everyone is allowed to experience a happy ending.

Coming Out on Top (abbreviated *COOT* hereafter; 2014), a gay-themed visual novel and dating simulator developed by Obscurasoft, appears as a breath of fresh air after playing so many games where queer characters are sacrificed for narrative drama. In contrast with these games, *COOT* follows the conventions of the comedy genre, with its goofy characters, witty banter, sigh gags, and overall light-hearted tone. The game tells the story of Mark Matthews, a college student who recently made his coming out, and centres on his last academic year, his friendship with his two roommates, and his romantic and sexual life. The main storyline allows the player to romance six characters, generally called "love interests" by players, and to hook up with twelve additional characters through the BroFinder dating app (these are called "bonus dates"). The game is a mix of situational, romantic, and gross-out comedy, and contains erotic and pornographic material, notably images of the protagonist having sex with other characters. Interestingly, Susan Sontag (1967/1982) writes that in literature, pornography plays with two patterns: tragedy, when "the erotic subject-victim heads inexorably toward death" (p. 223), and comedy, when "the obsessional pursuit of sexual exercise is rewarded by a terminal gratification, union with the uniquely desired sexual partner" (p. 223). Whereas the novel *Histoire d'O* (Story of O, Réage 1954) falls within the first pattern, as Sontag mentions, *COOT* largely draws on the second, and Mark can end up in a lasting relationship with any of the six love interests if the player decides to pursue their routes and makes all the right decisions.

Although *COOT* reinforces the idea of consumable gay male bodies and lacks body diversity (Harper 2015; Poirier-Poulin in press), a quick look at player review figures on Steam reveals that most players (queer and non-queer) enjoyed the game—the game has a total of 493 positive reviews out of 514 reviews, with the mention "overwhelmingly positive." Players describe the game as funny and fun to play, and as full of love and sexy scenes, and usually want the best for the game characters. Two elements seem to stand out from the game: its humour and its sexual content. One player even emphasises how both go very well together.

Studies on the relationship between humour and sex in video games are still scarce. Brent Kice (2018) has briefly explored how the potty humour and the presence of nameless characters in the *Fable* series (2004–2010) lead to player-disconnected sex acts, whereas Veli-Matti Karhulahti

and Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone (in press) have analysed the "enigmatic synergy" between sexual humour and puzzles in the *Leisure Suit Larry* adventure game series (1987–1996). Diana Pozo (2018) has also studied pornographic alterations of video game peripherals as a form of parody, emphasising the critical power of sexual hacks like the Joydick. Research on sexual humour in video games with LGBT+ content is even rarer. So far, research on these games has mostly drawn on queer theory and the politics of representation: Amanda Phillips (2017) has proposed a reparative reading of *Bayonetta* (2009), arguing that the "aggressively feminine sexuality" (p. 121) of the protagonist disrupts heteronormative masculinity and patriarchy; Bridget Kies (2018) has argued that *Gay Fighter Supreme* (2015), its camp aesthetic, and the comments surrounding its release have offered new ways to think about LGBT+ identity in games; and Braidon Schaufert (2018) has analysed the desexualisation of the daddy figure in *Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator* (2017) and has offered ways to challenge the game's appeal to homonormativity.

Although humour has sometimes been used by game designers and players in homophobic ways, thus reinforcing the status quo, I believe that humour can also be used to create a safe environment (Dormann and Biddle 2009) and can be a powerful tool to explore sexuality, including that of marginalised folks. As noted by Pozo (2018), "focusing on the humor in pornography draws critical attention away from pornography's visual style, allowing for an understanding of porn within its narrative and reception contexts" (pp. 135–136). With that in mind, this chapter analyses sexual humour in *COOT* and argues that *COOT* leaves a positive impression on queer players because it offers them something relatively new in the world of video games: the possibility to laugh and imagine their lives in a positive and fun way.

Theoretical Framework and Methods

My reflection on *COOT* finds its origin in the concept of affordance, which was originally defined as what the environment offers the animal/individual (Gibson 1979, p. 127). Following Stephen Greer (2013) and Tereza Krobová et al. (2015), I transpose this term to the medium of video games and explore what the world of video games offers queer players, and mostly gay men (since they are the target audience of *COOT*) in terms of gameplay and narrative possibilities. My approach is twofold and draws on netnography (Kozinets 2015) and close reading (Bizzocchi and

4

Tanenbaum 2011). Inspired by the tools and approaches of netnography, I first conducted a qualitative analysis of 514 reviews of *COOT* written in English, French, and Spanish,[2] and published on Steam between October 13, 2017 (date of the first review on Steam) and June 10, 2020 (date when the data collection ended). I coded each review using applied thematic analysis (Guest et al. 2012), with the goal of answering the following exploratory research question: what do players like or dislike about *COOT*? While I was mostly interested in the experience of queer folks, it was not possible to determine the sexual orientation of the reviewers unless they mentioned it. In referring to these reviews, I have decided to paraphrase them and to keep the name/pseudonym of the players anonymous for privacy reasons, and because some players mentioned being out online but not in their offline lives.

I use these reviews to guide my own reading of *COOT* and create a dialogue between my own *gayming* experience (my experience as a gay man and as a gamer), the experience of other players, and previous scholarship on humour. I interpret this data in light of incongruity theory, which states that people laugh at things that are surprising or unexpected, and enjoy humour that "plays with different frames of reference, multiple meanings, ambiguity, and association" (Dormann and Boutet 2013, p. 3). In these instances, laughter is the expression of the "suddenly perceived incongruity" between expectation and result, between a concept and an object that had been thought in relation to each other (Schopenhauer 1819/1969, p. 59). In the following pages, I first situate *COOT* in relation to the visual novel and dating simulator genre, and then analyse sexual humour in *COOT* in light of incongruity theory.

Playing with Genre Conventions

COOT can be seen as a hybrid game that belongs to the visual novel and dating simulator genre, two genres originally from Japan that often go hand-in-hand. While these hybrid games remain the main venue for erotic and pornographic content in game culture, Patrick Galbraith (2017) stresses that these games "are fundamentally defined by their focus on interaction with characters" (p. 74), whereas Luca Paolo Bruno (2017) points out that their main appeal is not their explicit imagery, but their "developed textual narrative which the player reads like a novel" (p. 92). Hybrid games like *COOT* are generally composed of two-dimensional environments with static backgrounds, character sprites, and boxes of text (plus music and voice), in line with the aesthetic conventions

of the visual novel. At key moments in the game, more detailed images drawn specifically for the scene are displayed (these are called CGs, which stands for "computer graphics"), and act as rewards for the player. Following the tradition of *bishōjo* games, a subgenre of dating simulator, the player typically controls a young, heterosexual man and navigates through a series of dialogue options and actions, interacting with attractive girls with the goal of ending up in a relationship with one (or many) of them. The player must make the right decisions to unlock specific CGs and different "happy" or "bad" endings. As Emily Taylor (2007) writes, unlocking all the CGs and endings requires that the player replays the game several times and choose alternative routes; this is the only way to "beat" the game. The game is played and narrated in the first person, and the protagonist usually remains unseen, inviting identification with them (they are an empty shell) while at the same time emphasising the distinct appearance and personality of the datable characters (Taylor 2007; Bruno 2017).

In her analysis of *bishōjo* games, Taylor (2007) argues that female characters in these games are rather weak and tend to be presented as "girls" (*shōjo*), or to revert to that state by the end of the game, even though they are supposed to be "women": they are cute, emotional, and sexually inexperienced. Along the same lines, Galbraith (2017) highlights that the assumed straight male player (and the protagonist) is presented as the subject that acts and decides who he wants to be in a relationship with, whereas the female characters are nothing more than there for the choosing—they are objects to be acted upon. According to Taylor, playing *bishōjo* games somewhat protects *otaku* (obsessive fans of *anime*, *manga*, and video games) from being labelled as feminine and sexually inexperienced due to the romance-comedy they consume and the fact that they are not married; it becomes a way for them to reaffirm their masculinity.

Since 2010, an increasing number of gay-themed visual novels and dating simulators have reclaimed this heteronormative space, with games like *Super Health Club* (2015), *Dream Daddy* (2017), *To Trust an Incubus* (2018), *Camp Buddy* (2018), *Full Service* (2020), *All Men Are Pigs* (forthcoming), and of course, *COOT*. These games are strong examples of what Tanja Sihvonen and Jaakko Stenros (2018) have called "queering the artifact" (p. 121): they present queer narratives, "push the player toward queer performance" (p. 121)—leading them to date other men, fantasise about them, and have sex with them—and ultimately subvert the conventions of *bishōjo*

games. As I shall now demonstrate, this queer potential in the case of *COOT* is also strongly related to sexual humour.

Sexual Humour and Incongruity in *Coming Out on Top*

When I started reading the reviews on the Steam page of *COOT*, I was surprised by how positive they were. Not because the game is bad—far from that—but because a few elements of the game were still making me uneasy (and to be honest, I am also starting to get used to reading homophobic comments online, including on Steam). After analysing these reviews, it became quite clear that even though *COOT* reinforces certain tropes, as some players acknowledge, players appreciate its numerous other aspects: the storyline and dialogues; the likeable/loveable characters; the game progression, with the possibility to unlock comic and mostly erotic and pornographic pictures that can be consulted in the gallery; the artwork; the fact that the player's decisions have actual consequences on the narrative; the theme song; the possibility to customise each character through beard and body hair options; and the presence of queer content and the fact that this content is available on Steam, a mainstream digital distribution platform. Some players even mentioned that the game made them feel represented by the video game industry, heard and empowered, and helped them to accept themselves.[3] While the variety of these elements might seem rather broad, they are all related to humour and sex. Almost everything in *COOT* is potentially sexualised and/or turned into a joke, and imagining the game without these themes structuring its story and gameplay is rather difficult.[4]

For Claire Dormann and Robert Biddle (2009), "humor can . . . work [in game design] by adding emotional and pleasurable elements that have a more explicit functional role. In essence, that role is to seduce the player, adding interest, arousing curiosity, creating anticipation" (p. 817). Interestingly, I would add, this desire to seduce the player and generate anticipation and curiosity is a central component of eroticism and pornography. In the case of *COOT*, humour becomes a form of transgression and a source of pleasure because it breaks with taboos around homosexuality and sex, and especially around the two together: gay sex. This transgressive humour evokes the original meaning of "queer" as something sexually transgressive, but also pushes it further and can be read in the context of heteronormative societal norms and of a heteronormative game culture as

a form of gaming against the grain, with "rebellious and countercultural connotations" (Sihvonen and Stenros 2018, p. 116).

Of special interest to me is the presence of humour that can be understood in light of incongruity theory. In *COOT*, incongruous humour is usually related to implicit or explicit sexual references. The game features a number of double entendres, and the player must constantly keep in mind the suggestive frame of the game to interpret them properly. For example, in one segment of the game, Donovan tells Mark to "Always, *ALWAYS* use protection" while Mark puts on his gear to do construction work; in another, Mark tells his anatomy professor, on whom he has a crush: "You can't imagine how *hard* it is to have you as my professor…" Successfully deciphering these sexual references leads to an "Aha!" effect that creates a feeling of complicity between the game and the player. As Karhulahti and Bonello Rutter Giappone (in press) observe, the end of a joke and its resolution is followed by satisfaction that can be compared to a sexual climax: "If the punchline suggests a triumph of cognitive shift," they say, "the opening onto laughter also brings with it a cathartic release that may be a kind of closure through satisfaction" (section 2.3., para. 2). This seems especially relevant in the case of sexual humour and is particularly noticeable in a segment of *COOT* in which Mark is tutoring Brad. To the surprise of the player, Mark's explanation on how to structure an essay turns into a rant about Mark's own sexual desire for Brad:

> Brad: Okay, well these rules just seem stupid. Like, why I should organize my essay the first way instead of the second?
> Mark: Because you want to drive your point home.
> B: Drive it home?
> M: Yeah, but first you have to ease into it.
> B: *Ease… into… it.*
> M: Yeah, slowly at first, let the reader get used to you, get a chance to adjust.
> B: Uh huh.
> M: Then, when he's caught his breath, start pounding it in.
> B: Pounding it in? Uh, okay.
> M: You want him gasping for breath, grabbing his ankles, panting in your ear and begging for it like a little bitch. / The reader wants it bad. Needs it like a nail needs hammering. Give it to him, Brad, give him the release he needs!

While taking part in this dialogue and clicking on the mouse at the end of each line, the player progressively uncovers the second meaning behind Mark's explanations. The whole dialogue is based on gradation and starts from something potentially sexual ("you have to ease into it"), moves toward something more explicit ("get a chance to adjust"), and ends with a description of a rough anal intercourse ("pounding it in," "gasping for breath," "hammering"). It is the accumulation of these sexual references and the fact that Brad emphasises each one of them as if he was himself participating in the sexual intercourse that transform this dialogue into something explicitly sexual and into a joke for the player. Following Sigmund Freud (1905/1976), the build-up to laughter, and the use of tendentious jokes more specifically (that is, jokes that are hostile or obscene and bypass taboos), allows for the satisfaction of a drive (pp. 140, 144). In this case, the joke can be seen as allowing both Mark and the player, who might also fancy Brad, to express their sexual desires for Brad and transgress social taboos surrounding gay sex, offering them a form of release. The scene ends with Mark's face getting a little red and sweaty, as if having just had sex, and the protagonist leaving the room while reminding Brad that he will look at his essay in one week. In so doing, Mark presents himself as the reader of Brad's work, and therefore, as the person who "wants it bad" and needs to get laid.

While slower-paced conversations like this one are especially effective at telling implicit sexual jokes, arousing the curiosity of the player and pushing them to pay attention to the double meaning of each sentence, dialogue trees—a central component in text-based games—seem strongly suited to telling more explicit sexual jokes. Dialogue trees allow the player to pick their character's response to a particular situation from several options. In one segment of *COOT*, after Mark has been woken up by Ian, his roommate, while he was having an erotic dream involving his anatomy professor, the conversation goes as follows (see Figure 1):

Mark: What the hell, Ian! You could have knocked!

Ian: Why? Did I interrupt something?

M: Jesus. What a dream.

I: Oh yeah? What about?

[Mark/the player has to choose between four options:]

1) Your mom.

2) You. I was holding you down and making love to your sweet virgin ass.

9

3) My anatomy professor. He was fingering me during class.

4) Nothing! Nothing at all! I don't remember.

Figure 1. Ian is being a little too curious. Screenshot by the author.

In comparison with the previous example, in which humour unravels one sentence at a time, humour is rather direct here and takes the form of gross-out comedy. I recall bursting out laughing when I played that part of the game for the first time because of how direct the answers were. The phrase "Your mom" is something I often heard when I was a teenager but would never say as an answer to anyone, and in this case, not even to Ian. I found the option "You" also quite hilarious because it is surprisingly vulgar, plays with the taboo of expressing sexual interest to an assumed straight man,[5] and breaks with my own expectations regarding social norms and what I should and should not talk about—sex being one of them, and even less talking about sex in a crude way. Answering that I/Mark had been dreaming about my/his anatomy professor was also awkward considering that this is what was really happening in the game, and it plays with taboos surrounding professor-student relationships. The game plays with the awkwardness of giving such direct answers, an awkwardness that also surfaces in Ian's potential reactions. Ian gets uncomfortable if Mark answers that he was dreaming of him or his anatomy professor, even answering, "Woah, woah, woah! My virgin ears!" and "TMI" (too much information), indicating that this kind of sexual detail is taboo even in the game, or at least, with that particular character. As this example

10

shows, dialogue trees and the presence of answers that reflect word-for-word what the player character would say are a way to tell many jokes at the same time and to allow the player to laugh at several dialogue options, including those they will not pick as their answer (Gilbert cited in Agnello 2012). These answers all appear rather abruptly on the screen, making their content look even more surprising, and follow the economy of jokes described by Freud (1905/1976): they are condensed and told through few words to be as effective as possible (pp. 79–80), and in this case, even save time by being all told on the same screen.,

Part of the sexual humour in *COOT* also comes from Mark getting into improbable situations—from being arrested by a macho cop, to being stuck in an elevator, to participating in a tag wrestling match. While these situations are comic, they also involve sexual fantasies, slowly building the "libidinal economy" of the game (Krzywinska 2018), and usually lead to sexual intercourse. In contrast with the *Leisure Suit Larry* series, in which the player laughs at sex, sex is rarely funny in *COOT*; instead, it is portrayed as a teasing and sexually arousing experience that follows the aesthetic of hardcore pornography (Poirier-Poulin in press; see Figure 2). Since most of the sex scenes of *COOT* are serious, the few scenes in which sex is turned into a joke come across as even more surprising and effective. An element that came up rather often in player reviews is the possibility to develop a strong relationship with Mark's goldfish, Slurpy. Mark becomes obsessed with him, and in the most improbable way, they end up having sex (see Figure 3). The presence of a picture to illustrate the scene makes its incongruous aspect even more palpable and nicely highlights the comic power of sight gags. As Noël Carroll (1991) stresses, "with sight gags, the loci of the relevant incongruities are the alternative, generally opposed interpretations put in play visually by the image" (p. 27). Here, the comic aspect lies in the juxtaposition of two incompatible interpretations: a human and a fish and at the same time a loving couple; a sex scene that is ridiculous and absurd but that is depicted seriously and pornographically, like the other sex scenes of the game. The scene plays with these contrasts to provoke amusement, somehow building on the idea of a comedy duo composed of individuals who are diametrically opposed.

Figure 2. Mark is having sex with macho cop Cesar. Screenshot by the author.
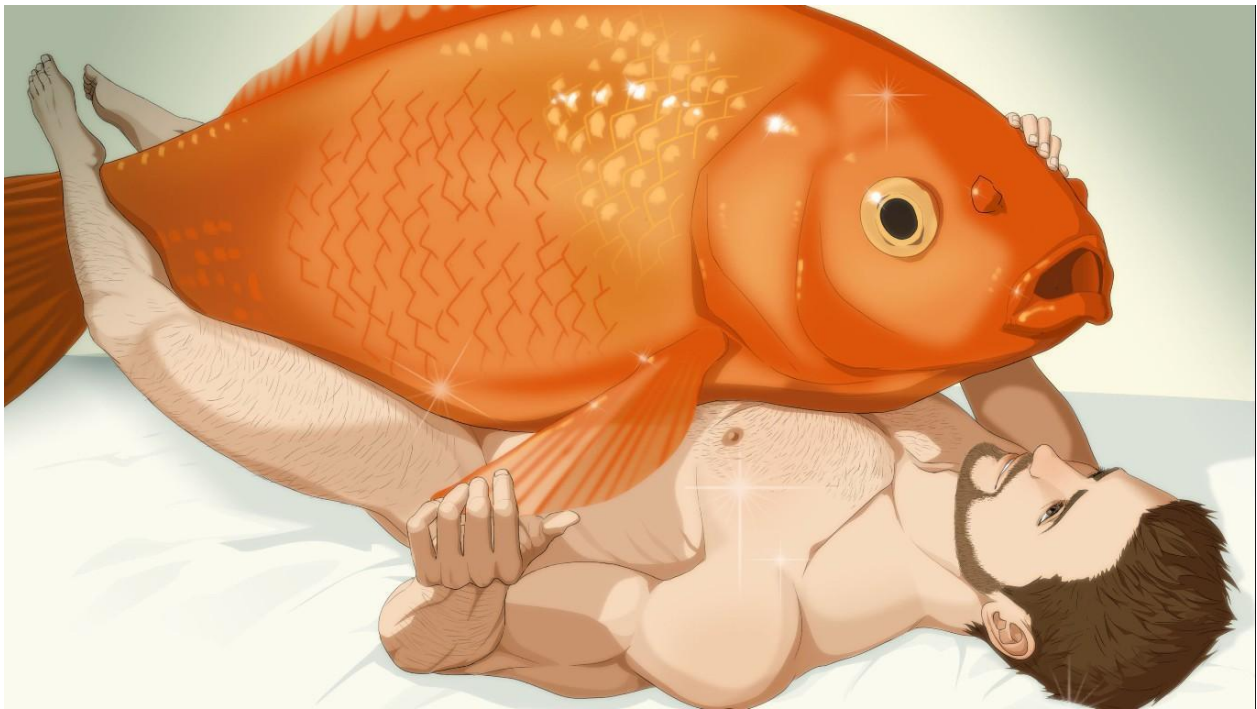

Figure 3. Mark is having sex with Slurpy. Screenshot by the author.

Despite being sexual, the humour in *COOT* is not exactly what Constance Penley (1997) has described as the brand of humour used in pornography: it is more than "bawdiness, humorously lewd and obscene language and situations" and "really bad jokes, ranging from terrible puns to every sort of dirty joke" (p. 94). It contributes to the development of the game characters, gives them a certain charm, and leads players to have preferences for some characters over others—Brad and Ian are especially popular. The use of humour and the witty banter, as some players mention, allow for socio-emotional interactions with and between the game characters: it allows for the depiction of sympathy, feelings of intimacy, or annoyance in a playful way; it provokes similar feelings in the players, and it makes the characters more interesting, believable, and memorable (Dormann and Boutet 2013). One player mentions how they initially thought they were only interested in the sexual content of the game but ended up finishing the game several times because of its very endearing characters and the love these characters could give them. Similarly, another player recalls starting to play the game because of its nude content but ultimately completing it because of Brad and all the puns, while yet another user mentions how they saved Alex, their anatomy professor and love interest, from an evil conspiracy. The role of humour in character development is especially noticeable if one compares *COOT* to the gay-themed visual novel and dating simulator *Full Service*, which also contains erotic and pornographic material but in which humour is almost absent. The characters are rather blank, not especially likeable, and built almost exclusively according to what Sontag (1967/1982) has called a "psychology of lust." As Sontag observes regarding *Histoire d'O*, the characters possess very intense and obsessive emotions; their motives are deeply influenced by lust and their psychology is limited to "modes of sexual concentration and explicitly rendered sexual behavior" (1967/1982, p. 209). Even though *COOT* incorporates elements of lust into the psychology of its characters—they are sexual beings after all—the use of humour ultimately allows for their depiction as more than mere sex objects, which *Full Service* fails to do.

Conclusion

Like many players, I came back from playing *COOT* uplifted and with plenty of funny anecdotes and meaningful memories to share. *COOT* is the first game that allowed me to freely live and express my sexuality in the virtual world and to experience, through my avatar, desires and

emotional and physical intimacy with characters that had the same sexual orientation as me. Playing *COOT* was a way for me to enter a safe space where almost everything was light-hearted and fun. It was a way to take a break from my daily life, from people asking me about the relevance of the "LGBTQ+ Positive Space" poster I have in my living room and from the gaze of strangers when I hold my boyfriend's hand in public.

While *COOT* does depict homophobia and the challenges of coming out, the world it depicts is mostly free of discrimination and social injustices; it is an optimistic world where every problem can be solved. Although this might be perceived as a queer optimism "too close to elite homosexual evasion of politics" (Muñoz 2009, p. 3), that is, an abstract, ahistorical, and apolitical vision of utopia—as Schaufert (2018) similarly notes in his analysis of *Dream Daddy*—I would highlight that worlds like the one of *COOT* do not consist in blind optimism but can be read as sites for radical hope. As Junot Díaz (2016) writes:

> Radical hope is not so much something you have but something you practice; it demands flexibility, openness, and what Lear describes as "imaginative excellence." Radical hope is our best weapon against despair, even when despair seems justifiable; it makes the survival of the end of your world possible. Only radical hope could have imagined people like us into existence. (para. 8)

Slightly modifying Schaufert's reflection on *Dream Daddy*, I would stress that the comic and fun world of *COOT* exposes social injustices by removing them from its world and making them seem out of place, absurd, upon the player's return to the "real" word.

By queering the visual novel and the dating simulator, and proposing a world where happiness for gay men is possible, *COOT* "upsets existing boundaries and norms, questions moral standards, and makes these often underlying, unmentionable structures visible" (Sihvonen and Stenros 2018, p. 118). It highlights the power of imagining things otherwise and of giving this power to gaymers through affordances for romance and sexuality. As argued by Borchard (2015), video games are not only sites for ideological reproduction, but also for critical thinking and can be used to reflect on the kind of world we want to live in. The positive experiences that many players had with *COOT* and the desire of these players to share their experiences online are a strong reminder that players are willing to take this creative opportunity and to hope for a better future.

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[1] Talking about a "bury your queers" trope might actually be more appropriate.

[2] That being said, the great majority of these comments were written in English.

[3] However, it would be a mistake to assume that this is representative of the experience of all players. A few players strongly disliked the game because of its hedonistic and escapist story, its emphasis on sex, and the presence of certain tropes.

[4] See also Karhulahti and Bonello Rutter Giappone (in press) for a similar observation on the *Leisure Suit Larry* series.

[5] While Ian is in an on-again, off-again relationship with Zoe, the player later finds out that Ian has had a crush on Mark for a long time.