Contents

Overview

Concept Overview

- VR comedic interactive story game based around simply pushing a button.

- The game is made up of 5 stages, with each stage being very different to the last.

- Can you push the button? What about pour tea without spilling any? Can you solve a murder? And what about escaping prison?

- Start out in a simple white box with nothing except a desk and a button. But what is outside the box? Another box of course!

- Each of the 5 stages may seem like a totally isolated game but in reality, the mistakes you have made in the past will haunt you into the future.

- Each time you have completed a stage, the walls around you collapse revealing a larger, slightly darker room.

Genre & Scene Overview

Genre:

Button in a Box is a single player interactive story in Virtual Reality. There are 5 stages each with a unique setting, but your earlier choices may come back to haunt you.

Scene 1:

Simply choose whether you want to push the button or not. This level acts as a sort of tutorial as the player gets used to playing in virtual reality.

Scene 2:

Here the player is joining two characters for a tea party. They must keep refilling each of the cups without spilling any tea.

Scene 3:

In the third stage the player is playing murder mystery and must use their detective skills in order to determine who was the murderer.

Scene 4:

Here the player must try to escape prison. Can they figure out how to escape without being caught?

Scene 5:

This is the final stage where the player is greeted with open space and talks to the light. Here, the player concludes the game.

Marketing Direction

Inspirations

Here is a collection of other games and TV series which have inspired Button In a Box.

As you can see the game is a weird mix of all of these combined.

Under each source of inspiration there are notes on what aspects I took inspiration from.

These include game mechanics, themes, the psychology, and gameplay.

Will You Press The Button?
("Will You Press The Button?" 2013)

- The idea of pushing the button or not
- Big red button

Inception
(Nolan 2010)

- Dreams are different yet related
- Each dream is different to the last but have some shared elements

Job Simulator
(*Job Simulator* 2016)

- Very simple VR experience
- No movement except of hands
- Funny humour

Murder Mystery
("Host Your Own Murder Mystery" 2021)

- Murder Mystery Game mode

Trick or Treat: Kitten
(Caron 2008)

- Looks at the psychology behind people not doing what they are told
- Despite knowing the consequences people pushed the button anyway

Target Demographics

◈ Virtual reality allows for some really unique experiences which can't be as easily achieved in a normal flatscreen game. I intend to use this to my upmost advantage and create an experience that people would enjoy and find interesting.

◈ The target audience are middle aged people (53-60) as they have the most dispensable income and have more experience in our reality, making this virtual reality more engaging.

◈ Due to this being the target audience, the game will take players roughly half an hour to an hour to complete since people in this age bracket tend to have less time to play games and completability within games is already very low.

◈ According to Richard Bartle's Taxonomy (1996), players can be split into roughly 4 categories. The Achiever, Explorer, Socialiser, and the Killer. (See Fig.1)

◈ This game is targeting the Socialisers as they make up 80% of players. But since this is a single player game, the characters within the game are constantly interacting with the player and giving the player a social experience.

◈ This is however also very close to the explorers who are curious and love to be immersed into a world which Virtual Reality achieves more than any other medium. This means that there is a niche of players who are a mix of socialisers and explorers who will find this game particularly engaging, spreading the word to their friends.

◈ As Virtual Reality grows, so does the audience. This is why the game will be targeting new VR users as they may not be used to the controls and this game will help teach them how to use them.

◈ This game would be targeting the Meta Quest 2 Virtual Reality headset as it has the largest player base and has the Lowest performance meaning that If it runs on this headset, It should run on almost any other.

Fig 1.
(Drennan and Keeffe 2007)
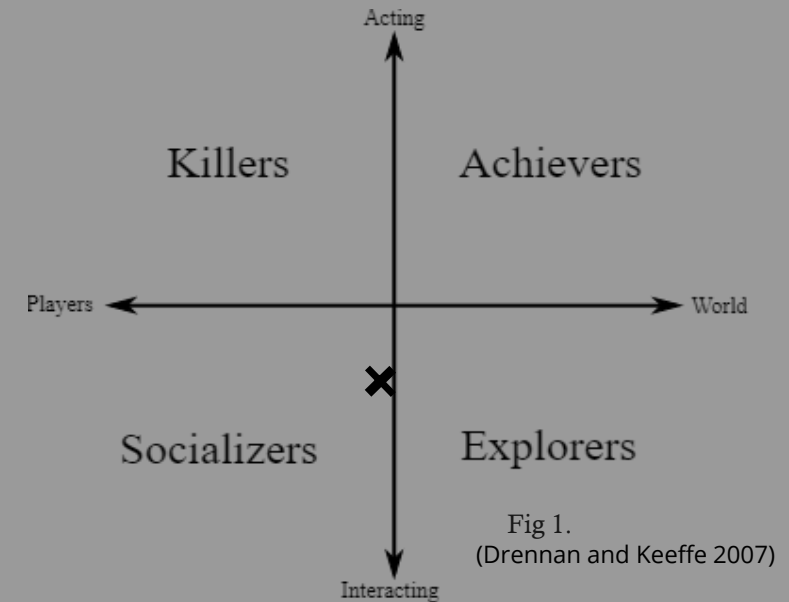
◈ With all the characters being very stylised and there being a lack of violence I expect a rating of PEGI 7. This also allows for a younger audience which may also have fun with the game, however due to it being a VR title, The game rating should be 13+ as that is the recommended age to play Virtual Reality.

Note: What's classed as middle aged is different for everyone. You're still young in my eyes Nick!

Unique Selling Points

Overview

There are many unique aspects of this game making it in some ways more of an artwork where the meaning is up to the eye of the beholder. I think this would work brilliantly in Virtual Reality as it grapples with our grip on reality itself.

This game gives people a unique experience that simply can't be experienced in our own reality in the same way.

Funny Humour

There is an emphasis of funny humour within the game in order to try and make the player laugh. This is to make the experience more enjoyable as well as bring a lighter tone to the dark theme.

Box within a Box

The Box opening up revealing a larger box is distinctly unique and makes the player question whether they are still within a box or not at the end. This theme can be applied to many situations ranging from the nature of our universe to depression and anxiety.

Short Completion Time

The whole game doesn't take long to complete, meaning that people with busy lives and schedules will still have time to play through the entire game. Another perk is that most people will complete it in just 1 sitting meaning that they won't have to relearn the controls all over again.

Simple to understand

Button In a Box is a very simple game for players to understand. This means that new players who may not have played a VR title before can enjoy the game the same way a VR veteran might.

Game World

Game World Overview

◈ Each scene takes place in a blank box.

◈ After each scene finishes, the walls collapse revealing an even larger box, that is also slightly darker. (See Fig.2)

◈ There are 5 scenes in total, with the last being so dark and large that the player can't tell if it is endless or not.
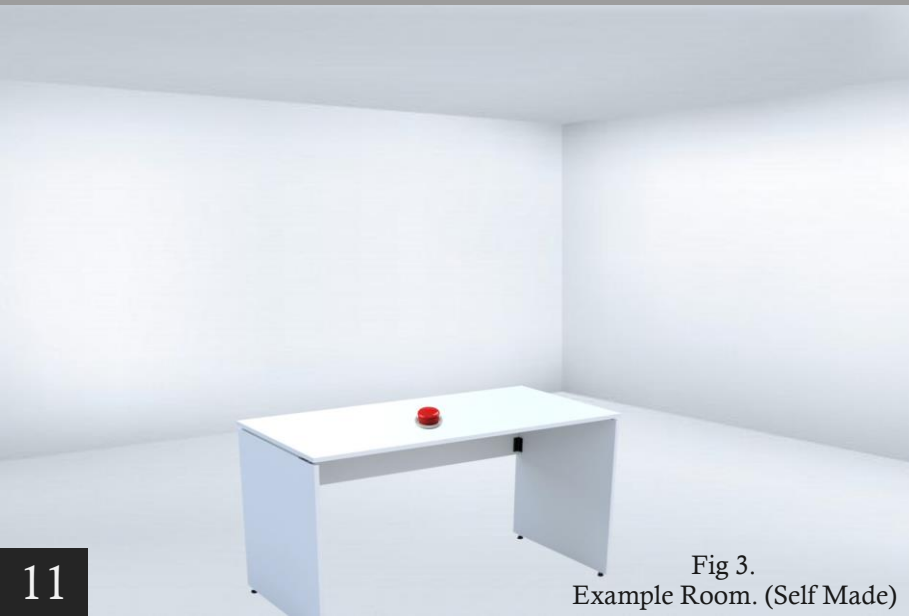
◈ The first scene is simply a white empty room with nothing in it except a desk and a button. (See Fig.3)

◈ Each scene represents a different element of Todorov's Narrative structure theory. (Tzvetan Todorov, 1960)

◈ Each scene also has its own minor narrative that is separate from the larger multi-scene narrative.

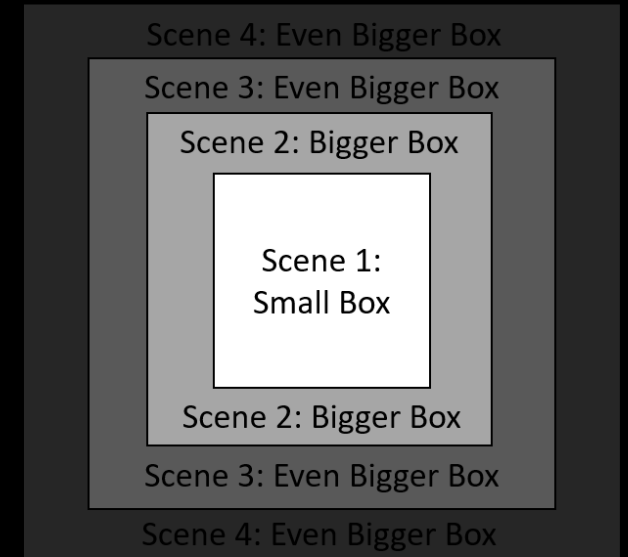

Scene 4: Even Bigger Box
Scene 3: Even Bigger Box
Scene 2: Bigger Box
Scene 1: Small Box
Scene 2: Bigger Box
Scene 3: Even Bigger Box
Scene 4: Even Bigger Box

Fig 2.
Diagram showing each scene. (Self Made)

Fig 3.
Example Room. (Self Made)

Theme & Tone

Tone:

The tone of the game at the beginning is a very light one, with constant jokes and puns. But as the player progresses, the tone shifts to a much darker and more sinister one.

The tone shifts as the player is discovered to have murdered one of the characters, giving the sense that their actions have real consequences. From what starts out as a simple game about hitting buttons becomes an existential crisis as the player grapples with what they had done.

This effect is made worse by the fact that it is in virtual reality, so they have a more innate connection to the characters.

Theme:

The theme of the game is very dark. As each time the player breaks out of the box, they find themselves within an even larger one.

To add to this, the walls get darker, implying that the game is taking a darker, more sinister route.

This theme can be taken to symbolise a multitude of different things. From breaking out of depression, to the nature of the universe, from life and death to it all simply being a dream.

There is a sense of chaos, resembling that of a dream. Every scene works in isolation but draws on elements from the previous. As the game goes on it gets weirder and more bizarre with the final act of the player physically smashing the walls themselves symbolising how they are breaking the eternal cycle.

Narrative & Game Flow

Overall Game Narrative

◈ The narrative of the game can be split into the individual narrative of each scene as well as the overall narrative of the game. This is because each scene has its own mini narrative story but also builds on the narrative of the whole game.

◈ Each scene represents a different element of Todorov's Narrative structure theory. (See Fig.4) (Tzvetan Todorov, 1960)

◈ The game starts out with the player simply having to try and push the button but in doing so unknowingly kills the button. This is discovered later in scene 3 when the player is trying to figure out who killed the button only to discover it was themselves.
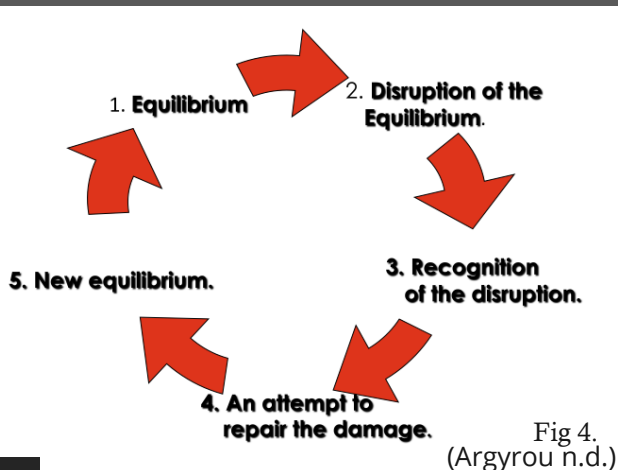
◈ The idea of this narrative is to challenge the players ideas of what is right and wrong as well as how their actions may have unforeseen consequences.

◈ This narrative also works well to get players to return and play again since they may have missed details in their first run of the game.

Fig 4.
(Argyrou n.d.)

Overall Game Narrative

◈ The game starts in an empty room with just a desk and a button. Here the player simply must push the button. The player meets Larry the Lever who helps them in their task and eventually the walls fall, revealing a larger, slightly greyer, room.

◈ Here, the player meets Diana the Dial who is having a tea party with Larry the Lever. The player is tasked with pouring out tea for each of the characters but if they spill any the walls get soggy and then disintegrate, revealing an even larger, even darker, room.

◈ In this third room, there is a Pull Cord called Paula the Pulley. Paula the Pulley announces that the button has been murdered to which Darren the Desk responds, "Let the murder mystery begin!". In this scene the player must try to solve the murder of the button but ends up being accused themselves of pushing the button at the beginning despite it telling them not to. This scene ends with all the characters shouting "guilty!" and "murderer!" at the player as the walls fade around them revealing the fourth room, even bigger and darker than the previous.

◈ Here the player finds themselves in chains and behind bars. Peter the plug and the room itself convince the player that they must break out using the desk to break the walls. Once they have done so the walls come crashing down around them.

◈ This reveals the final scene which is just an empty black void. The room is so big and so dark that it seems never ending. Then a light appears, revealing that the player has completed their objective and slowly fades away before the game quits itself.

Individual Scene Narrative

◈ As mentioned on previous pages, each scene has its own unique storyline.

◈ The first is simply the player trying to push the button. (See Fig.5)

◈ The second, a tea party where Diana the Dial is trying to get Larry the lever to love her, and the player must keep refilling their teacups without spilling any.

◈ The third scene is a murder mystery where the player gets to jot down notes on a notepad and try to solve the murder, only to find out they committed it.

◈ In the fourth scene the player has to try to escape prison by breaking the walls with the legs from the desk.

◈ Finally in the fifth scene, the player is in a black void and talks to a light which tells them that they have achieved their goal and the game will be over in 5 seconds.


Fig 5. Flowchart illustrating how the first level would be played out. (Self Made)
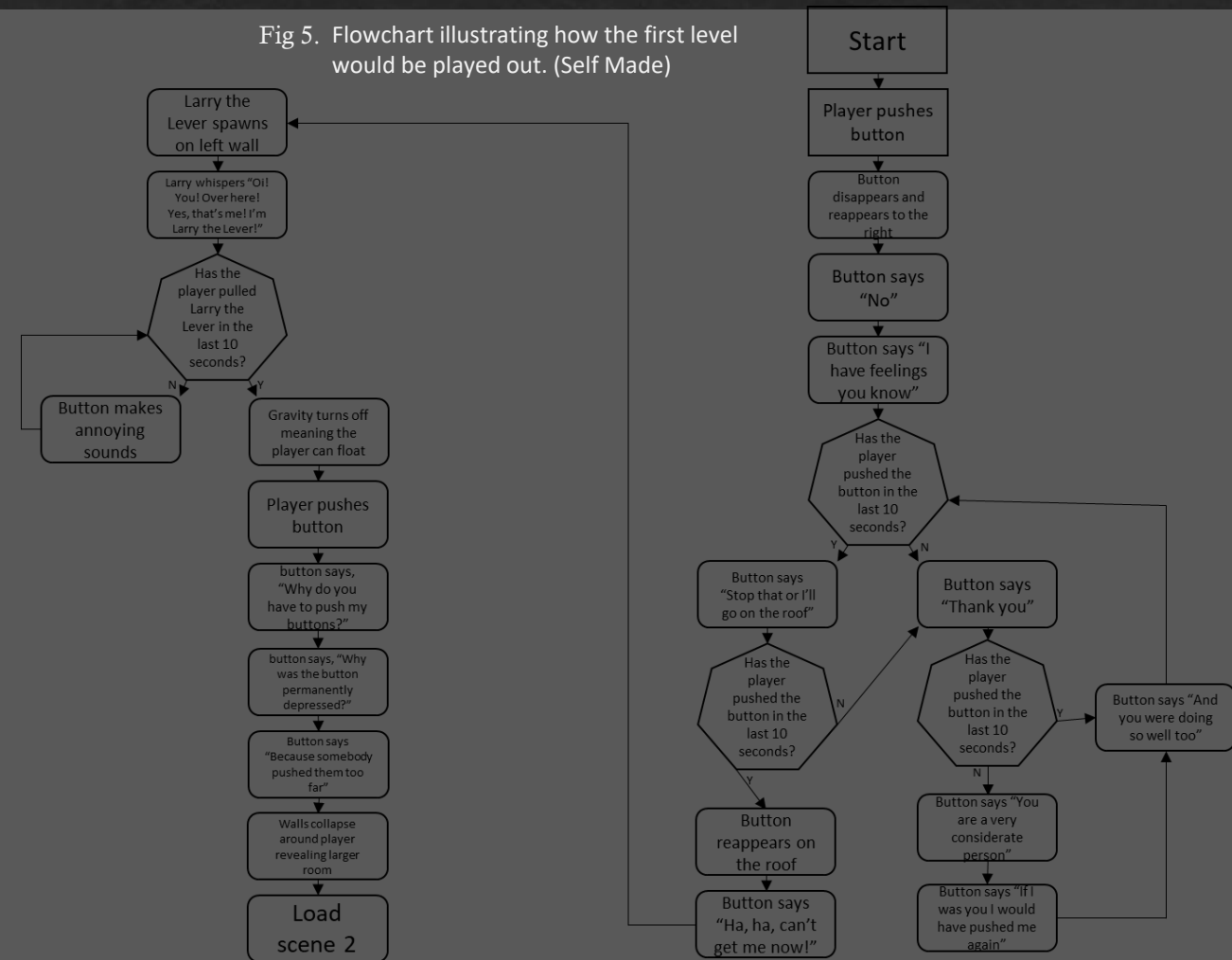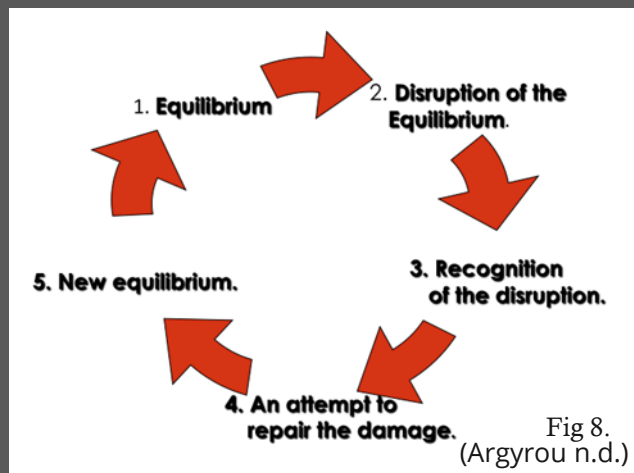
Game Flow

The flow of the game is very important and in order to keep the player engaged there are 3 different narrative structures in place, which all interact with one another making the gameplay more interesting throughout the experience.

1. Example flowchart of the first scene, showing off how the player interacts with the button and the different characters within the scene
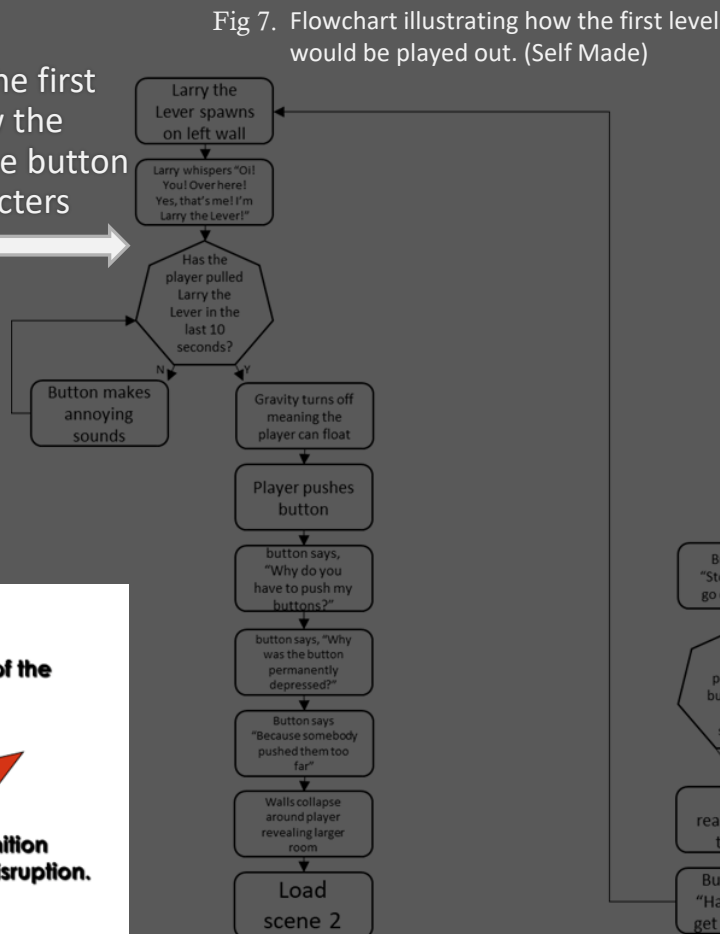
2. Diagram showing the layout of each of the 5 scenes as well as the colours of the rooms.

3. Todorov's Narrative structure theory as each scene represents a different state on the cycle.

Fig 7. Flowchart illustrating how the first level would be played out. (Self Made)

Fig 6.
Diagram showing each scene. (Self Made)

Scene 4: Even Bigger Box
Scene 3: Even Bigger Box
Scene 2: Bigger Box
Scene 1: Small Box
Scene 2: Bigger Box
Scene 3: Even Bigger Box
Scene 4: Even Bigger Box

1. Equilibrium
2. Disruption of the Equilibrium.
3. Recognition of the disruption.
4. An attempt to repair the damage.
5. New equilibrium.

Fig 8.
(Argyrou n.d.)
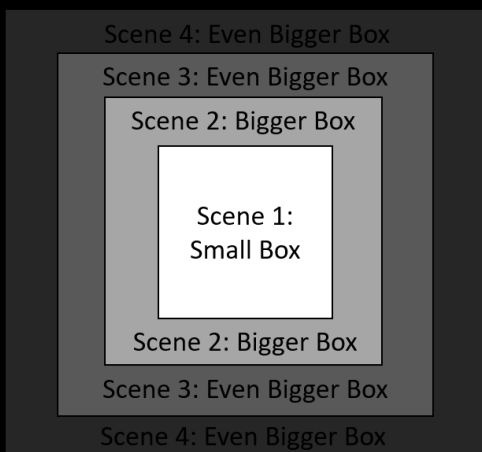
Characters

Fig 9.
(FIBARO, n.d.)

Fig 10.
(*How To Make A Control Lever* 2011)

Fig 11.
(Hot Rox UK n.d.)

Fig 12.
(Classic Switches n.d.)

Fig 13.
(Kjærholm n.d.)

Fig 14.
(Stick PNG n.d.)

Fig 15.
(Schubert n.d.)

Fig 16.
(Pngimg n.d.)

The Button

The button is the first character the player meets. He has a short temper and is rather rude. He is best friends with Larry the Lever and is well known for his terrible puns.

Larry the Lever

Larry the Lever is quite posh but loves pulling a good prank. He is also well known to snitch on people and get others into trouble for him. His favourite drink is tea.

Diana the Dial

Diana the Dial is very dignified in what she does. She speaks with a manner of importance and expects everyone to respect her. She secretly fancies Larry the Lever and also loves tea.

Paula the Pulley

Paula the Pulley likes to keep an eye on everyone and is absolutely in love with solving mysteries. She has a knack for asking the right questions and working out who did what and when.

Darren the Desk

Darren the Desk is a chronic sleeper and sleeps through the first 2 rooms. He is incredibly lazy and is a pain to move. But he is also extremely loyal and will always keep your stuff safe.
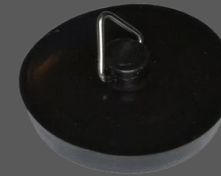
Peter the Plug

Peter the plug is an avid writer, however he constantly leaves massive plot holes everywhere. He is also known to be a little bit more dodgier the other characters as he has a secret dark background

The Room

The room doesn't talk much as they prefer to watch from a distance. The room is a mysterious character as nobody knows if they are actually alive. Or just a whisper in the air of someone's self-conscious.

Light

Very few people have seen the Light. Some say they are a god, others that they don't exist at all. Nobody knows the nature of the light and its existence hasn't even been confirmed.

Mechanics & Gameplay

Player Goal

The players goal changes depending on which scene they are in.

◈ For the first scene the players goal is to simply push the button.

◈ For the second scene their goal is to pour the tea into the teacups without spilling any.

◈ For the third scene, their goal is to solve the murder mystery.

◈ For the fourth scene the player is trying to escape.

◈ And finally for the fifth scene the players goal is to finish the game.

By having the player try to achieve different goals throughout the game, it allows for more varied gameplay which makes it a lot more interesting and fun to play. If the players goal was to simply press a button for 30 minutes, they would get bored very fast so by changing the game it allows the players to be more engaged.

Level design

The level design in this game is very simple. There is a white room with a desk and a button. With each scene the room becomes larger as well as slightly darker. (See Fig.17)

In scene 2 there is a picnic which is simply Larry the Lever and Diana the Dial eating around the desk which has a picnic rug placed over it.

In scene 3 the only change is that a notepad and pen appear on the desk for the player to use.

In scene 4 when the player is in a prison, they are simply behind giant bars which the player can easily walk through.

This is a very simplistic style reminiscent of the Bertolt Brecht style in theatre which is very stylised, and abstract in contrast to Konstantin Stanislavski's approach which is more serious and realistic.
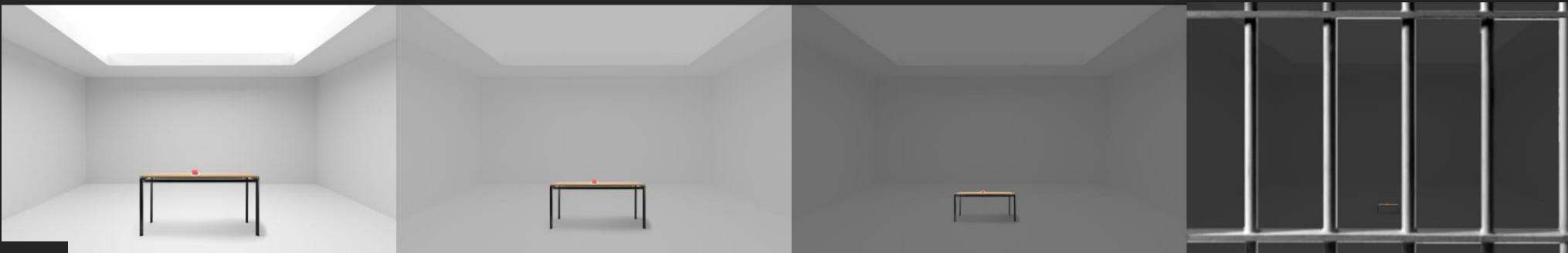
Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3	Scene 4	Scene 5

Fig.17 (Schubert n.d.) (Kjærholm n.d.) (Box Background n.d.) (Clipart Library n.d.)

Mechanics & Gameplay

Gameplay

Scene 1:

In Scene 1, the player has to push the button except every time they do, it moves. The button starts talking to the player and they must decide whether they want to push it again or not.

Scene 4:

In Scene 4, The player finds themselves trapped in a prison. Here they must figure out how to escape the prison and end up using one of the table legs to smash the walls around them. However, their hands are chained together meaning that it is more difficult than it otherwise would be.

Scene 2:

In Scene 2, the player has to pour tea into all of the teacups and refill them when they have run out. If the player spills any tea, then they have failed. The longer the player can survive without spilling tea, the more information they learn which can help out in scene 3.

Scene 5:

In Scene 5, The player simply sees an empty void and talks to the light. Here the game only lasts a few minutes before quitting, so there is limited gameplay.
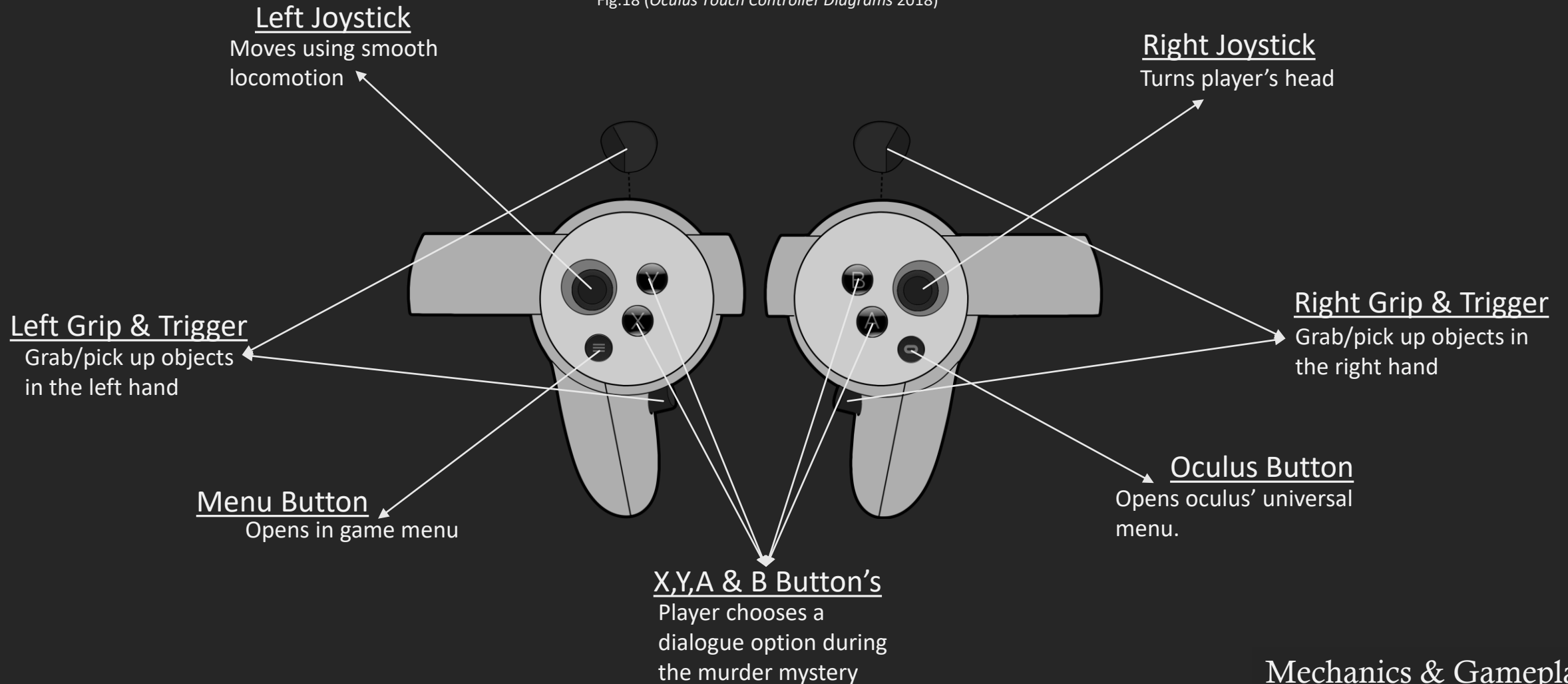
Scene 3:

In Scene 3, The player plays murder mystery. Here they are given a notepad and a pen and must go around all of the characters asking questions as well as answering some. In order to choose an answer, the player must choose either X, Y, A or B buttons on their controller. They may also note down any additional information they have gathered in the previous 2 scenes. Afterwards it is revealed that they themselves killed the button.

Player experience

◈ The player's experience is supposed to be a profound one. In some ways this game is more of an experience than a game since it challenges peoples grasp on reality and what they think is "normal". It is meant to challenge the players ideas of what life is and make them think about the world in a different way.

◈ The player is supposed to be caught unaware at first, with there being no signs of the dark themes at the beginning, only for it to slowly creep in throughout the game. This is to give the player a sense of shock as it may have come unexpected. This could be very effective if pulled off correctly and would result in the player wanting more.

◈ I think the player experience is key when developing this game as it's all about making it super fun and engaging as well as having a strong narrative in this simple yet dark Virtual Reality experience.

Controls

Fig.18 (*Oculus Touch Controller Diagrams* 2018)

Left Joystick
Moves using smooth locomotion

Right Joystick
Turns player's head

Left Grip & Trigger
Grab/pick up objects in the left hand

Right Grip & Trigger
Grab/pick up objects in the right hand

Menu Button
Opens in game menu

Oculus Button
Opens oculus' universal menu.

X,Y,A & B Button's
Player chooses a dialogue option during the murder mystery

Controls

Scene 1:

Player simply has to push the button by raising their index finger and pushing down on the button.

To interact with Larry the Lever, they must hold down the trigger and grip on the handle and pull the lever down.

When gravity is removed, they have to push off of the walls in order to fly upwards.

Scene 2:

Player has to hold the tea pot by holding down the trigger and grip on the tea pot handle. They then have to pour it by tilting the controller carefully whilst not knocking over any mugs or letting any tea spill.

To pick up a teacup, the player must once again hold down the grip and trigger on the teacup handle.

Scene 3:

The player has to use the left and right joystick to move about the room and use the trigger to select someone to talk to.

When they are talking to someone, they can choose dialogue options by using the X, Y, B and A buttons on the controllers.

They can also write down notes using the notepads and pens found on the table. They write the same way they would in real life.

Scene 4:

The player can use the left and right joysticks to move about the room once again.

Their hands are tethered together with about 10cm of slack. This means they can't pull their hands apart.

They can push down on the trigger and grip buttons at the same time to pick up objects.

The player can break a table leg off by simply pulling on it.

The wall can break by swinging a table leg at it with a high velocity.

Scene 5:

The player can move about using the left and right joysticks.

They can't see their hands at first until the light illuminates them.

Art & Usability

Art Direction

◈ The art style in this game is very simplistic and stylised. The white box and desk are meant to be bland and boring so the players eyes are directed at the button which is a bright red. (See Fig.19 & Fig.20)

◈ Each room is a slightly darker colour to the last which helps the player notice that it's a different room as well as symbolise the game slowly getting darker. (See Fig.21)

◈ Despite the colour change, everything else in the room mostly stays the same.

◈ The simplicity of the art makes the game a lot simpler to understand for new players, as there is no noise or unnecessary details to distract them from the gameplay.

Fig.21 (Schubert n.d.) (Kjærholm n.d.) (Box Background n.d.) (Clipart Library n.d.)
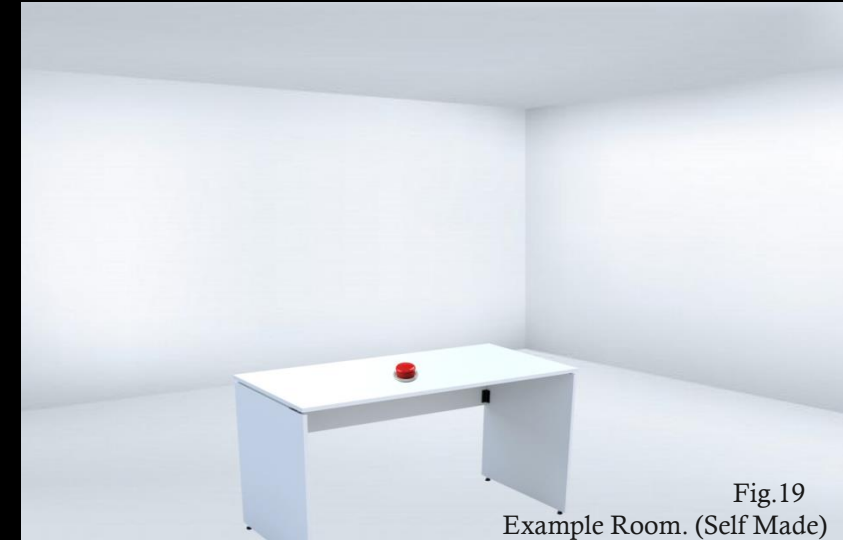
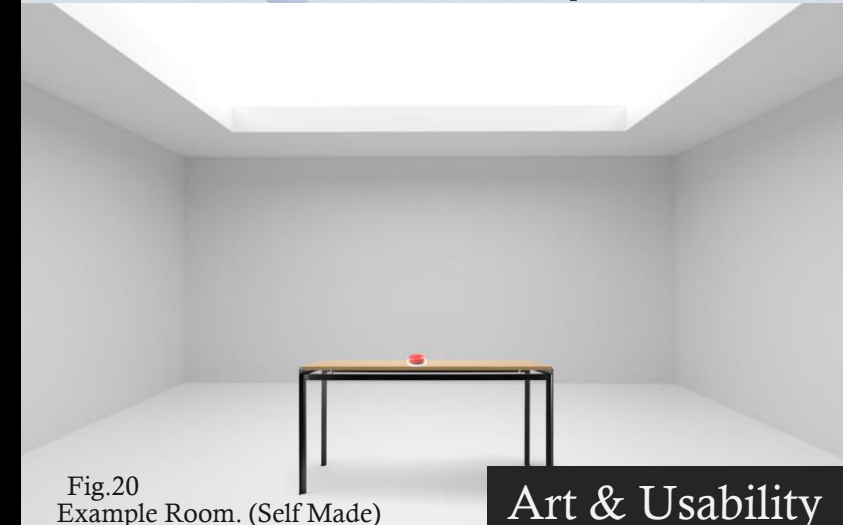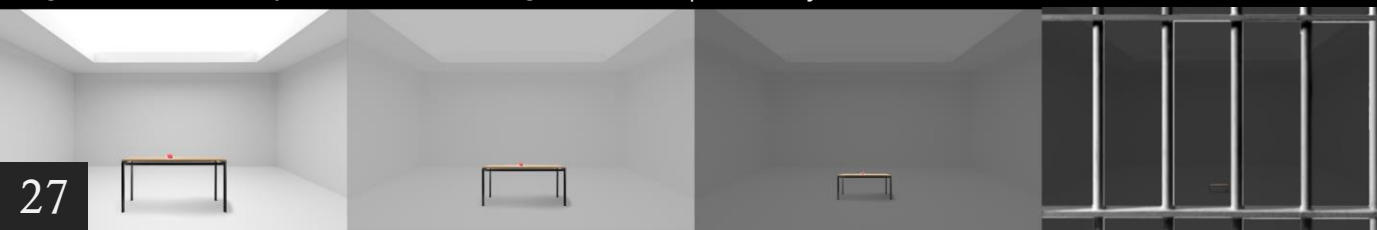Fig.19
Example Room. (Self Made)

Fig.20
Example Room. (Self Made)

Art & Usability

User Interface

Scene 1:

The user interface in Scene 1 is fully diegetic, meaning that the player has to interact with the world itself.

In this scene this is simply just the button and Larry the Lever.

Scene 2:

In Scene 2, the UI is once again fully diegetic. Except this time the player can interact with a tea pot, teacups as well as anything else on the table.

Fig.22 (Blanco 2020)

Scene 3:

In Scene 3, the UI is still within the world, however when the player interacts with the characters a popup comes up next to them giving the player dialogue options that they must choose by selecting one of the buttons on their controllers. (see Fig.22)

In this scene they also have access to a notepad and pen where they can write down notes in the same way as real life.

Scene 4:

The UI in scene 4 is once again fully diegetic like that of Scenes 1 and 2.

The player must grab an in-world object like a table leg and smash through the walls.

Main Menu:

The main menu of the game is in a room that looks identical to the first level except instead of just a button, there is a fully working menu. The menu is displayed like a touch screen but each button and slider input are very large so people can easily select the right one without issue.

The main menu allows the player to start a new game, load a save, change their settings, or quit the game.

Accessibility

Fig.23 (*Job Simulator* 2016)

◈ Due to the game being in Virtual Reality, accessibility is incredibly important.

◈ The game is mostly static with very limited movement which eliminates most motion sickness from the game, however there are times when the player may want to move about slightly.

◈ The player can choose in the settings whether they would prefer smooth locomotion or teleportation as well as snap or smooth turning.

◈ In addition, when the player uses the controllers to move, they don't accelerate the player, instead they move the player at a constant velocity helping to reduce the possibility of VR sickness.

◈ Another accessibility feature that isn't VR specific is having subtitles, so deaf people will also be able to enjoy the game. The subtitles would work similarly to Job simulator where they display as in world text. (See Fig.23)

◈ Finally, there will be an option to turn on distance grabbing so people who struggle to bend down can simply pick up items from a distance.

Bibliography

BLANCO, JORGE. 2020. *Building A Branching Dialogue System In VR (Unity)* [image]. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBFsA7rzNMQ [accessed 27 Nov 2021].

CARON, BEN. 2008. *Trick or Treat: Kitten* [film]. UK: Channel 4.

CLIPART LIBRARY. n.d. *Cell Jail Bars PNG* [image]. Available at: http://clipart-library.com/clipart/6TrRR5kTK.htm [accessed 27 Nov 2021].

DRENNAN, PENNY and DOMINIQUE A. KEEFFE. 2007. "Virtual Consumption: Using Player Types To Explore Virtual Consumer Behavior". *Entertainment Computing – ICEC 2007* [online], 466-469. Available at: https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-540-74873-1_62 [accessed 24 Nov 2021].

"Host Your Own Murder Mystery." 2021. *Masters of Mystery* [online]. Available at: https://mastersofmystery.com/ [accessed 4 Dec 2021].

Job Simulator [Oculus Quest, Playstation VR, Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, Valve Index]. Austin, Texas: Owlchemy Labs.

NOLAN, CHRISTOPHER. 2010. *Inception* [film]. Tokyo, London: Warner Bos. Pictures.

Oculus Touch Controller Diagrams [image]. n.d. Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/oculus/comments/8ycgov/oculus_touch_controller_diagrams/ [accessed 27 Nov 2021].

"Will You Press The Button?." 2021. *Willyoupressthebutton.com* [online]. Available at: https://willyoupressthebutton.com/ [accessed 27 Nov 2021].

How To Make A Control Lever [image]. n.d. Available at: http://gimpchat.com/viewtopic.php?f=23&t=5310 [accessed 20 Nov 2021].

HOT ROX UK. n.d. *Top Hat Volume Knob Black With Silver Cap, Gibson Style* [image]. Available at: https://www.hotroxuk.com/top-hat-volume-knob-black-with-silver-cap-gibson-style.html [accessed 20 Nov 2021].

Art & Usability

Bibliography

CLASSIC SWITCHES. n.d. *Ceiling Switch With Antique Brass Cover / White Pull Cord* [image]. Available at: https://www.classicswitches.com.au/light-switches/ceiling-switch-with-antique-brass-cover-white-pull-cord/ [accessed 20 Nov 2021].

STICK PNG. n.d. *Download Black Kitchen Plug Transparent PNG* [image]. Available at: https://www.stickpng.com/img/tools-and-parts/kitchen-plugs/black-kitchen-plug [accessed 20 Nov 2021].

PNGIMG. n.d. *Light PNG Image With Transparent Background* [image]. Available at: https://pngimg.com/image/14453 [accessed 20 Nov 2021].

FIBARO, n.d. *THE BUTTON smart home automation*. [image] Available at: <https://www.fibaro.com/en/products/the-button/> [Accessed 2 October 2021].

Argyrou, S., 2021. *Todorov Theory*. [online] Selina Argyrou. Available at: <https://selinaargyrou.wordpress.com/todorov-theory/> [Accessed 15 October 2021].

Box Background [image]. n.d. Available at: https://www.cleanpng.com/png-dunlap-the-big-red-button-push-button-organization-806188 [accessed 20 Oct 2021].

KJÆRHOLM, POUL. n.d. *PK52 | PROFESSOR DESK | 186,5X85* [image]. Available at: https://www.carlhansen.com/en/collection/desks/pk52/professor-desk-185-x-85-oak-oil-ral-9005-black/variant/7749 [accessed 20 Oct 2021].

SCHUBERT, MIREK. n.d. *Empty White Room* [image]. Available at: https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=297591&picture=empty-white-room#.XVpA53V-Szo.pinterest [accessed 20 Oct 2021].

FREEPIK. n.d. *Empty White 3D Modern Room With Space Clean Corner Background Premium Vector* [image]. Available at: https://www.freepik.com/premium-vector/empty-white-3d-modern-room-with-space-clean-corner-background_4868547.htm [accessed 6 Nov 2021].
UNKNOWN. n.d. *Folding Desks In White MFC – Folding-Desks* [image]. Available at: https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Ffolding-desks.co.uk%2Fproducts%2Fambus-folding-desk-in-white-mfc&psig=AOvVaw1Q44HGnx7NkOeuCIkYbrVf&ust=1638545398224000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAsQjRxqFwoTCMCBxKu3xfQCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAG [accessed 6 Nov 2021].