

# GENDER/SEXUALITY IN GAMES: SIMULATION, REPRESENTATION, EMPATHY

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# AGENDA

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- On Simulation as Gameplay/Design
- Effects of Simulation in *Coming Out Simulator* and *Mainichi*
- Simulation and Representation
- On Empathy in Games

# NOTES ON SIMULATION

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- Familiarity in Simulation —> artificial world and real-life context it simulates
- “A simulation is a procedural representation of ‘reality’” (S/Z 423)
- simulations based in formal rules and player experience
- Simulations work through meaningful play
- Simulate narrative/situation, and/or simulate action/feeling
- Games are representations (macro) and games can represent (micro)
- Immersive Fallacy and suspension of disbelief

# DESIGNING SIMULATION (1)

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- “given a phenomena to simulate, the problem is to decide what are its parts, how these parts can be represented with numerical values, and what the relationships are that let these parts affect one another...Making a simulation is a process of abstracting — of selecting which entities and properties from a complex real phenomena to use in the simulation program.”
- “A simulation does not attempt to simulate every aspect of its reference, but instead focuses on those elements necessary to the game.
- Simulations are systems, and “meaning emerges from the interaction of the parts.”

## DESIGNING SIMULATION (2)

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- “Brainstorming a list of attributes or effects that you want to include in a simulation is not enough. you must conceive of a system that incorporates them all”
- Simulations are numerical and simulations are limited
- “Design involves choice: to create a simulation you need to decide on what to simulate and how. Every choice you make as a game designer opens up some possibilities and closes others. What is meaningful in the context of a particular situation?”

**WHAT IS SIMULATED IN “THE  
COMING OUT SIMULATOR”?  
HOW DOES “THE COMING OUT  
SIMULATOR” SIMULATE?**

# SIMULATIONS IN “THE COMING OUT SIMULATOR”

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- A coming out conversation with Nicky’s parents;
- A coming out conversation with Nicky’s boyfriend;
- The parents’ reactions and the boyfriend’s reactions;
- Uncertainty and resistance of definition;
- “Half-Truths” or the multiplicity of truths;
- Time of texting/speaking;
- Interpersonal relationships;
- Limitations to communication (based in content or medium);

**WHAT IS SIMULATED IN  
“MAINICHI”? HOW DOES  
“MAINICHI” SIMULATE?**



# SIMULATIONS IN “MAINICHI”

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- Getting ready to leave the house;
- Strangers’ reactions to walking down the street;
- Baristas stumbling over speech for address;
- Friendship;
- Cyclicity;
- Adapting life to a norm;
- Internal monologue;
- External dialogue;

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN SIMULATION  
AND REPRESENTATION?**

# REPRESENTATION [POST-CLASS EDITS IN BOLD PURPLE]

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- Often done through vision or sound;
- Showing (rather than telling);
- Often very explicit and/or done with an aim to “true to life” qualities;
- Presents different issues with ethics and problematics than simulation;
- **Issue of Degree: Simulation as a greater degree of detailed likeness**
- **Difference of being / presence (representation) rather than doing / action (simulation)**

# SOME STAKES OF REPRESENTATION

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- Pleasure/desire in violence/grotesqueness/body in pain;
  - eg: “freak shows” of the 19th/early 20th centuries;  
Popularity of Tarantino aesthetic; stopping to witness a car crash on the road
  - Note: this can be the pleasure/desire of curiosity, or exploration
- Encoded qualities/characteristics;
- Truth in representation vs. stereotyping/caricatures;
- Who is the representation of? Who is it for?

When talking about inclusivity in games: is it enough to **represent** an often excluded group, without also including a **simulation** related to their Being in the World?

Cultural simulation in games is often pointed to as strengthening possibilities for empathy and understanding, particularly of minoritarian identities. What are the strengths of this position? What are its weaknesses?

## IMPLICATIONS OF USING SIMULATION / VIDEO GAMES AS VEHICLES FOR IDENTITY-BASED EMPATHY

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- Necessity of machines to mediate our capacity for empathy;
- Limits human to human interaction;
- Takes away / further silences voices of minoritarian populations —> implication that you need to “try on their life” to confirm their experience, rather than listen to / trust them;
- Simulations in this way often represent or simulate something **about** a community, but not **for** that community

# REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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- Steve Wilcox, “VideoGames and Empathy: Towards a Post-Normative Ludic Century,” *First Person Scholar*, July 30, 2014. Available: <http://www.firstpersonscholar.com/videogames-and-empathy/>
- merritt kopas, *Empathy Machine*. Available: <https://a-dire-fawn.itch.io/empathy-machine> [Note: This project is referenced in Wilcox’s essay, above, but the link is broken.]
- Sophie Houlden, “Some Words on Some Problematic Stuff,” *Sophie’s Blog*, March 5, 2014. Available: <http://www.sophiehoulden.com/some-problematic-stuff/>
- Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, Oxford UP, 1997. [Amazon link](#).