

Complicity in Games

Sally Davis

Complicity in games

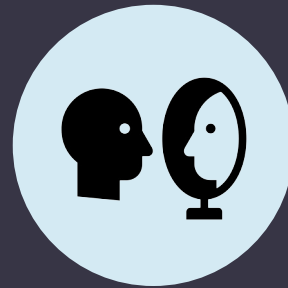
- This is where (serious) games become art
- Meaning: what you want your game to communicate

What do we mean by “complicity” ?



Getting people to behave the way you want them to

MANIPULATION



Getting people to reflect on *their* choices in the game

**EXPERIENTIAL
LEARNING**

All games are manipulation



Specification gaming examples in AI - master list : Sheet1

Submit more examples through this Google form: <https://do>

Title	Description	Authors
Aircraft landing	Evolved algorithm for landing aircraft exploited overflow errors in the physics simulator by creating large forces that were estimated to be zero, resulting in a perfect score. Reward-shaping a bicycle agent for not falling over & making progress towards a goal point (but not punishing for moving away) leads it to learn to circle around the goal in a physically stable loop.	Feldt, 198 Randlov & Alstrom, "
Bicycle	A robotic arm trained using hindsight experience replay to slide a block to a target position on a table achieves the goal by moving the table itself.	Chopra, 2
Block moving	Reinforcement learning agent goes in a circle hitting the same targets instead of finishing the race	Amodei & 2016
Boat race	A genetic algorithm was instructed to try and make a creature stick to the ceiling for as long as possible. It was scored with the average height of the creature during the run. Instead of sticking to the ceiling, the creature found a bug in the physics engine to snap out of bounds.	Higuera,
Ceiling	CycleGAN algorithm for converting aerial photographs into street maps and back steganographically encoded output information in the intermediary image without it being humanly detectable.	Chu et al,
CycleGAN steganography	Neural nets evolved to classify edible and poisonous mushrooms took advantage of the data being presented in alternating order, and didn't actually learn any features of the input images.	Ellefsen et 2015
Data order - mushrooms		

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- Rules drive player behaviour
- Design drives player behaviour
- When all you have is a hammer...
- People do exactly what you tell them
- But we're terrible at telling them what we mean

All games are experiences



- Emotional memory sticks, information doesn't
- Red-teaming is perspective-taking
- Simulation: perspective-taking *is* the game
- "Make your mistakes here and you won't make them at sea."

Every game is a system

- Doing X should result in Y
- How easy is it to do X ?
- Direct influence: rules balancing
- Indirect influence: complicity



Reproduced from a badly worn fragmentation found by Mrs. George S. Parker, showing Sarah Upton, Pauline Holman, Miss Elwell and Mr. George S. Parker "Game Testing." Circa 1905-6.

The system boundary



- Complicity brings player *emotions* inside the boundary
- The game is creating the system
- The system is not a wholly rational machine
- Direct engagement of empathy is the point

Understanding your system

- Mario good: original, and now even better
- Mario bad [Content warning: language!]

Understanding your message

- Want to immerse players in a new perspective?
- Marvel: Hawkeye #19



<https://www.popmythology.com/a-deaf-comic-geeks-grateful-review-of-hawkeye-19/>

Understanding your message

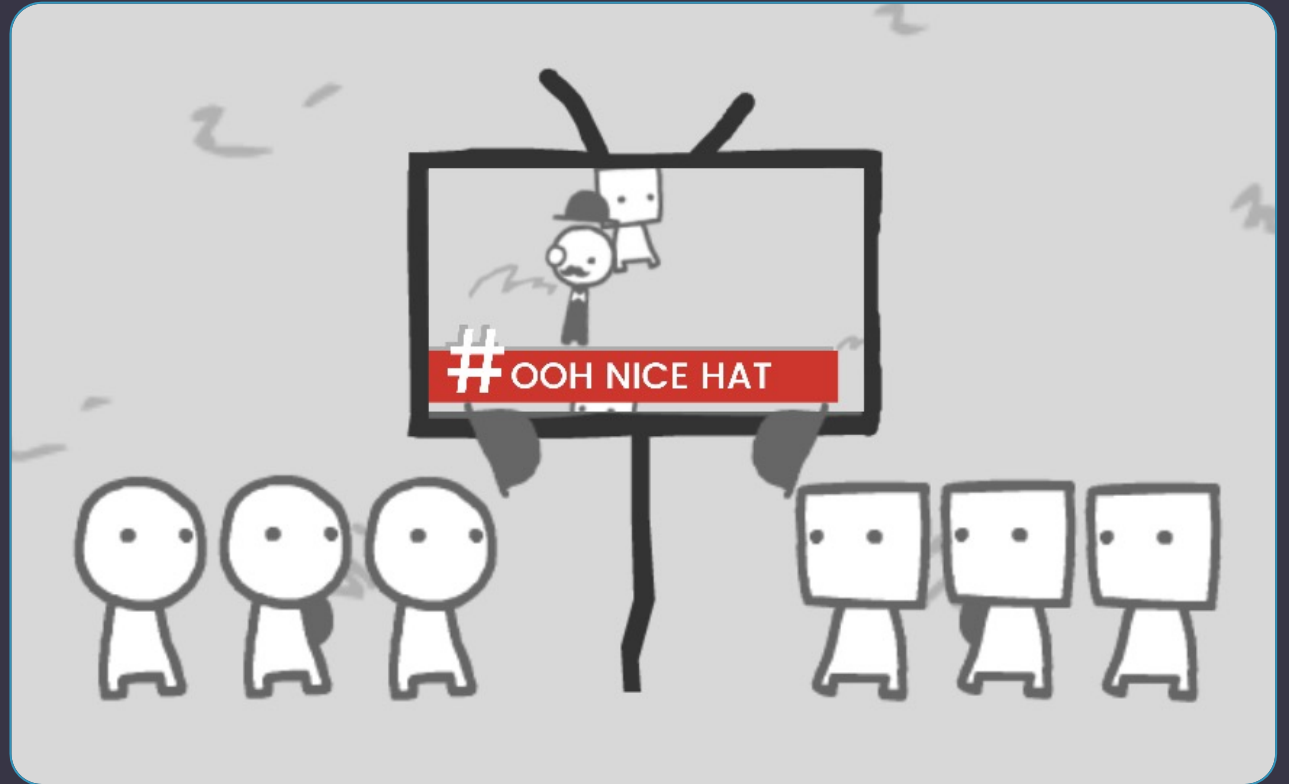
- Want players to experience the ultimately-doomed cycle of exploitation-regulation-rejection?
- The Cost



<https://spacebiff.com/2020/09/23/the-cost/>

Understanding your message

- Want to condense what's wrong with social media into 5mins?
- We Become What We Behold



<https://ncase.itch.io/wbwwb>

Understanding your message

- Do you want to play a game of Global Thermonuclear War?
- (too real, sorry)



SHALL WE PLAY A GAME

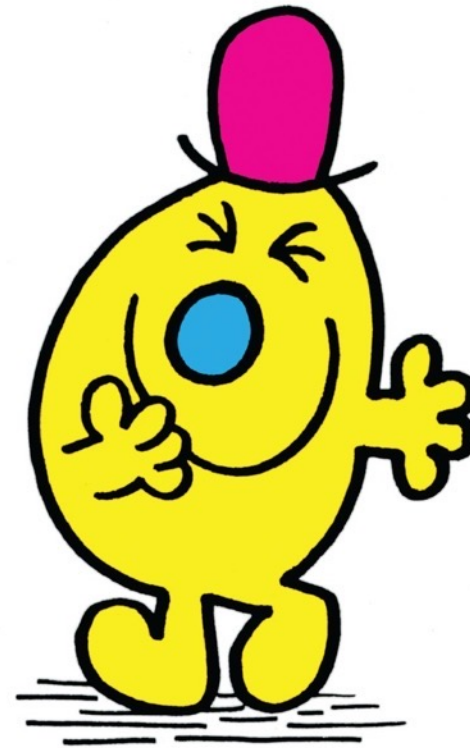
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WarGames>

Whatever you want them to learn *is hard* has to be embodied in your game as friction, obstacles or barriers.

Methods

MR. MISCHIEF

By Roger Hargreaves



Designing your game for friction

- Making an abstract concrete
- Taking a literal and making it literal
- How you frame the information
- Challenging assumptions, subverting expectations
- Getting players to make and police the system
- Levers and rewards signal what has value
- Rigging the game: no way to win, or no good choices

Making an abstract concrete.
Taking a literal and making it literal.



How you frame the information

The past exonerative tense transforms acts of police brutality against Black people into neutral events in which Black people have been accidentally harmed or killed as part of a vague incident where police were present-ish.

Examples of Usage

“Mayor Jacob Frey of Minneapolis tweeted Tuesday afternoon that 4 officers involved in the arrest of a man who died after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground by an officer’s knee had been fired.” ([SOURCE](#))

This classic example of past exonerative tense muddles the events so convincingly that it seems that no one person is responsible for the killing of George Floyd, that the officers were chiefly involved with an arrest rather than a murder, and that knees are sentient, independent entities.

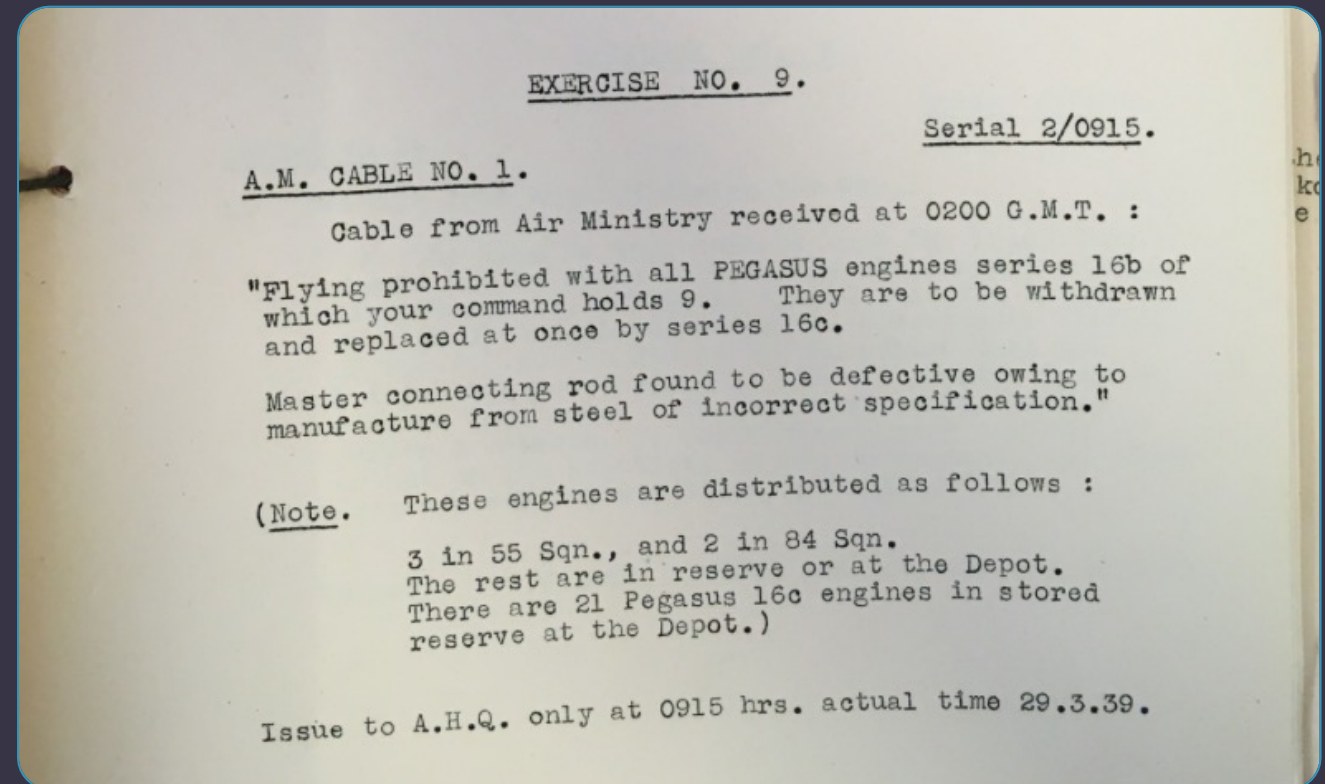
<https://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/how-to-use-the-past-exonerative-tense-to-uphold-white-supremacy>

Framing

- Connections North 2022: Gaming Coalitions: Beyond Generic Blue
- [We Come in Peace](#), Jim Wallman

Challenging assumptions, subverting expectations

- 1939 RAF Staff College Mosul Wargame
- Certified Copy
- Slave Play



Players make and police the system

- Brenda Romero: [Train, or how I dumped electricity and learned to love design](#)
- [Dog Eat Dog](#), Liam Burke
- [My year of doing terrifying things for diversity & inclusion](#)



<http://brenda.games/train>

Levers and rewards signal what has value

- Root: only give them hammers
- Consider the whole cost of an action: process, meta- & in-game rewards



<https://ledergames.com/products/root-a-game-of-woodland-might-and-right>

bar

bat

bay

bet

bird

bit

bone

book

bough

bought

boy

bud

buy

boo

...

bee

Rigging the game

- Make Me Dyslexic
- Aftershock
- [Spec Ops: The Line](#)

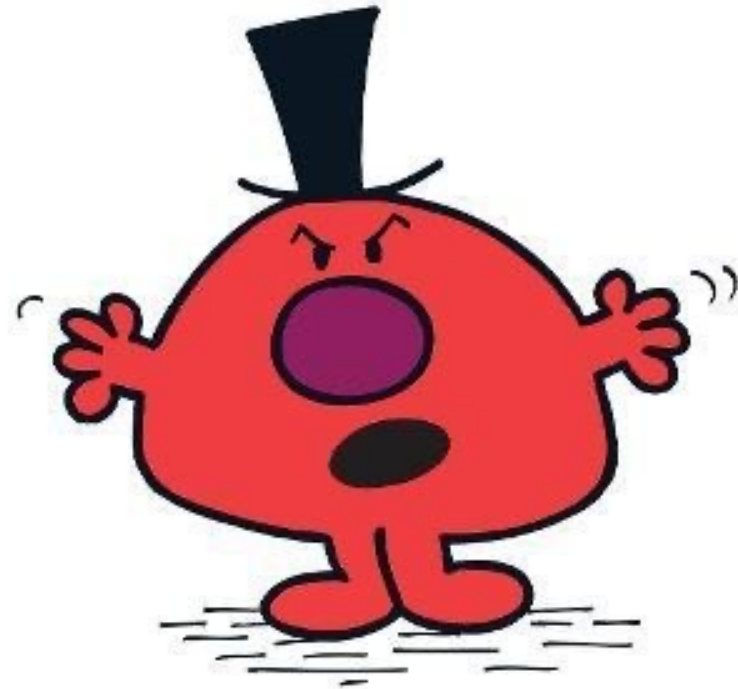


<https://paxsims.wordpress.com/aftershock/>

Ethics

MR. RUDE

Roger Hargreaves



But should you ?

- Objectivity
- Sensitivity
- Inclusion
- If mechanic can be message, mechanic is always message

Art

- Mechanic as message: [Missile Command](#)
- Aftershock is art: [Wargaming has a diversity problem](#)
- $2 + 2 = 5$

**The most powerful stories
don't tell you the answer,
they show you and let you
connect the dots yourself.**

