Language, Interaction, and Affect in Tabletop Role-Playing Games



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Abstract

This thesis project consists of a conversation-analytic approach to performed affect, frame navigation, and creative language use in a tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) context. Drawing on work in the domains of narrative processing, embodiment, affective production and perception, intertextuality, and the boundaries of play, this research investigates the role of language use in facilitating playful interaction and affect. TTRPG sessions are entertaining, playful experiences aimed at collaborative narrative building through the use of synthetic characters in a fictional world. Players speak as their characters, acting out their desires, motivations, and actions. The goal of TTRPG play is the collaborative construction of a narrative, and work in Discourse Studies has established that emotional narratives are more compelling and impactful than their non-emotional counterparts, generating identification and involvement from audience members with story world characters. TTRPG players, however, are in the unique position of both audience and creator, since their response to story world stimuli has the capacity to influence events in the narrative being constructed. Work in games scholarship illustrates that in emotional story world circumstances of conflict, loss, resolution, and levity, players employ affective cues to represent their characters' emotions, even if it 'bleeds' into a strong emotional response that has potential negative repercussions for the player. This research attempts to address the question of why players perform this affect, examining ten excerpts of play from Critical Role, an actual play Dungeons & Dragons show, that immediately follow or concern emotional story world circumstances and analyzing them for affective cues, their appraisal and affirmation, navigation across the game-reality boundary, and players' capacity for creative language use. Ultimately, this work aims to contribute to the broader question of why we play narrative games and what we get out of them, through its analysis of the role played by language in facilitating creative interaction.

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Chapter 1

Theoretical Background

1.1 Introduction

This research draws on several domains of academic scholarship, ranging from discourse studies to ludology. In order to sufficiently situate this work within its interdisciplinary context, the following chapter consists of an overview of relevant literature from all these fields.

First, it is necessary to establish the connection to identification studies, narrative processing, and emergent narrative construction. This section is centered around central works by Hoeken et al. (2016), Aylett and Louchart (2007), and Bruner (1966). Following this is an exploration of discourse studies, with a focus on emotion; recent perspectives as laid out in Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019)'s volume on the appraisal, embodiment, and performance of emotional affect within and through discourse are examined. Thirdly, an introduction to TTRPGs is outlined to provide the context necessary to understand the remainder of this paper in full, alongside a definition of and elaboration on TTRPG actual play shows, which are the object of analysis at hand. Since actual plays are a form of performed media, an overview of performed discourse and playful performance follows, centered around Trester (2012)'s work on improvisational theater and Goffman (1961)'s frame theory. The latter is used as the foundation for introducing a new framework that accounts for the multiple frames occupied and navigated between by TTRPG actual play performers. The issue of performativity as it pertains to affect and believability is explored through Silvonen and Stepanova (2020)'s research on affective performance and the use of performed affect to enhance

an improvisational narrative.

This leads into the next section on emotional play, which first establishes the concept of the magic circle using the work of Huizinga (2016), Klabbers (2006), and Goffman (1961), and then explores the magic circle as a safe space for experiencing deep emotions. Several perspectives on why players engage in emotionally intense story world scenarios are reviewed, from Bowman (2013a)'s thoughts on bleed to Poremba (2007)'s examination of brink play, and the usefulness of what Montola (2010) refers to as the "positive negative experience" in play spaces (p. 1). From this, we move to a preliminary examination of what performed affect might look like in play spaces, drawing from Attardo (2019)'s framework for sustained humor and the virtuous cycle of non-default conversational modes. This framework is applied to other emotional dimensions and explored in conversation with Trester (2012)'s work on entextualization, to conclude that players signal changes in conversational mode using affective cues, which are then either appraised and responded to by other players, resulting in a sustained virtuous cycle of affect, or ignored in favor of other conversational cues; both outcomes impact the emergent narrative of the story world, thereby impacting play.

Combining all the threads explored in this chapter, the final section presents a TTRPG play framework that identifies the magic circle, performed affect, and narrative construction as interrelated factors in TTRPG play. This section also establishes this research project as an examination of the role of creative language use in player interaction with these three factors, through a conversation-analytic approach to actual play content.

1.2 Identification and Narratives

Emotion and Identification

Existing work within narrative studies has highlighted the impact of emotion and identification on the persuasive power of a narrative (see Das and te Hennepe, 2022; Hoeken et al., 2016; De Graaf et al., 2012; Graesser et al., 2002; Mar et al., 2011; and Cohen, 2006). Mar et al. (2011) and Das and te Hennepe (2022) in particular have shown that narratives that emotionally appeal to an audience, whether through the elicitation of high levels of identification, the usage of tragic story elements, or the portrayal of characters as having similar belief systems as an audience, are evaluated by audience mem-

bers as more successful and impactful. This body of work seems to offer us a reasonable mechanism by which to measure narrative impact: emotional appeal and identification. However, Aylett and Louchart (2007) highlight that this approach relies on a rigid conceptualization of "audience", assuming an objective point of view from which the narrative can be assessed and evaluated (p. 117).

Interactivity

Aylett et al. (2011) discuss the usefulness of research that studies what they refer to as "interactive drama environments", encompassing various forms of role-play and group storytelling, for the purposes of assessing "impact": emotional, intellectual, and creative (p. 1). The crucial element highlighted by Aylett et al. (2011) is the notion of interactivity and its impact on narrative processing. Aylett et al. (2011) define interactivity as "the involvement of the user" in a narrative (p. 8). This is especially interesting considering that Hoeken et al. (2016) define identification as "audience involvement with narrative characters" (p. 293). One could argue that there is no such thing as a "non-interactive narrative" in the manner that Aylett et al. (2011) present it here: audience members interact with the narrative through identification. However, Hoeken et al. (2016)'s audience involvement has no impact on the narrative itself: someone reading a novel, however involved they may be with the narrative characters therein, has no power to alter the novel's contents or change the story. In contrast, Aylett et al. (2011) defines user involvement as not simply spectating or viewing the narrative, but continuously creating and shaping it in collaboration with other "users" (p. 8). Users in a noninteractive (non-involved) narrative environment are termed spectator-users, whereas users in an interactive narrative environment are termed participantusers (Aylett & Louchart, 2007).

Emergent Narrative

The specific narrative construction that occurs within TTRPG and other similar environments has been termed *emergent narrative*, defined by Aylett and Louchart (2007) as "the creation of story-like experiences in real-time using interaction between intelligent synthetic characters as a generative mechanism" (p. 116). This definition forms the basis for Aylett and Louchart (2007)'s argument that spontaneously generated narrative experiences allow

users to take collaborative responsibility for the resulting narrative, making explicit the value of "user actions"—namely, speech—in positively affecting the narrative experience (p. 116). The authors address a potential criticism—that spontaneous interactions of this nature do not guarantee the creation of story events that are "experienced as narrative"—by highlighting tabletop and live-action role-play as "empirical counterarguments"; these environments, they argue, clearly demonstrate that the spontaneous interaction of "users" in collaborative role-play spaces reliably and consistently generates rich narrative experiences (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p. 116). Notably, they also make clear the specific circumstances typical of TTRPG play: a combination of "pre-authored structure" and improvisation, by way of preparation and pre-session worldbuilding in combination with player in-character responses to the same (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p. 116). Within the context of Aylett's later work, the authors do ask a pertinent question: how does one evaluate the "success" of an emergent narrative?

Participant-Users and Impact

Once the notion of interactivity enters the picture, the narrative no longer functions as a static object of analysis ("the text") (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p. 117). The "user" is, after all, more than a spectating audience member, and has the power to influence the narrative itself. How, then, do we assess the success and impact of such a narrative? According to the authors, the key lies in moving away from the notion of "the text" and towards an understanding of individual processes by which users engage with the narrative—before, during, and after its construction—and internalize it as a narrative experience (Aylett & Louchart, 2007). The authors refer to this process as "storification" (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p. 117). Key to this approach is an understanding of the evaluation of an emergent narrative as being "process-oriented", rather than "artefact-oriented": the prioritization of individual user experience during the course of narrative construction is crucial to accurately understanding how to evaluate emergent narratives (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p. 117). The authors highlight that this approach does not lend itself to systematic quantitative analysis, as the assessment of an emergent narrative's impact via a universal or standardized scale is antithetical to the formulated approach.

Broadening our understandings of how narrative processing functions in non-interactive environments, Aylett and Louchart (2007) posit that storification can be understood as the application of fictional narratives to autobiographical memory, unconsciously finding similarities between experiences of the self and the narrative being presented; this explains why spectators report high levels of identification with story characters when engaging or "involving" themselves with a narrative, and falls in line with theory of mind (ToM) principles of autobiographical memory as the basis for social cognition and engagement with "the stories of others" (p. 118; Hoeken et al., 2016). Through this formulation, Aylett and Louchart (2007) suggest that storification—user engagement with and internalization of a narrative occurs even in non-interactive narrative environments. The difference between this process and what occurs when looking at interactive narrative construction, Aylett and Louchart (2007) state, is that participating in the process of narrative construction "forces [the user] to commit to actions as a character within the narrative" (p. 118). With regard to storification, this means that while spectator engagement with a narrative allows users to infer character motivation and desire, participant engagement requires the user to feel their character's motivations and emotions, which is what enables the participating user to "[experience] a commitment to act" (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p.118). In other words, spectator engagement, while it may potentially enable storification, is optional, whereas participant engagement is required for emergent narrative construction: it is a tool employed by participant-users to contribute to the narrative. In contrast, spectator engagement positions the user at a meta-level in relation to the narrative character(s); they can observe and relate to the character and to events occurring in the narrative, but have no agency or power over what occurs in the narrative or what is actually being felt by narrative characters in comparison to participant-users.

As an added dimension to illustrate the difference between spectator and participant user experiences, Aylett and Louchart (2007) discuss Bruner (1966)'s conceptualization of three systems of thought through which child development and learning occur: iconic, involving the usage of mental images; symbolic, involving language use and logical reasoning; and enactive, involving the manipulation of objects through action. An emergent narrative, Aylett and Louchart (2007) argue, requires the usage of all three of these systems, in entangled ways, by participant-users; story-world circumstances are imagined through mental representations, reflected on and reasoned, and then enacted by way of player action, which can encompass ludic actions as well as player and character speech.

1.3 Emotion in Discourse

Appraisal and Affect

In their comprehensive review on the topic of emotion in discourse, Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019) highlight the role of appraisal, the process by which people assess situations as emotional and react in accordance with that assessment. If someone appraises a situation as unfair, they state, the emotion system corresponding to anger will likely be activated; in accordance with this, if someone shows (non)verbal signs of anger, their conversational partner may appraise that they find a situation unfair (Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019). Appraisal is conducted through the immediate and intuitive assessment of linguistic and non-linguistic information in context: speech, gesture, facial expression, and prosody all factor into this continuous process of evaluation (Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019).

Wetherell (2012) builds on this to propose the concept of affective practice, which she posits is an evaluative mechanism that draws on "integrated readings of somatic, discursive, situated, historical, social, psychological and cultural bases of affectivity" (p. 4). She highlights this conceptualization as embracing the fluid and mobile nature of engagement with human emotion, which she refers to as affect or "embodied meaning making" (p. 4). Though Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019) make clear the lack of clarity and consensus of scholars in the field on these various terms—emotion, affect, appraisal, embodiment—this paper will be primarily working with Wetherell (2012)'s notion of affective practice, as it stands out among the literature as the most holistic and interdisciplinary formulation. Wetherell (2012) also equates emotion with affect, which foregrounds the understanding of emotion not as the feeling itself (cognitively, mentally, or shall we say intellectually) but as the embodied, enacted consequence of appraisal, nonverbally and/or verbally.

Drawing on psycholinguistic appraisal theories, Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019) distinguish between evaluative and expressive emotional statements by stating that utterances whose main function is evaluative are relevant to questions of appraisal, whereas utterances whose main function is expressive are relevant to questions of emotion, which also falls in line with Wetherell (2012)'s framework of emotion (affect) as expressive. The authors make clear that one utterance can be both evaluative and expressive: a statement such as "He is a horrid man!" is both evaluative, in that it explicitly

prescribes a negative judgement, but also expressive, in that it implicitly suggests that the speaker dislikes the man being referred to (Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019, p. 17). They define emotion as "a multimodal discourse process, which permeates all linguistic levels but also manifests itself in non-verbal ways, presenting different states and forms" (Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019, p. 18). Once again, this falls in line with Wetherell (2012)'s formulation of the same, hence the interchangeable usage of emotion and affect throughout this project.

Processing Emotion

Majid (2012), addressing how emotion is parsed and processed in read discourse, points out that understanding the emotional weight of narrative events is crucial to audience understandings of character motivations and key plot moments. This emotion comprehension makes use of various sources of input: character facial expressions, gestures, and "descriptions of actions resulting from an emotional episode" (Majid, 2012, p. 439). The key point made by Majid (2012) is that emotions can be inferred from discourse, through the parsing of both linguistic and non-linguistic information. Wetherell (2012) would class this non-linguistic information—facial expressions and gestures—as elements of performed affect, and Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019) would likely class this inference of emotion from discourse as a form of appraisal.

Majid (2012) also discusses several studies in emotion parsing within discourse that highlight the role of a reader's emotional state while processing emotional discourse; the comprehension of emotional discourse is facilitated when readers make facial expressions that are congruent with the emotional valence of the discourse in question, and inhibited when readers are prevented from making these expressions (see Havas et al., 2007; Havas et al., 2010, Glenberg et al., 2009). Glenberg et al. (2009) in particular make the claim that experiencing or simulating a congruent emotion when reading is a "necessary process of deep comprehension" of emotional discourse (p. 152). They also suggest that reading an emotional text may result in a change in emotional state for the reader, which then results in observable non-linguistic affective cues from the reader; a reader processing a sentence about two lovers reuniting after time apart, for example, may smile while or after reading the sentence (Glenberg et al., 2009). This reveals support for what Majid refers to as a "simulated" or "embodied" account of language: "the same neural

systems responsible for perception and action are invoked during language processing" (Majid, 2012, p. 440). Based on these findings, Havas et al. (2007) propose that the stimulation of emotion does not occur at the lexical level, but rather requires additional linguistic material providing context. In contrast to this, Van Berkum et al. (2009) show that the processing of emotionally-stimulating statements is severely inhibited as soon as readers encounter a word or lexeme that contrasts with their personal beliefs, marked by an immediate neural signal associated with processing difficulty. Majid (2012) takes this to mean that there are different processes by which emotion discourse is parsed depending on whether we are speaking of "third-party discourse", such as fictional narratives, and discourse that holds direct relevance for the reader's values (p. 440). Naturally, we run into a problem when discussing fictional narratives that happen to hold relevance to a reader's—here, participant-user's—values, such as the emergent narrative. This issue is discussed further in 1.6.

Affective Production

Majid (2012)'s focus is on the perception of emotional discourse, which, while relevant to this project, is only part of the story. The production of emotional discourse, according to Wetherell (2012)'s affective practice, is also embodied, which means that neurobiological systems connected to action and perception should also be active during production. Thankfully, the connection between production, affect, and embodiment has been long-established. Scherer (1994) refers to the communication of one's emotional state as emotional expression, which for our purposes we will equate to affect. He proposes a model suggesting that there are three functions for any affective utterance: a physiological symptom representing a certain emotional state, a communicative act conveying the emotional state of the utterer, and a signal whose aim is to elicit a specific response from the listener (Johnstone & Scherer, 2004, p. 221). The function of a loud sob, for instance, is simultaneously a representational symptom of the emotional state of grief, a communicative act conveying that the speaker is sad, and an appeal for attention and sympathy. Physiological responses correspond to non-linguistic affective cues, both in the sense that the presence of tears, for instance, is a physiological symptom that conveys affective information non-linguistically, and that, as Johnstone and Scherer (2004) show, the bodily act of crying impacts paralinguistic components of speech such as prosody, tone, and articulation (p. 222). The

absence of a physiological symptom representing a certain emotional state within an affective utterance is in fact best understood as the successful conveyance of a normal, or rather, unaffected, emotional state. What this means for the purposes of affective production is that a physiological, embodied expression of one's emotional state is expected in any affective utterance, with a lack thereof implying a less altered or unaltered emotional state. Think for instance of a sarcastic utterance such as "so:: funny" in response to a joke, without any accompanying embodied affect such as laughter; this utterance successfully conveys to a hearer that the speaker does not find the joke funny. Another way to formulate this is that we expect a speaker to embody their emotional state before, during, and after speech, and that we expect that this embodiment will subsequently convey affective information when the speaker experiences a change in emotional state.

Using Affect

Of concern to this project is the notion of affect as a tool employed for the purposes of narrative construction, and its relation to story-world events and characters. Emergent narrative construction may allow participant-users to experience emotional situations and tap into the activation of the relevant emotional systems to make affective statements that are appraised, understood, and affirmed by other participant-users, all while these emotional situations take place within the safe boundary-space of the imaginary storyworld. But how is this affect embodied and performed with regards to both participant speech and character dialogue? When using affective practice as a framework, are the bases of affectivity that are being integrated and read, located within a real-world context or a story-world context? Regarding emotional systems, is there a distinction to be made between participant emotion systems and character emotion systems? After all, in a TTRPG environment, players can appraise ludic situations as unfair, in which case the anger-emotion system is activated within the player space, rather than the character space. Does the activation of emotion systems on multiple levels—both player and character—render players less capable of accurately appraising the corresponding story world situation, i.e. acting "in character"? How is the "multimodal discourse process" of emotion in these environments influenced by the domain-specific common ground: norms of play, interpersonal relationships between players, and ludic character attributes? These questions all highlight the necessity of examining emergent narratives

and the usage of affect therein, specifically in a playful context. The next section will delve into the specifics of TTRPG play and actual play shows as potential objects of research.

1.4 TTRPGs and Actual Play

Introduction

Tabletop role-playing games, or TTRPGs, are ludic exercises in emergent narrative creation. They generally consist of a group of players who each create, narrate the actions of, and speak as a character within a story world; these characters are called player-characters, or PCs. The process of play consists of combining ludic elements such as dice rolls and character stats with player decisions about story world actions; if a player wants their character to jump over a chasm, for example, they would likely roll a die and add a relevant modifier for their character's strength level. Generally, a high roll is a success and a low roll is a failure, though this varies; some TTRPGs also do not make use of dice, but use tarot or playing cards, random tables, or other ludic components. TTRPG play has connections to live-action role-play, or LARP, which is a form of role-play in which players physically enact the actions of their characters, usually with props and costumes; the key difference is that TTRPG play occurs at a table, and players enact PC actions through language use, rather than physically simulating these actions¹ (Bowman, 2013a).

Game Masters and Storytelling

A significant portion of TTRPGs require one player to play the role of Game Master or GM. This is a player who, unlike the other players, does not inhabit one single character, but rather "runs" the game by describing the environment and events of the story world, and inhabiting any non-player character (referred to as an NPC) encountered by the PCs in the story world, including monsters and enemies but also the family and friends of various PCs. The GM makes final calls regarding the outcomes of dice rolls (whether

¹Many TTRPGs make use of miniature figurines, or "minis", which are used to represent each character's movements during a combat encounter, but the specifics of character actions and behaviors cannot be enacted through the use of minis.

an action succeeds or fails in the story world, for example), narrates the transitions from one role-play scene to another, and presents the players with story world stimuli for their PCs to respond to.

Aylett et al. (2011) frame the behavior of GMs in TTRPG spaces in opposition to that of "storytellers" in non-interactive domains, saying that "[a GM's] concern is more for whether the impact of the events in the story is satisfying for their players, and less for whether the events of the game would read as a satisfying story after the fact" (p. 8). However, this framing suggests that the GM is solely responsible for creating narrative events that impact their players in meaningful ways, but the purpose of TTRPG play is collaborative narrative construction. The GM may embody NPCs, present players with stimuli, and narrate events in the game-world, but player responses to dialogue and game-world stimuli shape the narrative just as much as GM actions. That is, the role of "TTRPG player" is not simply to be impacted by the narrative, but to contribute to it. Therefore, the positioning of player satisfaction and narrative satisfaction as dichotomous is false: all players share the narrative goal of story construction, so evaluating a game-world narrative's impact on the user is evaluating the quality of the narrative itself. Furthermore, this evaluation is a continuous process enacted by all players at the table, including the GM, to assess whether the process of play and narrative construction is satisfactory for all players, or whether certain components of the narrative should be edited, developed, or omitted. One instance of omission can be seen in the example below; Marisha suggests that her character aggressively smashes a chair to pieces, and then edits the story world narrative after the fact by saying "no I don't do that", thereby omitting the utterance from the story world. Further principles guiding this process will be expanded upon later in this chapter.

```
1
     FJO: is there a chair in the room
2
     Lau: a HUH [HA Ha] heh heh h
3
     Mar:
                 [m(h)mm m(h)m]
     Mat: there ↑is =
5
     JES: [.h oh n0]
     FJO: [my god] .h kill it with fire
6
7
     Mar: .H H °tsh°[°tsh°] ((sound effects and gestures
8
          for smashing the chair))
9
     FJO:
                     [o:kay] s'this- that'll come
     Mar: no i don't do that
```

Aylett and Louchart (2007) also get some things wrong about the posi-

tion of GM, conceptualizing it solely as a "non-participant influencer" role (p. 120). They dismiss GMs' portrayal of NPCs as "well short of participation", since NPCs are "essentially disposable vehicles for influencing...players in specific ways" (Aylett & Louchart, 2007, p. 120). The authors are partially correct in asserting that GMs act as non-participant influencers in that they pre-prepare game materials and decide on, for example, the availability or lack thereof of necessary resources in the story world, as well as the specific outcomes of ludic actions such as dice rolls. However, the positioning of GM and player experiences of the narrative as entirely distinct—and of the GM as a non-participant—does not ring true for longform campaigns, wherein GMs may find themselves portraying certain NPCs regularly. Session interactions that spotlight or emphasize a specific NPC are not uncommon, especially in contexts where an NPC is a loved one or family member of one or more PCs; in these sessions, the GM's portrayal of an NPC has just as much potential to enable participant-user storification in the GM as a player's portrayal of their character.

Actual Play

Much of what has been discussed becomes further complicated when considering actual play shows as our object of analysis. Actual play shows, or actual plays, are a form of new media in which TTRPG play groups livestream or record their play sessions for an audience (Jones, 2021). These media can take various forms, such as podcasts (*The Adventure Zone, Friends at the Table*), livestreams (*Critical Role, LA By Night*), and shows with extensive editing and post-production (*Dimension 20*). Since most actual plays are hosted on public platforms, and consist of recorded or streamed sessions of TTRPG play, they present as ideal sites for analysis of play and emergent narratives.

However, a number of obstacles become clear when discussing actual plays as research objects. Firstly, actual plays function as *performed* media, consisting of casts of professional actors and performers. This calls into question the validity of applying conclusions reached by analyzing actual play data to TTRPG play in general, and specifically amateur play. Secondly, actual play casts are likely far more motivated to achieve the narrative end goal of collaborative story construction, since they are distinctly aware of a spectator audience and are, in essence, playing to produce a media artefact, be that a single session ("episode") of play, or a completed actual play campaign

("season"). That is, not achieving the goal of narrative construction has consequences for players in an actual play show that don't apply to players in an amateur play setting; a narratively unsatisfactory actual play session has potential ramifications for audience engagement and financial viability of an actual play project. To this end, it is necessary to keep these obstacles at the forefront of any theoretical analytical framework developed for studying actual play performance; this will be examined in detail in section 1.5.

TTRPG Culture

The question remains of why one would choose to analyze actual play TTRPG content rather than, for instance, recording and transcribing the play sessions of an amateur TTRPG group. Indeed, that is the preferred methodology for several analyses on processes of TTRPG play, including one I have carried out myself (see Bowman, 2013b; Montola, 2010; and Sridharan, 2022). Setting aside the accessibility of actual play content for analysis, there are two main points of argument for engaging with actual play as objects of research. First, my own work analyzing the play of amateur TTRPG groups involved novice participants, whose knowledge of and experience with TTRPGs was almost null prior to the experiment (Sridharan, 2022). By contrast, actual play performers have years of experience inhabiting a TTRPG environment, exemplifying and abiding by what Montola (2008) refers to as the invisible rules of role-playing. It is, of course, possible to address this by observing the play of experienced "amateur" TTRPG groups, as has been done by the authors mentioned above.

However, the second and perhaps most important argument for this research is that actual play shows stand as influential TTRPG artefacts. Norms of play, engagement, and identification demonstrated on actual play shows inevitably influence the same in amateur play environments; these shows have audiences of hundreds of thousands, as well as devoted fan communities, meaning that actual plays influence the culture of TTRPG play as a whole. As highlighted by studies exploring the resurgence of TTRPG systems such as *Dungeons & Dragons* in recent years, a heightened actual play presence has contributed heavily to the renewed popularity of TTRPG play, and has in turn affected player behavior in amateur play settings (Sidhu and Carter, 2020; Jones, 2021). Therefore, while it is not feasible to draw immediate conclusions about amateur play from analyzing actual play, there is merit in studying actual play content as a new media phenomenon and as a powerful

1.5 Performance and Play Spaces

Improv and Entextualization

In order to understand the relevance of work on performance and play to this research, it is crucial to position TTRPG Actual Plays as, in essence, long form improv theater. Trester (2012) defines long form improv as being comprised of slower, longer, "more quotidian" interactions, not dissimilar to the narrative structure present in a theatrical play (p. 241). Of course, these interactions are spontaneously generated, classing improv performance, too, as a form of emergent narrative. Further evidence of the similarities between improvisational performance and TTRPG Actual Play is exemplified in Trester (2012)'s examination of entextualization in improve theater. Through ethnographic participation with a group of improv performers, Trester (2012) studies improv as the collaborative use of language as "a creative, interactional resource" (p. 237). In improv, Trester (2012) explains, performers frequently make use of practices of intertextuality, constantly paying attention to "incidents"—be they utterances, character quirks, or entire scenes—that can be used again at a later point in the performance (p. 238). This attention is broken down into three steps: entextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization (Trester, 2012). Entextualization is defined as the noticing and rendering of a text as "extractable" from its original context, decontextualization is the removal of this text from that context, and recontextualization is the usage of the text in a new interactional context (Trester, 2012). The ability to reincorporate earlier material into a performance is an essential skill for improv performers that generally proves productive (humorous) onstage. However, Trester (2012) notes that this process of en-, de-, and recontextualization takes place both on and offstage. The difference here is that whereas onstage interactions are automatically keyed and mutually understood as performance interactions, interactions that occur offstage is not, by default, within the performance mode, and so performers must pay close attention to when switches to the performance mode occur.

Framing

Drawing on the work of Goffman (1961), Trester (2012) positions improv performance within the context of game world creation. According to Goffman (1961), "games place a 'frame' around a space of immediate events, determining the type of 'sense' that will be accorded everything within the frame" (Goffman, 1961, p. 20). Trester (2012) identifies three categories of rules that maintain the frame: rules of irrelevance, realized resources, and rules of transformation (p. 241). Rules of irrelevance inform the player as to which aspects of the real world should be ignored, and which should be taken into the game world; in other words, the degree to which the player is asked to suspend their belief, and for which real world phenomena this suspension applies to. Realized resources are those real world phenomena that are taken into the game world, and at times used to create the game world; in the context of TTRPGs, dice are realized resources in that players are required to engage with them to react to events in the game world. Transformation rules refer to how realized resources are changed for the purposes of the game; for instance, the outcomes of dice rolls are understood by players to represent consequences of player-character actions, and collectively treated as such. Returning to Trester (2012)'s improve group, she states that to be able to play spontaneous games on and offstage, players must agree on what does and does not exist in the game world, what is transformed, and how these transformations occur (p. 242). Crucially, Trester (2012) makes explicit that whether or not the game is successful is dependent on how effectively the group has managed to communicate these rules, and that more often than not these rules are negotiated implicitly, once the game is already in play. "If group members pay attention for the right aspects of language," she says, "the unfolding interaction itself serves as a roadmap to tell group members how to navigate intertextuality within the world of the game" (Trester, 2012, p. 242). Paving attention allows performers to be "rewarded" by being able to engage with and play the game, entering the game world alongside the rest of the group; she once again refers to this practice as the creative usage of language as an "interactional resource", a framework that we will return to later (Trester, 2012, p. 242).

Navigating Frame(work)s

As performed media, it can be argued that the interactions during Actual Play shows are perpetually enmeshed in the Performance frame. However, when adopting affect as a methodological dimension, it is clear that players of actual plays are frequently and deftly able to navigate between various frames. For one, as mentioned, the nature of actual play shows as performed media positions performer actions within the Performance frame. This is maintained by rules of irrelevance (the fact that the media being produced is a product, for instance), realized resources (a set, several cameras, the production crew), and transformation rules (the presentation of out-of-character dialogue between players as genuine spontaneous speech, rather than potentially encompassing a performer persona).

Within this Performance frame, we enter a Game World frame, which is also maintained by rules. Interestingly, one of the rules of irrelevance for this frame is that the nature of play as being encompassed by the performance frame should be ignored. That is, the performers are presented as players, within the Game World frame, and it is implied that their status as performers is irrelevant for the purposes of this frame. The realized resources for this frame, as mentioned above, are ludic elements such as dice, character sheets, and miniature figurines; the transformation rules are that dice rolls represent events in the game world, character abilities are represented by (and confined to) attributes tracked on character sheets, and that the movement and manipulation of miniature figurines represents the game world movement of characters.

In addition to this, we have the immersive or Story World frame, the rules for which dictate characters' in-game actions and knowledge. The rules of irrelevance here once again include the dismissal of the earlier frame; characters in the story world are not aware that their actions are being determined by TTRPG players, restricted by game rules, or decided by dice rolls, so the Game World frame is irrelevant. Another point of interest with regards to irrelevance is that player speech, also called out-of-character speech, is selectively (ir)relevant for characters in the game world. In moments of player-character ambiguity, characters may respond to player speech (if it is assumed when a player is speaking as their character when they are not, for example), or revise their actions or dialogue to account for information given by another player. The realized resources within this frame are real world elements such as notebooks, props, and costumes, all of which correspond

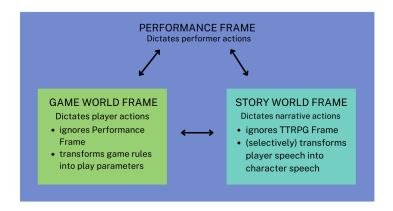


Figure 1.1: TTRPG Actual Play 3-Frame Framework

to actual items in the story world according to the rules of transformation. Two other important realized resources carried into the story world are of particular importance to this paper: (character) speech and affect. Both are performed by players, but responded to, affirmed, and acknowledged by characters in the story world, because performed speech is treated as representative of a character's speech in the story world, and performed affect is (generally) treated as representing a character's real emotional state within the story world.

Of course, since the characters in question are fictional, it may be erroneous to attribute actions such as acknowledging and responding to affect to them. Rather, players respond to emotional affect through in-character dialogue that treats this affect as being real within the game world; the same can be said of the other rules of the Story World frame. Another way to structure this is to think of the Game World frame as dictating player ludic actions, and the Story World frame as dictating player narrative actions, both of which are contained within the larger Performance frame. Movement between and across these frames occurs throughout TTRPG actual play, especially with regards to affect and how and when it is employed. This movement is detailed in Fig. 1.1.

Performance and Performativity

Regarding affective practice through the lens of performance, the notion of performativity warrants consideration, as does the question of how genuine and spontaneous we can presume performed affect to be in an actual play context. Silvonen and Stepanova (2020), studying performativity and the embodiment of affect in Karelian lament performance, observe that the performed embodiment present in these laments consists of both intentionally produced affective cues and automatic bodily responses occurring as a result of nervous system activation. Karelian laments are a form of oral poetry, described as "improvised sung solo performances", and are performed affectively (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020, p. 205). The authors note that the process of emotion expression in laments is multimodal, specifically making reference to bodily expressions, sounds of sobbing, and vocal affectations such as creaky voice, all of which fall under Wetherell (2012)'s affective practice (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020). In this context, intentionally produced affective cues are employed to enhance the resulting performance, inducing a similarly mournful emotional state in the audience; the purpose of these affective cues is to produce a more compelling and impactful narrative experience.

As established by Johnstone and Scherer (2004), affective expressions that are "raw" are interpreted as more reliable and believable, to a hearer, than expressions that are conventional and stereotypical "vocal emblems"; they mention the difference between a loud roar of pain and someone saying "ouch!" (p. 222). It stands to reason, then, that lamenters intentionally produce affective cues that are as realistic, and thereby believable, as possible; this is what facilitates audience appraisal of the performance and their subsequent engagement with the lamenter's emotional state.

Silvonen and Stepanova (2020) reject the presumed dichotomy of performative and genuine affect, stating that "the formulaic and idiomatic form of expression does not prevent the expressed emotions from being personal and individual" (p. 208). Instead, they claim that the intentional practice of a public performance space in which the lamenter is not only allowed but explicitly required to perform and display affective cues serves as a safe environment for the lamenter to explore and express their genuine emotional state (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020).

This is most clearly visible in the observation that performed embodiment during laments consists of both intentionally produced affect and automated bodily responses. That is, affect is both intentionally performed as part of the performance, and in some way induced as a result of the performer's emotional state being altered and intensified during the performance (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020). In fact, the authors link these two elements, drawing on the work of Johnstone and Scherer (2004) to suggest a causal connection between intentionally produced affect and neuro-physiologically automated affect; the bodily response system, they say, is "linked to the recognition and interpretation of emotions", defined earlier in this chapter as appraisal (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020, p. 210). The key contribution Silvonen and Stepanova (2020) make is in stating that the process of appraisal is not only social, but also individual: the intentional production of affective cues triggers a sort of self-appraisal, in which the autonomous nervous system is activated and corresponding bodily responses are automatically produced by the lamenter, presenting as an increase in affective cues. This increase allows the performance to be more easily appraised by both performer and audience as emotional, which may result in a heightened neuro-physiological response, and so on, and so forth. The continuous appraisal-affect process in particular is what allows the performance to function as an emotional outlet and source of catharsis for not only the audience, but also the lamenter (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020).

Changing States and Affective Impact

Referring back to Glenberg et al. (2009), this self-appraisal process is in line with the notion that reading an emotional text may entail a change in emotional state, observable in the production of affective cues in response to processing the text. The argument here is that producing—or more accurately, simultaneously producing and performing—an emotional text and enhancing that performance through affect seems to entail a change in the emotional state of the performer. Also relevant here is Havas et al. (2010)'s work establishing that blocking a reader from displaying emotionally congruent affective cues prevents them from engaging with or comprehending the text fully. A performer who either chooses not to or is restricted from employing affect in their performance of an emotional text would likely remain in an unemotional state throughout. In addition to this, an emotional performance sans affect—linguistic and non-linguistic—would likely be difficult to accurately appraise as emotional for an audience, rendering it significantly less successful and impactful, or, in a TTRPG context, for other players at the table, making

story world engagement with the affective scene more difficult.

As stated, Karelian laments are improvised, not recited or practiced (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020). This improvisational context is, of course, relevant to this paper, as it affirms that performed embodiment can alter the emotional state of the performer even when the content of the performed speech and affect are spontaneous. Another interesting component at work is that lamenters sometimes perform on behalf of somebody else, such as a mother performing a wedding lament on behalf of a bride, and this is received and perceived as indistinguishable from a lamenter performing their own grief (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020). Superimposing this onto our player-character framework suggests that players perform affect on behalf of their characters, producing intentional affect cues as a way of accurately representing the emotional state being experienced by their characters in the game world. At least according to the parameters of the Game World frame, the players' performance is understood as representing the characters' experiences. Since a defined goal of the Game World frame is the successful collaborative construction of an impactful narrative, it follows that a player would be motivated to perform affect as realistically and convincingly as possible, in order to enhance the narrative being created during play. As a result, it is a possibility that players in a TTRPG environment undergo a similar process of self-appraisal, altering a player's emotional state and potentially allowing the play space to function as a safe environment for the player to explore and express various emotional states. This possibility forms an exploratory focus for this project, and is elaborated on in the next section.

1.6 Emotional Play

Play and the Magic Circle

Why do we play games? An intuitive answer is that games are fun; they are positive, gratifying, generally social experiences generating enjoyment. They also allow us to act on, respond to, and experience stimuli that do not exist in the real world; expecting a reward for successfully throwing a ball through a plastic hoop would be preposterous in any non-game context, but that expectation is a central tenet of, say, basketball. Games allow—in many cases require—us to play by a different set of rules than real world interaction dictates, even when following these rules outside of the gameplay context

could generate a negative response; players of Monopoly, for example, are required by the game to bankrupt their peers, a behavior that is generally frowned upon in a real world context. Importantly, the distinction between what is acceptable in the game world and what is acceptable in the real world is implicitly understood by all players; a line is drawn between play and life. This line is better known within the domain of game studies as the magic circle (Klabbers, 2006). The inside of the circle is the game world, defined by Huizinga (2016) as a temporary world marked through intention, rather than physical space; the intent of playing basketball, not the physical court, is the magic circle. Here I repeat Goffman (1961)'s conceptualization of this boundary, which he refers to as an "interaction membrane" (p. 20):

Games place a "frame" around a space of immediate events, determining the type of "sense" that will be accorded everything within the frame.

Goffman's interaction membrane, crucially, is permeable, allowing it to be continuously traversed during play; it forms a separation between life and play space while still acknowledging the real world context in which play occurs (Goffman, 1961). Games do not occur in a "social vacuum", as Klabbers (2006) states; rather, games are social systems that function as ways of engaging with life (p. 82). Here I feel that it is necessary to amend Klabbers (2006)'s definition somewhat: these social systems function as ways of engaging with life non-normatively. We can do things in games that we cannot do in real life. This is generally understood as pertaining to the creative and imaginative potential of game worlds. Role-play is of particular relevance here: in most role-playing game contexts, characters speak and are spoken to, form relationships, and "live" in the story world, all things that players do in the real world. But of course, characters can do things that their players cannot: fight dragons, cast spells, complete quests. The opportunity to engage in fantastical or "unrealistic" story world events is part of what makes role-play compelling.

However, the appeal of games as allowing non-normative engagement with life goes beyond realism; story worlds are not restricted to fantasy settings or otherworldly planes. Often, games are set in worlds that are not markedly different from our own; some even explicitly simulate a real world environment. But the mere fact that player actions during a game occur within the context of a game world frame affords players opportunities during play that are not accessible in a real world environment.

Bleeding at the Brink

Poremba (2007) discusses the notion of "brink games", existing at the brink of the game world-real world border. Brink games, she states, are those games whose rules bump up against the social, behavioral, and physical rules of the real world in ways that afford players "an opportunity to go against the social code" (Poremba, 2007, p. 774). She cites Twister as one such example, in which the real world rules of social distance are temporarily rewritten to allow intimate physical closeness between players; "In real life, only intimate partners get this close. But in Twister, we are only playing the game. Wink." (Poremba, 2007, p. 772). In other words, the Game World frame is an environment that permits players to engage in non-normative behavior without facing the societally expected consequences to that behavior, acting as a sort of safe space for players to act in ways they normally would not be allowed to (Poremba, 2007). The concept of brink play is particularly interesting when applied to role-playing environments, since players do not simply decide character actions but actually enact them, either physically or through language. In a role-playing game that makes use of brink play, a player can experience and enact behaviors that they are not able to engage with in the real world. Understandably, this can have a substantial impact on the player, who, through their character, is able to act on desires and motivations that are otherwise inaccessible to them. This ties into another oft-cited term in games scholarship, known as bleed.

Bowman (2013a) defines bleed as "the phenomenon of the thoughts, feelings, physical state, and relationship dynamics of the player affecting the character and vice versa". Players can experience bleed-in, which is when "out of game factors affect the players experience", and bleed-out, which is when game world events cause emotional reactions that affect the player outside of and after the game (Bowman, 2013a). A significant portion of bleed-out is reported by players as positive; feeling joy when characters achieve complicated tasks, for example, or forming close interpersonal relationships with fellow players as a result of story world character interactions (Bowman, 2013a). However, negative events in the story world also contribute to bleed-out; Bowman (2013a) describes players being unable to sleep, falling into periods of depression, and experiencing grief and isolation as a result of circumstances such as character death or inter-party conflict (Bowman, 2013a). While identification (see 1.2) can also cause similar responses in audiences, as with a movie character or novel protagonist, the specific nature

of role-playing games lends itself to a form of investment in and possessiveness of one's character that is much higher in intensity than with traditional narratives. Kessock (2013) suggests that this is because "the performative aspect of [role-play] translates the game experience from heavily-mediated to one that is more physically and sensorily immediate" (p. 103). When it comes to emotionally heightened or uncomfortable content, a player who "wants to remain within the game does not have the option of turning off the incoming stimuli as you would with a television; they are typically embroiled in the back-and-forth of player interactions, putting the player at the heart of the difficult content" (Kessock, 2013, p. 102). Poremba (2007) has established that this is advantageous, allowing players to undergo non-normative experiences safely, but Kessock (2013) and Bowman (2013a) point out its potential for harm, as this safety hinges on players being capable of keeping the playful frame intact and disengaging from the story world after play stops. The phenomenon of bleed-out in response to negative story world events illustrates that players are not always able to maintain safe distance from the story world (Bowman, 2013a). This begs the question of why TTRPG players choose to engage in emotionally affective story world circumstances; if negative story world events can have a lasting negative impact on a player, shouldn't play consist of only generating "happy" narrative experiences? The answer lies in the question asked at the start of this section: why do we play games?

Positive Negatives

According to Montola (2010), it is necessary to broaden "the scope of playful experiences" beyond assertions that "games are supposed to be fun" (p. 1,8). He explores two high-intensity role-playing games designed to elicit helplessness, disgust, horror, grief, and self-loathing in players; note the use of players here and not characters, as the games are aimed at generating bleed-out (Montola, 2010). Montola (2010) finds that players ultimately appreciate their experiences of these games, despite experiencing intensely embodied negative emotional responses to story world events during and after play. He points out the potential for games to be "simulations of extreme experiences that can elicit physiological stress responses in a gratifying manner", suggesting that fun is not a necessary component of play gratification (p. 8). That is, negative bleed-out does not inherently render a play experience unpleasant, unsafe, or unsuccessful, and, according to Montola (2010), players

may in fact seek out game environments in which they can experience bleed, positive or negative (p. 2).

Catharsis

If we look at emotional role-play as a form of brink play, we see a similar practice to Karelian lament tradition in the designation of a safe space for emotional exploration (Silvonen & Stepanova, 2020). Laments are not only performances, but also emotional outlets for performers. In much of the same way, emotional role-play affords players opportunities to engage in these deeply emotional experiences in a way they cannot in a real world context without being in "real danger": dying, losing a loved one, etc. What the interaction membrane of play does is not only allow but encourage—in some cases require—emotional engagement with events in the game world, while shielding players from the consequences of embodying these emotions, both in terms of safety (i.e. players not being in real physical danger) and in terms of vulnerability (i.e. players not being shamed or made fun of for their emotional responses). Bleed-out does still occur, but as Bowman (2013a) states, "people role-play in order to feel things". That is, bleed may well be an intended consequence of emotional role-play, allowing players to experience the emotional consequences of enacting their brink play behaviors without requiring them to enact these behaviors in the real world.

Bowman (2013a) posits that players experience role-play as cathartic specifically because they "[allow] players to experience deep emotions through the character in a safe setting". She mentions that her research participants, veteran role-players, frequently collect "golden moments", which she defines as experiences during play where "the game seems to crystallize into one distinct pinnacle", cited elsewhere as "intense emotional moments" that players deem "the best part of the game" (Bowman, 2013a; Bowman, 2013b). These are, she clarifies, not all positive emotional experiences; "torture, humiliation, grief, wrath, and defeat" feature in many a golden moment (Bowman, 2013a). Despite generating negative bleed-out and requiring players to roleplay painful, difficult scenarios, negative story world events are still gratifying, cathartic experiences for players. Returning again to Silvonen and Stepanova (2020), another way of conceptualizing this intentional bleed is to look at emotional role-play as a trigger for self-appraisal; embodying and performing affective cues in response to game world events can facilitate change in a player's emotional state, allowing them a safe space in which to engage

their own-bodily and linguistic-affective responses.

Emotional Narratives

The relationship between narrative construction and emotional exploration in a TTRPG context is twofold: first, the safe exploration of intense emotions is made safe through the assertion that these emotional explorations are simply contributions to the narrative, and since narrative construction is an established goal of play, players doing this are "just" playing the game. Simultaneously, the constructed narrative becomes more cathartic and impactful as players engage in more emotionally affective story world events. The goal of emergent narrative construction is to generate an "impactful narrative experience", as established by Aylett and Louchart (2007). This means that the more players generate and engage with emotionally intense story world events, the more successful their gameplay experience. This exploration of emotions, of course, is done through the use of affect during play. The next section will illustrate how performed affect is appraised, affirmed, and sustained during TTRPG actual play.

1.7 Playful Affect

(NB: The following section contains excerpts of actual play content, transcribed according to conversation analytic conventions. A comprehensive overview of these conventions, as well as turn labels and other specifics of annotation, can be found in section 2.3.)

Humor, Disruption, and Modes

An insightful dimension through which to think about affect as it relates to the specific circumstance of TTRPG play is humor, or humorous discourse. As Attardo (2019) states, humor is marked in conversation: it is not the default mode, and interlocuters tend to move back to communicating seriously soon after a humorous utterance is spoken. He defines this as the "least disruption principle", stating that speakers of humorous statements feel the need to "minimize" their conversational violation by returning to the default mode as soon as possible (Attardo, 2019, p. 190). This default, unmarked mode, he states, is "purposeful, goal-oriented, cooperative communication"—telic (Attardo, 2019, p. 191). However, as he highlights, instances of "sustained"

humor", wherein multiple opportunities to return to the serious mode are ignored or forsaken in favor of continuing to communicate humorously, violate the least disruption principle. Humorous utterances, in general, tend to fall under the classification of "paratelic": oriented not towards the goal of effective communication, but rather towards the goal of seeking mirthful pleasure, passing time, forming connections with an interlocutor, etc. (Attardo, 2019, p. 191). Naturally, a question arises as to whether language used during play is telic or paratelic: characters may be communicating in the default mode, but players are playing, engaging in "fun-making" for the purposes of social bonding-at least, this is the assumption in an amateur TTRPG context. When taking the Performance frame of actual play into account, it is possible that the two may be reversed; players could decide to communicate as efficiently and truthfully as possible out-of-character in order to focus audience attention on the game world narrative. That is, character communication may also include paratelic interactions, such as in-game jokes, pranks, or other forms of game world "fun-making" that is not in the default mode. Of relevance here is that humor can occur within any frame: character interaction, player interaction, and/or performer interaction.

Marking and Keying

Attardo (2019) states that humor is "marked", in the sense that speakers "mark" or "key" their humorous interactions through gesture, tone, manner, or other verbal or nonverbal cues (p. 192). The notion of keying is especially relevant to meta-humor interactions during TTRPG play; interactions that are humorous at the player or performer level. When portraying situations that make humorous references to out-of-game phenomena such as celebrities or events, players are required to maintain realism within the Story World frame, but do often key each other and the audience to acknowledge an understanding of the humorous nature of the situation. This kind of meta-humorous interaction, initiated by one PC, is almost always taken up by another, through responsive, realistic speech (in character) and non-linguistic mirth markers such as laughter (out of character) simultaneously. It is understood by all players that there is a distinction between player speech and character speech, and in some cases, players and audience alike are asked to suspend their disbelief by way of imagining the character speech as uninterrupted by the players' interjections. In such instances, players simultaneously occupy the Game World frame—in which they are players humorously engaging with real world phenomena—and the Story World frame—in which their characters are unaware of the humorous context, since being aware of it would violate the rules of irrelevance of the Story World frame.

Virtuous Cycles

Attardo (2019)'s ultimate argument is that the least disruption principle is frequently violated, in instances of what he refers to as "sustained humor" (p. 196). Adopting a cognitive linguistic approach, he reviews established work on mirror neurons, emotional embodiment, and the link between facial expressions and emotion comprehension to conclude that sustained humor occurs as a result of interlocutors responding to the perceived emotional state (mirth) of a speaker in an effort to achieve the same emotional state (Attardo, 2019, p. 204). The observation of laughter in a default mode context, he explains, elicits more laughter, even if this enables the humorous utterance to disrupt the conversation further (Attardo, 2019). He views this as a "virtuous cycle" of humor, which is essentially a feedback loop that sustains itself through continued mirth marking and keying on the part of interlocutors (Attardo, 2019, p. 205). This virtuous cycle is clearly visible in many meta-humor TTRPG interactions. Take for instance the example below, in which Travis makes a joke while in character as FJORD, that is only understandable as humorous outside of the story world.

```
1
      JES: ((pointing)) Beau remember you almost died in that
2
           rug
3
      BEA: yeah
4
      CAD: there is-
5
      JES: that was [so sad]
6
      BEA:
                     [that was ↑weird]
7
      CAD:
                     [there is something] to be said [about not
8
           starting a fire] =
9
      BEA:
                                                       [that was a
10
            good day] ((smiles))
11
      CAD: = in a hh in a h in a closed cave i think i think
12
            perhaps [this is not the place to-]
13
      FJO:
                          [well we didn't start the fire]
14
      Mar: hhhh
15
      Mat: ((shakes head)) h heh
16
           [was it always burning?]
17
      Lia: [shh oh no]
```

```
18
      BEA: since the [world's been turning]
19
      Tra:
                      [uh y(h)EAhp heh yeh]
20
      Lau:
           [ heh heh h heh]
            [((smiles))]
21
      Sam:
22
            [((smiles, shakes head))]
            [get out] GET OUT
23
            [hate you all] (.) never mind. [never mind]
24
      Tal:
25
      Lau:
                                             [>h h hah hah hEH<]
26
      BEA: u(h)m
      Mar: heh heh ((smiles))
27
28
      Lia: ↑ah:::
29
      Tra: ah hUH HUH HEH
```

In this example, the initial humorous utterance is keyed by the complete absence of humorous affect in its delivery; FJORD speaks in character, and in the context of the story world, the conversation is not marked as humorous. In the real world, though, everyone at the table understands it to be a humorous interjection; Travis is quoting from Billy Joel's "We Didn't Start The Fire". Billy Joel (we can presume) does not exist in the story world, and neither does his body of work. Marisha and Matt respond to the joke with exasperated laughter, which is clearly delineated as occurring outside of the story world. According to the least disruption principle, the next story world conversational turn should respond to FJORD's interjection as though it were genuine. What actually happens is that Sam chooses to sustain the humorous utterance by continuing to the next lyric, in character as NOTT. The lyric in question is a declarative statement ("it was always burning"), so Sam chooses to recontextualize it; Nott poses it as a question (again, in the default conversational mode) to Fjord. Liam protests the initial joke and its continuation, and both are dismissed as real world utterances, since BEAU continues the cycle by completing the lyric, delivering it as an answer to NOTT's question. This is the point at which the conversation fully exits the story world, since the following utterances consist of out-of-character laughter and mock anger at Travis, Sam, and Marisha for the joke. Taliesin, whose sentence as CADUCEUS was interrupted by the joke, utters "never mind" without using his character voice, implying to the players (and the audience) that he will not be continuing the sentence that was interrupted, and perhaps that the sentence did not occur in the story world to begin with. Marisha attempts to speak as Beau, in an effort to return the story world conversation to the default mode, but instead "breaks", laughing out

of character and rendering the utterance exempt from story world inclusion.

It is important to make clear that the entire instance of sustained humor occurs as a result of group entextualization; what are distinctly categorized as Billy Joel lyrics in the real world are re-contextualized as spontaneous character speech in the story world, first by *Travis* and then by the other two players who sustain the cycle. The humor lies in the collective knowledge that the story world characters have no reason to be responding to the initial interjection with those specific utterances. Also of note is that this process of entextualization is only made possible through the players' continuous navigation in and out of the magic circle. The dimension of (meta)humor as it pertains to narrative construction will be elaborated on extensively in later chapters.

Cue Shifts and Emotional Modes

This project is concerned with whether Attardo (2019)'s explanation of marking and keying can also be applied to other emotional dimensions in TTRPG play. Any discourse that is particularly influenced, transformed, or impacted by affect results in a shift away from the default mode, which should trigger the least disruption principle. Instead, preliminary observation suggests that a similar virtuous cycle takes place. An emotional situation triggers emotion, which is expressed through affect, which is then appraised by players as emotional, leading to players responding with a similar expression of affect, allowing the conversation to shift into a paratelic, emotional mode, until the feedback loop fails to sustain itself (in-game, until the characters' circumstances are resolved or addressed). This movement into the emotional mode is also a process of of entextualization, in that a player's performed affect is extracted from the existing context (generally, a marked intrusion in the default mode) and recontextualized as the trigger for a mode shift. This virtuous cycle is what facilitates safe emotional play; players appraise and affirm each other's affective cues, normalizing and legitimizing their presence in the story world. Returning to Trester (2012)'s work, players' ability to accurately perceive the mode shift and respond to it in character is part of the implicit rule negotiation that makes up successful gameplay; failure to do so may result in story world consequences for a character whose affective cue is ignored. In the following example, the party has just survived a neardeadly combat encounter with a dragon, and are celebrating having made it through alive, but JESTER, who was the closest to dying during the fight,

does not join in on the celebration.

```
eventually everyone [makes their way out of
 1
 2
            the sphere]
 3
      JES:
                                 [HH .shih >a hh ahhuh h<
 4
            ((hangs head))]
 5
      TWI: you \footnote{\text{guys}} (.) i \footnote{\text{DID}} it i [killed the dragon]
 6
            all by myself!
 7
      JES:
                                       [((hides face in
8
           hands))]
9
      BEA: [what?]
10
      JES:
11
      NOT: [what?] (.) no no the dragon was alive we
12
            just left (.) its-
           °aw may:an°
13
      TWI:
14
           [awh HOH HOh ho] ho ho ho ho
15
            [a \text{heh ha hah heh]
      Mar: heh [heh heh .hhh]
16
17
                18
           heh<]
19
      BEA: ((looks at Jester)) [\piaehh]
20
      JES:
                                 [((removes hands from
21
            face, sits up))]
22
      NOT: did you really?
23
      TWI: i ↑really did
24
      BEA: aw: jessie
25
      JES: ((looks at Beau))
26
      Tra: yeah yeah ro(h)ll [that shit caduceus]
                               [°.hh hh uhmm°]
27
      BEA:
      JES: °°.pt °°
28
29
      CAD: god damn
30
      Mat: a [HAH hah hah hah]
31
      Sam:
              [\text{heh heh heh]
           ((dances while smiling))
32
      JES: ((smiles at Twiggy))
```

Considering that crosstalk is commonplace at the table and that a conversation between TWIGGY and the other characters was taking place, it is likely that the players collectively missed JESTER's affective cue keying the mode shift in the wake of crosstalk and post-combat conversation (first the sobbing in line 2, followed by covering her face in her hands from 4-15). As a result, by the time BEAU responds to the cue (the low "aehh" utterance, serving as a sort of secondary attempt at a mode shift), JESTER has begun suppressing her affective response. Note that this does not render affective

engagement with the scene *impossible*, but the missed mode shift does affect the narrative of the story world. If someone had responded to JESTER right away, for example, perhaps the scene would have continued with her crying, confiding in the others about her fear, and so on. Instead, the narrative shifts to focus on TWIGGY's successful kill shot on the dragon, with JESTER herself smiling at the celebratory nature of the conversation. This resulted in a conversation in a later session between BEAU and JESTER about the latter's inclination towards hiding her emotions, so affective engagement with the content of the scene was still possible after the fact. To that end, the degree to which affective mode shift triggers are correctly appraised, affirmed, and responded to in the story world influences the resulting emergent narrative, and subsequently impacts play.

1.8 Tying it all Together

Taking all of these perspectives into account, a relational framework of TTRPG play emerges that can help us better understand the aims of this research. As highlighted in Fig. 2 below, the *Magic Circle*, *Performed Affect*, and *Narrative Construction* are all interrelated factors involved in the process of TTRPG play. The magic circle is what allows the safe exploration, through brink play, of intense emotion, which is demonstrated through performed affective cues at the table. This performed affect may generate self-appraisal in one or several players, which can be safely enacted and embodied during play; players collectively and implicitly decide whether specific affective cues will be treated as existing in or outside of the magic circle, in accordance with the Story World Frame.

Initial affective cues trigger a shift in conversational mode, and these cues are appraised, affirmed, and responded to in the story world, beginning a virtuous cycle of affective response that continues until the story world circumstances resolve or demand a shift back to the default mode. This performed affect is employed in service of the goal of narrative construction, used to enhance the impact and success of the narrative. A successful contribution to enhancing the constructed narrative is considered a successful play experience, affirming to players that the magic circle can effectively function as a safe space for emotion experiences and resulting in player gratification. This affirmation then facilitates further exploration as play continues.

This selective transformation also applies to non-affective player actions,

which are at times fully representative of character actions, at times only partially, and at times exist entirely outside of the story world narrative; a clear example is in meta-humor interactions during play, and other such entextualizations. The decision of whether or not a particular player action should be interpreted as occurring in the story world is made implicitly, through the continuous navigation of the player-character boundary delineated by the magic circle.

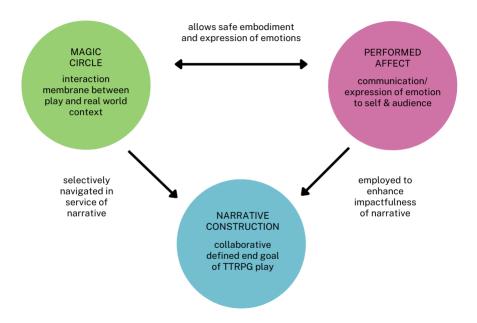


Figure 1.2: Relational Framework of TTRPG Play

The goal of this research, broadly, is to examine how players engage in creative language use to interface with these three factors. In other words, this study investigates player usage of language as an "interactional resource" in achieving collaborative narrative construction; this is investigated with regards to how players employ creative language use to navigate the magic circle and entextualize real-world information within the story world, and how players appraise and perform linguistic affect during play to enhance

the impact of the narrative being created.

Chapter 2

Methods

2.1 Introduction & Hypotheses

In line with the research goal established at the end of Chapter 1, the following research question has been formulated for this project: how do TTRPG players employ creative language use across the relational framework of Magic Circle, Performed Affect, and Narrative Construction? To explore this question, three hypotheses have been formulated, outlined below. All three hypotheses explore the influence of players' creative language use on the story world narrative created during play.

- H1. Players employ language as an interactional resource during play in order to achieve the collective end goal of collaborative narrative construction.
- H2. Players use language to navigate the magic circle and entextualize real-world information within the game world whenever necessary.
- H3. Players embody and perform linguistic and non-linguistic affect during play to enhance the constructed narrative.

This project will adopt a conversation-analytic approach to examine excerpts of TTRPG actual play sessions with regard to these hypotheses. H1 is concerned with whether or not we can observe creative language use in service of narrative construction during play. H2 then looks deeper at the player-character divide and how the interactional membrane is navigated through player language use during play. Lastly, H3 allows for a closer look

at how, when, and why affect is performed during play. This chapter will detail the methodological processes involved in this research, expanding on the framework of conversation analysis, the process of data selection, and transcription practices.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The excerpts presented in this research are transcribed in accordance with conversation analysis (CA) standards. Conversation analysis is an analytical framework ascribed to Emanuel Schegloff, who first developed it alongside Harvey Sacks in 1973 (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). They describe CA as "a naturalistic observational discipline that [deals] with the details of social action(s) rigorously, empirically, and formally" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 289-290). This is done through, as the name suggests, the study of conversational interaction, and the actions carried out through conversational turns at talk. Foundational work in CA has established how turns at talk are constructed in conversation, and how these formulations are interrupted and made complicated by non-default conversational modes.

Schegloff (2015) identifies four general problems in what he calls "talk-in-interaction"—conversation—and puts forward solutions for addressing and accounting for each of them in analysis (p. 6). I will present an overview of these points and how they relate to the object of research at hand.

Turn-Taking

Conversational turns are made up of turn-constructional units, or TCUs; interlocutors structure and organize conversation by taking turns, generally in such a way that one speaker talks at a time (Schegloff, 2015). However, the understanding of when a turn is over, when the next turn should start, and how this influences the resulting interaction, are complicating factors in navigating talk-in-interaction. In "ordinary talk" (that is, talk not otherwise mediated by a Chair or an explicit conversational hierarchy), these turn-taking boundaries are implicitly put forward in an interaction and expected to be followed. These boundaries—turn order, turn length, continuity, etc.—are not fixed, and, as Schegloff (2015) points out, they are not cross-culturally universal. He gives the example of conversational practices between urban and rural interlocutors often are perceived as excessively slow and hostile by

the former, and excessively rude and aggressive by the latter; this is because conversational norms in rural areas tend towards longer pauses after a turn for the processing and "taking in" of information before a response, whereas urban areas perceive these pauses as "silences", associated with an inability or unwillingness to engage with the statement being posed (Schegloff, 2015, p. 8). To address this, it is necessary to bear in mind the "differences in the values of variables" affecting turn-taking practices for various speakers and hearers (Schegloff, 2015, p. 7).

In the context of TTRPG play, turn-taking rules are mediated by story world context; while all players at the table are permitted to speak as players, story world conversation is limited to the players whose characters are present in the relevant story world environment. A conversation between two characters while the other characters are asleep, for example, would not allow for a player whose character is asleep to take a turn. This does not mean that these players cannot or do not speak while these story world conversations are occurring; rather, this speech is omitted from the story world relevance according to the rules of irrelevance and transformation associated with the Story World frame. As a result, this irrelevant speech is interpreted as player speech, and can convey a player's reaction to a story world conversation, but does not affect the narrative. Crosstalk, which is the phenomenon of several players engaging in (multiple) conversations at once, violates turn-taking rules and yet occurs frequently during play and story world conversation, as it does during ordinary talk; generally, it is addressed and "repaired" fairly quickly after the initial violation, in that one speaker's utterance eventually dominates the interaction (Schegloff, 2015, p. 7). How Story World frame rules of transformation and irrelevance apply to instances of crosstalk can be deduced by examining which utterances players and characters attend and respond to.

Sequential Organization

The second problem identified in CA literature is the question of how successive turns are interpreted as being "coherent" with prior turns, and how to categorize these turns and the conversations they belong to as "courses of action" implied and made clear through talk (Schegloff, 2015, p. 8). What is meant by (courses of) action here is the variety of *things people do* in conversational interaction: assessing, proposing, asking, rejecting, among others (Schegloff, 2015). Schegloff (2015) proposes that conversational actions are

organized on the basis of small "kernel forms" of organization that offer a framework through which to understand the larger conversations they belong to (p. 8). The most relevant one in his and this work is the "adjacency-pair-based" understanding of sequential turns (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). The smallest unit of sequential conversation is two turns long, and consists of an adjacency pair with one initiating turn—asking, offering, announcing—and one response turn that can align with or reject the initiating turn Schegloff (2015).

```
1 A: apparently there's gonna be a snow day
2 tomorrow
3 B: oh that'd be nice
```

Once the first or initiating adjacency pair is identified for a conversation, Schegloff (2015) posits, the action trajectory of that pair can be identified, and the conversational turns that remain can be understood in relation to that initial action. That is, continuation of a sequence after an initial initiating-response pair almost always expands or extends the initial course of action through further talk, as seen below:

```
4 A: yeah i think its long overdue
5 B: could do with a day off
6 A: yep
```

An adjacency pair can also be preceded by a pre-announcement, which can in of itself demand a response, constituting another adjacency pair, such as in lines 1-2 below, or it can contain an insertion, as in lines 6-7, which interrupt the pair formed by line 5 and line 8.

```
1
           dyou hear about tomorrow?
2
     B:
          no whats tomorrow
3
          apparently there's gonna be a snow day
4
          tomorrow
5
     B:
          oh okay (.) what's with this weather?
6
          whaddaya mean?
     A:
7
           it oughta be warmer by now
          its supposed to clear up next week
```

In this way, adjacency pairs allow us to consolidate multiple sequential turns into the courses of action they belong to (first speaker A's course of action to inform B about the snow day, then speaker B's course of action to discuss the unusual weather). As for the research at hand, story world conversations or "scenes" have objectives, as do Trester (2012)'s performance games, and

the course of action carried out by a speaker in story world conversation can also be determined by identifying an adjacency pair and deciding how further talk aligns with or differs from the initial action trajectory. Story world scenes are generally both initiated through character speech, which we can classify as an initiating turn, and marked or keyed by player speech, which is also an initiating turn; an example can be seen below.

```
1 Lau: I walk over to Caduceus
2 Mat: ((nods))
3 (1.7)
4 Mar: I'll join
5 Mat: ((looks at Marisha, nods))
6 JES: um (.) hell\(^1\)o:o
7 (2.3)
8 CAD: hey
```

Here, three adjacency pairs can be identified; 1-2, in which Laura explicitly keys an impending story world conversation to Matt, the GM, who acknowledges this; 4-5, in which Marisha explicitly keys her character's proximity and presence in the conversation to Matt, who once again acknowledges and accepts this; and 5-7, in which JESTER greets CADUCEUS in the story world, and he responds with a greeting. In the first two, the course of action can be defined as the players requesting to perform a certain action (taking part in a conversation) and the GM allowing it. In the third, which is a story world interaction, the course of action is one character inviting the other to take part in a conversation, and the other accepting the invitation. In our analysis, it is necessary to delineate shifts from game world to story world, as the courses of action entailed by talk-in-interaction in both contexts vary widely. Identifying the relevant adjacency pairs will also allow for the identification of the specific affective cues serving as mode shift indicators for other players, helping to determine the "start" of a particular course of (affective) action, and, upon identifying an adjacency pair that indicates a shift back into the default mode, the end of an affective scene.

Trouble & Repair

Trouble refers to conversational difficulty, in production and perception; misspeaking, mumbling, and mishearing all fall under this category (Schegloff, 2015). The "trouble problem" is the consideration of how trouble is resolved when it occurs in talk-in-interaction, without halting or compromising the

initial action trajectory (Schegloff, 2015, p. 11). Schegloff (2015)'s answer is in the organization of practices aimed at resolving talk trouble, deemed repair. This is fairly self-explanatory: repair is any attempt at resolving conversational trouble, whether through repeating oneself, asking for clarification, or waiting (such as in cases where a speaker cannot find the word they are looking for) until the trouble resolves itself (Schegloff, 2015). A large majority of trouble is repaired either in the same TCU (called "same-turn repair") or immediately following it ("transition space repair") (Schegloff, 2015, p. 12). If, as in some cases, trouble is not correctly identified and resolved, this can lead to the interaction being indefinitely "stalled", interrupting the intended course of action with unpredictable consequences (Schegloff, 2015, p. 12). Repeated failed attempts at repair, for instance, can lead to a speaker becoming frustrated and ending a conversation ("Nevermind"), and repeated failures to notice or identify trouble can lead to mutual misunderstandings and a loss of the shared reality usually shared by interlocutors (Schegloff, 2015).

In a TTRPG play context, unidentified and unresolved repair has similarly unpredictable consequences for the story world narrative, where a scene interrupted or derailed by talk trouble may be discarded from the narrative entirely, or unintentionally included in the narrative (if a player's language is incorrectly or inappropriately interpreted as character speech, for instance). At times, trouble that is only troublesome in the story world, such as when a conversation makes reference to a phenomenon or thing that does not exist in the story world, will be facetiously "identified" for the purposes of role-playing its repair and resolution, as a way of enacting an instance of meta-humor by emulating "realistic" story world interaction.

Word Selection

Schegloff (2015) makes clear that falling into the fallacy of assuming that talk is composed of usages and phrases that are employed because they are "correct" is a disservice to the process of composing and designing an utterance (p. 13). Utterances are formulated in the context and environment in which conversation takes place, not simply physically, but sociopragmatically; what is most important to consider with regard to composition in talk is not "correctness", but "relevance", and what actions the utterances are designed to embody (Schegloff, 2015, p. 13). There are always, Schegloff (2015) states, utterances that are equally correct as the one that is employed, so any

examination of the words and usages employed in talk should be primarily concerned with how this selection impacts the intended course of action. His elaboration on the topic is also interesting to consider in dialogue with Trester (2012) and Wetherell (2012)'s perspectives on creative language use:

The elements of the talk are selected and deployed to accomplish actions and to do so recognizably; and recipients attend the talk to find what the speaker is *doing* by saying it in *those* words, in *that* way. (2015, p. 15; emphasis original)

The theoretical framework of this research hinges on viewing language as a tool for communicating several things: changes in emotional state, shifts in conversational mode, movement across frames, processes of entextualization, and so on. The above quote highlights the universality of this view, of language as a tool for indicating and embodying a course of action or actions. For the purposes of this research, it is necessary to keep in mind the multiple frames being navigated across, the conversational modes at play, and the interactional membrane of the magic circle. In addition to this, it will be assumed that recipients behave in the way Schegloff (2015) outlines above; attending to the talk, paying attention, as Trester (2012) would say, to rule changes in how to navigate the talk at hand.

CA & DA: A Comparative Example

Before proceeding to a discussion of the research design, it is perhaps necessary to outline why CA was chosen as an analytical framework for this research. More specifically, it is clearly possible to investigate TTRPG play language through discourse analysis (DA), as demonstrated by Montola (2008), Bowman (2013a), and Sridharan (2022). These works have been able to employ discourse-analytic approaches to generate rich insight into how language is used during TTRPG play, so it stands to reason that this research could very well employ the same.

There are a number of distinct advantages offered by a conversation analytic approach that I will highlight here. The clearest way to illustrate this is through the use of an example. Take for instance the meta-humor excerpt presented in section 1.7, repeated here in DA format.

```
1
      Lau: Beau remember you almost died in that rug?
 2
      Mar: Yeah
 3
      Tal: There is something to be said about not
 4
           starting a fire in a- in a- in a closed cave,
 5
           I think perhaps this is not the place to -
 6
      Tra: Well we didn't start the fire
 7
      Mar: (laughs)
 8
      Mat: (laughs)
 9
      Sam: Was it always burning?
10
      Lia: Shh, oh no.
      Mar: Since the world's been turning.
11
12
      Tra: Yep! (laughs)
13
      Lau: (laughs)
14
      Lia: Get out, get out!
15
      Tal: I hate you all. Never mind. Never mind.
16
      Lau: (laughs)
17
      Mar: Um...(laughs)
18
      Tra: (laughs loudly)
```

There are a few things immediately noticeable here. First, there is no reliable way to differentiate between player and character speech using a discourse-analytic framework. Secondly, no non-linguistic information can be conveyed in detail: "(laughs)" does not allow for distinct observations to be made about the nature and length of the laughter, and information about eye contact, nonverbal signals such as nodding, and non-obvious gestures cannot be denoted. Speaking of length, the pauses between and during turns, as well as overlapping turns, are not made explicit, meaning that a reader could reasonably infer that all of this happened sequentially, with every new utterance only beginning after the last utterance was over. A reader would also have to guess at speed, intonation, pitch, and volume. From this transcript, we cannot draw conclusions about what is occurring in the story world, which utterances are discarded from the narrative, and what modes of conversation are in play. Compare this to the CA transcript below:

```
JES: ((pointing)) Beau remember you almost died in
1
2
            that rug
3
      BEA: yeah
4
      CAD: there is-
5
      JES: that was [so sad]
6
      BEA:
                     [that was \text{weird}]
7
      CAD:
                     [there is something] to be said
8
            [about not starting a fire] =
9
      BEA: [that was a good day] ((smiles))
10
      CAD: = in a hh in a h in a closed cave i think i
            think perhaps [this is not the place to-]
11
12
      FJO:
                          [well we didn't start the fire]
13
      Mar: hhhh
14
      Mat:
           ((shakes head)) h heh
15
      NOT: [was it always burning?]
      Lia: [shh oh no]
16
17
      BEA: since the [world's been turning]
18
      Tra:
                      [uh y(h)EAhp heh yeh]
19
      Lau: [ heh heh h heh]
20
      Sam: [((smiles))]
21
      Ash: [((smiles, shakes head))]
      Lia: [get out] GET OUT
22
23
      Tal: [hate you all] (.) never mind. [never mind]
24
      Lau:
                                            [>h h hah hah
25
           hEH<]
26
      BEA: u(h)m
      Mar: heh heh ((smiles))
27
28
      Lia: ↑ah:::
29
      Tra: ah hUH HUH HEH
```

First, since attention is paid to differences in pitch, articulation, and volume, we can use this to form a framework for differentiating between player and character speech (elaborated on in section 2.3). Second, non-linguistic information such as gestures, eye contact, and shaking one's head are all clearly indicated. Pauses and pause lengths are described, where and when overlap occurs is clearly visible, and simultaneous reactions to information (such as lines 20-24 occurring in reaction to BEAU's utterance in line 18) are correctly presented as occurring simultaneously. Variance in pitch, volume, speed, and articulation, such as laughing speech, stuttering, and whispering, are all marked. Given that this research is concerned with both performed affect and navigation between the magic circle, critical attention to non-linguistic information, silence, and turn-taking is a required element of the analytical approach. In the example above, this attention allows us to draw conclusions

regarding entextualization, magic circle navigation, narrative modification, and performed affect. These conclusions would not be accessible or reliable in a discourse analysis context. To that end, this research project will make use of a conversation-analytic framework to evaluate the research question and hypotheses outlined at the end of this chapter.

2.3 Data

Excerpt Selection

Critical Role is a TTRPG that makes use of Dungeons & Dragons as its game system. Episodes are livestreamed on the popular streaming website, Twitch, and then made publicly available on YouTube shortly thereafter. Critical Role consists of three longform campaigns, two completed and one currently running. Both completed campaigns consist of over 100 episodes of gameplay, each several hours in length. For this reason, it is necessary to make a selection of data for inclusion within the research. There are four emotional dimensions to be investigated: humor, grief, joy, and anger. Two excerpts of play will be selected for analyzing each of these emotional dimensions. Since, as Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019) identify, affect is performed in response to the appraisal of a situation as requiring an appropriate affective response, identifying game world events that correspond to these affective responses should generate a number of potential excerpts. In other words, while attempting to determine whether or not a scene is "sad" is a subjective and unreliable measure, examining the narrative for emotionally impactful moments allows us to then examine the scenes associated with or immediately following those moments. In accordance with Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019)'s work, we can expect the following:

- Players appraising a situation as one of conflict should respond with angry affect.
- Players appraising a situation as one of loss should respond with mournful affect.
- Players appraising a situation as one of resolution or catharsis should respond with joyful affect.

• Players appraising a situation as one of levity should respond with humorous affect.

TTRPG play is rife with emotionally turbulent circumstances; character death, romance, confrontation, secret character information being brought to light, and so on and so forth. Accordingly, exploring the narrative for moments of **conflict**, **loss**, and **resolution** and transcribing the occurrence or discovery of these moments during gameplay generates a selection of data with which we can examine player affect. After viewing the entirety of the two completed campaigns, a representative sample of two game world moments associated with each emotional dimension were identified and transcribed, displayed in the table below.

C:E	Dimension	Context
2:30	Grief	Loss: Jester and Fjord, newly freed from having been captured, are informed by the rest of their party that another character, Molly, died trying to rescue them.
1:69	Grief	Loss: As part of a ritual attempting to resurrect Percy, Vex pleads with his corpse to return to her, confessing her love.
2:21	Anger	Conflict: Beau confronts Caleb over what she perceives as his projection of his own traumas onto innocent people, berating his behavior.
1:85	Anger	Conflict: Scanlan, fed up with the way the group's actions have impacted his relationship with his daughter, calls them out for never caring about who he really is.
1:58	Joy	Resolution: Following a harrowing battle, Gilmore reveals to Vax that his armor has the ability to sprout wings, and Vax takes Gilmore on a victory flight to thank him.
2:75	Joy	Resolution: Fjord, faced with a crisis of faith, is reassured by Caduceus that he falls under the protection and guidance of a new deity.

Table 2.1: Emotional Story World Moments

Instances of levity prove difficult to identify within the game world narrative, since, as highlighted in the previous chapter, a significant portion of humorous interactions at the table stem from circumstances that are humorous in the real world but unmarked or at least not overtly mirthful in the game world. For this reason, excerpts conveying humor were selected based on the presence of several humor cues, namely laughter, and the presence of Attardo (2019)'s virtuous cycle. Since humorous affect and its performance in the play space serves as a blueprint of sorts for the other emotional dimensions being examined, as presented in section 1.7, two excerpts, one each of meta-humorous and humorous contexts, were taken from each campaign as a representative sample for this dimension.

Transcription

Scenes were transcribed according to conversation analytic conventions as outlined by Jefferson (2004). Further additions to the transcripts were made in order to accurately notate specific affective cues, such as sniffs, wobbly voice, whispers, and sobs, in line with Hepburn (2004)'s work on transcribing emotional expression. Transcription was done in LaTeX with the use of Walker (2022)'s convtran.sty package. For the purpose of H2, a distinction was made between player speech and character speech whenever possible, delineated by the presence or absence of a player's "character voice"; a character voice can consist of a noticeable and drastic difference from a player's natural voice, such as an accent, or can be subtle, such as with a change in pitch, prosody, speed, or tone. While some players may choose to not employ a character voice, all of the players in the relevant data do use character voices. These player-character distinctions were marked in the transcript as changes in turn, even if they might be classified in a discourse-analytic framework as belonging to the same speech act or utterance; this is because these "breaks", such as in lines 27-28 of the example in section 2.2, interrupt character speech in the story world and signify movement(s) across the magic circle. In other words: the delineation of turns and their takers must make explicit what occurs in the story world and what occurs outside of it. A table of turn-taker labels and their corresponding characters and players can be found in the appendix.

Chapter 3

Data & Analysis

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Humor

3.2.1 Game World Humor

The scenes below are both excerpts where a significant portion of what makes the scene humorous is found in a game world context, as opposed to a story world context. While the data selection for the other emotional dimensions relies on the identification of emotional moments in the story world, it is important to analyze scenes of this nature, wherein the emotion (here, humor) is better or best understood in the game world, in order to gain insights about how players navigate between frames during play and how this navigation impacts the story world narrative.

Campaign 2, Episode 38 $(1:59:07-2:00:57^1)$

The following excerpt is a scene in which JESTER, a PC, talks to JAMEDI, an NPC, while they are both taking watch as the rest of the group is asleep. JESTER asks many questions about JAMEDI'S life prior to accompanying the group, which JAMEDI reluctantly answers; JESTER is known as a talkative, cheerful character, whereas JAMEDI is stoic and not particularly forthcoming.

¹The timestamps listed here are used to indicate the start and end of each excerpt in the corresponding episode's YouTube video.

```
1
      JES: >what were you doing before you were working for
           her?<
2
      (.)
 3
 4
      JAM: working for other people
 5
      JES: what's the craziest thing you've ever done
 6
           °hahh[hhh°]
7
      Lia:
                 [°heh heh°] ((covers face))
      Mar: °hm(h)m°
8
 9
      Sam: ((smiles))
10
      Tal: ((smiles))
11
      Mat: the eyes kinda narrow at you
12
      (2.1)
13
      JAM: i was the fonly survivor to the escaping hh singular
14
           hh .h mines (0.8) to the north area of the uh (.)
15
           continent .h how far have you traveled outside of the
           empire?
16
17
      JES: hoo: well im from the menagerie coast actually
18
      JAM: ↓alright
19
      JES: yah (.) so (.) that far
20
      JAM: hm (.) .hh i have delved (.) into a few: ruins (1.2)
21
           i have uh h been lucky enough to .hh survive by
22
           working alone. i have seen .h h many friends >fall
23
           and disappear< (1.2) but (.) i have made my way
24
      JES: ((smiles))
```

In lines 6-10, multiple players whose characters are not awake during the scene react to the question that JESTER asks in line 5 as though it is a humorous utterance. Line 5 does not contain any affective cues that would indicate or mark it as such, so we can infer that its humor comes from story or game world context; here, that JESTER considers it appropriate to ask someone she doesn't know very well an "intense" question, especially when JAMEDI is known for keeping to himself. Lines 6-10 are not extant in the story world, and so do not interrupt the story world narrative. Their conversation continues in the default conversational mode, with JAMEDI asking a question (an initiating line, in line 15) and JESTER answering it (a response line, in 17). JAMEDI then elaborates on his response to JESTER'S initial question. The non-participant players in this scene do not sustain their humorous game world responses, perhaps because JAMEDI entertained the question in line 5 as a genuine, default mode utterance.

```
25
      JAM: what's the craziest thing \(\frac{1}{2}\) you have seen?
26
      JES: ever? in my life?
27
      (.)
28
      JAM:
            .pt ↑sure
29
      Tra: [uh HA Ha hah]
30
            [((blows raspberry, leans back in chair))] oh shit
31
            I've seen some <crazy> shit°
32
      Sam: °heh [heh°]
33
      Tal:
                 [°hhhehhehh°]
                 [°ehee°]
34
      Mar:
35
      (1.4)
36
            ((leans forward)) this one time (1.1) i saw a bug (.)
37
            carrying a piece of bread that was like (.) five
38
            times its size
39
      Mar: ehe[hehehehehe]
               [((chokes on drink)) ptheheh]
40
41
      Tra:
               [((smiles))]
42
      JES: [and he was carrying it UP (.) stairs (.) like (.)
43
            like up]
44
      Mar: [°hehehehehehe]
      JES: and then he would turn and then he would go [up and
45
            then he would turn]
46
47
      Tra:
                                                           [°hah hah
48
            hahah ha:°]
```

Here, Jamedi begins a new adjacency pair in line 25, but Jester's response, asking for clarification, indicates trouble, which Jamedi attempts to repair in line 28. This response indicates confusion as to why there was trouble at all, and this confusion is met with a game world response of laughter from Travis. Following Jester's utterance in lines 30-31, which can best be interpreted as a preamble before completing the adjacency pair, we can observe more humorously affective responses in the game world, from Marisha, Taliesin, and Sam, who are all once again responding to Jester's "unusual" utterances: swearing, blowing a raspberry, and responding in a tone that is inconsistent with Jamedi's calm, measured speech. These utterances are not by default disallowed in the default mode, but they are, once again, inconsistent: they are marked, and this is confirmed by both Jamedi's responses (confusion, in line 28, and silence, in lines 30-36) and the non-participant players' responses.

Line 36 serves as a cue for a mode shift into the humorous mode, but it is unclear whether JESTER, in the story world, perceives or intends it as such: she answers the question posed in line 25, completing the proposed adjacency pair, but does so with a story that, by most accounts, would not be catego-

rized as "the craziest thing [she's] ever seen". This is a humorous utterance specifically given the context of JAMEDI'S response to a similar question in lines 13-15 and 20-23, which detailed ruins, survival following disaster, and the loss of several friends, and the context of the broader story world narrative, in which JESTER has experienced many of the same circumstances as JAMEDI has conveyed. Despite this, JESTER chooses to respond with a story about a bug carrying a piece of bread. This results in several instances of game world laughter and mirth, but JESTER does not perform humorous affect herself; to her, she is simply telling a story, and the choice to tell one that may be seen as "juvenile" is implied to be intentional. Yet again, the players' mirthful responses do not interrupt the story world narrative, but JAMEDI'S subsequent response does indicate that the mode shift has been picked up on and affirmed, as seen below:

```
49
      Mar: ((leans on Liam, laughing))
50
            <will wonders ever ↓cease>
51
      Tra: uh HA HA HA [HUH .h hA HA HA]
52
      JES:
                         [((throws hands up, nodding))]
53
      Mar: eh heh heh heh
54
      Lia:
            °hee heh hh°
55
      Tra: uh huh >hah heh huh huh hah ha< \text{heh}
56
      Mar: hhuh::: [heh heh >heheheh<]</pre>
57
      JAM:
                     [im going to concentrate]
58
      Sam: hah hah heh heh
59
      Tra: †ah huh huh heh ha
60
           on our surroundings for the remainder of our shift
61
            [((slow claps))] hehe heh heh
62
            [if you do not mind]
      JES: ((nods)) °me too°
63
```

Jamedi's utterance in line 50 is observably sarcastic, as seen in the slow speed and falling tone where a rising tone is expected (indicating that his question is not meant to be read as genuine). This response serves two functions: it continues the story world's conversational course of action, by responding to Jester's story, and it serves to sustain the humorous mode within the game world, leading to seven mirthful utterances in response. Worth noting is that even as the players in the game world respond humorously, Jester's gesture in line 52 implies that she has not perceived Jamedi's response as sarcastic; this in turn indicates that Jester does genuinely think that her story qualifies as a valid and appropriate response to Jamedi's question, heightening the humorous impact of the scene in the

game world. That is, the non-participant players are not simply responding to the inappropriateness of certain aspects of JESTER'S speech in this scene, but to the fact that JESTER presumably does not perceive herself as acting or speaking inappropriately at any point in the scene.

What is important to note during this scene is that non-participant players are not barred from interacting with and responding to the story world narrative; their interaction is simply limited in its ability to influence or heavily impact the narrative itself. In terms of affect, Jester's speech contains many indicators of what I call naive affect, which is the categorization for those story world utterances that are performed "straight", even or especially in cases where the player of a character has access to information that the character does not. JESTER claiming the bug story as the craziest thing she has ever seen, for example, as well as her conversational mode transgressions, are examples of naive affect because Laura is aware of what utterances are allowed and recognized as belonging to the default mode, and because she is also aware of the many experiences Jester has had in the story would that would be more readily assessed as "crazy". The performed naive affect is what makes the scene funny in the game world, enhancing the narrative by providing non-participant players, who serve as audience members in this scene, with utterances they can perceive as humorous.

Campaign 1, Episode 85 (3:04:27-3:05:08)

The next excerpt also relies on performed naive affect to generate a humorous game world scenario. This scene is set in Campaign 1, meaning that the players are playing different characters that in the previous excerpt. In this scene, the group meets Taryon, Sam's new character, for the first time. This is the same session in which his previous character, SCANLAN, has just left the group following an angry outburst (a scene that is analyzed later in this chapter). Taryon is rich, pompous, and condescending, which none of the group likes, and early into their interactions, he makes a critical mistake by referring to Vex, Laura's half-elf character, as the "little elf girl". As the rest of the group knows, Vex despises being belittled, and patronizing her is always a bad idea. Sam, having played SCANLAN for over 80 sessions, also knows this, but Taryon, his new character, does not.

```
1
      TAR: I (.) .h I can grant powers to <many people> (.) for
2
            instance (0.5) YOU (.) little elf girl
3
      Tra:
            . HH
4
      TAR: what's [your name]
5
                     [\frac{\tau^{\circ}}{hhahhhh^{\circ}}] \circ I(h) 'm gonna move over [here\circ]
6
                                                                 [oh:::]
      Mar:
7
      Tra:
            ((moves away from Laura))
8
      Mat: ^^ommheh heh heh heh heh heh
9
            ((smiles)) ^{\circ\circ}I'm moving^{\circ\circ}((moves away from Laura))
10
            [\text{hell:: no]
11
      Mat: [ \tauh heh heh heh]
12
           [((waves arms around happily))]
13
      Lau: [((opens mouth, glaring))]
14
      Mar: oh(h)h ho ho ho
15
      Mat: \tag{he: >hueh hm(h)m mhm he<
      Mar: oh [ho ho ho ho hoh no]
16
17
                [£I take it back I like him£]
18
      VAX: wai- wait wait I'm [stealthing]
19
      Mat:
                                  [flames] (.) on the side of my
20
```

Taryon's utterance in line 2 is immediately appraised as a conversational transgression by the other players at the table, leading to player responses in line 3 and lines 5-15. This totals thirteen humorous responses to Taryon's utterance, but since lines 10-13 are simultaneous, this does not yet violate the least disruption principle; the players are simply responding to the initial humorous utterance. The first definite story world response to Taryon's question is from Percy in line 17, who, in laughing voice, recants his earlier judgement of Taryon and says that he likes him, perhaps implying that his bravery in speaking to Vex in this way makes him likeable. Vex has still not verbally reacted in the story world, and it is difficult to delineate whether line 13, for example, is a story world or game world action. Following Percy, Vax declares that he is "stealthing", a common phrase in a Dungeons & Dragons context to mean "making a stealth check", otherwise known as hiding or fading into the shadows.

Line 18 is also an instance of a player using their character voice and the first person perspective to describe their character's actions, which we would expect to be disallowed or result in trouble for the other players. Worth noting is that *Travis* and *Liam's* utterances in lines 5 and 8 refer to their physical proximity to *Laura* in the game world and performance frames, implying that *Laura* herself will be angered by Taryon's story world utterance. However, with his utterance in line 18, VAX in the story world is mirroring

Liam's game world actions, physically moving away from VEX out of an exaggerated sense of fear of her response. This cues a story world shift into the humorous mode, since the characters in the story world are reacting in the same way as the players in the game world. Matt also makes reference to Laura's anger with a meta-humorous reference, quoting from the movie $Clue^2$.

```
21
      Lia: with adv(h)antage ((rolls dice))
22
      Mat: fi- heaving breaths
23
            yeah [hueh heh heh ha ha]
      Mar:
24
      Tal:
                 [melting]
25
      Mar: Keyleth uses a [fog cantrip] and =
26
                            [hwhat did I g-]
      Lia:
27
      Mar: = just [fades into the: uh the alleyway]
28
      VAX:
                   [>I rolled a thirty three on stealth<] I'm
            GONE
29
30
      Lau: HA HA HAH
      Mat: whooshhh ((gestures for Vax disappearing))
31
32
      Mar: a \taghtarthe heh heh
33
      PER: and I just hex into the shadows
      Mat: a heh heh ho ↑HA
34
35
      Mar: .HHH >it's like w- in a Western< when they cut BACK
            to the tavern and [everyone's gone]
36
37
                               [everyone's ↓gone] ↑↑ha ha ha
      Tal:
38
      Mat: ↓basically
```

As the scene continues, Liam reverts to his player voice to clarify that his stealth roll will be made "with advantage", meaning that two dice are rolled instead of one, and the player picks the higher of the two rolls. VAX makes all his stealth checks with advantage as a result of a magic item he owns. The difference of character voice in line 18 and player voice in line 21 does not lead to trouble or necessitate repair on the part of the other players, who instead continue to laugh at the humorous game world circumstance of Laura's anger. Keyleth follows VAX by using a spell to fade into the back-

²In the movie, the line "Flames, on the side of my face; fi- heaving breaths" is spoken by a character named Mrs. White, describing her absolute hatred and anger for her husband's mistress. By making this reference, Matt is implying that Laura is as angry as Mrs. White. Since the line is formulated in the first-person perspective in the movie and in its reproduction here, this utterance can be conceptualized as Matt humorously speaking as though he is Laura. This utterance does not exist in the story world, but is continued in line 22 and acknowledged and affirmed by Marisha, sustaining the humorous mode in the game world.

ground, as VAX reports the highly successful result of *Liam's* roll (switching back into character voice in line 28). Keyleth's actions in lines 25 and 27 are described in the third person by *Marisha*; in fact, despite the fact that Keyleth is present and takes actions in this scene, she does not speak in the story world.

KEYLETH'S and VAX'S actions sustain the humorous mode in both the story world and the game world, prompting Laura and Marisha's mirthful responses in lines 30 and 32. Percy further sustains the humorous mode by using another ability, Hex, to fade into the shadows as well, leading to more laughter and Marisha pointing out the scene's similarity to a real world media trope, with *Matt* and *Taliesin* agreeing. What makes the scene funny in the Story World frame is that Taryon is unaware of Vex's temper, while the other characters are; this is what prompts their collective disappearance from the scene. What makes the scene funny in the Game World frame is that Sam, who plays Taryon, is also aware of Vex's temper, but has no story world reasoning to suggest that TARYON would know of it or be polite. What makes the scene funny in the Performance frame is that the players are aware of the "hastily-abandoned tavern" trope in Western movies, whereas presumably, the characters in the story world are not well-equipped with movie trope knowledge; further, Matt's reference to the Clue movie is also specific to the Performance frame and cannot be understood as humorous in the story world.

It is the tension between these frames that facilitates humorous character, player, and performer responses. In other words, this scene functions as a site of brink play: characters are required to act according to the circumstances and truths of the story world, even if players are aware of things that their characters or not. This affords Sam a social alibi in addressing VEX in an impolite way: he is "just" playing the game, as Poremba (2007) would claim, and while VEX is very much allowed to respond angrily within the story world, Laura cannot reasonably be angry with Sam for acting in line with the information his character TARYON has. Of course, Laura still is angry, as implied by the players' game world responses, but this anger is entextualized and treated as humorous given the story world and game world circumstances of the scene. This entextualization is confirmed by Laura herself, seen in her laughter in line 30.

3.2.2 Story World Humor

Having explored the phenomenon of Game World Humor, where the humorous context of a scene is only or mostly visible in the game world, it is necessary to also examine Story World Humor, where the humorous context of a scene is entirely or almost entirely visible in the story world. That is, while players may (and do) display mirthful responses as players rather than as characters, their characters have almost as much information and awareness of the humorous context of the scene as the players do. In the analysis that follows, we can observe how player navigation across frames occurs even in a Story World Humor context, and what purpose these movements across frames serve in comparison to those in Game World Humor scenes.

Campaign 2, Episode 39 (2:34:51-2:36:35)

In the following excerpt, the group is in a chamber in an underground temple, hiding from a monster who is unaware of their presence. Earlier in the session, NOTT and CALEB have both eaten a sacred fruit that induces psychedelic visions and gives the ingester a "high" of sorts; NOTT has since mostly recovered, but CALEB is still inebriated. The group is debating how best to go about engaging the monster in combat, but because of their proximity to it, they are all attempting to speak quietly. Sam and Laura offer a strategy that has not been discussed in session up to the group as NOTT and JESTER.

```
1
      FJO: "who's got one awesome shot"
2
      NOT: ↑we do
3
      FJO: we (.) we do? hh
      NOT: [we do]
5
      JES: [we do]
6
      FJO: hwhat's your awesome shot
7
      (0.8)
8
      NOT: °it's a little something° \leq \underline{we} like to call:> (1.6)
9
            [<fluffernutter>]
10
      JES: [<fluffernutter>]
11
      Mat: °ts[heheheheh°]
               [heh heh heh] hah heh heh
12
      Mar:
13
            ((covers mouth))
      Tra: ((smiles))
14
15
      Mat: tsheh heh heh heh heh heh
16
      FJO: I wanna say [yes]
17
      Mar:
                        [^\hehh]
18
      FJO: I just don't know if now's the time to be <demo-ing>
```

```
19
      BEA: [°yeah°]
20
            [a] new thing
      FJO:
21
            °can you pitch it [to us in thirty seconds or less?°]
22
                               [°yah could we get- a quick-] a
23
            quick pitch would be really good°
24
            °do you have a o(h)ne sh(h)e(h)et°
      BEA:
25
      Mar: uh heh [heh heh]
26
                    [\text{hee heh heh]
```

In response to FJORD's question, NOTT volunteers herself and JESTER, but this creates trouble, which FJORD attempts to clarify in line 3. In lines 4-5, this trouble is resolved by JESTER and NOTT speaking in unison, defining "we" as the two of them. They speak in unison again in lines 9-10, which serves as the humorous cue shift for this scene and leads to multiple humorous responses³ in lines 11-15.

Matt's reaction is the same as the players', implying that Sam and Laura have not discussed this with him as a GM. FJORD continues in the story world by stating that he would like to approve of the strategy, but that their situation is dire and may need something that isn't new and untried; BEAU then continues this course of action by asking the two of them to "pitch" the strategy to the group, which CALEB seconds. In line 24, BEAU makes a meta-humorous joke, asking if they have a "one sheet", a term in the entertainment industry for a single sheet summarizing a product and its marketability. This causes Sam to "break" in line 26, laughing in response to the usage of this term⁴ in the story world context.

³It is worth noting that the word "fluffernutter", in colloquial North American English, refers to a kind of sandwich made with peanut butter and marshmallow fluff; this marks one of the few instances of meta-humor in this scene, since presumably the laughter in response to the name is partially because of the dissonance of an allegedly violent combat strategy being named after a children's sandwich, and there is no guaranteed story world analogue for a fluffernutter sandwich.

⁴The humor of line 24 is best understood with regard to the Performance frame, since the cast are all established performers in the entertainment industry.

```
27
      FJO: or °>should we-<°you know what? (1.2) fluffernutter
28
            sounds GREAT
29
      Mar: [pffft hah heh heh]
      CAL: [NO NO (.) NO] \uparrowI'm so high right now but I know that
30
31
            >that is not a good id-< what is it?
32
      NOT: ((gestures and makes sound effects for loading a
33
            crossbow))
34
      JES: ((gestures to hold a barrel))
      Mat: a ↑↑°°hhhheh°°
35
36
      (0.9)
37
      Sam: ↓she-
38
      Lau: heh heh heh
39
      Sam: she's [g- heh heh she's] pull-
40
                             [a hAH heh huh?]
41
      FJO: what are you [holding]
42
                         [what] ↑is that?
```

FJORD suddenly reconsiders his stance, enthusiastically approving of the strategy, which causes Marisha to laugh and CALEB to protest and ask again for NOTT and JESTER to tell the group what "fluffernutter" is. Their response is to load a crossbow and hold up a barrel, respectively, which sustains the humor of the scene and causes Matt to laugh. Since this response in the story world is only observable in the game world as Sam and Laura miming these actions, this creates trouble for the other players, which results in more humorous responses from the other players (Matt and Marisha in lines 35 and 40) and Sam and Laura, in lines 38-39. As Sam attempts to repair this trouble in the game world, something interesting occurs: Travis and Liam choose to address the game world trouble (being unable to deduce what Laura and Sam are holding up) by entextualizing it and bringing it into the story world, where FJORD and CALEB ask JESTER and NOTT what they are holding.

```
43
      JES: I'm pulling out the little keg of black powder
44
      CAL: [°ohh:::°]
45
      JES:
           [that Nott stole] (.) that Nott [stole] from the =
46
      BEA:
                                           [.pt]
47
      JES: pirate ship
48
      Sam: and I've got my ((gestures and makes sound effect)) =
      NOT: = explosive arrow nocked
49
      Mat: [↑↑°°hhhehh°°]
50
51
      FJO: [okay (.) just- a coup-]
52
      BEA: [startin to get a picture (.) yeah]
53
      FJO: couple quick [thoughts]
                        54
      Mat:
```

Ordinarily, we would expect the characters to see what is being held, since the game world gestures are transformed into story world actions within the Story World frame, but this entextualization allows Travis and Liam to question the rules of transformation (specifically, what the gestures are meant to represent in the story world) and allows Laura and Sam to clarify these rules without exiting the story world. What this results in is more instances of character actions being described using character voice and the first-person perspective, in lines 43 and 49. Once again, this usage of character voice, rather than creating further confusion, resolves the trouble, seen in CALEB'S response in line 44 and the group's continuation of the scene. Matt continues to respond humorously, sustaining the humor in the game world, but it appears that the story world characters have lapsed back into the default mode, with FJORD and BEAU affirming that the trouble has been repaired and that they understand what the strategy is. This is not the case for long, however:

```
55
      Mar: uhuh
56
      FJO: when we tried to blow up the tree? (.) didn't work so
57
            well (.) two-
58
      JES: °what tree°
59
      FJO: load-bearing beams in a closed room with no windows
             (.) so it's gonna hurt us too
60
      JES: <fluffernutter>
61
62
      Mar: [°m(h)mhm]
63
      Sam: [\^oheh heh ha^o]
      Lia: [^^°hhehh°°] HA Ha
64
65
      FJO: <fo:kay> the [name is greatf]
66
      Lia:
                           [hah hah hah]
67
      FJO: [I'm just thinking maybe]
68
      Sam:
           [hah hah hah hah]
           [°heh heh heh]
69
      Lau:
70
      FJO: in [<practical:> use]
71
                [hhah hah hah]
      Mar:
72
      Lia:
                [>\uparrow ha \uparrow ha \uparrow ha \uparrow ha<] .hhh
      FJO: not the best idea here
```

When FJORD attempts to outline his concerns for the safety and feasibility of carrying out "fluffernutter", JESTER responds by simply repeating its name, which is a conversational transgression in the default mode; this cue shifts the scene back into the humorous mode in the story world, as evidenced by the multiple humorous responses that follow and the presence of laughing

voice in line 65, which is a story world utterance. Since players rarely laugh in character voice, it is difficult to delineate which of these humorous responses (lines 62-64, 68-69, 71-72) occurs in the story world, but the humorous context of line 61 comes from the fact that JESTER responds to FJORD'S valid and important concerns by restating the name of the strategy, rather than affirming or acknowledging any of what he is saying. This context is not game world specific; it can just as easily be understood and categorized as humorous in the story world, meaning that the players' humorous responses could very well be the characters' humorous responses. This also means that line 61 is a cue that shifts the story world conversation into the humorous mode, and that the laughter that follows sustains the humorous mode in both the game world and the story world.

```
74
       (1.0)
75
      NOT: \think about <this>
76
      Mat: [°°heh heh°°]
77
      FJO: [I- >a- the-<] I'm the \uparrowonly one doing that
78
            ((turns to Jester)) she throws it (0.6) I fire: (0.4)
79
             it °explo:des°
80
      BEA: ↓uhuh
      NOT: <nNO:: [STRUCTURAL DAMAGE]>
81
82
      JES:
                     [SH:: shpshpshpshpsh]
83
      (1.4)
      NOT: [O(h)NLY da(h)mage] to the creature
84
85
            [shh:: pshpshpsh]
      JES:
86
       (1.2)
87
      NOT: that's how \( \T\) see it going [do(h)wn]
88
      Mar:
                                           [aHA HA HA]
89
             [\tau_hah heh hee heh heh]
      Sam:
90
            [AH HAH HAH HAH] HA: HA HA Ha ha ha ha (.) .hh
91
92
      Lau: [A HEE HAH HEH HA:] ((ducks head))
93
            [>HA HA HA HA HA<]
94
      Tra: [otsffhh heh hehoyep (.) yep]
      Mat: [\uparrow\uparrow^{\circ\circ}hee: heh heh heh^{\circ\circ}]
95
96
      BEA:
            .pt ss okay
97
      Lia:
            ↑ha::
98
      JES: we're whispering all of this [\frac{\tau}{very} quietly]
99
```

NOTT attempts to address FJORD's concerns by walking the group through how she believes fluffernutter will succeed; once again, the humorous mode seems to have lapsed back into the default mode after line 77. In line 80,

BEAU affirms that the process of throwing the keg and shooting it with the explosive arrow will result in an explosion, but this doesn't yet resolve FJORD'S concerns. In line 81, NOTT yells that no structural damage will occur, which JESTER responds to by shushing NOTT repeatedly, in an attempt to remind her of their proximity to the monster. NOTT'S next utterance starts off at the same volume, but gradually returns to normal, as JESTER continues to shush her. We can see the beginnings of Sam "breaking" in line 84, with words said through laughter. At this point, NOTT has insisted that there will be no structural damage, but has not elaborated on how or why she believes this; there is a group pause as they wait for her to resolve this implied trouble.

Line 87 contains the last humorous cue of this scene, in which NOTT clarifies that she has no solid reason to believe that no structural damage will occur, but believes it anyway. This unresolved trouble (or rather, the group's realization that NOTT never claimed to have a reason for her insistence, retroactively rendering the trouble a fault of the group's assumptions rather than a failure of NOTT'S) leads to several loud mirthful responses, including from Sam and Laura as they break character. As the scene continues, JESTER retroactively entextualizes the dialogue of the scene, stating that all of it was whispered "very quietly", when multiple utterances were yelled or shouted in the game world. Line 98 is another instance in which the rules of transformation are changed; player speech in character voice, which is normally treated as directly representing character speech, is for the purposes of this scene treated as a louder version of the speech that occurs in the story world.

This rule change is explicit, and is directed at *Matt*, the GM, likely to prevent him from surprising the group with the news that the monster has heard them and is aware of their presence later in the scene. It is, however, spoken in character voice, making it an utterance from Jester to *Matt*, who doesn't exist in the story world, about the content of the story world narrative in the last few minutes, which is not a frame of reference that Jester, as a story world character, has access to. However, once again, this does not create trouble; the scene continues, and the changed rule of transformation applies, suggesting that *Laura's* usage of character voice in this utterance is ignored.

Campaign 2, Episode 43 (2:51:32-2:52:52)

The following excerpt consists of a scene where the group, currently sailing on a ship, is preparing to go underwater and investigate a possible shipwreck on the ocean floor. NOTT, who hates the water, asks to stay on the ship to keep watch, but FJORD, who knows that NOTT is a fan of little trinkets such as buttons and gems, attempts to coerce her into coming along.

```
1
      FJO: or you could stay \( \text{above if you wanted ta (.) send a } \)
2
            message if some trouble (0.4) appears on the >horizon
3
            I'd just hate to leave you behind on such a great
4
            adventure there could be buttons
5
      NOT: ((raises eyebrows))
6
      FJO: [.hhh there could be] =
7
      CAL: [i could also]
8
      FJO: = little (.) i dunno jewels [ingots-]
9
10
      NOT: don't you ta- don't you talk down to me \uparrowI hh
11
      Mar: \taghare
12
      Mat: m(h)m
13
      NOT: [I know what you're up to]
14
      Mat: [mmha ha hah hah]
15
      Lau: >hA HA HA [HA ha ha<]
      F.JO:
                       [what are you talking about?] it's the
16
17
            bottom of the ocean
      CAL: [I could also]
18
19
      FJO: [ships throw people all the time]
20
      CAL: full [disclosure (0.8)] i could help you cope with-
21
                  [°°>heh heh heh heh<°°]
22
      NOT: >thinks im gonna go into the water for some fucking
23
            buttons<
      Mat: °°ssss[heh heh heh heh°°]
24
25
                   [^{\circ \circ}h h h \uparrow \uparrowheh hEh]
      Mar:
26
      Lau:
                   [ha HA HA HA HA heh hah]
27
      Tal:
                   [ts(h)sss(h)s]
```

At FJORD's emphasized usage of the word "buttons" in line 4, NOTT displays immediate surprise and suspicion. This is natural, considering the unusual specificity of suggesting that the investigation of a shipwreck would result in the group finding buttons. As FJORD continues, CALEB attempts to inform NOTT that he might have a solution to help, but is interrupted by both FJORD's further attempts in line 8 and NOTT's response to him in line 10. In telling FJORD not to talk down to her, NOTT makes explicit her understanding that FJORD is attempting to coerce her, and disparages him

for being condescending; this serves as a humorous cue, leading to mirthful responses in lines 11, 12, 14, and 15. FJORD, however, performs naive affect within the story world, insisting that he is being genuine and claiming that because people are thrown off ships all the time, it isn't unreasonable to expect to find buttons at the bottom of the ocean.

This performed naive affect in lines 16-17 and 19 is especially interesting because, as stated, it is not a game world performance, as with JESTER in the first excerpt of this chapter; FJORD is aware that he is being condescending and outright lying to NOTT, but is pretending that he isn't in order to continue his attempt to convince her to come underwater with the rest of the group. What this means is that FJORD feigns a return to the default conversational mode, implying that Nott's initial response was a result of misunderstanding FJORD'S honest intent. This feigning means that the humorous mode is not sustained in the story world; it is sustained in the game world, evidenced by Marisha's laugh in line 21. In the midst of this, CALEB continues trying to tell Note that he has an alternative solution, but he is interrupted once again by Nott's utterance in lines 22-23. These lines, which are performed as an aside to CALEB in response to FJORD'S antics, are the second humorous cue, once again spurring multiple mirthful responses. As with the previous excerpt, it is unclear whether these responses occur in the story world or the game world, but the humorous context can be fully grasped in the story world, making the mode shift applicable in both story world and game world.

```
28
      FJO: I heard tale there was a sh-
29
      Lau: HA HA [>ha ha ha<]
30
                   [there was a] button ship that crashed \right
31
            around =
      NOT: [↑OH: THE OLD: BUTTON SHIP] LEGE-
32
33
      FJO: [= these waters]
34
      NOT: LEGEND =
35
      Mat: a HA ↑HEH
36
      NOT: [REALLY?]
37
      FJO: [a wharf- a a] button wharf-
      NOT: OH::: a buh (.) bu- | BUTTONBEARD (.) THE PIRATE?
38
39
      FJO: yep
            ^{\circ}. \text{HH}^{\circ}
40
      Mar:
41
      NOT: HE HAD BUTTONS FOR BEARDS (.H Hhh)
42
      Mar: ((throws head back in silent laughter))
```

```
43
      CAL: [Nott the Brave] (.) we have
44
      Tra: [°°ha huh ha-]
      NOT: °yes:°
45
      CAL: we have things to accomplish here
46
47
      NOT: ves?
48
      Tra: °.s(h)hih
      CAL: if you allow me (0.8) i could do what i have done in
49
            [the past]
50
51
      Mar: [.s(h)hih]
52
      CAL: a little sneakily to help you cope with this fear you
53
           ~°heh heh°~((covers mouth))
54
      CAL: if you allow me
55
```

FJORD continues feigning the default conversational mode, telling a story about a "button ship", and NOTT responds with a sarcastic affect, visible in the increased volume, slowed speed, and rising tones of her speech, as well as in the content of her utterances; she embellishes FJORD's story, adding details of a fictional "button pirate", which sustains the humorous mode in the story world. FJORD maintains a naive affect, agreeing with NOTT's additions to his story, and their interaction causes numerous mirthful responses, most observably in *Marisha*, whose reaction escalates from silent laughter in line 40 and line 42 to a laughing sob in line 51. *Travis* also breaks as *Marisha's* responses escalate, which we can treat as a game world break rather than a story world mirthful utterance because FJORD continuously maintains a feigned naive affect.

Caleb continues to speak in the default conversational mode, though his utterances, unlike Fjord's, are not feigned; he calls for Nott's attention in line 43, and emphasizes the need for her to pay attention in line 46. Line 46 in particular can be read as Caleb reminding Nott of the least disruption principle, an explicit cue to return to the default mode. In line 47, Nott accepts this cue, and Caleb is able to communicate his alternative solution: the *Calm Emotions* spell, which he has cast in the past to help Nott temporarily forget her dislike of the water. While Caleb communicates this, *Marisha* and *Travis* are unable to contain their laughter, which sustain the humor in the game world, but do not influence the story world narrative.

```
56
      Tra: .h(h)hh
      NOT: i appreciate that [Caleb (1.1) but I've got my] =
57
58
                                 [~°heh heh heh°~]
      NOT: = ((lifts flask)) way of doing it
59
60
       (2.3)
       FJO: there might be bronzed shoes (.) maybe little silver
61
62
63
       NOT: ↑ooh:: those ↑spoons?
64
       FJO: the c- de[coder rings]
65
       NOT:
                       [the little ↑spoons:?]
      FJO: yep
66
67
       NOT: the [collectible ones?]
68
      FJO:
                 [maybe sporks if you're lucky]
69
      NOT: FUCK this guy
70
      Tra: [a hee heh hee]
71
      Lau: [hh HA HA HA]
      Mar: [\uparrow^{\circ} H(h)H(h)H^{\circ} ((slaps table))]
72
73
      Mat: [hhh ↑HA HA HA HA Ha::]
74
      Tal: [\(\frac{1}{2}\)^\circ hhh::\(\frac{1}{2}\)]
```

As Travis takes a calming breath, NOTT declines CALEB'S offer, implying instead that she may get drunk enough to overcome her distaste for going underwater. After a long group pause, FJORD resumes his efforts, feigning a naive affect and mentioning the possibility of finding more trinkets underwater. In response to this, NOTT also feigns a naive affect, observably more believable as genuine than her earlier utterances in lines 32-41. FJORD affirms her response and elaborates on more trinkets, even building on NOTT'S own additions by saying "maybe sporks if you're lucky" when NOTT asks about spoons. Lines 61-68 serve as a unique instance of two story world characters feigning affect with and at each other, both pretending to be invested in the other's utterances.

The other players at the table do not respond to these utterances, since they are being played in the story world as genuinely in the default mode. In line 69, however, NOTT reveals that she was feigning her naive affect by loudly swearing at FJORD, eliciting mirthful responses from the other players and from *Travis* himself. Yet again, it is unclear whether the players or their characters are laughing, but line 69 is undoubtedly funny in the story world; its humor comes from NOTT having successfully tricked FJORD into thinking that she was buying into his ruse, which is information available to all the story world characters present.

Observations

As outlined in section 2.3, humorous interactions at the table are not confined to story world moments of *levity*, necessitating an exploration of both Game World Humor and Story World Humor in a TTRPG actual play context. In both forms of humorous context, the following observations can be made with regard to the three hypotheses formulated in the previous chapter.

Firstly, looking at H1, players do use language as an interactional resource during play. Language is used and leveraged creatively during play to communicate the rules of transformation and changes to those rules, such as when JESTER establishes that the characters have all been whispering throughout a scene, or FJORD asks JESTER and NOTT what they are holding up. Players also use language as an interactional resource to delineate between player and character, making explicit which frame they are currently situated in. This is observable in the performance or delivery of an utterance, such as in the usage of character voice and the presence/absence of affect, and in the content of an utterance, such as the deliberate exclusion of information that is not available to a character (but perhaps is available to the player) in a story world utterance. For instance, when JESTER talks to JAMEDI, we can observe the presence of character voice and naive affect, and the content of the utterance implies that she is unaware of the humorous nature of her conversational behaviors, despite Laura likely being aware of them.

Language is also used by players to communicate their characters' actions and behaviors in the story world, using either player voice or character voice, and either the first-person perspective or the third-person perspective; as it has been established, these options can be combined in numerous ways to communicate the same character story world action. That is, the utterance below:

```
JES: I'm pulling out the little keg of black powder
```

should have been disallowed, since it is a player's description of their character's actions in the first-person perspective, *using* character voice. We would expect one of the following alternative formulations instead:

```
Lau: I'm pulling out the little keg of black powder Lau: she's pulling out the little keg of black powder
```

But, as stated in the analysis, this utterance does not generate trouble.

This leads into the observations within the dimension of humor regarding H2, which concerns the navigation across frames and the magic circle. First and foremost, the blurring of lines between player and character, as in the selection of utterances below, does not create trouble or disrupt the story world narrative.

```
JES: we're whispering all of this \tauvery quietly
VAX: wai- wait wait I'm stealthing
PER: and I just hex into the shadows
Sam: and I've got my ((gestures and makes sound effect)) =
NOT: = explosive arrow nocked
```

The assumption made in defining the Story World and Game World frames was that player speech is selectively transformed into character speech; this assumption was further fleshed out in chapter 2 with the identification of "character voice" as a cue indicating transformation into the story world. That is, utterances made in player voice were assumed to occur in the game world, and utterances made in character voice were assumed to occur in the story world. However, the selections above highlight that this is not the case, and that violations of this assumption do not confuse or disorient players.

This is true even for instances such as the third example above, where Sam starts an utterance, but Nott, his character, finishes it; if this were interpreted according to the assumptions laid out in earlier chapters, trouble would be generated in both frames, since they both contain incomplete sentence fragments. This suggests a sort of multidimensionality with regard to frame navigation during play, in that a player is able to describe story world actions while embodying a character's "voice", and that other players at the table do not incorrectly interpret this as meaning that the character themselves is making such an utterance in the story world.

This is a form of implicit entextualization: sentences uttered in the "wrong" voice (player voice when character voice would be expected, character voice when player voice would be expected) are entextualized by the other players at the table as having been uttered in the "correct", expected voice. This process occurs without any explicit consensus on the content of the story world narrative relative to such an utterance: it seems that no clarity is necessary as to whether VAX is speaking in the story world as he takes the action of hiding or stealthing, whether NOTT is saying the words "explosive arrow nocked" or is silent, and so on.

What this means is that the shared reality of the story world, which

according to conversation-analytic expectation *should* collapse at the onset of any significant uncertainty that is not made explicit and then resolved, is unaffected by the ambiguity generated by such utterances; play continues, and the story world is intact. I will term this phenomenon of player-character blurring in speech *performance bleed*, to be examined further with regard to the other emotional dimensions being studied.

Other forms of entextualization are also observable: players invoke terms, phrases, and references to media that are not extant in the story world for the purposes of meta-humor, such as "fluffernutter", "one sheet", and the Billy Joel example outlined in chapter 1. Players also entextualize *trouble*, bringing it into the story world to be repaired *in the story world*, which also serves to allow players to change and clarify the rules of transformation at work during a scene.

Travis and Liam's identification of trouble in interpreting Laura and Sam's mimed gestures, for example, signalled to the table that there was trouble in identifying what the gestures were meant to represent in the story world. Jester and Nott's subsequent clarifications are not intuitive story world utterances (imagine a character holding up a keg of black powder and then saying "I'm pulling out the little keg of black powder" several turns later), but are both allowed and imperative to repairing the identified trouble and facilitating the continuation of the scene. Player emotions, such as Laura's anger at Sam's character Taryon, are entextualized as humorous when they cannot be interpreted as legitimate or reasonable within the context of the Game World frame.

Lastly, editing, omission, and modification of the story world narrative are all permitted player actions, such as in the post hoc clarification that the story world characters are whispering and the clarification of gesture meaning in the story world through repetition (first gesture, then explicit linguistic "translation" of the gesture). What this reveals is that the rules of transformation within the Story World frame are always subject to scene-specific changes; player speech is selectively transformed into (quiet) character speech, ambiguous player gestures cannot be successfully transformed without elaboration on what they represent, and these changes are not permanent once made.

Just because a rule change such as the whispering one is made in one scene does not mean that *all* player speech should perpetually be interpreted as a louder and non-whispered representation of character speech. The point at which these rule changes revert back to the "normal" rules of transformation

seems to be implicit, since in later scenes, players who yell in character voice are presumed to be indicating that their characters are yelling in the story world, and so on, without an explicit recognition of the rules reverting to an assumed default.

In relation to H3, numerous instances of performed affect are observable in the selected excerpts. Naive affect, which is employed in scenes where characters in the story world do not have access to game world information that renders a scene humorous, occurs frequently. Also compelling is the presence of *feigned* naive affect, which occurs within the story world to communicate sarcasm and signal to other characters and players that a character is pretending to be genuine. Both of these forms of performed affect serve to enhance the narrative in that they sustain the humorous mode in either/both frames, forming a virtuous cycle and generating a story world narrative scene that is interpreted and understood by all players (and, if an instance of Story World Humor, some or all characters) as funny.

These observations suggest support for all three hypotheses. Following the analysis of scenes from other emotional dimensions, this support will be elaborated on in the discussion section.

3.3 Grief

Campaign 2, Episode 30 (00:18:52-00:20:47)

This excerpt is from a scene where FJORD and JESTER, two PCs who were kidnapped by an enemy and are now being rescued by the other PCs, learn that one of them, Molly⁵, died in the process of trying to rescue them. *Travis* and *Laura*, who play FJORD and JESTER respectively, were not present for the session where Molly died, but were told by *Matt*, the GM, outside of session, that their characters had been present in the scene, inside a magically sealed caravan. During the session, Molly, who was played by *Taliesin*, died in combat while attempting to get to the caravan, since the PCs suspected that FJORD and JESTER may have been inside, but this could not be confirmed. At the beginning of the excerpt, FJORD and JESTER have just met

⁵While Molly is a character, at this point in the narrative, he has died, meaning that he is not a speaker in the context of this scene or this analysis. For this reason, his name is not in small caps in this section. In other excerpts in which his character is still alive and present in the story world, he is presented as a speaker, e.g. Molly.

CADUCEUS, who is played by *Taliesin*, the player who also played Molly. CADUCEUS knows that the group recently lost a member, but does not know anything about the circumstances of his death.

```
JES: where's [Molly?]
2
     Cad:
                    [you're welcome.]
3
     (2.0)
4
     Cad: who?
5
     (1.4)
6
     FJO: Molly.
7
     NOT: hh::
     Cad: oh hh your friend (.) h
9
     (0.7)
```

The first response to Jester's question is from Caduceus, who did not know Molly personally. It is important to note here that while *Taliesin* knows who Molly is, of course, having played him, CADUCEUS does not, and so asks the question "who?" in line with the story world information available to him. This utterance also tells FJORD and JESTER that despite presumably having traveled with their group to rescue them, CADUCEUS has apparently not been introduced to Molly, which is the first implicit indication of his death. FJORD'S utterance in line 6 seems to be an attempt at repairing perceived trouble, perhaps accounting for the possibility that CADUCEUS did not hear Jester correctly. Line 7 shows us an affective cue shift: an extended exhale, which can be read as an attempt by Nott to regulate her breathing and emotional state before divulging the fact of Molly's death. In the story world, this cues to CADUCEUS that the person being talked about is the late group member, leading to his realization in line 8. The silences in lines 3 and 9 serve as cues as well: the first indicates an uncertainty in how best to go about approaching Jester's question, and perhaps an unwillingness to broach the subject at all. The second marks the discomfort and difficulty being experienced by the characters, since they are now faced with the task of telling Jester and Fjord about Molly. It is important to note here that while the mode shift has been cued (by NOTT, in line 7), JESTER has not yet picked up on it. Note as well that this does not mean that Laura has not picked up on it; not only is it likely that all the players are aware by this point that this will be the scene where Molly's death is revealed, but it is also likely that Laura's choice to have Jester say "Where's Molly?" in line 1 was a verbal cue to the other players indicating a possible course of action in this scene.

```
10
      CAL: °Jester-°
      (2.0)
11
12
      BEA: ((shakes head))
      JES: is he waiting up\stairs?
13
14
      (1.5)
      CAL: ((shakes head))
15
16
      BEA: .pt he didn't make it.
17
      (1.0)
      JES: [<to: (.) this (.) dungeon?> cause he's waiting
18
19
            upstairs?]
20
      FJO: [.h ((looks away, closes eyes))]
21
      CAL: hh:
22
      (2.8)
```

Following this, Caleb makes an attempt to speak to Jester, but seemingly cuts himself off, unable to continue (he is not interrupted, since this utterance is followed by a long pause). This is followed by more silence, during which Jester still seemingly has not picked up on the conversational shift into the emotional mode.

Beau shakes her head, which is an attempt to convey the death implicitly rather than saying it aloud, but once again, Jester, assuming that they are still in the default conversational mode, is not able to infer meaning from the utterance⁶. When JESTER asks what appears to be a clarifying question, Caleb shakes his head, which semantically indicates to Jester that Molly is not waiting upstairs. We see another attempt to cue the emotional mode in line 16, with Beau stating that Molly "didn't make it". While "didn't make it" is commonly understood within the emotional, grief-oriented mode as meaning "died", in other contexts it can mean failed to arrive. Within the emotional mode, there is no ambiguity as to its meaning, but in line 18, JESTER deliberately interprets it as the latter. I say deliberately here to show that at this point in the story world, JESTER has been exposed to five verbal cues indicating a shift into the emotional mode, as well as several group silences, but has not engaged with this mode herself. In line 20, we see FJORD interpret Beau's utterance correctly, breathing in sharply and looking away from the group to process the information; still, JESTER seemingly does not. Caleb has already established that Molly is not upstairs, and yet Jester's literal interpretation in lines 18-19 of BEAU'S statement contradicts that in-

⁶The default conversational mode of "purposeful, goal-oriented, cooperative communication" would entail Beau repairing the trouble as soon as possible, as clearly as possible (Attardo, 2019, p.191).

formation. To put it simply, Laura's performed affect here is of JESTER'S denial of the emotional mode and of the information being conveyed. This is especially interesting in light of JESTER'S utterance in line 1 serving as a verbal cue indicating the course of action in the conversation. As a player, Laura cues the mode shift, but as a character, JESTER does not immediately engage in it, so as to reflect her unwillingness to face the information being presented to her. This is a form of naive affect that serves to contribute to the emotional nature of the scene. JESTER'S denial is affectively impactful within the story world, seen in the affective cues that it spurs: the group's silences in lines 14, 17, and 22, and CALEB'S slow exhale in line 21. The pause in line 22 is interesting in particular because it is much longer than average (2.8 seconds), and is the first cue that JESTER does not ignore, as seen in what follows:

```
23
      JES: ((looks at Caleb, Fjord, and Beau)) ~°°.hh°°~
24
      BEA: he didn't survive the trip
25
      JES: ~°°hp°°~
26
      BEA: .pt I'm [really °sorry°]
27
      FJO:
                    [((crosses arms, looks up))]
28
      JES: ~was that when we heard you ↑guys?~
29
      (.)
      NOT: w- w what [do you mean]
30
31
                      [othe caravano]
      F.IO:
32
      NOT:
            [you were in there?]
33
      JES: [~we heard you guys fighting~]
34
           .hh ~we heard people shouting (.) I heard you call
35
      JES:
36
            for Mollv~
37
      BEA: hhh
38
      NOT: >↓yeah<
```

Even before Beau makes the information more explicit, Jester looks at Caleb, Fjord, and Beau and breathes in shakily, the first cue performed by Jester that is in line with the emotional mode. All of Jester's utterances from line 23 onwards are in what Hepburn (2004) calls wobbly voice, a shaky articulation that indicates sadness and near-crying. Once Beau states that Molly did not survive, Fjord and Jester both appear to connect the information with their time in the caravan. Here, the course of action shifts: Fjord and Jester have been informed of Molly's death, and are now informing the others of their presence in the caravan, which was only guessed at by the other characters at the time. This information is confusing and

difficult to parse, seen in Nott's stuttering in line 30, and greatly upsetting, as seen in Nott's incredulous "in there?" in line 32 and Beau's expletive interjection in line 34. Further efforts by Jester to communicate their experiences are also met with affective cues of upset, as in Beau's extended exhale in response to learning that Jester heard her call for Molly, and Nott's sharp "yeah" affirming the same. All the characters present are realizing that Fjord and Jester were present for Molly's death, which is new and upsetting information to all of them; to Fjord and Jester, because they were unable to help him, and to the others, because it confirms that Molly was right to attempt to reach the caravan, even if it resulted in his death.

```
FJO: we couldn't see ya (.) [we could barely see] =
39
                                    [h °we tried-°]
40
      BEA:
41
      FJO: = anything >we were stuck they had us gagged and
42
           bound< .hh hh I s- I swore I heard a few voices, but
43
            .hh hh we were moving before we knew it. hh
44
      JES: ~we tried shouting there's just ↑no way you could
45
           hear us~
46
      (2.0)
47
      CAL: no (.) we are sorry. (1.0) we tried our best but it
48
           wasn't good enough
49
      NOT: he tried his best (.) he- he got right up in
50
           Lorenzo's face (.) and .hh (1.7) he just wasn't
51
           strong enough
52
      (1.2)
53
      BEA: we uh (1.2) we got hh:
54
      JES:
      BEA: cocky and [underestimated] (2.1) our enemies
55
56
      JES:
                      [.shih]
57
      FJO:
           .hhh it's not your fault.
```

As the scene continues, FJORD, who has largely been silent in processing this information, begins displaying several affective cues. In line 39 we see that he ignores BEAU's interjection in favor of continuing to speak, and in lines 41-43 we can observe increased speed in speaking to convey agitation, a stutter in line 42, and short breaths in the middle of phrases, indicating difficulty in regulating breaths. JESTER continues to speak in wobbly voice, followed by another longer-than-average group pause in conversation, which is in of itself an affective grief cue; as with CALEB in line 10, the group is collectively unable to speak. CALEB's utterance in line 47 is technically a response to JESTER, but its phrasing is interesting; the emphasis on "we"

suggests that Jester's utterance is an apology (the way that "I am sorry" could be followed with "No, I am sorry"). This implies that Jester saying that she and Fjord tried to communicate to the other group is being interpreted by Caleb as an apology, which he is then rejecting in favor of apologizing on behalf of the rest of the group. Note also displays affective cues here, with a stutter in line 49, and a long pause and mid-phrase breath in line 50. Beau's affect also presents as difficulty speaking here, with two longer-than-average pauses and an extended exhale in lines 53 and 55. Fjord reassures Beau, but is only able to do so after an extended inhale: a steadying breath, which is another affective cue.

```
58
      JES: ~whe- where did you leave him?~
59
      BEA: he's buried in the wood. the Bramblewood.
60
      Mar: ((turns to Matt)) ↑right?
61
            ((smiles)) £no£ [heh heh] nah
62
      Mar:
                             [no] > that's not right. that's the
            old campaign.^{\circ}<
63
      Mat: yeah no you b- you [buried him on th-]
64
65
                                [>°what's it called again°<]
66
      Lau: ~heh heh~
      Mat: you b- you buried him along the Glory Run Road.
67
      (1.5)
68
69
      BEA: that's a fitting name. (1.0) we can um .hh hh
70
      FJO: ((wipes eyes))
71
      BEA: we can take you there.
72
      JES: °okay.°
```

The last part of this excerpt is of particular interest in terms of both frame shifts and entextualization. In response to JESTER'S question, BEAU answers that Molly is buried in "the Bramblewood". However, Marisha realizes that this may not be correct as soon as it is uttered, asking Matt if this is correct; this utterance marks the first frame shift from Story World to Game World, and all of the affective cues present in BEAU'S speech just 5 lines prior is absent in Marisha's. Matt affirms (in laughing voice, as indicated by the pound symbols) that she is in fact incorrect, explicitly marking the trouble. The use of laughing voice also indicates a frame shift out of the story world, since the content of the story world scene is still very much in the emotional mode. Marisha's speech in lines 62-65 is fast and quiet, likely in an effort to process and repair the trouble—and return to the Story World frame—as quickly as possible. Matt makes an effort to resolve the trouble, but is interrupted by Marisha's attempt to explicitly invite him to resolve it; this is

unintentionally humorous, since both line 64 and line 65 could have served as the initiating part of an adjacency pair, with 65 interrupting a turn.

We see a response to this humor with Laura's laughter in line 66, but note here that this laughter is still in wobbly voice: bleed-out has occurred here, in that JESTER'S affect in the story world has carried over into Laura's utterance in the game world. Taking line 65 as an initiating line, Matt completes the adjacency pair with an answer to Marisha's question. This is where a second frame shift occurs, from the Game World frame back to the Story World frame. However, this time, information from the Game World is taken directly into the Story World, without a character having conveyed this information to BEAU in the story world. That is, BEAU'S utterance in line 69 is a response to Matt, who does not exist or have a character present (in this scene) in the story world. She continues in line 71, saying "we can take you there", where "there" refers to the Glory Run Road. JESTER'S response suggests that she knows what "there" refers to, despite that not being established within the story world dialogue.

Here, an assumption may have been made on the part of the players that Matt's utterance in line 67 replaces Beau's answer in line 59, resulting in a line of story world dialogue by Beau along the lines of "He's buried in the wood. Along the Glory Run Road". However, this would not explain line 69, since Beau would have no reason to comment on it being "a fitting name" if she herself had said the name. Furthermore, none of this is made explicit; instead, the scene moves forward with the assumption that the story world narrative has been altered to reflect the new information given to the players by the GM. The specifics of this alteration are not clear, nor do they seem to matter for the purposes of continuing with the scene; the game world utterances in lines 60-68 are simply entextualized and collectively understood as having been conveyed to the characters in the scene. This is yet another instance of performance bleed, wherein a player has used character voice to respond to and engage with game world information, but in this particular instance, the resulting story world narrative for the scene is highly ambiguous. It would not resolve any uncertainties to, for example, assume that the other players are entextualizing BEAU'S utterance as MARISHA'S, because this would render the "fitting name" utterance redundant and confusing. There is also no reliable and obvious way to entextualize MATT'S utterance as a story world utterance, since he is not playing a character present in this scene. Again, though, this lack of clarity on what the story world narrative consists of for the purposes of this scene does not cause any conversational

trouble, and the scene continues.

Campaign 1, Episode 69 (1:10:13-1:13:11)

In this excerpt, the group attempts to revive *Taliesin's* character, PERCY, who died in battle, through the use of a resurrection ritual. In this ritual, three characters must make an offering to attempt to bring PERCY back to life. When prompted, VEX tries to use whitestone, a magical material that is said to enhance magical spells, as an offering, and confesses her love to PERCY's corpse.

```
Lau: can I- augh (.) can I reach forward and >and and <
1
2
           look in Percy's coat for that um (.) that (.)
3
           whitestone that condensed whitestone? that he
4
           carries?
5
      Mat: sure (.) go ahead and make an investigation check
6
           .hhh hhh ((looks over dice))
7
      KEY: uh hhey vex (.) will you look for that raven skull
8
           that I gave him while you're at it?
9
      Lau: sure
10
      KEY:
           .shih
11
      Lau: um (1.7) twenty five
12
      Mat: twenty five (.) you >start rummaging through his coat
13
           and you< find: um: .pt you find hi- h his gun Retort
14
           (.) um: you find a bunch of- of random bullet casings
15
           and bullets (.) you find a \cluster of papers and
16
           notes that are folded up in a small hh book (.) and
17
           what \appears to be a ss- uh partially sealed letter
           (.) with no name on it.
18
19
      Lau: .pt ah (.) onothing else?
20
      Mat: um: .hh you eventually find uhm: (.) .pt some of the
21
           the whitestone glass the g- the green glass that you
22
           guys had- (.) kinda flashed around in Ank'Harel.
23
      Lau: ((nods, holds up hand as if to hold glass))
24
      Mar: does he still have the raven skull on him that I gave
25
26
      Mat: uh the raven skull is still on him (.) yeah he hangs
27
           around his neck yeah
     Mar: °°okav°°
```

Even as *Laura* is speaking in player voice, she displays observable affective cues, seen in her increased speed, difficulty with articulation, and repetition. This is possibly an instance of bleed-out, but could also be an example of game world affect, since *Laura* herself is likely worried about the conse-

quences of Percy's resurrection being unsuccessful for Taliesin. In line 6, we see Laura hesitate in picking a die to roll for the investigation check, which could indicate continued game world nervousness and worry. Seeing that VEX is investigating PERCY'S body, KEYLETH asks her to look for a raven skull, which Keyleth gifted Percy. In line 9, Laura responds to a story world utterance in her player voice, marking an instance of performance bleed. This causes no trouble, and Matt reveals the results of Vex's investigation check as some detritus from Percy's weapons, a few papers, and a letter. Laura does not react to any of the information Matt reveals except to ask "nothing else?", implying impatience and worry that VEX won't be able to find the whitestone. This is an attempt on Laura's part to signal trouble, indicating to Matt that Laura's utterance in lines 1-4 was in an effort to find whitestone, and that Matt's response is indicating that VEX was unsuccessful. Matt then repairs this trouble by clarifying that VEX does find whitestone. Marisha similarly asks a clarifying question in line 24, which Matt answers by establishing information about the story world; namely, that Percy still has the raven skull around his neck. Marisha's response in line 28 could also be bleed-out, since it is whispered, but could also once again be an instance of game world affect.

```
29
      GRO: what is that?
30
      VEX: its um (.) .HH he says it's supposed to amplify
31
            ↑magic (.) right?
32
      SCA: mhm (.) mhm mhm [i \text{\text{think}}]
33
      VEX:
                             [um] (.) so I um
34
      Lau: I put it on his chest
35
      Mat: mkay (.) alright. um: what (.) do you want to offer
36
            to the skill challenge [for this event]
37
      Lau:
                                     [um]
38
      Mat: something something that .h h that >you as an
39
            individual< bring to this and bring to >the
40
            connection to Percy to try< and-
      Lau: ~I say~(.) uhh
41
```

```
42
      VEX: ~Percy I don't know if you can hear me (.) but (1.7)
43
            .hh that day in Syngorn was .h .pt one of the best
44
           moments of my life (.) and not (.) because of >what
           you \think it wasn't because of my< fa:ther or the
45
46
           ti:tle (.) .hh hit was because of whitestone. it was
47
           because of you (0.8) you allowed me to be a \part of
48
           the that (.) you hold dearest. .shih .pt and I was so
49
           °proud°((smiles)) heh (1.2) but I don't want to BE
           here if you're not. .hh hh whitestone still needs you
50
51
           darling (2.0) I still need you ↓here.~(1.2) and I
           lean down (.) and I kiss him
52
53
      Mat: ((nods))
54
      VEX: ~and I say (1.7) °I should've told you~(3.1) it's
55
```

Continuing in the story world, GROG asks VEX what she is holding, since Laura is miming holding up the whitestone. VEX'S answer in lines 30-31 contains several affective cues: difficulty articulating, a loud and short inhale, frequent pauses, and an unexpected rising tone at "magic". She also implies doubt with regard to what whitestone is used for, which SCANLAN attempts to reassure her about. In line 33, VEX begins an utterance in the firstperson perspective, but Laura corrects herself and continues the utterance in player voice, marking an observable preemptive correction of performance bleed. This indicates that players are able to identify the usage of "the wrong voice" and correct themselves. Matt asks Laura what, of her described actions, constitutes VEX'S offering to the ritual skill challenge. As he does, Laura uses the filler "um", which indicates doubt and confusion: possible trouble. Matt repairs this trouble by elaborating on the parameters of what a skill challenge offering should consist of. Following this, Laura once again displays the ability to "correctly" shift between player and character in lines 41-42, changing from a first-person player voice description of VEX'S actions to Vex's own speech in the story world.

Lines 42-52 contain several explicit affective cues. First, lines 42-51 are spoken in wobbly voice. There are also several long pauses contained within this single turn, in lines 42, 47, 49, and two in 51. VEX also displays difficulty breathing and articulating, varying speech speed, volume, and prosody in abnormal ways. The vowels in "father" and "title" are elongated, but lines 44-45 immediately preceding those words are spoken markedly fast. We also see rising and falling tones that are in line with mournful, frantic affect, and a sob in line 48. The variance in articulation is what renders it particularly affective; the contrast between a whispered "proud" and a yelled "be" in the

same line (49) indicates grief and a loss of control over the ability to articulate normally. Also in line 49, we see what would normally be interpreted as joyful affect, in Vex's smile and laughter cue. This, while seemingly out of place in the emotional grief mode, is not disallowed and does not cause a mode shift into the joyful mode. This indicates that the performance of emotional affect in a particular dimension may not be limited to those cues that specifically indicate that emotion. No audience member or player seeing and hearing line 49 being uttered would interpret it as a happy or joyful scene, especially given that line 49 is also in wobbly voice.

In lines 51-52, we see an instance of performance bleed, where VEX describes her own actions in the story world in the first-person perspective, in character voice. This does not lead to trouble; *Matt* nods, acknowledging the story world action of VEX kissing PERCY, and VEX continues, with the words "and I say" in line 54 still in character voice as another instance of performance bleed. Lines 54-55 still contain affective grief cues of whispering, long pauses, and wobbly voice. It should be noted here that in this scene, despite several characters being present, none of them sustain the emotional grief mode by *speaking* in lines 41-55. Instead, VEX's affective cues are uninterrupted and given space, allowing her extended utterance to sustain the emotional mode instead. Put differently, the other characters present in the scene sustain the emotional mode through group silence, affirming VEX's grief and allowing her to remain upset (and violate the least disruption principle as a result) for as long as necessary.

```
56
      Mat: make a persuasion roll
57
            .hh hhhh huh .shih ((rolls die)) (1.2) NATURAL TWENTY
58
            ((claps))
59
      Mar: ((covers mouth)) [°hah hoh oh°]
      Tra:
                               [((leans to check roll))]
60
61
      Sam:
                               [((smiles))]
      Mat: ((smiles))
62
63
      Tra: ((gestures to Matt))
      Mat: I trust you (.)
64
65
      Tra: okay!
66
      Sam: ah hoh hah hah hah
67
      Mar: \^\circ\hhhh\circ\approx a(h)aw:
            .hhh hhh °.shih°
68
69
      Mat: okay! (.) who else wants to: add something to this
70
```

Having heard Vex's offering in the story world, Matt instructs Laura to

make a persuasion check, which is the ludic, game world representation of the outcome of VEX'S offering. Laura displays heightened worried affective cues, taking a long calming breath, and sobbing, the latter of which may also be an instance of bleed-out. Rolling the die, Laura reveals that she has rolled a "natural twenty", a term for when a player rolls a 20-sided die and gets a 20. In a Dungeons & Dragons context, a natural twenty indicates a critical success; not only was VEX'S offering successful, it was at the highest level of success possible according to the rules of the game.

In lines 57-58, Laura yells the result of her roll and claps, which shifts the conversational mode not back into the default, but into the joyful mode, seen in the players' responses in lines 59, 61, 62, and 66-68. Despite the mournful nature of the scene and Vex's emotional state, the players are able to celebrate the success of the offering in the game world, since they—unlike their characters—are aware of its success. Vex has no way of knowing whether her offering has succeeded in the story world until the ritual is complete, but Laura and the other players are now aware that one of the ludic components of the ritual skill challenge has succeeded. Despite this game world joyful mode, in line 68, Laura sobs quietly, which could be either a game world affective cue of relief at the success of the offering, or another instance of bleed-out from Vex's emotional outpouring. In line 69, Matt moves the scene along, bringing it back into the default mode and asking the other players to contribute to the ritual.

Observations

The section above analyzed two scenes that revolved around emotional story world circumstances of *loss* for the use of language as an interactional resource, navigation across the magic circle, and performed grieving affect. In line with this analysis, the following observations can be made with regard to the hypotheses outlined in chapter 2 and the emotional dimension of grief.

Firstly, engaging with H1, it is once again clear that players use language as an interactional resource. It is used to signal and resolve trouble with other players, communicate changes in transformation rules, and delineate between player and character with regard to what information is known in the story and game worlds. CADUCEUS, for example, uses language to indicate in a scene that he does not know who Molly is, even if *Taliesin*, his player, does. It is also used to engage in *deliberate* trouble/repair delays, seen in JESTER'S repeated inability and/or unwillingness to pick up on the emotional mode

or understand the fact of Molly's death. While the literature would expect this sort of deliberate repair delay to stop a conversation and disorient its interlocutors (in Schegloff (2015)'s words, the "shared reality of the moment" would be lost, with "unpredictable consequences"), this instead functions to enhance the emotional nature of the scene by highlighting JESTER'S denial (p. 12).

Regarding H2, the analyses above revealed several instances of performance bleed, where players both responded to game world information using character voice, and described character actions in the story world using character voice. None of these instances resulted in conversational trouble, despite the fact that BEAU'S "Glory Run Road" mishap in particular should have brought the scene in both story world and game world to a standstill. The ambiguity of how *Matt's* utterance was entextualized in the story world did not cause confusion among the players; no explicit consensus was reached, meaning that players could have theoretically entextualized and interpreted the utterance in varying ways, but the shared reality of the story world did not collapse, and the scene continued. Players are therefore not only able to edit and omit things from the narrative post hoc, but are able to do this without making the details of the editing or entextualization explicit or known to other players. This indicates that players are able to navigate the magic circle in ways that are fluid and more creative than previously anticipated.

Lastly, several indicators of performed affect are observable in the anal-Wobbly voice, sobbing, difficulty regulating breathing, difficulty in articulation, and varying volume and speed of speech are all consistent with affective cues for grief. These cues are affirmed and responded to by other characters in one of two ways: the adoption of similar cues in the story world, which sustains the emotional mode as expected, and the usage of silence, as with VEX'S confession to PERCY, which sustains the emotional mode by leaving space for a character to be emotional, deliberately not shifting the conversational mode back to the default. Worth noting also is that the deliberate trouble/repair delay identified in the first excerpt can be better understood as naive affect, which, as with the humorous mode, sustains the emotional mode in the story world by way of indicating to the other characters that JESTER does not realize or understand the emotional context of the scene, whereas the other characters clearly do. It is, however, difficult to say whether this naive affect is genuine or feigned within the story world, since it is possible that JESTER picked up on the affective grief cues and chose not to engage with them until it was not possible to continue the conversation

without doing so, but it is also possible that JESTER truly did not appraise the cues correctly until several of them had been uttered. Regardless, it is important to highlight the use of naive affect beyond the humorous mode, and examine its presence or absence in further emotional dimensions.

3.4 Joy

Campaign 1, Episode 58 (2:14:17-2:16:24)

In the following excerpt, the group has just defeated a monster in combat; the monster had disguised itself as GILMORE, an NPC and friend of the party. The group only found this out after the monster stabbed VAX, still wearing the guise of GILMORE and startling the party. Having defeated the monster and found the real GILMORE, the group recovers from the combat encounter. As a sorcerer merchant, GILMORE has extensive knowledge of magical artefacts, including a set of armor that VAX is in possession of. Because of this, GILMORE is aware that this armor possesses new and recently activated abilities, which he decides to reveal to VAX.

```
Mat: he walks up to >the very edge< with you and goes
1
2
      GIL: do you trust me?
           .hhh hhh ((nods)) ^{\circ\circ}i do^{\circ\circ}
3
      VAX:
4
      (0.8)
5
      Mat: as soon as you look down (.) you feel a as he pushes
6
            you off the cliff (.) uh (.) at that moment (0.8) .pt
7
            you (.) suddenly- instinctively (.) look up <and:>
            from outside the back of the armor (.) fwshsh
8
9
            ((gestures wings))
10
      Tra: whAT?
      Lia: [((smiles))]
11
      Mar: [oh >hoh]ohoh[oho<]</pre>
12
13
      Mat:
                          [these giant black raven wings]
14
      Lau: wait! so [you could've flown] =
15
                     [spill out from the sides]
      Mat.:
      Lau: = when you came out of the dragon?
16
17
      (1.2)
18
      VAX: ((smiling)) only if i knew how to work it
19
      Lau: .HHHH
20
      Mat: uh: you get the sense that this fffeature to the
            armor: (.) was only recently- (1.2)
21
```

```
22 Lau: [<oh: shit>]
```

23 Tra: [<ohhhh FUCKING] shit>

24 Lia: ((smiles, puts hands on face))

In the first two lines, we see a clear delineation between player and character as *Matt*, the GM, describes GILMORE's actions before switching into character voice to enact his dialogue in line 2. VAX displays affective cues as early as line 3, though these are not consistent with a joyful mode, but rather with a different emotional dimension: VAX was stabbed by a monster disguised as GILMORE, which, before the reveal that it was not actually GILMORE, was a huge betrayal of VAX's trust. As a result, the deep, slow breath and whispered delivery of line 3 is an affective cue of grief, with VAX acknowledging that the real GILMORE would not hurt him. This is followed by a group pause, suggesting a brief sustaining of the emotional mode here. *Matt* continues the scene with more third-person narration, describing GILMORE pushing VAX off the cliff they are both on. This is a counterintuitive story world action, but none of the story world characters present in the scene interrupt the actions being carried out or attempt to rescue VAX.

Instead, *Matt* continues, describing a set of wings bursting out of VAX'S armor. It should be noted that his first "description" of these wings is nonlinguistic: he provides a gesture and an onomatopoetic noise, but this suffices for the purposes of being successfully transformed and interpreted by the players as wings emerging from the armor. This is clear because lines 10-12 are all exclamations of surprise and joy, the first affective cues that trigger the joyful mode, before *Matt* explicitly describes the wings in line 13.

The first responses are in the game world, with *Travis* exclaiming in surprise, *Liam* smiling, and *Marisha* uttering surprised laughter. As *Matt* continues his narration, *Laura* interrupts him with a question to *Liam*, ignoring the conventions of turn-taking that would normally apply in the default conversational mode. Lines 16-18 are interesting in that they mark another instance of performance bleed; after a long group pause, VAX responds to *Laura's* game world question. *Laura's* affective cues here are mainly consistent with what would be termed *surprised affect*, seen in the exclamatory nature of her utterances, interruptions, and loud volume. Even so, VAX's smile in line 18 sustains the joyful mode, and *Laura's* utterances do not seem to shift the conversational mode significantly. That is, her surprise does not seem to be disallowed in or incongruent with the joyful mode.

As the scene continues, Matt reveals further information about the armor

in an utterance that could arguably be categorized as "meta-gaming". As a GM, Matt has done extensive worldbuilding with regard to how things like magic, artefacts, and history work in the story world of both campaigns. One such element is the notion of Vestiges of Divergence, which are magical relics that were crafted thousands of years ago within the fictional timeline. These vestiges are arcane in nature, and their magical properties manifest in three distinct stages: dormant, in which there is no significant difference between a "normal" magical item and a vestige; awakened, in which some select arcane properties begin to reveal themselves; and exalted, in which the full extent of a vestige's arcane nature is revealed (Mercer et al., 2020). In lines 20-21, Matt hints to the players that VAX'S armor is exalted, and that the wings are the manifestation of its full magic state. However, at this point in the narrative, the characters in the story world do not know what vestiges are, or what dormant, awakened, and exalted states are, meaning that VAX would have no reason to understand the significance behind the armor's wings. The players, though, are aware of the lore behind vestiges, and know what these magical states mean.

What *Matt's* utterance does here is safely navigate between the story world, in which VAX has a vague intuition that the wings are a recently developed feature to the armor, without knowing why, and the game world, in which the players are being told that the armor is now exalted. I say "safely" to illustrate that the utterance does not actually reveal inaccessible information to the story world characters, meaning that it is not actually interpreted by the players as meta-gaming. If, for instance, *Matt* had said "you get the sense that your armor is now exalted", he would be revealing information and lore about the vestiges that VAX does not yet have access to. Also worth noting is that the categorization of an utterance as meta-gaming is at a player group's discretion; another session with different players may have disallowed *Matt's* utterance.

The utterance in question is interrupted by further affective cues of surprise and joy from *Laura* and *Travis* in the form of slow, loud, expletive

⁷Meta-gaming is the act of disclosing, acting on, or assuming information about the story world as a character that is only accessible in the game world as a player. That is, if a player is aware that their character is about to walk into a trap, but their character has no story world reason to be suspicious or on guard, it is considered meta-gaming for that player to declare that their character is suspicious or overly cautious as they approach the trap. Meta-gaming is a form of frame navigation (from game world to story world) that is disallowed and seen as interrupting the immersion of the story world.

exclamations, implying that the players have picked up on *Matt's* hint about the vestige. These cues, alongside *Liam's* nonverbal cue of smiling and covering his face, sustain the surprised, joyful mode in the game world.

```
25
      Lau:
           . HH [HOOHH]
26
              [get it arkangel]
27
      Mat: you go from falling to swooping over [the forest] =
28
                                                 [what the fUCK]
29
      Mat: = [on the outside of whitestone]
30
              [oh: he's the Crow!] he's the Crow!
           [((imitates wings flapping in wind))]
31
32
      Lau:
          [\text{he can FLY? .h hh]
33
      VAX: after-
      34
35
                            [after] doing that I double back (.)
      VAX:
36
           and I fly up that same cliff >and I< \tauLIFT Gilmore
37
38
      Lau: hhh
      GIL: ohAA!
39
40
      VAX: into the fucking sky
41
      Mat: [heh heh heh]
42
      Lau: [HAH heh ha ha]
43
      VAX: YOU: FUCKING <BRILL>IANT BASTARD >THANK YOU< (.) .h
44
           thank you (.) ((smiling)) thuhhh this is embarrassing
45
           I- I float us back down >I float us back down <.
```

As the scene continues, Laura and Travis both continue to sustain the joyful mode in the game world, the former with a loud, extended, and voiced breath, and the latter with the emphasis on "get". Matt continues narrating VAX's flight over the forest, but does so amongst several instances of game world crosstalk in lines 28, 30, and 32, all of which serve to sustain the surprised, joyful mode. In line 30, Sam makes a meta-humorous reference⁸, which suggests that humorous utterances can also serve to sustain a joyful mode. This is not altogether surprising, considering the positive nature of both emotional dimensions, but is worth highlighting. In line 32, Laura exclaims, "he can fly?", only to repeat it in her character voice as VEX in line 34, with the repetition being louder, more incredulous, and, presumably, uttered in the story world. In lines 35-37, we see another instance of performance bleed as VAX describes his actions in the first-person and in character voice; we also see further affective cues sustaining the joyful mode in the varying speed and

⁸The Crow is a superhero comic book character who, in some iterations, has the power of flight.

increased volume of this utterance.

It is possible that the performance of these joyful affective cues triggered bleed-out in Liam, enabling performance bleed to occur. That is, the story world joyful circumstances and VAX's story world reaction to them may have allowed Liam to also experience joyful affect, blurring the line between game world and story world and resulting in the utterance being spoken in character voice. Laura responds to this utterance with an extended exhale, which is a cue consistent with frustration⁹ and/or disbelief. This cue does not disrupt the joyful mode, however.

In line 39, GILMORE responds to the circumstance of being lifted into the air with an exclamation, suggesting that lines 35-37 have been successfully entextualized as player speech. Line 40 contains another small affective cue in the use of an expletive, which would be disallowed in the default mode, and is met with laughing reactions from *Matt* and *Laura*. In the story world, VAX displays extreme joyful cues in lines 43-45, evident in the consistently loud articulation, elongated speech, smiling, and fast speech in the same utterance. After a calming breath, he repeats his thanks to GILMORE, emphasizing "thank" as yet another affective cue. In line 44 VAX displays embarrassment, explicitly stating that "this is embarrassing", but doing so as he smiles, a joyful cue. Line 45 is more performance bleed, alongside stuttering and repetition and increased speed, all of which are affective cues consistent with embarrassment and shame. Curiously, these seemingly out-of-place cues also do not disrupt the joyful emotional mode, as seen in what follows:

⁹At this point in the story world narrative, VEX has spent a substantial amount of time attempting to magically enchant a broom to fly, in order to enable her to ride it during combat. Because of this, VAX gaining access to the power of flight through the armor is a frustrating circumstance for VEX, and presumably also for *Laura*.

```
46
      Mat: £you can see he's a little nervous but he's like
47
            smiling-£ =
48
      GIL: = ha (.) heh (.) .hh
49
      VAX: sorry
50
      Tra: heh heh
      GIL: >thank you no it's uh< ((wipes forehead)) .h h it's
51
52
            ↓alright ((smiles))
53
      VAX: hyou-
54
      GIL: ((smiles)) I would've been fine
55
      VAX: you are a dear dear friend (.) you are a dear friend.
            and i give him a big ((gestures)) diagonal hug (.) a
56
57
            long: strong: hug
      Mat: he kinda- freezes for a moment (.) kind of
58
59
             ((gestures)) °you know°(.) still figuring out his
60
            boundaries with the (.) dynamic being what it is >but
            eventually< he gives in and you feel >his arms take
61
62
            you in as well and you guys have this < long .hhh
            honest hh uh: connecting hug (.) and (.) as this
63
64
            happens the (.) the wings also kind of (.) wrap
65
            around and [envelop the both of you]
66
                         [°aw::°]
      Mar:
                         [°\aw::°]
67
      Sam:
68
      Lau: ↓hhh
      Tra: °°good moment°°
69
70
      Lau: its so [ridiculous]
71
      Tra: \uparrow^{\circ\circ}good moment^{\circ\circ}(.) ((looks at Laura)) he's a<u>live</u> (.)
72
73
            let it ↓go
74
      Mat: and then-
75
      Lia: [((smiles, looks at Travis))]
      Tal: [\uparrow^{\circ \circ}heh::^{\circ \circ}] ha [ha hah]
76
77
                             \lceil^{\circ \circ} heh^{\circ \circ} \rceil
78
      Mat: time (1.0) just seems to pass for a minute and as you
79
             .hhh release him hh the wings (.) kinda ((makes
80
            fluttering noise)) scatter into black feathers in the
81
            wind (.) and disappear
```

In lines 46-47, Matt describes GILMORE'S demeanor in laughing voice, suggesting either bleed-out or a continuation of his laughter in line 41. In line 48, he switches into character voice to enact GILMORE'S nervousness and smiling through performed halting laughter. Both Matt's and GILMORE'S utterances serve to sustain the joyful mode in the story and game worlds. VAX apologizes for being embarrassing, which GILMORE responds to by thanking him. This utterance, in lines 51-52, also serves to sustain the joyful mode through GILMORE'S smile, which we see again in line 54. VAX continues talking

and displays several more joyful cues, seen in lines 55-57 with pauses, repetition, emphasis, and elongated articulation that sustain the joyful mode. Lines 56-57 also mark yet another instance of performance bleed, that once again does not generate trouble in the utterance. *Matt* responds to this by describing GILMORE's initial discomfort, hesitation, and eventual reciprocation of the hug initiated by VAX. This description also contains several joyful (and nervous, as with GILMORE's previous dialogue) affective cues; increased speed, varied volume, difficulty articulating, frequent pauses, and unexpected breaths. This is likely another instance of bleed-out, with *Matt* being impacted by the emotional circumstances currently affecting GILMORE.

Marisha, Sam and Travis both continue to sustain the joyful mode in the game world with their utterances in lines 66, 67, and 68 respectively, suggesting that the players have been positively impacted by the joyful and cathartic nature of the scene. However, in the midst of this, Laura continues to display frustrated affective cues in lines 67 and 69, exhaling heavily and commenting on VAX'S wings and the situation as a whole as being "ridiculous". These cues, alongside Matt's "um" as he prepares to continue narrating the scene, could potentially trigger a lapse back into the default mode, but in lines 72-73, after repeating his joyful affective utterance ("good moment"), Travis seemingly reprimands Laura for her continued frustration, reminding her that "he", which could mean VAX or GILMORE¹⁰, is alive, and telling her to "let it go". This utterance is interesting because it functions to make explicit that Laura's utterances are out of place in the context of the scene, but it in of itself is out of place, evidenced by the unexpected return to normal volume, falling tones, pausing, and general lack of joyful affect. Despite this, the utterance in lines 72-73 generates multiple laughing responses from *Liam*, Taliesin, and Marisha, suggesting that it is being interpreted by the players as Travis playfully¹¹ reprimanding Laura for "ruining" the joyful story world moment between VAX and GILMORE. These responses are not joyful, but

¹⁰Both their lives were at risk in the fight with the monster that the group just triumphed over.

¹¹The other players' responses imply the interpretation of *Travis's* utterance as playful, but because *Laura* does not respond, it is unclear whether *Travis's* intent with the utterance in question is serious. However, the subsequent responses imply that it has been entextualized as playful and therefore humorous, rendering *Travis's* original intent irrelevant. *Travis* also does not protest this entextualization, allowing the players to laugh and *Matt* to continue his narration, suggesting that since *Laura* produces no further frustrated utterances, *Travis* views the interaction as successful.

rather humorous, suggesting a mode shift in the Game World frame from joyful to default to humorous, triggered by Laura's and Travis's utterances. As these humorous cues in lines 75-77 all overlap somewhat, there is no utterance that sustains the humorous mode, and we subsequently see a shift back into the default mode in line 78. In fact, it could be argued that Matt begins this shift in line 71, with "um", sustains it in line 74 with "and then", but gets interrupted and is only able to continue in line 78. However, since his shift cues in lines 71 and 74 are ignored in favor of sustaining the joyful and humorous modes respectively, line 78 is the first affirmed and sustained cue for the shift back into the default mode.

Campaign 2, Episode 75 (2:11:11-2:16:31)

This excerpt concerns two characters, CADUCEUS and FJORD, as they discuss FJORD's recent struggles with faith and power. As a warlock, FJORD received magic in return for his devotion and service to a dark, otherworldly being, known as $Uk'otoa^{12}$. As the story world narrative progressed, FJORD grew wary of the potential repercussions of empowering and strengthening an unknown entity with strong ties to evil legend, and ended his pact with Uk'otoa, surrendering his powers. As a result, FJORD is now unsure of how to move forward, and looks to another deity, the $Wildmother^{13}$, for guidance. CADUCEUS is a cleric of the Wildmother, meaning that he has a connection to her and receives his ability to do magic in exchange for his devotion to her. In this scene, CADUCEUS uses a spell, $Commune^{14}$, to allow FJORD to talk to the Wildmother and see if she can answer his questions.

¹²Within the lore of Critical Role, Uk'otoa is an underwater leviathan who seeks to be freed from an ancient prison; he is immensely powerful, and is confirmed to have an evil moral alignment (Mercer et al., 2020, p. 31).

¹³According to the lore of Critical Role, the Wildmother is a deity of nature, and "those seeking safe passage across dangerous waters pray to her to guide them" (Mercer et al., 2020, p. 23). Since FJORD's previous pact was with an underwater creature, CADUCEUS has previously suggested that it may be worth it for FJORD to turn to her.

 $^{^{14}}$ The language of the spell Commune states that its range is "self", meaning that the conversation between the caster and their deity cannot be heard by anyone else (Mearls & Crawford, 2014, p. 223). The usage of this spell to allow someone who is not the spellcaster to ask questions and potentially hear the answers would not be allowed according to the rules of the game, but Matt allows it here.

```
Tal: um I'm casting Commune.
 2
      (1.0)
 3
      Mat: ↑okay =
 4
      CAD: = .pt I'mna let you speak to her
 5
      Mat: hhh
 6
      FJO: t- to who?
 7
      CAD: to the Wildmother.
 8
      FJO: .hhh
 9
      CAD: you have (1.0) three questions.
10
      Mar: ((rubs hands together, smiles))
      CAD: eh the answers will be [simple] just (.) yes and no =
11
12
      Mar:
                                   [°heh heh°]
13
      CAD: = simple positives or negatives.
14
      Tra: ((rubs face))
15
      CAD: but uh if you want (1.4) and [it can be-]
                                         [((bites hand))]
16
17
      CAD: hh I know we have a lot here, and >if you have any
           questions about what we're getting into that's fine<
18
19
           but I wanted to give you the opportunity of .h h
20
           maybe clarifying something that's inside of you.
21
      Tra: ((taps fingers on cheek))
22
      FJO: right. (.) three questions, simple (.) yes or no
23
           answers .hhh
24
      CAD: or [complex yes or nos] ((nods))
25
               [hh] (1.0) .pt all right hh
26
      Tal: I have set up a small ((motions for fire)) little
27
           fire and I'm breathing in the incense and (.)
28
           starting my trance.
29
      Mat: mkay
```

Taliesin first establishes that he is casting the Commune spell, which Matt acknowledges. We see a clear shift from player to character as CADUCEUS tells FJORD that he is letting FJORD speak to the Wildmother. FJORD'S utterance in line 6 suggests trouble, which CADUCEUS immediately resolves. This results in FJORD displaying significant cues of nervousness, seen in the elongated, stressed exhale in line 8. CADUCEUS begins explaining the parameters of the spell to FJORD, while, in the game world, Marisha begins displaying joyful affective cues, rubbing her hands together, smiling, and laughing. These cues are not sustained, however, since Travis's gesture in line 14 is not a joyful cue; it is another nervous cue, suggesting bleed-out on Travis's part. This is also visible in line 16, where he bites his own hand anxiously. CADUCEUS continues to lay out the instructions of the spell, clarifying that he wanted to give FJORD the opportunity to clarify his inner turmoil. In line 21, Travis displays another nervous cue, fidgeting, and FJORD'S utterance

in lines 22-23 also contains more nervous cues in the form of frequent pauses and a long inhale. Both FJORD'S and *Travis's* nervous cues are not being sustained by CADUCEUS or *Taliesin*, meaning that the conversation continues to move forward in the default mode. *Taliesin* describes CADUCEUS'S actions in the first-person player voice, which *Matt* acknowledges; as of line 29, the scene remains in the default mode.

```
30
      CAD:
           .hhh hhh
31
      FJO: .hh hh um (.) I- (1.0) have felt (0.7) your (.)
32
            presence Wildmother .hh (2.0) is there a reason that
33
            you (.) intervened in (.) mmy particular .hh hh
34
            journey? hh
35
      (1.2)
      Tal: ((looks at Matt))
36
37
      Mat: ((looks at Taliesin)) (0.7) n you ((gestures)) carry
38
            this question on?
39
      CAD: I do. (1.7)
40
      Mat: um (.) [the]
41
      CAD:
                   [just bring along]
42
      Mat: yeah. the warmth of her presence comes and encircles
43
            you and the .hh biting cold of the growing night
44
            fades around both of you .pt though you do not have
45
            a- a direct connection, there is >kind of < a a
46
            presence and a warmth that unexpectedly (.) encircles
47
           your space, beyond just the- f- th- small fire you've
48
            set. .hh um (2.2) the \u2214answer comes through unclear.
      (1.6)
49
      CAD: I think it's the wrong question. [I don't think]
50
51
      FJO:
                                              [.hhh hhh]
52
      CAD: that that has that kind of answer.
53
      FJO: "wrong question".hh pfhhh I (.) miss having the
            ability to affect greater change by .hh having
54
           m(h)ore at my (.) fingertips. if I were to (.)
55
56
           †change the way that I live (1.2) change what I (.)
            focus on or do (.) would you be able to help me
57
58
           regain some sort of .hh hstanding in a way that's
            similar to what I (.) knew before?
59
```

As the scene continues, Caduceus takes a deep breath, embodying the action described by *Taliesin* in line 27, breathing in the incense. Fjord copies the action, and then begins formulating his first question to the Wildmother. There are several more nervous cues in this utterance, from frequent, long pauses, to the inability to regulate breathing, to difficulty in articulation, such as in "mmy". Following a long pause, *Taliesin* looks at *Matt*, suggesting that

he is waiting for *Matt* to answer FJORD'S question as the Wildmother. In lines 37-38, *Matt* identifies and voices trouble, clarifying whether CADUCEUS repeats the question *to* the Wildmother.

In line 39, we see an instance of performance bleed as Caduceus responds to *Matt's* utterance in character voice, resolving the trouble. As *Matt* attempts to continue speaking, Caduceus elaborates on his resolution, inadvertently interrupting *Matt*. This is quickly resolved, with *Matt* affirming this addition and then going on to describe the Wildmother's response. This utterance, in lines 42-48, does not contain any joyful affective cues, meaning that the interaction continues to function in the default mode.

After a long pause, Caduceus tells Fjord that the question he has asked is wrong, which spurs more nervous affective responses from Fjord in the form of whispering and elongated breaths. As he attempts to formulate his second question, we see that Caduceus's silence allows the "nervous emotional mode" to be sustained through Fjord's utterance(s), as with Vex in the resurrection scene. Fjord's anxious state, observable in his difficulty articulating, his extended pauses, and his unregulated breaths, would all be disallowed in the default mode, but the absence of any interruption or rejecting utterance implies that a mode shift has occurred.

```
60
      CAD: hm [((tilts head))]
61
      Mat:
               [the warmth] (1.2) becomes a (.) jovial
62
            [understanding]
63
      CAD: [heh]
      Mat: and (1.1) the b- wind picks up slightly around you
64
65
            >but it's a warm wind< and you swear for a second you
66
            see (.) a green leaf or two (.) kind of scatter by
            before vanishing into the (.) shadow of night. um (.)
67
            the answer appears to be .hh a (.) £definitive
68
69
            [ves£].
70
      CAD: [heh] .pt (1.4) I think so.
71
      FJO: ((nods slowly)) .hh [hh]
72
      CAD:
                                  [something akin]
73
      (3.2)
74
      FJO: hhh oh god I >now I have ^{\circ}all the^{\circ}< hh so many more
75
            †questions
76
      Mar: [heh]
77
      Lau: [((smiles))]
78
      FJO: ((screws eyes shut)) ^{\circ}why did i ask a stupid one
79
            first heh°
```

```
80
      Lau: heh heh
81
      FJO: um ((scratches shoulder)) hh .pt
82
83
      FJO: I hhh don't know about any of this. .hh it's all a
84
            bit under ((shakes head)) >uh< over whelming, cities
85
            and nature and .hh deities overlapping .hhh (1.2)
86
            <would you please:> (2.4) hh do something or show me
87
            (.) something or .hh intervene or take agency in .hhh
88
            my life and show me how best to \text{\pmove .hh hh towards}
            achieving that sort of change?
```

However, as the scene continues, FJORD's anxious cues are not sustained; rather, through CADUCEUS's and *Matt's* utterances in lines 60-63, this nervous emotional mode is *rejected* in favor of a joyful mode. This is observable in *Matt's* emphasized use of the word "jovial", and CADUCEUS's laughter. This mode is sustained in *Matt's* description of the environment around the two characters, illustrating a warm wind and the sight of a green leaf (both forms of verbal imagery that highlight FJORD's apprehension as unnecessary and out of place), and his laughing voice as he describes the answer as a "definitive yes". CADUCEUS continues to sustain the joyful mode with laughter, pausing before repeating the affirmative answer to FJORD.

FJORD'S next answer does not sustain the joyful mode, suggesting a lapse back into the default mode, but his nervous utterance in lines 74-75 (evident in the repetition, increased speed, whispering, and rising tone) generates laughing, possibly joyful, responses from *Marisha* and *Laura*. This results in the joyful mode being sustained, evident in FJORD'S laughter in line 79. While *Laura* and *Marisha* continue to display joyful affective cues in the game world, FJORD'S subsequent utterances in line 81 and lines 82-89 do not contain observable joyful cues. Instead, once again, we see nervous affective cues, and the longer than average pauses in this utterance suggest that CADUCEUS'S silence enables FJORD to sustain the nervous mode independently.

```
90
      (1.2)
91
      CAD: h heh hah heh
92
      Mat: hhh ((smiles))
93
      Lau: °heh heh°
94
      Mat: the warmth (.) has almost like (1.2) a gentle breeze
95
            >passing through the bows< of a tree, like a forest
96
            sighing
97
      CAD: ↓mm ((nods))
98
      Mat: and it very much has kind of a- a [playful] sigh to =
99
                                               [I'm with it]
      Tal:
```

```
100
       Mat: = it. um (.) the answer comes through (1.1) \unclear?
101
             ((smiles)) [but]
102
       Tal:
                         [buh I uh yeh-]
103
       Mat: \footnote but (.) asking. you understand the answer =
104
       Tal: [I do]
       Mat: [= as you are] a man of faith to know that the answer
105
106
             is to require faith.
       (0.8)
107
108
       CAD: {}^{\circ}uh^{\circ} I mean F- Fjord I- (.) <u>I</u> could answered that
             one, what do you think this is? ((smiles)) all of us,
109
110
             me here, you here, these people. this \is
111
             intervention. ((smiles wider))
112
       (3.4)
       FJO: °right°. .hhh [hhh]
113
114
       CAD:
                            [eventually] one day, somebody will (.)
115
             pray for a miracle (1.2) pray for something to save
             them to whatever gods are nearby (.) and that prayer
116
117
             will be answered because \(\frac{1}{2}\)you'll show up. ((smiles))
       Lau: ((smiles at Marisha)) ° that's sweet°
118
119
       Mar: ((smiles at Laura)) [((nods))]
120
       CAD:
                                   [that's (.)] that's how it works,
121
             that's what a champion is. ((smiles))
122
       Lau: ((smiles at Taliesin))
```

After another long pause, CADUCEUS laughs, rejecting the nervous mode in favor of the joyful mode, and generating multiple subsequent joyful responses from Matt and Laura that sustain the joyful mode. As Matt continues to speak, he describes more warmth and a gentle breeze, which CADUCEUS responds to appreciatively, sustaining the mode further. Matt's next utterance in lines 98-99 suggests that the Wildmother is being "playful", which is an action congruent with the joyful mode. In the game world, Taliesin affirms to Matt that he understands the message being described, and Matt's smile in line 101 once again sustains the joyful mode in the game world. After a pause, CADUCEUS conveys the answer to FJORD, with a smile that sustains the mode in the story world. After the longest pause in the scene, FJORD responds in the affirmative, but this response does not sustain the mode, displaying nervous cues instead once again. As FJORD takes an elongated breath, CADUCEUS elaborates on his answer, smiling once again to maintain the joyful mode. This utterance, in lines 113-116, spurs several emotional game world responses, with Laura and Marisha both smiling and communicating in the game world about the "sweet" nature of the scene. CADUCEUS'S final response in the story world also ends with a smile, continuing to sustain the joyful mode despite FJORD not responding to this. Lastly, *Laura* smiles at *Taliesin*, marking the last joyful cue in the game world before the narrative moves on.

Worth noting here is that the story world circumstance of catharsis or resolution that occurs in this scene is happening to FJORD; after experiencing a lack of direction and guidance, the Wildmother has offered him respite and reassurance that he is capable of being her champion. However, FJORD himself does not engage in the joyful mode for more than one line (an aside, in line 79), instead performing continuous and persistent nervous affect. These cues are both allowed, in that these nervous utterances are not interrupted or shot down, and rejected, in the sense that after Fjord is done talking, Matt and CADUCEUS both highlight the unnecessary and incongruent nature of FJORD'S worry and doubt by reverting to the joyful mode. I highlight this because it may function as a way to allow FJORD to play out his anxieties regarding these story world circumstances, while also reassuring him that this is in fact a moment of resolution and catharsis. In terms of emotional mode shifts, the clearest categorization of this scene is as one that is in the joyful mode, but with FJORD unwilling (or unable, due to his past experiences with Uk'otoa) to acnkowledge and engage with this mode. A parallel can be drawn here to Jester's naive affect in the scene where she is told about Molly's death; her unwillingness to engage with the emotional mode does not render the emotional mode absent or shift the conversation into the default mode, since the only speaker sustaining the naive/default mode is JESTER. In that sense, Fjord's behavior can also be considered naive, although the clear presence of nervous affective cues means that his utterances cannot be classed as naive affect. Both scenes are similar in that they illustrate the ability of a character to ignore, refuse, or reject the emotional mode of a scene, without collapsing or shifting this mode; the affective virtuous cycle of an emotional mode is contingent on whether the majority of speakers in a scene correctly appraise and affirm a mode shift, not whether all speakers do. FJORD'S "incongruent" cues in this scene do not interrupt the joyful mode, suggesting once again that out-of-place cues do not instantly halt an affective virtuous cycle.

Observations

This section has analyzed two scenes immediately following emotional story world circumstances of *resolution*, with the aim of examining player language use regarding the three hypotheses of this research. To that end, the following preliminary observations can be made.

Firstly, we see that players yet again do use language as an interactional resource. Alongside the previously established findings of players using language to delineate between player and character, communicate and navigate the rules of interaction, and signal and resolve trouble, the two scenes analyzed above demonstrate that players use language to engage in normally disallowed behaviors without explicitly violating the rules of interaction. The clearest example of this is in Matt's not-meta-gaming about VAX'S exalted armor; by not explicitly saying the words "exalted" or "vestige", Matt is able to inform the players about the armor without violating the rules of interaction or providing the story world characters with information that they have no reason to have. In the story world, this utterance tells VAX that he has a vague intuition that the wings were not previously a feature of the armor, but in the game world, it tells the players that Liam's character is now in possession of an immensely powerful weapon. The use of gestures in place of or before their explicit verbal equivalent, such as when the wings were indicated through gesture before the word "wings", is also an example of the use of language as an interactional resource, implying the nature of the armor's new feature instead of making it explicit to the players. FJORD'S inability to engage with the joyful mode in the second scene can also be read as another form of deliberate trouble/repair delay, assuming that CADUCEUS and Matt's joyful utterances function as repair attempts that are subsequently ignored by FJORD in favor of displaying more nervous cues. Language is also used by players to communicate requests to other players to engage with a scene differently, seen in Travis's reprimanding of Laura to stop her continuous frustrated utterances in the face of a joyful story world occurrence.

With respect to the second hypothesis, this section also revealed several occurrences of performance bleed, alongside the observation that this may be triggered by bleed-out. Bleed-out potentially renders navigation from character to player—and by extension, from story world frame to game world frame—easier than it would be otherwise, and causes the side effect of blurring the lines between player voice and character voice. However, we also see in earlier sections that performance bleed occurs even in the absence of bleed-

out (see Beau's response to *Matt's* clarification about Glory Run Road), and instances of bleed-out that do not result in performance bleed. This suggests that while bleed-out has the capacity to trigger or increase the chances of performance bleed occurring in a scene, it is not the only factor influencing the presence or absence of performance bleed. Returning to H2, entextualization is also observable in these excerpts, both in relation to the performance bleed (with "incorrect" voice utterances entextualized as the "correct" ones) and in the ability for players to infer information about the story world from game world utterances, as with the players interpreting *Matt's* not-metagaming utterance correctly as indicating the armor's exalted state. As with earlier sections, instances of performance bleed do not generate trouble and are not disallowed, suggesting that players possess a substantial capacity for selective transformation and context-dependent entextualization.

H3 concerns performed affect, of which there were numerous cues in the analysis above. Laughter, elongated articulation, significantly increased speed of speech, drastically varying volume (as with the presence of both whispering and yelling in the same utterance), prolonged loudness, the use of expletives, and irregular or improperly regulated breathing all served to indicate and sustain the joyful mode. It is important to note that this section's analysis revealed more support for the observation that a character rejecting or refusing to engage with the emotional mode of a scene does not necessarily cue a mode shift back into the default mode or into another, differently-emotional mode. That is, incongruent cues do not automatically halt an affective virtuous cycle, and preliminary examination suggests that the maintenance of an emotional mode is reliant on a majority of speakers present affirming and responding to cues that correspond to that mode, rather than all speakers present doing so. While JESTER'S out-of-place cues in an earlier section were deemed naive affect, FJORD'S cues were not naive; it is therefore necessary to more broadly explore how and when incongruent affect is employed in all emotional dimensions. Also reaffirmed in this section is the notion that the usage of silence can sustain the emotional mode by leaving space for a character to be emotional, as with FJORD'S nervous affect and VAX'S initial mournful affect in the first scene. This analysis also reveals that emotional story world circumstances (here, of resolution) do not necessitate that the character most impacted by those circumstances engages with the expected emotional mode; this will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

3.5 Anger

Campaign 1, Episode 85 (2:06:18-2:12:44)

In this excerpt, the group has just resurrected SCANLAN, a gnome bard character played by Sam. Before resurrecting him, the group found SCANLAN'S estranged daughter, Kaylie, and brought her to his body. Upon awakening, SCANLAN reprimands them for having done so, saying that he promised her that he would never die. The ensuing conflict brings up numerous unaddressed old wounds and results in Scanlan leaving the group.

```
1
      SCA: I \(\frac{1}{2}\)made (.) I made a promise (.) and I broke it (.)
 2
            and you proved: it (.) to her (.) and I ↑wish you
 3
            hadn't meddled in my affairs I don't have
 4
            ((swallows)) I don't have many things that I care
 5
            about (0.7) and I don't have anything that cares
 6
            about me
 7
      VEX: that's a lie
 8
      GRO: that is bullshit
 9
      KEY: definitely [not true]
10
      VAX:
                       [full bull:shit]
11
      SCA: what (.) you think you care about me
12
      GRO: [vea]
13
      VAX: [YES asshole yes]
14
      SCA: yes I'm sorry (.) you're right (.) .pt you like me
15
            (.) because I: make jokes (.) and I play songs and I
16
            give you a warm place to stay at night and I =
17
      Lia: [((takes off glasses, throws them on table, massages
18
           head))]
19
      SCA: [= feed you fucking chicken] and I heal you in battle
20
            (.) but you don't really care about me >come on< (.)
21
            let's be honest with each other (.) .hhh you don't
22
            <really> give a [shit about me]
                   [I'VE CHANGED MY] OUTLOOK ON LIFE BECAUSE OF
23
      VAX:
            YOU WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU <TALKING> ABOUT OF
24
            <TCOURSE> WE ALL LOVE YOU YOU COULD <CRUSH> ME-
25
26
      SCA: prove it
27
      VAX: IN A SECOND
28
      SCA: PROVE it
29
      VAX:
           [HOW?]
      VEX: [what'd you want us to ↑do?]
```

SCANLAN begins by explaining to the group why he wishes they hadn't brought Kaylie to his body, saying that they proved to her that he broke

his promise. In lines 4-5, he states that he doesn't have anything that cares about him, which leads to VEX disagreeing, displaying the first angry affective cue in the scene through emphasis. GROG sustains it by agreeing with VEX and using an expletive. While KEYLETH'S utterance does not necessarily sustain the angry mode, since there are no observable affective cues in it, VAX'S utterance in the next line definitively sustains it. SCANLAN responds negatively to these assertions, his utterance in line 10 is in effect a feigned identification and clarification of trouble. It is clear that the group thinks they care about SCANLAN from their utterances in lines 6-9, but SCANLAN still explicitly asks the clarifying question, with what appears to be sarcastic affect (the emphasis on "you" and the lack of a rising tone at the end of the question). This sarcastic utterance, despite seeming incongruent, sustains the angry mode because its sarcastic nature is not hidden or disguised. GROG and VAX both respond affirmatively to the question, the latter with substantial angry affect, sustaining the angry mode further.

SCANLAN'S reply in lines 14-16 also begins as a sarcastic response with feigned naive affect, agreeing with VAX and GROG and apologizing, but quickly escalates into an angry utterance, evident in the elongated articulation, emphasis, and, within the content of the utterance, listing superficial and utility-based reasons for the group supposedly caring about SCANLAN. In line 17, *Liam* displays a game world affective angry response, taking off his glasses and throwing them onto the table. This cannot be effectively interpreted as or transformed into a story world action, since the character of VAX does not wear glasses; *Liam's* glasses are not a known realized resource in the story world. This suggests that this is an instance of bleed-out. As SCANLAN continues in lines 19-22, the use of expletives and continued pauses, emphasis, varied speed, and elongated articulation of "really" all sustain the angry mode.

It is further sustained in line 23 as VAX interrupts him, with an utterance that is best described as an outburst. This utterance immediately escalates the angry mode due to the drastically high volume, yelled expletives, elongated articulation, and unexpected high tone in "course", suggesting agitation and difficulty regulating tone and volume. SCANLAN'S response does not match VAX'S escalated volume, but does sustain the angry mode by way of interrupting VAX'S utterance and implying disbelief at VAX'S claim that the group loves SCANLAN. SCANLAN repeats this response in line 28, this time matching VAX'S volume and further sustaining the angry mode. VAX and VEX both respond by asking how SCANLAN wants them to prove this

claim, the former with visible continued angry affect and the latter with, at the very least, concerned and upset affect.

```
31
      (1.2)
32
      SCA: we traveled into the fucking nine hells to get Pike a
33
            suit of <armor> .hh we went (.) and battled a city of
34
            vampires so Percy could feel good about his name .hh
35
            we've fought goliaths for Grog .hh we've traveled
            across planes of existence .hh so you could fix your
36
37
            FUCKING DADDY issues (.) .hh but you've ((points
38
            finger at Vax)) NEVER done anything for me (.) EVER
39
            (.) you've never RISKED anything .hh you don't KNOW
40
           ME .hh you don't know ANYTHING about me .hh wh (.)
41
            ↑WHAT'S my mother's name?
42
      (2.9)
43
      SCA: WHAT'S her name? EASY question. DIED in front of me.
            KILLED by a goblin. \(\frac{1}{2}\)BIGGEST part of my life.
44
            °°what's°° her name?
45
46
      (2.7)
47
      SCA: my father: (.) is he alive or dead?
48
      (3.4)
49
      SCA: how OLD am I? WHERE'S my fucking dog? [you don't =
50
      VEX:
                                                    [~we did get =
      SCA: = care about me]
51
52
      VEX: = your dog~] (.) ~we did get your dog~
53
      SCA: °did you?°
      GRO: ↓no we didn't
54
      VAX: °I've- °
55
      VEX: ~°no we ↑did: I searched-°~
56
      Mat: ((shakes head slowly))
57
      GRO: °°no: we didn't°°
58
      VAX: I've asked you your age
59
      VEX: ((looks at Matt)) °I thought I did the ↑magic search°
60
      Mat: ((shakes head))
61
62
      VEX: fuckin =
63
      Lau: = hell
```

After a group pause, which sustains the angry mode by highlighting the tension of the scene, Scanlan continues. This utterance, from lines 32-41, is a slow escalation, but there are observable angry cues throughout; an expletive in line 32, elongated articulation and an unexpected breath and pause in line 33, emphasis and more breathing in lines 34-36. In line 37, the utterance escalates with significantly increased volume and an accusatory gesture (pointing at VAX), which continues into more loudness in lines 39-

41. In these last three lines, we also see more difficulty regulating breathing, frequent pauses, and the uneven nature of loudness here (rather than consistent yelling throughout) implies difficulty regulating volume and the use of volume for emphasis, both of which are angry cues.

After Scanlan's question in line 41, there is a significantly long group pause, which serves both to sustain the angry mode in allowing space for Scanlan's anger, and to highlight the group's inability to answer the question, implying that none of them know the answer. Scanlan continues to sustain the angry mode by repeating the question, employing a repeated stress structure ("easy question, died in front of me, killed by a goblin") to further emphasize his anger as he elaborates on his mother's importance to him.

In line 45, he repeats the question again, but this time completely devoid of the volume or emphasis cues in the previous two iterations. Note however that this does not mean that line 45 is not performed with angry affect; in line with Johnstone and Scherer (2004)'s assertion regarding "raw" expressions of affect being just as if not more believable than societally indexed "emblems" of emotions, Scanlan's whispering here is just another, equally significant affective anger cue (p. 222). After another markedly long group pause, which once again sustains the angry mode by emphasizing the tension and conflict of the scene, Scanlan asks the group to tell him whether his father is alive or dead, another question that the group responds to with silence.

As Scanlan continues, Vex interrupts him as soon as she has an answer to one of his questions, insisting that the group retrieved Scanlan's dog. She does this in wobbly voice, which, in this context, is an angry cue, expressing her frustration and upset with Scanlan's outburst and her desperation to prove him wrong. Having interrupted Scanlan, she repeats her assertion when he is done talking. Scanlan's response to this in line 53 is a quiet question, identifying and responding to the potential trouble of Scanlan having assumed that the group didn't know where his dog was; this utterance suggests the possibility of shifting away from the angry mode. However, this possibility is cut short by Grog immediately repairing the trouble by correcting Vex, letting Scanlan know that he was not wrong in making that assumption. Vex protests the correction, continuing to use wobbly voice alongside a rising and elongated "did", suggesting increased frustration and upset.

In the game world, *Matt* responds to this protest by shaking his head, implying that GROG is correct and that the group did not get the dog. In

line 60, we see an instance of performance bleed as VEX, in character voice, talks to *Matt*, clarifying that she thought she had found the dog through a spell of some kind; *Matt* shakes his head again, confirming that this is not what happened in the story world.

This occurrence functions to reveal an instance of incorrect transformation. That is, while *Matt* and *Travis* (and, presumably, the other players except *Laura*) know that the group didn't get SCANLAN'S dog, *Laura* is under the impression that VEX *did* get the dog, due to previous story world ambiguity. As a player, *Laura* transformed the action of doing a search, finding the dog, and bringing it to SCANLAN as having happened in the story world narrative, when in actuality, VEX'S attempt to do this was unsuccessful. *Laura* remembering this event incorrectly is entextualized as VEX incorrectly affirming that she *did* find the dog. Instead of correcting this in the game world, clarifying the incorrect transformation to *Laura* herself, *Travis* once again entextualizes the trouble, choosing to have GROG correct VEX in the story world. This entextualizes VEX'S assertion to the contrary as a lapse in judgement or memory, perhaps brought on by the shock of SCANLAN'S outburst.

Once the trouble is resolved in the story world, lines 62-63 are uttered, illustrating continued performance bleed that corrects halfway through the utterance and suggesting bleed-out on *Laura's* part, or perhaps game world frustration at having gotten story world information wrong. In the midst of this utterance, in lines 55 and 59, VAX tries to express further upset and anger at Scanlan's claims, stating that he has attempted to ask Scanlan how old he is and in turn implying that Scanlan's presumed lack of response is the reason VAX cannot answer that question, not the group's lack of care for Scanlan.

```
Sam: it's fine ((rubs face)) .shih
64
      VAX: °°what's-°°
65
66
      SCA: I'm ↑just (.) I'm just a little hungover from being
67
            dead .hh hh and I just have been thinking for a while
68
            that (.) ↑you know ~.hhh~(2.9) <↑Grog: has ↓Pike
69
            (1.5) \uparrowVax has \downarrowKeyleth (0.8) \uparrowPercy has \downarrowVex (.) but
70
            <u>Scanlan</u> has <u>no one</u> and I had .hh <u>one</u> chance at <u>one:</u>:
71
            real relationship with my daughter .hh and I ~ feel
72
            like you gone and fucked it up too~> (.) because you
73
            don't really know me and you don't really know (.)
74
            >what my relationship is with her or \tau what I promised
75
            her< .hhh or \uparrowanything really. (3.0) and \uparrowit's fine
76
      Lau: °.shih°
77
      SCA: .pt when I met you all I was just hh I was just a a
78
            funny little man playing songs (1.4) and ((nods))
79
            that's all I'll ever really be (.) and that's okay
            cause I can take care of myself (.) ((nods))
80
81
      (3.9)
82
      SCA: [I'm-]
83
      VEX: [you don't] have to (0.7) Scanlan
            ((wipes eyes))
84
85
      VEX: nobody knew that any of this was going on (2.7) ~ \text{how}
86
            many times have >we asked you if you're alright and
87
            you just< laugh: and joke: .hh (2.1) we can't help
88
            you if you don't tell us what's going on~
89
      (5.1)
90
      SCA: I don't \tag{need your help}
91
      (0.8)
92
      VEX: ~>well apparently< you do: darling~
93
      SCA: well I don't like that very much at all
94
      VEX: ~>well< get used to it (.) [nobody] likes needing
95
            someone~
96
      SCA:
                                          [\downarrow no]
```

SCANLAN continues talking, with no increased volume but multiple angry cues in the form of emphasis, rubbing at his face, and a sob. VAX attempts to ask a question, but SCANLAN cuts him off, sustaining the angry mode in another longer utterance. This one, in lines 66-75, does not escalate as with the previous ones, but contains consistent angry cues throughout. These are in the form of slowed speech indicating resigned frustration, the use of repeated phrase structures ("X has Y", where X is said with rising intonation and Y with falling), frequent breaths, several usages of emphasis, varied speech speed, multiple longer-than-average pauses, and of course, in the content of the utterance itself.

In line 76, Laura sobs, implying bleed-out since VEX is not currently talking in the scene. Scanlan's speech continues in lines 77-80, with more of the same affective cues, further sustaining the angry mode. This is followed by another long group silence, sustaining the mode once more. When Scanlan attempts to continue talking, VEX interrupts him again, asserting that he does not have to take care of himself. This utterance displays frustrated cues in its nature as an interruption and the use of emphasis. As Sam wipes his eyes, which may or may not be selectively transformed in the story world as Scanlan wiping his eyes, VEX continues, using wobbly voice, varied speed, emphasis, irregular tones, elongated articulation, difficulty breathing, and long pauses to convey further angry affect as she asserts that the group cannot help him if he is not honest with them.

This is followed by the longest group silence in the scene (in fact, the longest group silence in the data analyzed in this research), after which SCANLAN asserts that he does not need the group's help. The delivery of this utterance does not overtly contain angry cues, but its content rejects VEX and the group, and so functions to sustain the angry mode. VEX'S response sustains this, disagreeing with his assertion and employing the term of endearment "darling" in a somewhat sarcastic manner (seen in its unexpected emphasis). SCANLAN responds negatively once again, and VEX does the same, both of them escalating the angry mode by refusing to resolve the identified trouble of SCANLAN feeling that he does not need the group's help and VEX insisting on the contrary. When VEX tells SCANLAN to "get used to it", he responds with a low, angry, interjected "no", further sustaining the mode.

```
97
       KEY: Scanlan do you think any of us could have gotten here
 98
            without each other?
99
            .shih
       Lau:
       KEY: I thought you: knew that more than the ↑rest of us I-
100
            maybe we just (.) thought (.) you (.) didn't need us
101
102
            as much as you felt like we didn't
       (1.7)
103
104
       VAX: ↑°I thought you were the only one who had everything
            figured ↑out°
105
106
       KEY: I did ↑too
107
       (1.3)
108
       SCA: well then I must be a very good liar
109
       VEX: you ar[e]
110
       KEY:
                   [you] are
```

```
VAX: ^{\circ\circ}I've thought (.) ffor months (0.8) what haven't I
111
112
             got figured out that Scanlan has got figured
             ↑out?°°.hh (1.2) I've been trapped in the mmmud
113
              ((thumps table)) for \(\frac{mmmonths}{mmonths}\) ((thumps table)) (2.6)
114
             wondering what I could do to get where you are (1.8)
115
116
             ↑↑Scanlan you ffffucking saved the WORLD with us .hhh
             and if your DAUGHTER can't see \tag{THAT (.) then she
117
118
             can't SEE ↑ANYTHING
       (2.8)
119
120
       SCA: "yeah" if you really respected me .hh you wouldn't
121
             pick me up like some sort of dwarf and [pick me up =]
122
       VAX:
                                                         [((covers eyes
123
             with hands))]
124
       SCA: = and put me down and take off your ff fucking armor
             and treat me like a fucking child:
125
126
       Lau: .shih
127
       VAX: \^\circ^\circ}you've thrown some of us like baseballs (.) I
             don't know what that \uparrowis^{\circ\circ}
128
       Lau: °.pt hahh°
129
130
       Mat: ((smiles))
```

As the scene continues, Keyleth interrupts Vex and Scanlan's argument, demonstrating angry cues through content and emphasis. Line 99 contains another bleed-out sob from *Laura*. Keyleth continues talking, displaying more sustaining cues through emphasis, elongated articulation, stuttering, frequent pauses, and tones. After a group silence, Vax speaks again, after having been silent for nearly 40 lines¹⁵, with his high tones and whispering delivery indicating confusion, frustration, and sustaining the angry mode. Keyleth affirms Vax's claim, and when Scanlan suggests his being a good liar as the reason for the group believing him to be well-adjusted, content, and happy with his place in the group, both Vex and Keyleth respond by angrily affirming this.

VAX continues in lines 111-118, slowly escalating the angry mode from whispered incredulity, emphasis, and pauses in lines 111-113, to marked difficulty articulating and violently thumping the table (which we can presume is transformed into a story world table or equivalent) in lines 113 and 114, to an extremely high tone in line 116 immediately followed by drastic elevated

¹⁵VAX and SCANLAN, at this point in the story world narrative, consider each other best friends, suggesting that VAX has been largely silent in an effort to process his shock and confusion at SCANLAN'S anger.

volume, once again implying difficulty in regulating volume by only yelling specific words.

This leads to another group silence in line 119. After this, SCANLAN responds with an initial affirmative response, performed with *feigned* naive affect that suggests acceptance of VAX'S point. This quickly reveals itself as a sarcastic affirmation, escalating to reject his point and argue that the group would not treat someone they respected the way they treat SCANLAN. VAX'S response to this is to cover his eyes, presumably to hide his tears and frustration as SCANLAN continues to disparage the group's treatment of him, escalating the angry mode with the use of expletives and emphasis. We see yet another bleed-out cue from *Laura* in line 126, implying an extended state of bleed-out throughout the scene.

In lines 127-128, VAX counters SCANLAN'S argument by saying that SCANLAN has thrown members of the group into the air "like baseballs", implying that the group picking SCANLAN up and putting him down is not mistreatment. After this assertion, *Liam* realizes that VAX would not know what a baseball is, and entextualizes this meta-humorous violation as a story world utterance, engaging in performance bleed to allow VAX to say "I don't know what that is" in the story world.

This causes an instance of story world ambiguity; did VAX not use the world baseball? Did he somehow say the word baseball and then become confused upon not understanding or recognizing the word? Was VAX attempting to be humorous in the story world? All of these questions are categorized as irrelevant to the scene by the players, as beyond Laura and Matt reacting appropriately to the humorous utterance, no trouble is generated or identified. This humorous utterance and Laura and Matt's subsequent mirthful responses are incongruent with the angry mode, but do not disrupt or collapse it; this is likely because both mirthful responses occur in the game world, where the emotional mode has not been cued beyond Laura's individual sobbing cues, which are not sustained by other players.

```
131
       KEY: ~ Scanlan (.) do you wish we wouldn't have brought
             you back should we not have done [that ~]
132
133
       SCA:
                                                [I just] >wish you
             wouldn't have  brought her into this
134
135
       VAX: .hhhh
136
       KEY: Scanlan (.) it-
137
       SCA: I had one shot with her and \( \text{now} \) (.) how will I
138
             <ever> -
139
       PER: ~°°ohh°°~((looks upward, covers face in hands))
```

```
140
       SCA: show her that I can be trusted (.) how will I ever
141
            show her [that I can protect her?]
142
       VEX:
                      [well maybe you] should FUCKING TALK TO HER
143
       KEY: YEAH you think y you you are a better father than
144
            most of us have ever [HAD]
       SCA:
145
                                  [you're right] I \frac{1}{2} should ham I
146
            †should talk to her
       VEX: you SHOULD
147
148
       SCA: I SHOULD (.) I should (.) [and I will]
149
       VEX:
                                       [>DON'T] TREAT HER LIKE A
            FUCKING< SACRED OB: JECT >TREAT HER LIKE A< DAUGHTER =
150
151
       SCA: fine
152
       VEX: = Scanlan
       SCA: you're right (.) I will (.) I \talk to
153
154
            her (0.8) listen (.) I >don't know what adventure<
155
            we're going on next (2.5) but I think you should go
156
            without me
157
       GRO: really?
```

KEYLETH sustains the angry mode in her next utterance, employing wobbly voice, a pause, and whispering. SCANLAN further sustains it by interrupting her, speaking with increased speed, and emphasizing "her". VAX has an extended exhale in line 135, which sustains the angry mode as a sigh. When KEYLETH attempts to placate SCANLAN, he interrupts again, sustaining the angry mode once again. PERCY's utterance in line 139 is interesting because it is his *only* utterance in this scene. This is explicitly a grief cue, since it uses wobbly voice, whispering, and an exhalation, and since PERCY has not said anything to suggest anger on his part during this scene. As such, this is an incongruent utterance, but does not disrupt the angry mode.

SCANLAN continues, asking how he can ever show Kaylie that he can protect her now that she has seen his dead body, but VEX interrupts, escalating the angry mode once again by yelling and using an expletive. KEYLETH sustains this by agreeing with VEX, displaying difficulty articulating and regulating speed and volume that reflect her frustration and anger. SCANLAN interrupts again, agreeing with VEX and KEYLETH without matching their volume. This suggests exhaustion on SCANLAN'S part, alongside an unwillingness to continue yelling, but does *not* indicate a shift away from the angry mode. Rather, SCANLAN attempts to de-escalate the angry mode without leaving it. VEX'S response in line 147 is to repeat herself, yelling once

more, and SCANLAN'S next utterance in 148 matches her volume, perhaps to ensure that VEX understands that he is agreeing with her.

He continues at a normal volume, attempting once more to de-escalate, but VEX replies with an entirely yelled utterance in lines 149-150, using expletives, varied speed, emphasis, and elongated articulation to indicate an extreme state of anger. SCANLAN responds by once again affirming VEX'S point, telling her that she's right and that he will talk to her. After a brief pause, he tells the group that he thinks he shouldn't join them for their next adventure. This utterance is de-escalated, but SCANLAN'S difficulty articulating, repetition, and varied speed are all consistent with frustrated and upset angry cues. GROG'S reply in line 157 is entirely devoid of emotional affect, serving as a default mode utterance.

```
159
       SCA: .hhh hhh Vex is right I should talk to her I should
160
             be here for her I don't know why I wasn't with her in
             the \first place .hh I didn't need to go with you to
161
162
             ss to kill the \dragons ((swallows)) .pt I should've
             just been with her in the \first place (.) .hh s
163
             probably just scared to (.) I should just be her
164
             ↓father (0.8) and stay
165
166
       (3.5)
       GRO: can I ask you a \question?
167
168
       (1.8)
       SCA: yeah (2.1) no I will not go whoring with you one more
169
170
171
       GRO: n nno I was gonna ask you what your mother's \undername is
       (2.6)
172
173
       SCA: ((looks down)) h was Juniper
174
       (1.4)
       GRO: °I'm sorry I didn't know that°
175
176
       (3.6)
       SCA: ((nods)) othank you for askingo
177
```

As SCANLAN elaborates on his reasoning for leaving the group, we see more de-escalated cues of frustration; difficulty regulating breathing, sporadic emphasis, unexpected rising and falling tones, frequent pauses, and swallowing, indicating difficulty with articulation. This is followed by another long group silence, after which GROG replies with another default mode utterance. The pause that follows would be disallowed in the default mode, suggesting that SCANLAN is still angry; this is affirmed in the latter half of his reply, where he sarcastically and derisively assumes that GROG's question is a superficial one, sustaining the angry mode. GROG's response rejects the angry mode,

though, and cues the default mode for a third time. Another pause follows, that once again suggests a rejection of a shift into default mode, and SCANLAN'S utterance in line 173 is in fact consistent with grieving, mournful affect. This is understandable given that he is discussing his mother, inadvertently correcting GROG'S usage of the present tense to emphasize that she is dead. The silence that follows in line 174 sustains the grieving mode, marking a shift from angry to grieving cued by line 173. GROG further sustains it in line 175 by apologizing, emphasizing the word "sorry" and speaking softly. After another long pause, SCANLAN nods and thanks him for asking; since this utterance contains no affect beyond reduced volume, it suggests a move back towards the default conversational mode.

Campaign 2, Episode 21 (4:08:57-4:11:18)

This excerpt is from a scene where the group has just acquired a magical bowl that can be used to summon an evil deity. Having journeyed to find this bowl with a character who is not part of the group, Calianna¹⁶, the group discussed how to proceed once they obtained the bowl. The majority of the group was in favor of handing the bowl to Calianna, but Caleb, who is slow to trust, suggested that they cast a spell on her to see if she was telling the truth about wanting to destroy the bowl. The rest of the group reacted poorly to this, but eventually agreed to cast the spell, which revealed that Calianna was being truthful. In the aftermath of this, Beau expresses frustration and upset at Caleb's actions and worldview.

¹⁶This character is a player-character, not an NPC, but is played by a "guest player", a common occurrence in actual play shows. Guest players are people who join a handful of play sessions as a character that is not known to anyone in the group, but who usually needs the group's help with achieving a quest of some sort. Calianna recruited the group's help in finding the bowl in order to destroy it; she was raised by a cult that worships the evil deity in question and recently escaped, and has since vowed to take down the evil deity's followers to ensure that no one else goes through what she did.

```
1
      CAL: °I'm glad for you to take it (.) .pt I'm a little
 2
            surprised uh: at the rest of you for me being
 3
            [\frac{cautious but uh:]\circ}
 4
      BEA: [.hhhh]
 5
      CAL: °I'm >glad for you to take it<°
 6
      CIA: othank youo
 7
      MOL: oh no I'm with you
 8
      Mar: I: (0.5) GRAB Caleb drag him aside (.) HAND Cali the
 9
            bowl D:RAG Caleb over to a (.) private corner >and I
10
            say<
      BEA: ^{\circ\circ}look^{\circ\circ}(1.2) we all have our <u>fuckin</u> trauma (0.3) you
11
12
            understand that? we ALL have our fucking garbage .h
13
            and our dirt (.) and \(\forall \)our shit .h but \(\forall \)ou don't get
14
            to use your: (1.1) skeletons in your closet your PTSD
15
            .hh to be \uparrowshitty and control other people (0.6) and
16
            what \text{they want (0.4) it does not make you the
17
            AUTHORITY hh .h on what's \right .h h and what's
18
            \wrong (.) just because you think that you're a
19
            ↑SHITTY person .hh ↑guess what we're ALL FUCKING
20
            ↓shitty people
      JES: [~not ↑all of us are shitty people~]
21
22
      MOL: [no I'm all pretty heroic I'm pretty fine for all-]
23
      FJO: [yeah I don't feel like that's particularly fair-]
24
      Lia: are we: ↑separate or are we not separate?
25
      JES: we- she's yelling I feel like we [hear her at this
26
            point]
27
      Mat:
                                                [d- she's: not
28
            being: subtle]
29
      (1.2)
30
      BEA: \uparrowI: get feeling like a shitty people I \uparrowdon't speak:
31
            for the rest of these guys but \I get feeling shitty
            (0.9) but it doesn't mean .hh that you get to impress
32
33
            that on other people and make \tag{them} (.) feel like
            shitheads JUST BECAUSE ↓you are.
```

Caleb tells Calianna that now that they know her intentions are good, he is happy for her to have the bowl, but expresses surprise at the rest of the group's reaction to him wanting to be cautious. In response to this, Beau utters a long sigh that overlaps with the remainder of Caleb's utterance, marking the first angry cue in this scene. Caleb repeats his affirmation to Calianna softly, to which she thanks him; both these utterances are in the default mode, suggesting a rejection or ignorance of Beau's anger. Molly states that he agrees with Caleb's caution as the right course of action.

In lines 8-10, we see an immense amount of bleed-out as Marisha describes

BEAU'S actions of dragging CALEB away from the rest of the group; observable are elongated articulation, frequent pauses, unregulated volume, emphasis, unnecessary repetition ("drag him aside" followed by "drag Caleb"), and increased speed, all of which indicate not that BEAU is angry, but that *Marisha* is. Considering that there have been no game world circumstances that would justify her anger as a player at this point, this utterance is likely bleed-out. It does not shift into performance bleed, however, as BEAU'S utterance in lines 11-20 is rightfully in character voice. These lines also contain numerous affective angry cues¹⁷, cueing the angry mode in the story world.

However, Jester, Molly, and Fjord's responses in lines 21-23 do not sustain this cue, functioning instead as humorous utterances. Jester in particular employs wobbly affect to demonstrate feigned grieving affect, interpreted as offense at Beau labelling Jester as "shitty". In response to this, Liam identifies trouble in the game world by asking whether Caleb and Beau are separate from the group, as Marisha described, or not; in doing so, he is implying that the interjecting comments from the other characters would be disallowed, since they would likely be unable to hear this private conversation. In line 25, we see performance bleed as Jester, in character voice, responds to Liam's question with an assertion that because Beau is yelling, the other characters would be able to hear her regardless of their distance.

This serves both as performance bleed and as a story world utterance that reaffirms the rules of transformation: *Marisha's* utterances in character as Beau are being spoken loudly, so they should be and are interpreted as loud utterances in the story world. *Matt* also affirms this, resolving *Liam's* trouble and confirming that the interjections in lines 21-23 are allowed. After a pause, Beau corrects her assertion that the group is "all shitty people" by narrowing it to herself, continuing to display angry cues in the form of emphasis, elongation, pauses, breathing, and increased volume. Note that at this point, Beau is the only speaker continuously engaging with the angry mode.

¹⁷It could be argued that BEAU's use of expletives also cues the angry mode here, but as a character, BEAU is prone to using foul language, hence the inability to outright class this usage as an angry cue.

```
35
36
      CAL: ^{\circ}.hh Beauregard what if she had been \uparrowlying to us^{\circ}
37
      (1.1)
      BEA: then she fucking <u>lied</u> to us (0.4) and we take that
38
39
            and we learn that as a lesson for later on
40
      CAL: .hhh
41
      CIA: miss Beauregard (.) if I can
42
      BEA: YES CALI hh °mhhmmm°
43
      CIA: I think out of everyone here (0.4) from what I've
44
            ↑seen (1.1) mister Caleb's the only one who really
45
            understands how powerful this thing is
46
      (1.6)
47
      BEA: [°°I know°°]
48
      CIA: [I-] even I didn't know (.) as much (1.2) I
            appreciate (.) \text{ everything that you've just said (.)}
49
            and it's (.) the nicest thing anyone's ever done for
50
            me (0.8) but \uparrowplease don't blame \uparrowhim (0.8) he was
51
            doing- he was doing the right thing
52
53
      BEA: °I'm not blaming him°
      CIA: °okay°((nods))
54
      BEA: it's just that this isn't the first occurrence (.) of
55
56
            something like this with him \text{\text{either}}
57
      CAL: ((frowns))
58
      CIA: I think he's trying to do the [right thing]
59
                                             [I ↑think he is too]
```

The group silence in line 35 is the first that sustains the angry mode, since it is devoid of any story world attempt to shift back into the default. Caleb's response in line 36 also sustains the angry mode, seen in the short sigh, whispered delivery, and high tone, all of which indicate frustration and upset in this context. Beau continues to berate Caleb, sustaining the mode, that Caleb further sustains with an angry sigh in line 40. In line 41, Calianna interrupts the side conversation to ask for Beau's attention, in a default mode utterance.

In response, BEAU yells an affirmative, which is likely a humorous attempt at "realism" in the story world, since BEAU and CALEB are further away from the group; this arguably entextualizes CALIANNA'S utterance as having been too quiet for BEAU to have heard, but this story world ambiguity does not generate trouble (we'll return to this later). CALIANNA'S next utterance in lines 43-45 also function in the default mode, which, based on the long pause that follows, is rejected. BEAU'S response in line 47 implies exasperation, once again cueing the angry mode, but CALIANNA'S response in lines 48-52 contain numerous indicators of nervous affect. It is unclear whether this is

incongruent, since the angry mode has just been cued in line 47 and has not yet been sustained (suggesting that a clear mode shift has not been initiated), but BEAU'S response in line 53 seems to be a default mode utterance, perhaps an attempt to placate Calianna's anxiety by rejecting the nervous mode.

In line 55, Beau continues to speak in what appears to be the default mode, but since speaking (negatively) about someone who is present and in earshot in the third person is disallowed in the default mode, it actually functions as a condescending and judgemental utterance (in terms of content) that provokes an emotional, angry response from Caleb in line 57. Calianna attempts once again to defend Caleb, which Beau agrees with.

```
60
      CIA: °okay°
      BEA: °b-°
61
62
      MOL: ((cupping mouth as if to yell from afar)) YOU WERE
63
            RIGHT CALEB YOU'RE JUST A SHITTY COMMUNICATOR
64
      Lau: £hhh£
      Tra: ^{\circ\circ}a [\uparrowhee (.) ha^{\circ}]
65
66
      Mat:
                 [((smiles))]
67
      BEA: it's kind of mut- what Molly said
      MOL: YEP
68
69
      CIA: li[sten]
70
      CAL:
               [I told] you [exactly] =
71
      BEA:
                             [((puts hand on Caleb's shoulder))]
72
      CAL: what I wanted to do and why
73
      BEA: the road to hell is paved with good intentions [my
74
            friendl
75
      CAL:
                                                                [I
76
            don't know] what you are TALKING ABOUT ^{\circ}and I walk
77
            away from her-°.HH Hh without saying aNOTHER word
78
      (0.8)
79
      BEA: that's: fair
```

As Calianna affirms Beau's agreement, Molly interjects, marking the second usage of increased volume to feign "realism" with regard to distance. This is another humorous cue, both in content and articulation, which Laura, Travis, and Matt all respond to mirthfully. Beau tells Calianna that she agrees with Molly's assertion, to which he responds with another yell; this utterance in particular is humorous because it implies that even though Molly is capable of hearing Beau and Calianna's normal-to-soft volume utterances, he himself must yell his responses in order to be heard. In doing so, a humorous circumstance arises out of the story world ambiguity identified above, where Molly's utterance pokes fun at how the rules of

transformation regarding volume are unclear.

Calianna attempts to start another sentence, but is interrupted by Caleb angrily disagreeing with the claim that he is a bad communicator, stating that he told the group exactly what he wanted to do and why. This cues the angry mode once again, but Beau's responses in both line 71, where she attempts a calming gesture, and lines 73-74, where she cites a platitude, are default mode utterances, meaning that Caleb's anger is being rejected as unnecessary and out of place rather than sustained. This does not deter Caleb from continuing to display angry affect, however, as his difficulty regulating volume and quick breathing imply continued anger.

There is also another instance of performance bleed here, where CALEB describes himself walking away from Beau in character voice, and potential bleed-out, evident in the unregulated volume and breathing occurring during the part of the utterance that is presumably entextualized as having happened in the game world. Beau's last utterance, while verbally affirming Caleb storming off as valid, does not affectively sustain the angry mode, instead marking a return to the default as the scene continues.

Given the analysis above, it is likely that the majority of this scene does not occur in the angry mode, since no more than 3 consecutive utterances sustained the angry mode, despite multiple attempts to cue it. At the same time, Beau and Caleb are clearly both angry at multiple points in this scene, and the other characters present clearly appraise this anger correctly, and simply choose to reject or make light of it. What this suggests is that there is room for characters to experience and express affective cues, and for those cues to be appraised correctly, without explicitly shifting into a relevant emotional mode. This is also consistent with the observations made in earlier sections regarding incongruent cues.

Observations

In this section, two scenes immediately related to story world circumstances of *conflict* were examined and analyzed with regard to the hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2. This analysis revealed further support for all three hypotheses, the preliminary observations of which are outlined below.

First, once again, players do employ language as an interactional resource. This is most clear in this section in relation to trouble: players use language to signal trouble in the game world or story world, *feign* trouble in the story world to enhance affective performance, and ignore conventions

of turn-taking in utterances that subsequently generate "realistic" trouble (seen in characters consistently interrupting each other and sustaining the angry mode as a result). Players also use language to communicate, affirm, and change rules of transformation, as with *Travis* correcting *Laura* about SCANLAN'S dog, and, as with the other dimensions studied, to differentiate between player and character both in articulation and content.

Examining these scenes in relation to H2, numerous instances of performance bleed can be identified, including an instance of *intentional* performance bleed to humorously amend a meta-gaming violation in the story world (VAX'S "baseball" correction), and an instance of performance bleed that was used to resolve game world trouble by clarifying story world circumstances (Jester telling Liam that the group would be able to hear Beau yelling). Also observable are multiple occurrences of entextualization; game world trouble being entextualized into the story world to facilitate repair, seen in Grog correcting Vex, story world ambiguity being entextualized as humorous, seen in MOLLY'S recurring yelling gag, and the expected entextualization of performance bleed utterances as having been uttered in the "correct" frame and voice. Additionally, several instances of bleed-out are visible, from the previously observed player sobs and sniffs that recurred in this section, to player utterances (such as from Marisha and $Liam^{18}$) that clearly displayed numerous angry affective cues, including yelling, difficulty regulating breathing, and varied speed.

Lastly, several observations can be made regarding performed affect in this emotional dimension. Beyond the "traditional" affective cues attributed to anger (yelling, increased speed of speech, pointed and aggressive gesturing, unregulated breathing, all of which were present in the scenes analyzed above), the analysis revealed angry affect that manifested in wobbly voice, slowed speech, repetition, stuttering, whispering, the usage of high and low tones, and repeated stress structure ("like this, like that, like always"). Anger can also be conveyed void of any non-linguistic affect, since the content of utterances such as "I don't need your help" can, in the appropriate context, convey anger and sustain the mode. While a number of the cues listed above would generally be categorized as signalling grieving affect, their presence in the scenes above consistently functions to sustain the angry mode, suggesting once again that affective cues cannot be clearly differentiated across

¹⁸The utterance in question was in character voice, but was identified as performance bleed and presumably entextualized after the fact as having been uttered by *Liam*.

emotional dimensions. These cues are, as established in previous sections, sustained through responses that carry similar affect or through the use of silence, which allows characters room in which to express their emotional state. The rejection of angry affective cues is done through the use of either humorous or default mode, both of which serve to entextualize a character's anger as incongruent, unwarranted, or funny. Important to note is that the rejection of a character's angry affective cues does not disallow them from continuing to display these cues in subsequent utterances (see Caleb's persistent frustration at the end of the second excerpt); it simply impacts how other characters present in a scene will respond to these subsequent utterances, in that a rejected cue shift into the angry mode signals to other characters that anger is out of place and incongruent in that scene. Angry affect can also be escalated or de-escalated without collapsing or shifting out of the angry mode, evident in SCANLAN, VAX, and BEAU'S longer utterances in the scenes analyzed. We also see that feigned affect can be employed in this emotional dimension, too: sarcasm and feigned naive affect serve to enhance the angry nature of a conflict interaction, since it is used to give characters a false sense of resolution before reaffirming the aggressive, unfriendly emotional state of a speaker.

Incongruent cues, as with other emotional dimensions, do not disrupt the angry mode, offering more support to the notion that out of place cues are not immediate threats to the progression and continuation of an affective virtuous cycle. However, in the second excerpt of this section, the angry mode itself is not sustained for the majority of the scene, despite BEAU and CALEB repeatedly displaying angry cues and the rest of the characters repeatedly appraising them correctly. This suggests that rejection of emotional cues can be used to represent a character or characters' reluctance or unwillingness to engage in conflict. With regard to BEAU'S rejection of CALEB'S angry affect at the end of the scene, despite having repeatedly employed angry affect herself earlier in the scene, this can be interpreted as BEAU judging CALEB'S anger as unreasonable; she may feel that while her own anger was reasonable, his is unwarranted, since she is correct. While this does result in no virtuous cycle in the scene, the rejection of angry cues is both allowed and realistic with regard to how humans respond to anger and aggression. The ability of an interlocutor to affirm and sustain angry affective cues does not equate to the willingness of a character to engage in continued conflict. Ultimately, the decision to affirm and sustain an affective cue is dependent on the story world emotional state of a character, meaning that there will be (and are)

instances where cues are identified, appraised, and rejected, in line with a character's unwillingness to affirm the cue-er's emotional state. As outlined in section 1.7, this is *allowed*, but inevitably has consequences for the story world narrative. In this scene, for instance, CALEB is given the impression by the rest of the group that they think of him as a poor communicator and that they are comfortable speaking negatively about him.

Chapter 4

Discussion

As established in the Observations sections of the previous chapter, analysis reveals support for all 3 hypotheses in all 4 emotional dimensions being studied.

- Players use language creatively: to implicitly communicate the rules of interaction and transformation, as well as changes to these rules, to differentiate between player and character, to convey information through gestures and sound effects, and to selectively violate conversational norms of turn-taking, trouble, and repair.
- Players navigate the magic circle: play reveals numerous instances of entextualization, performance bleed, post hoc editing of the story world narrative, and meta-humorous utterances.
- Players perform emotional affect: affective cues are performed to signal conversational shifts into the emotional mode, and a majority of the time, these cues are identified, affirmed, and responded to, sustaining the emotional mode.

In addition to these observations, four phenomena warrant elaboration and further discussion with regard to emotional TTRPG play: **performance** bleed, narrative ambiguity, affective virtuous cycles, and the fluidity of emotional modes.

4.1 Performance Bleed

Performance bleed is best defined as the delivery of an utterance in the incorrect voice and frame: character voice in the Story World frame when player voice should be used, or player voice in the Game World frame when character voice should be used¹. This phenomenon is notable because the existence of a player's character voice would suggest that it is employed to indicate that an utterance occurs in the story world, rather than the game world. This allows players to effectively signal to other players which utterances should be transformed as occurring in the story world, and which should be understood as occurring in the game world. The very function of character voice should disallow all instances of performance bleed, generating trouble and confusion when it does occur. We see instead that performance bleed occurs frequently, does not cause trouble, and does not disrupt play. It is unclear how or why this is, but it is likely that players entextualize "incorrect" utterances as having occurred in the correct voice and frame.

```
VAX: \uparrow\uparrow^{\circ\circ}you've thrown some of us like <u>base</u>balls (.) I don't know what that \uparrowis^{\circ\circ}
```

In this utterance, *Liam* engages in performance bleed to acknowledge his meta-gaming violation, since VAX would not know what a baseball is. However, no trouble is generated, suggesting that the other players are able to successfully entextualize the utterance into the one below:

```
VAX: \uparrow\uparrow^{\circ\circ}you've thrown some of us like <u>base</u>balls^{\circ\circ} (.)
Lia: ^{\circ\circ}I don't know what that \uparrowis^{\circ\circ}
```

This entextualization process falls in line with Trester (2012)'s assertion that a scene's success hinges on players being able to communicate the rules of interaction *implicitly*; allowing an "incorrect" utterance to generate trouble would interrupt a scene, causing it to fail and highlighting player inadequacy in gleaning the rules of interaction from implicit communication.

However, certain utterances cannot be directly entextualized without causing narrative ambiguity.

¹The latter has not been identified in this research, but does potentially occur.

```
Mat: you b- you buried him along the Glory Run Road. (1.5)
BEA: that's a fitting name. (1.0) we can um .hh hh
FJO: ((wipes eyes))
BEA: we can take you there.
JES: ^{\circ}okay^{\circ}
```

In this excerpt, Marisha employs performance bleed to respond to Matt's game world utterance in character as Beau. Beau then continues speaking, telling FJORD and Jester that she can take them to the Glory Run Road. This cannot be directly entextualized to resolve performance bleed, since at no point are the words "Glory Run Road" uttered in the story world. If "that's a fitting name" is entextualized as having been uttered by Marisha in the game world, then the utterances that follow should cause trouble, since there is no story world clarity on what "there" refers to. What actually needs to be entextualized is Matt's utterance, but since he does not play a character in this scene, there is no clear process by which this utterance can be transformed into the story world. Despite this, we know that entextualization does occur, since Jester is successfully able to infer that "there" refers to the Glory Run Road. This creates ambiguity about what actually occurs in the story world narrative, as elaborated on in the next section.

The fact that performance bleed occurs and spurs such implicit, seamless entextualization, indicates further support for understanding the magic circle as an interactional membrane, as argued by Goffman (1961). Players can pick apart seemingly "incorrect" utterances without trouble, interruption, or explicit verbal clarification of whether an utterance occurs in the story world or the game world. Furthermore, players can and do engage in performance bleed, fairly frequently, employing character voice when they should judge its usage to be inappropriate. It is not only that performance bleed is not disallowed, but that it is actively allowed, permitted and well within the parameters of play. This suggests that movement across frames is fluid, and that players who engage in performance bleed have the capacity to somewhat simultaneously occupy both frames without difficulty. It also indicates that the play space facilitates this fluid occupation of Game World and Story World frames somehow, allowing players to violate the expected norms of frame navigation; indeed, not categorizing these as violations at all, but successful, correct usages of language during play. Once again returning to the magic circle, this also reaffirms my own modification to Klabbers (2006)' definition of games as social systems and ways of engaging with life; the magic circle enables players to engage with life non-normatively, categorizing actions and behaviors (here, language use) that would normally be disallowed as permitted and welcome.

4.2 Narrative Ambiguity

As indicated in earlier sections, narrative ambiguity occurs when there is a lack of clarity regarding the content of the story world narrative. Take the example in the previous section of Beau making an implicit reference to the Glory Run Road, and it being understood by Jester despite the fact that Jester did not hear the words "Glory Run Road" in the story world. There are several possibilities here: Beau uttering something like "The Glory Run Road. It's a fitting name", Beau uttering "We can take you to the Glory Run Road", or Jester not understanding what "there" refers to, but choosing not to make this trouble explicit, perhaps due to her grief. Since the analysis demonstrates that post hoc editing of the story world narrative is well within the parameters of play, any of these possibilities could be true about the story world.

However, because nothing about how this interaction is entextualized is made explicit, all of them are equally likely to be true. In other words, Marisha could believe the first possibility, Laura could believe the second, Travis could believe the third, and the other players, such as Liam or Sam, could believe something else entirely. There is no shared, explicit consensus on what the story world narrative looks like at this point in the scene; it is not possible to generate an objective narrative text that accurately reveals the content of the story world narrative at this point of ambiguity. A lack of shared reality, according to the conventions of conversation analysis, should collapse an interaction, since no agreement or common ground in interpretation can be guaranteed. Instead, we see that even narrative ambiguity does not generate trouble; scenes and interactions continue, and these uncertainties are permitted to exist, apparently not needing resolution or repair.

Since successful language use during play hinges on the implicit identification and communication of rules of transformation by players, it is possible that these narrative ambiguities are a result of players' efforts to continue communicating *implicitly* during play, rather than making things about the story world narrative explicit if such an act is not deemed strictly necessary.

It is the fact that it does not seem to be strictly necessary according to the norms of play that is interesting; story world ambiguities are not inherently classed as violations or generating trouble during play. At times, an ambiguity can be meta-humorously highlighted, as with Molly's yelling during Beau and Caleb's argument; this running gag pokes fun at the lack of clarity in how speech volume is transformed into the story world, since Molly apparently needs to yell to be heard, but can hear Beau's normally spoken utterances. This gag also inadvertently creates more story world ambiguity; it is not clear whether Molly is actually yelling in the story world, or whether Taliesin is delivering his lines as Molly louder than he normally would as part of the joke, and Molly's volume in the story world is normal. Despite this, and despite the fact that the initial ambiguity is pointed out and highlighted, it still does not cause trouble, and is thereby assumed to not be a violation of the norms of play. This further suggests that play affords speakers space to use language more creatively than is predicted in conversation-analytic norms of interaction and trouble, and that the story world narrative is in of itself fluid and amorphous, not rigid.

Since players do make modifications to the narrative after story world utterances occur, every story world utterance has the potential to be altered, edited, or omitted, perhaps hours or even entire sessions after it has been uttered. The end goal of TTRPG play is narrative construction, but the allowance of narrative ambiguity suggests that the constructed narrative itself needn't be a tangible, immutable end product. This once again emphasizes Aylett and Louchart (2007)'s view of the story world narrative as a narrative experience, as opposed to an objective narrative text.

4.3 Affective Virtuous Cycles

The successful appraisal, affirmation, and sustaining of affect is visible in all four emotional dimensions being examined, demonstrating that the conversational virtuous cycles identified by Attardo (2019) occur in contexts beyond humor. I call these affective virtuous cycles, and highlight their presence in the analysis as further support for the hypothesis that performed affect is employed in service of the narrative. Performed affect functions as a way to enhance and highlight the emotional nature of a scene, permitting characters to express their emotional state in ways that would be disallowed in the default conversational mode. Sustaining this affect allows the emotional mode to continue, progressing into an affective virtuous cycle that results in an emotionally affective, and therefore more compelling, scene in the story

world narrative. These affective cycles also facilitate character catharsis, giving space for characters to process and fully work out their emotions, often through conversation with one or more other characters in the story world.

Numerous observable instances of bleed-out suggest the potential that emotional play has for *player* catharsis, consistent with existing work on the same (see Bowman, 2013a; and Montola, 2010). While investigating this is outside of the scope of this research, it is worth noting the frequent presence of bleed-out utterances in response to emotional story world circumstances.

It is necessary to expand upon the role of naive affect in emotional story world scenes. Initially identified as a cue to enhance and signal (meta)humorous affect, analysis reveals its capacity to enhance the affective nature of a scene in humorous, angry, and grieving modes. In humorous scenes, feigned naive affect within the story world is used to sustain the humorous mode by implying that a character is entirely unaware of the humorous context of their circumstances, as with FJORD when attempting to tell the story about "Buttonbeard the pirate". It can also be used as a form of disguised sarcasm to sustain this mode, as with NOTT'S feigned interest in that same scene. In the grief mode, naive affect can be used to highlight a character's unwillingness or inability to face the loss they are being confronted with, seen in JESTER'S repeated inability to correctly appraise or respond to the grief cues or upsetting information being given to her. This denial of the relevant mode, rather than cueing a mode shift, serves to emphasize the gravity of a mournful circumstance. In the angry mode, feigned naive affect is used sarcastically, to falsely indicate the potential for a shift away from the angry mode or towards resolution, before revealing a character's genuine response to an utterance. This is visible at numerous points in SCANLAN'S confrontation with the rest of the group, and sustains the angry mode by violating the conversational norm of truth-telling. Naive affect is not observable in the two joy excerpts analyzed, but incongruent affect in an emotional mode can still enhance and sustain the mode in question, as expanded upon in the following section.

For affective virtuous cycles to occur, an initial affective cue must be correctly appraised and sustained almost immediately, carrying out the signalled mode shift from default to emotional conversational mode. The analysis does, however, reveal scenes in which an affective cue is appraised correctly, but rejected rather than sustained. This means that no virtuous cycle occurs, but it is worth noting that the rejection of an affective cue does not disallow further utterances with similar cues; it just impacts how these subsequent utterances are responded to, further lessening their likelihood of being sus-

tained. This has to do with another preliminary observation in the previous chapter: that an emotional mode being sustained hinges on the majority of characters in a scene accepting and sustaining that mode, not *all* the characters in a scene. Because of this, if an affective cue is rejected once, it is likely that subsequent utterances with similar cues will be similarly rejected, since the initial categorization of the cue as out of place or incongruent has already occurred.

The presence of affective virtuous cycles during TTRPG play indicate that the least disruption principle is flouted frequently, in conversational contexts beyond humor. This also holds implications for whether the non-emotional conversational mode during play should be termed the "default", or whether, as with performance bleed and narrative ambiguity, play facilitates and perhaps encourages unconventional, non-default modes of conversation at all times, rather than just in emotional story world circumstances.

4.4 Fluidity

This research set out to examine how affective cues are used to signal shifts into specific emotional modes: humorous, grieving, joyful, and angry. However, analysis revealed that the shift into an emotional mode does not disallow cues that are not consistent with that mode, termed incongruent cues. That is, even if the angry mode is being sustained in a scene, a character (or player, depending on where the mode is being sustained) can make an utterance that does not contain any angry affective cues, and can in fact make an utterance that explicitly contains humorous affective cues. It would be expected that these incongruent cues initiate mode shifts into different emotional modes, or back into the default mode, but this is not always the case. Incongruent cues are allowed in conversational interaction, and do not stop or interrupt an affective virtuous cycle; instead, they are entextualized by other interlocutors in the scene, as either out of place or humorous.

One example of this is in Caduceus's response to Fjord's incongruent nervous affect during their conversation with the Wildmother; Fjord's affective anxious cues are not rejected outright, but are responded to with mirth and joyful cues, which serve to entextualize Fjord's nervousness and doubt as unwarranted. The joyful mode continues to be sustained by Caduceus and Matt's (through his description of the Wildmother's responses) utterances, and while Fjord is allowed to display this incongruent affect, it

is rejected in that no other character sustains it.

In this way, incongruent utterances can function as "asides"; utterances that do not disrupt or sustain the mode in question, but are allowed and observable in emotional conversational interaction. This once again relates to the observation that sustaining the emotional mode does not require all speakers in a scene to produce congruent affective cues; rather, an emotional mode is sustained when the majority of characters in a scene sustain it, and when incongruent utterances are entextualized as incongruent within the story world circumstances taking place.

JESTER'S naive affect in the scene where she finds out about Molly's death functions as an aside, because every other speaker in the scene entextualizes her naive affect as ignorance, and the continued presence of affective grief cues in these other speakers' utterances sustain the grieving mode². This is also why the argument between BEAU and CALEB cannot be categorized as occurring in the angry mode; of the six speaking characters in that scene, only two of them display and sustain angry affective cues, with the other four making utterances that are either default or humorous. This entextualizes BEAU and CALEB'S behavior as incongruent, and while their utterances are allowed, they are not sustained, and they do not disrupt the default (or humorous) conversational mode. Incongruent asides can also happen as part of a congruent utterance, as seen in the example below:

```
VAX: \uparrow\uparrow^{\circ\circ}you've thrown some of us like <u>base</u>balls (.) I don't know what that \uparrowis^{\circ\circ}
```

Here, VAX's utterance is primarily in the angry mode, but in saying "I don't know what that is", he makes a meta-humorous reference to the fact that VAX would likely not know what a baseball is, which, being overtly humorous, is an incongruent aside. As with other incongruent utterances, though, this does not disrupt the emotional mode, but it is both allowed and responded to mirthfully (in the game world, with *Matt* and *Laura* both laughing). This suggests that, as with performance bleed, incongruent utterances are well within the parameters of acceptable and correct language use during play.

Furthermore, affective cues that are not immediately associated with a

²As discussed above, this specific instance of naive affect also ultimately contributes to and enhances the grieving mode, but its initial entextualization by the other characters as incongruent is what facilitates this.

specific emotional mode can still sustain it, as with the naive affect discussed in the previous section, but also with "non-traditional" affective cues for the specific emotional modes. This is visible in cues such as wobbly voice, slowed speech, elongated articulation, and sobbing being used to sustain the angry emotional mode, when "angry cues" are generally understood as encompassing increased volume, increased speech, and difficulty articulating. In addition to this, the same affective cue can signal different modes, as seen in the examples below:

```
VEX: ~Percy I don't know if you can hear me (.) but (1.7)
    .hh that day in Syngorn was .h .pt one of the best
    moments of my life~
```

SCA: we traveled into the fucking nine hells to get Pike a suit of <armor> .hh we went (.) and battled a city of vampires so Percy could feel good about his name .hh we've fought goliaths for Grog .hh

FJO: .hh hh um (.) I- (1.0) have felt (0.7) your (.)

presence Wildmother .hh (2.0) is there a reason that
you (.) intervened in (.) mmy particular .hh hh
journey? hh

In these three utterances, the same cue of unregulated breathing signals three different emotional modes: grief, anger, and nervousness. This indicates that unregulated breathing cannot universally be attributed to and appraised as one specific emotional mode. Despite this, players are able to effectively appraise this cue correctly in all three examples. This is because appraisal is not solely dependent on one single cue; as established in Chapter 1 by Mackenzie and Alba-Juez (2019), appraisal is a continuous process of evaluation, encompassing speech, gesture, facial expression, and prosody, all in context. Emotion, after all, "permeates all linguistic levels but also manifests itself in non-verbal ways, presenting different states and forms" (Mackenzie & Alba-Juez, 2019, p. 18). Put differently, context informs the appraisal and interpretation of an affective cue.

In Vex's utterance, for instance, the presence of wobbly voice and the content of the utterance itself provide support for the interpretation of the breathing cue as indicating grief. In Scanlan's, the presence of emphasis, elongated speech, and the use of an expletive, as well as the content of the utterance, indicate that the breathing cue signals anger. For Fjord, the presence of filler words, long pauses, and difficulty articulating, alongside the content of the utterance, suggest that the breathing cue is one of nervousness.

Even cues that are closer to *emblems*, holding a specific indexed status that is associated with a specific emotional mode, can signal modes other than the one they are most closely associated with, seen in the use of sobbing, commonly attributed to grief, as an angry, humorous, and joyful cue below:

Lau: °.shih°
Mar: [.s(h)hih]
Lau: .hhh hhh °.shih°

While all three utterances look more or less the same, and two are by the same speaker, the first is during Scanlan's confrontation of the group, the second is *Marisha's* reaction to the "Buttonbeard" scene, and the third is *Laura's* response to having rolled a natural 20 to help with the resurrection ritual.

The capacity for affective cues to signal various emotional states, alongside the ability for incongruent "asides" to be uttered without disrupting an emotional mode, suggest fluidity within and across the emotional modes being studied. Anger can be expressed through the use of cues conventionally associated with grief, joy can be sustained despite numerous nervous utterances, and characters can make humorous references in the middle of deeply serious conflict. All of this once again points to play spaces facilitating unconventional and creative interaction, and the capacity for story world emotional circumstances to be explored without confining players and characters to limited modes of expression with which to explore them.

4.5 Limitations

Though this project offers insight into several important questions regarding TTRPG play and language use, there are a number of limitations with regard to the design, methodology, and applicability of this research.

The first limitation of this work is that the players whose language was observed are not amateur players, but professional performers with years of experience in TTRPG spaces. Because of this, it is difficult to examine the extent to which extended exposure to the game, TTRPGs as a whole, or actual play spaces in general, impact their behavior during play. A longitudinal study that examines player language use from their first ever play session and then at regular intervals of continued play could better account for the role of experience and familiarity on player language use. It is likely, for example, that experienced players are more adept at engaging in creative

language use, magic circle navigation, and performed affect, than novice or beginner players. The question of performed vs. amateur play is addressed later in this chapter.

The second observable limitation is in the selection of data. A representative sample consisting of ten scenes across the four emotional dimensions being studied was chosen for analysis, but considering the sheer amount of usable play session data, totalling roughly 1030 hours of play³, a considerably larger sample size could contribute more information and nuance to the analysis. Part of the choice to restrict the amount of data in this project was made on the basis of the chosen methodology, as conversation analysis is an extensive process; a corpus study examining transcribed session data for specific linguistic affective cues could allow for a larger selection of data to be studied.

That being said, this research has demonstrated the usefulness of CA for studies in this domain, as the approach facilitates the transcription, observation, and analysis of gestures, changes in eye contact, turn-taking and speaker boundaries, lengths of pauses, details of articulation and prosody, and non-linguistic verbal cues such as laughter, changes in breathing, and sobs. As laid out in Chapter 2, the conversation-analytic approach paints a far more detailed and nuanced picture from which to draw conclusions about language use in TTRPG play than alternative methods such as discourse analysis and corpus studies.

Another limitation with regard to design is that this work does not allow us to draw conclusions about individual player experiences before and after play. This is especially relevant with regard to the question of why people engage in emotional play, but since the object of analysis chosen for this research was actual play data, multiple years after the original play sessions occurred, the assessment of individual player experience was not possible. As addressed later in this chapter, further research could attend to this issue by combining a CA approach with player interviews.

Lastly, as elaborated on in section 4.6 below, this project's conclusions cannot be applied to language use in TTRPG play broadly until similar research is carried out with amateur player participants. This will account for the differences in play between professional actual play performers and amateur play groups.

³A rough estimate given two completed campaigns of 115 and 141 episodes respectively, with each episode averaging four hours in duration.

4.6 Directions for Further Research

While this project offers substantial insight into the questions it aimed to address, the data analyzed also present opportunities to extend these questions to other domains and address the methodological limitations of this study through further research.

Firstly, the presence of bleed-out cues in emotional scenes suggests that emotional story world circumstances have the capacity to facilitate not only character catharsis, but player catharsis, too. Work in this regard has established that play can serve as an emotional outlet (see Bowman, 2013b; Montola, 2010; and Poremba, 2007), but one potential avenue for further research would be to combine the conversation-analytic approach explored here with interviews of players before and after emotional play, to determine whether the presence, absence, and frequency of affective cues in a player's performance influences their play experience and contributes to game world catharsis.

Secondly, certain conclusions drawn from this data suggest that the "default mode" in play may not be default at all, and that conversational interaction in a TTRPG play space is potentially never telic. There is potential support for both sides of the argument: either the "goal" of the "goal-oriented, cooperative communication" is play, meaning that interaction can be telic, or all language during play is "playful", categorized in the same way as conversation made to pass time, seek pleasure, or in other words, have fun, meaning that play interaction is always paratelic. One way to examine this question is to look at player language use in response to non-emotional story world circumstances, to see if and how violations of the default conversational mode occur. Future research could conduct a conversation-analytic review of language use in play to determine the extent to which play encourages unconventional and creative interaction in non-emotional circumstances.

Another aspect of this is the importance of studying emotional game world circumstances—failed or successful dice rolls, trouble between players, or extended bleed-out and/or bleed-in—using the same approach, with the goal of seeing what affective cues are observable in these circumstances, if and how they are appraised by other players, and if and how they are sustained, in comparison to story world emotional circumstances and affect. The analysis in this paper already contains an example of an emotional game world circumstances, as when Laura's dice roll to help with PERCY'S resurrection is a critical success; further research could explore game world affect, per-

formance bleed in the opposite direction than identified in this research (i.e. utterances in player voice that should be in character voice), affective virtuous cycles within the Game World frame, and the proximity and influence of these affective cues to and on the Performance frame.

Regarding performance, the other clear avenue for further research is in analyzing amateur play interactions, especially with regard to emotional story and game world circumstances. This research would also require a reformulation of the Performance frame and its relevance to amateur play interactions, since the lack of a produced media component and viewing audience does not render the Performance frame obsolete. Rather, questions of performativity, vulnerability, and personas should be explored with regard to the behavior and language use of amateur TTRPG players. A methodological concern relating to such a research endeavor is that amateur play interactions may prove difficult to transcribe if amateur players do not always or consistently employ character voices. Since amateur players are not professional performers, it may be difficult to differentiate between phenomena such as performance bleed and human error in employing the "correct" voice (for example, as a result of a player lacking confidence or skill in consistently using their character voice).

However, what may initially seem like a methodological issue could potentially function as further evidence for creative language use during play. That is, the absence of consistent character voice would mean that amateur play and the rules of transformation therein do not rely on character voices to delineate between story world and game world; if, despite this, amateur players are just as capable of deciphering the frame in which utterances occur, then this suggests an increased capacity for entextualization and implicit communication of transformation rules among players. It is therefore necessary to investigate amateur play and language use therein, to examine the extent of this capacity for entextualization and creative language use. This is also necessary due to the fact that the majority of TTRPG play groups are not made up of professional performers. Any conclusions made about language use during TTRPG play based on this research must first be proven to apply in amateur play settings before we can definitely make statements about if and how play spaces facilitate creative, unconventional, affective interaction through language.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This project attempted to address three hypotheses relating to creative language use, magic circle navigation, and performed affect in TTRPG play. Having presented the results of this research, I will close by offering three concluding statements reflecting on this work and how it contributes to academic scholarship in this domain and beyond.

Firstly, humans have an incredible capacity for creative language use during play, and are able to shift across frames, occupy simultaneous consciousnesses, and generate ambiguity without generating trouble. In addition to this, we see that in play spaces, conversational norms can be and often are violated without trouble or repercussions. Player interaction can generate ambiguity about the story world narrative, and this ambiguity does not need to be resolved for play to progress. Interestingly, story world ambiguity seemingly does not violate the end goal of collaborative narrative construction. This suggests even more support for the view of a TTRPG narrative as a narrative experience, meaning that "constructing the compelling narrative" does not entail constructing one, distinct, objective narrative end text, but participating in and facilitating a compelling narrative experience. This ties back into the broader question of how best to assess the impact of a narrative, providing further evidence for Aylett and Louchart (2007)'s claim that quantitative approaches to analyzing narrative impact don't apply to interactive, emergent narratives and TTRPG play specifically. Attempts to evaluate the success of an emergent narrative must acknowledge the inadequacy of standardized, universal measures for properly accommodating multiple fluid, extant narrative experiences. The prioritization of individual user narrative experiences would also indicate support for player catharsis as a byproduct

of emotional play, since the goal of narrative construction would then be to construct a compelling narrative (player) experience. In other words, the rules of TTRPG play would encourage, if not require, players to construct a narrative experience that is compelling to them as players and characters. Player catharsis could not be explored within the current research design, but warrants investigation with regard to emergent narrative experiences and players' ability to simultaneously function in multiple frames.

This relates to the second concluding point, which is that, as predicted by the literature, players employ linguistic and non-linguistic affect during play, even when this results in bleed-out. The initial hypothesis predicted that this performed affect is employed in service of the narrative end goal (constructing a compelling narrative), and the first point above suggests that while this is the case, the end goal also involves constructing a compelling narrative experience for the player, meaning that players may perform affect to enhance their own experience of play. This also potentially means that bleed-out is a desired effect of emotional play, and an outlet through which players can explore strong emotions safely, as indicated by Bowman (2013a) and Montola (2010). Once again, definitive conclusions about whether or not player catharsis occurs cannot be drawn from this research, as this would require insight into players' thoughts and experiences before, during, and after play. However, this research can definitively provide strong support for the notion that facilitating character catharsis and achieving the end goal of compelling narrative construction, even if this involves performing strong negative affect that results in bleed-out, is in some way rewarding for players.

The third and final point has to do with the conceptualization of TTRPG play as a living lab; as established by games scholarship, the magic circle offers players opportunities to engage in behaviors and actions that would be disallowed in real life, behind the social alibi of being in a play space. The willingness and, indeed, enthusiasm with which players flout conversational norms during play in these spaces suggests a capacity to flout these norms elsewhere, outside of an explicit game context. Examining this further reveals that not only do humans possess this capacity to engage in conversational violations, but that they do engage in them, and frequently. Opportunities for playful language extend beyond a TTRPG context; dinner table talk among family members, inside jokes between friends, and children's pretend games are all conversational play spaces wherein creative interaction and violation is encouraged. This project's conclusions about the fluidity of emotional modes also apply to real world interaction; humans joke about traumatic

experiences, death, and fear, express linguistic and non-linguistic affect in multidimensional, at-times unconventional ways, and make asides that we would expect to be disallowed. In other words, there is always the potential for play: interlocutors always have the ability to entextualize conversational violations as allowed and permitted within the parameters of a playful interaction, constructing a conversational magic circle of sorts around an interaction, communicating the rules of that interaction implicitly, and allowing deliberate violations of talk. This is a form of linguistic brink play, in which norms are flouted deliberately and explicitly, where the social alibi is that the other interlocutors present sustain the conversational magic circle, maintaining the boundary of playful interaction that permits otherwise disallowed forms of talk, turn-taking, and affect.

Perhaps further work attempting to address the question of why we play games can make something of the fact that we seem to play them even outside of "play spaces", in everyday interactions with others, using language as a creative, affective, interactional resource for play.

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Appendix

Label	Character Name	Player Label / Name
JAM	Jamedi	Mat/Matthew
GIL	Gilmore	
BEA	Beau	Mar/Marisha
KEY	Keyleth	
CAL	Caleb	Lia/Liam
VAX	Vax'ildan	
CAD	Caduceus	Tal/Taliesin
PER	Percy	
JES	Jester	Lau/Laura
VEX	Vex'ahlia	
NOT	Nott	
SCA	Scanlan	Sam/Sam
TAR	Taryon	
FJO	Fjord	Tra/Travis
GRO	Grog	
YAS*	Yasha	Ash/Ashley
TWI	Twiggy	Deb*/Deborah
CIA	Calianna	Mak*/Mark

Table 1: Transcription Labels and Players

^{*}While these labels were generated for accurate transciption, they do not appear in the transcribed data as their speakers do not make utterances in the excerpts analyzed.