

***THE NATURE OF GAMES AS
APOCALYPTIC AND SYSTEMS OF
PLAY IN SIMULATION THEORY***

by Craig Stam

CLAIM

“The Simulation Argument, an apocalyptic theory, is applicable to the classic game model - presenting itself as a clear parallel to games as a whole. Thus, games can compare themselves to simulacra as much as the simulation theory can to games.”*

** examples used focus primarily on digital/virtual, computer, and videogames*



Fallout 4 (2015)



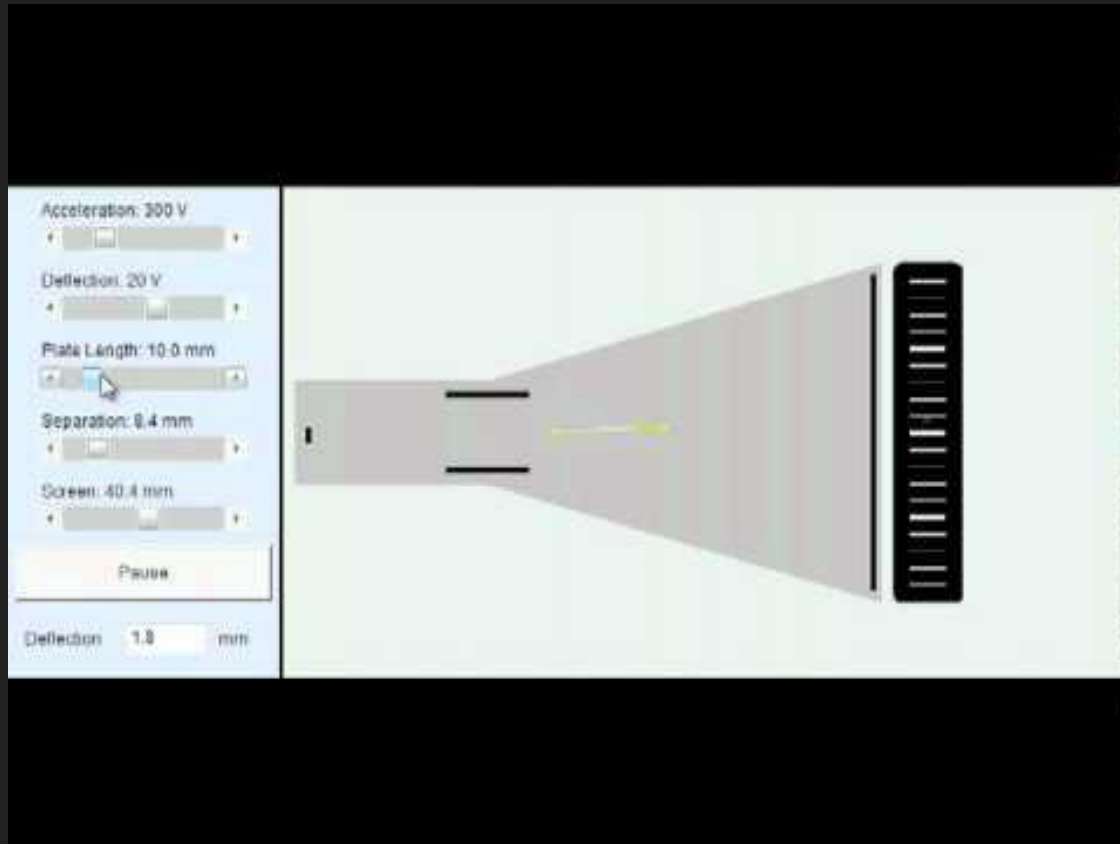
inFAMOUS (2009)



Bubble Bobble (1986)

BREAKDOWN

- + What is a game?
- + What is The Simulation Hypothesis?
- + Through what definition is something apocalyptic?
- + By what means is a game *“inherently apocalyptic?”*
- + How are they related and interconnected within each other?



Cathode-Ray Tube Amusement Device (1947)



Jesper Juul, Ludologist & Game Guy

A DEFINITION OF GAMES

The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness (2013)

- + Essay written by Jesper Juul
 - + Ludologist, Game designer, educator, and theorist
- + Proposes the *classic game model*;
 - + “a list of six features that are necessary and sufficient for something to be a game”
 - + Derived from seven prior definitions of games and their commonalities
 - + Consists of three branches: game as a system, the player vs game, and play vs the world
 - + Things are either: *games, borderline cases, or not games*
- + Explains that games are *transmedial*, though the computer is the most recent to emerge

[\[> jesper juul: text\]](#)

The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness

Keynote presented at the Level Up conference in Utrecht, November 4th-6th 2003.

Jesper Juul: "The Game, the Player, the World: Looking for a Heart of Gameness". In *Level Up: Digital Games Research Conference Proceedings*, edited by Marinka Copier and Joost Raessens, 30-45. Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2003.

<http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/gameplayerworld/>

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a definition of *games*. I describe the *classic game model*, a list of six features that are necessary and sufficient for something to be a game. The definition shows games to be *transmedial*: There is no single game medium, but rather a number of game media, each with its own strengths. The computer is simply the latest game medium to emerge. While computer games¹ are therefore part of the broader area of *games*, they have in many cases evolved beyond the classic game model.

Keywords

Game definition, game history, transmedial gaming; computer game history.

Introduction

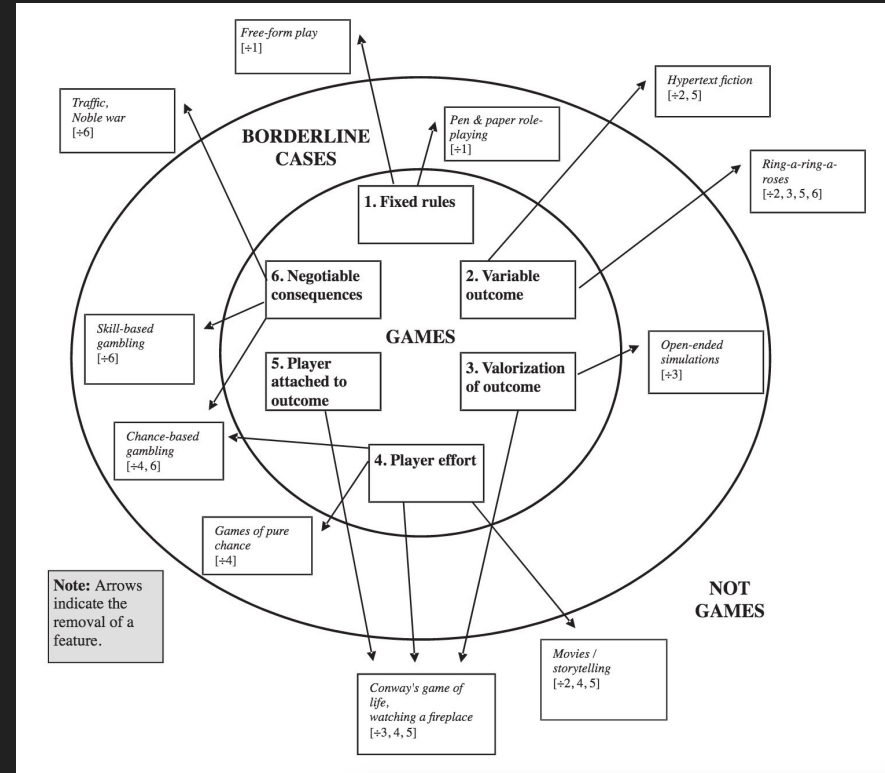
Why is there an affinity between computers and games? Why do we play games on computers rather than using any other recent technology such as the telephone, TV, microwave ovens, cars, or airplanes? Computers appear to work as enablers of games, supporting and promoting games much in the way that the technologies of the printing press, cinema, and television have promoted storytelling. But how do we explain this affinity?

My intention here is to claim the existence of a *classic game model*; a standard model for creating games, a model that appears to have been constant for several thousand years. While computer games were initially based almost exclusively on the classic game model, we can point to several ways in which they have evolved from their non-electronic roots.

While many definitions of games have been attempted, my goal here is to create a game definition capable of

THE CLASSIC GAME MODEL

- + Fixed Rules
 - + Rules of a game must be clearly defined with all players or within the game
- + Variable Outcome
 - + Must provide different possible outcomes
- + Valorization of Outcome
 - + Outcomes are weighted/valued differently (i.e. win/loss)
- + Player Effort
 - + Player's actions influence game state and/or outcome
- + Player Attachment to Outcome
 - + Psychological; players feel attached in some way to the result
- + Negotiable Consequences
 - + Can be played with or without real-life consequences





Nick Bostrom, Philosopher & Scared Guy

SIMULATION THEORY

Are You Living in a Simulation? (2001)

- + Essay written by Nick Bostrom
 - + Philosopher and educator
- + Proposes trilemma entitled "the simulation argument"
 - + *"The fraction of human-level civilizations that reach a posthuman stage (that is, one capable of running high-fidelity ancestor simulations) is very close to zero",*
 - OR
 - + *"The fraction of posthuman civilizations that are interested in running ancestor-simulations is very close to zero",* or
 - + *"The fraction of all people with our kind of experiences that are living in a simulation is very close to one"*





The Matrix (1999)

apocalyptic

adjective | apoc·a·lyp·tic | \ə-ˌpä-kə-'lip-tik\

Simple Definition of APOCALYPTIC

Popularity: Top 40% of words

: of, relating to, or involving terrible violence and destruction

: of or relating to the end of the world

Source: Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary

Apocalyptic definition

DEFINING APOCALYPTIC

Merriam Webster defines *Apocalyptic* as:

- + “*Of, relating to, or involving... destruction*” and “*of or relating to the end of the world*”

Similarly, Bostrom describes an *existential risk* as:

- + “*one that threatens to cause the extinction of Earth-originating intelligent life or to reduce its quality of life... permanently and drastically.*”

Assuming that Bostrom’s idea of *existential risk* aligns with the Merriam Webster definition of *apocalyptic* then...



The Sims (2000)

SIMULATED LIVING PRINCIPLES

... The Simulation Hypothesis is apocalyptic through such principles

- + Our world, which exists as a simulation, is no longer real
- + There is no discernible difference between reality and simulation
- + Social interaction is meaningless because we are all simulants or
- + Entirely directed by our advanced descendants
- + Since time is simulated, no day or experience is more important than another
- + Freedom of choice/decision and self-government is questionable
- + We are not separable from the simulation, nor our simulators



OTHER ISSUES OF SIMULIFE

- + Limited computing/processing power
 - + How much power do simulants have?
 - + Will simulants be able to develop into advanced posthuman state and create simulations of their own?
 - + The simulation within the simulation within the simulation within the simulation...
- + Change of simulation identity
 - + *How To Live In A Simulation* (2001) - Robin Hanson
 - + In response to Bostrom; one should aim to be an exciting and exemplary simulation to avoid being *shut down* or turned *low fidelity*

How To Live In A Simulation*

by [Robin Hanson](#)

If you might be living in a simulation then all else equal you should care less about others, live more for today, make your world look more likely to become rich, expect to and try more to participate in pivotal events, be more entertaining and praiseworthy, and keep the famous people around you happier and more interested in you.

People love to pretend, and to watch others pretending. From story-telling to plays to movies to virtual reality, we keep getting better at making people feel like they are watching imagined places and events. We also keep getting better at role-playing, i.e., creating environments where several people can see what happens when they all pretend they are different people in another time and place. Eventually such role-playing simulations may get so good that people will often forget that it is just a simulation.

This brings us to the intriguing premise of many recent movies, including *The Matrix*, *13th Floor*, *Truman Show*, and *Dark City*: what if people in the future create role-playing simulations where the people in it do not know that it is a simulation? This premise naturally leads to a premise even more thought-provoking: future people might create simulations of a world much like our world. If so, how sure can each of us now be that we are not now living in such a role-playing simulation?

A related scenario is the *holodeck* of the television show *Star Trek Next Generation*. The holodeck offers computer-generated environments that allow real people to role-play not only with each other, but also with sophisticated computer-simulated people. Today, computer-simulated humans contain only a pale shadow of the complexity and sophistication of real humans. But eventually, if we continue to make better simulations at lower cost, at least some of our simulated humans may be as sophisticated as real humans. In a holodeck, a simulated person might not realize that they were simulated. So the question arises: how sure can we each be that we are not a simulated person in a future holodeck simulation?

Obviously we cannot now be sure that we are not living in a simulation. The more likely our descendants are to be rich, long-lasting, and interested in simulating us, the more simulations of people like us we should expect there to be on average, relative to real people like us. And so the more we expect our descendants to be rich like this, the more we should expect that we are in fact living in a simulation [Bostrom 2001].

SIMULIFE MIMICS GAMES

Simulated reality falls in correspondence with Juul's *classic game model* in that:

- + Fixed Rules
 - + Guidelines and parameters set within the program of the simulation
- + Variable Outcome
 - + Is the simulant left alone, shut down, reprogrammed, or otherwise interacted with?
- + Valorization of Outcome
 - + Debatable on whether being *shut down* or left alone is more valued, both are indefinitely better than being reworked into a low fidelity simulation
- + Player Effort
 - + Seems as if the effort is either not knowing, and working as the simulation intends, or knowing, and making an effort to be an exemplary simulant.
- + Player Attachment to Outcome
 - + If knowingly a simulant, the player may feel more gravitation to being kept an active participant. However, there is a chance the player may never be aware of the outcome.
- + Negotiable Consequences
 - + Unsure of whether real-life consequences relate to the simulated reality or the reality which exists outside of it- the posthuman simulators



The Matrix: Path of Neo (2005)

GAMES AS SIMULATION; GAMES AS APOCALYPTIC

- + Games rely on the suspension of our disbelief- to trust the system.
- + All games have a fixed set of rules, some more loose than others
 - + We are inherently limited in capability
 - + Do our decisions matter?
- + In regards to valorization, are we able to gauge which outcomes we value more?
 - + Games are generally made in manners which certain results trump others or are infinitely more desirable- the obvious one being the highest score is better
- + Efforts may be placed into achieving one outcome and, through the defined parameters of the game, result in a completely different conclusion
 - + Is subverting a player's hopes/expectations devaluing their effort?
 - + Is there room for error? At how large of a margin? Consequences?

Is the *perfect* outcome truly achievable?

- + An end product which is pre-determined from its conception is apocalyptic.



Train Simulator 2015 (2015)



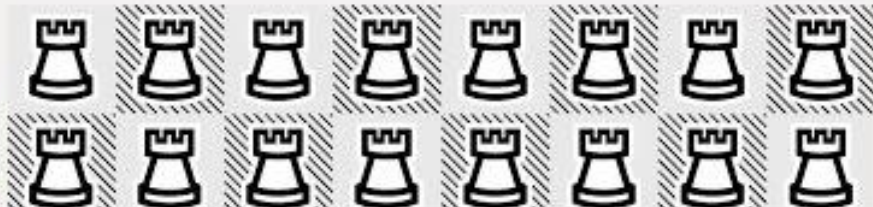
Surgeon Simulator 2013 (2013)



Civilization 3 (2001)

really bad chess

a definitely balanced game by zach gage



Really Bad Chess (2016)

GAMEPLAY FOOTAGE



The Stanley Parable (2011)