

Sim City: The City Simulator

By Jared Kuvent

November, 2016



GameSpot, *Sim City*, Digital Photograph,
http://static3.gamespot.com/uploads/scale_medium/box/3/9/2/5/5927-23925.jpg

Week 1: Liberalism and its Discontents: Structural Inequality and Democracy

Sim City is a game in which the player is given a plot of land, tools and implied objectives of 'growing' a city from nothing into a metropolis. The game genre started in 1986 and was the first simulation game to be developed, by independent developer Will Wright. The concept for this 'open ended game' was uncommon among other adventure, shooting and puzzle-based games of the time. It gave players a sense of responsibility to the 'sims', the little people, unseen at the time, who inhabited the world you create.

The city simulation genre continued to evolve through the years from Sim City, to Sim City 2000, 3000 and 4. The model of gameplay, which is discussed in Week 11: Governance, Bureaucracy and Evaluation, is based on a foundation of growing capital and population, which is driven by residential, commercial and industrial growth, 'RCI'. Paradox Interactive continued the city simulation genre with the creation of Cities Skylines with an incredibly rich and deep interactive gameplay model, based on the RCI model, which is problematic, but evolved the gameplay to include new levels of detail and consideration not originally seen in the game genre.

One such level of detail is that the game now represents each individual citizen as an individual. This means that a player can zoom-in to a neighbourhood or street level of the game and see individual people walking on the streets. While this visualisation was introduced in Sim City 3000 in 1999, Paradox took it a step further so that players can actually click on an individual and see their story. In Cities Skylines, every citizen, represented in your overall population, lives in a specific address, works, shops, visits parks, uses public transportation in a huge array of simulated movement and choreography that you would see in a real city environment. For this reason, traffic patterns, accessibility for bikes and pedestrians and access to green space are new considerations in the genre. While this progression is impressive, these individual sims do are not diverse. They all are part of this larger society, working towards a common goal. In this way, Sim City and the current version of city simulation games in all their complexity, are basically a simulation of totalitarianism.

The game genre attempted to break free of this stereotypical gameplay through the development of Sim City Societies in 2007, which landed a sad 63% on Metacritic. The game's aim was to shift the focus from large city simulation to social-engineering within a neighbourhood level. Other attempts to focus on social interaction in Sim City happened in early development phases of Sim City 4, released in 2003, which was later abandoned by Electronic Arts and features were 'absorbed' into Sim City 4. The goal was to create a spin-off game that would focus on the interaction among communities within a city, narrowing in on the mid to close zoom range of the city.

Despite multiple attempts developers have made to incorporate a more cultural element into the gameplay, it is still, to this day, unsuccessful. There still is no racial diversity among citizens, cultural backgrounds, belief structures or religions. There is no visualisation of the homeless, even though 'unemployment' is a monitored statistic in-game, nor do we see what happens when gentrification of neighbourhoods push poor people out. Are we afraid of introducing those elements into the sterile environment of Sim City and city simulation? Would we rather look past the homeless and instead focus on the beauty of the parks in juxtaposition to the neighbourhoods and shopping districts we carefully construct?

Perhaps this lack of what we see in the game design of Sim City is most poignantly articulated by Hannah Arendt in "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man", in which she expresses "...mankind, for so long a time considered under the image of a family of nations, had reached the stage where whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organized closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether."¹

¹ Hannah Arendt, "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harvest, 1966), 294.

Week 2: Human Rights and Human Development

Sim City by design, as outlined in the Evaluation section, assumes universal human rights and capabilities. This has been prevalent for 20 years of gameplay in the city simulation genre. Through development, economics and population growth, you are 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' as a player of the game.

Through the evolution of the game from 1986, the next major release for Sim City, Sim City 2000, offered a more human perspective to the gameplay. With the introduction of a newspaper, which was delivered to the player by popping up on screen during major events or news updates, a virtual insight was provided into the impact that your city management and design was having on the citizens. Public feedback not only provided some more personability in gameplay, it also made the user more conscious of the individual impacts of the decisions they were making.



TheAlmightyGuru, *Sim City 2000 - DOS - Newspaper*, 2013, Digital Screenshot, http://www.vgmpf.com/Wiki/images/b/b5/Sim_City_2000_-_DOS_-_Newspaper.png

In further iterations of Sim City, there was an introduction of 'policy advisors', consisting of department heads from health, education, police, utilities, business, residential and other

sectors. This centralized hub became a place to view feedback for each sector you controlled in the game. In addition to this, ordinances were introduced, allowing a player to impact their citizens in various ways, through social, environmental or business policies that affected the way that the 'sims' lived. Feedback from the impact of those policies were fed through the policy advisors to the player, so that the human impact and element was present in gameplay.

This evolution of looking at human rights and development coincides with the writings of Amartya Sen Lamont in her work, "Human Rights and Capabilities", in which she outlines the importance of public feedback in the evolution of human rights and capabilities policies. As she outlines, "The problem is not with listing important capabilities, but with insisting on one predetermined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning. To have such a fixed list, emanating entirely from pure theory, is to deny the possibility of fruitful public participation on what should be included and why."²

Though these elements of gameplay were not required, they became central elements to successfully managing your city through the evolution of the game throughout the years. While it is important to note that these elements changed gameplay in positive ways towards illuminating the importance of rights and capabilities for the individual, it is important to note that the central gameplay element of economic and population growth remains today.

² Amartya Sen, *Human Rights and Capabilities* (Journal of Human Development 6 (2), 2009), 158.

Week 3: Modernity / Postmodernity

Throughout the last decade, many games have continued to evolve their user-generated capabilities in the form of 'modding', or modifying the game. Modding is something that is becoming more common in games and as coding continues to become a more commonly understood skill, with some students learning coding in primary and secondary schools along with Science and Math, one can predict that a modded game community might continue to flourish and evolve. We might see a shift in authority and authorship of games to be more in-line with the community's wants and needs, rather than a single developer's vision.

In Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", he describes the shift towards writing in the general public, an early iteration of which was the "letters to the editor" section of newspapers. As Benjamin describes, "For centuries it was the nature of literature that a small number of writers confronted many thousands of readers. This began to change toward the end of the past century ... At any moment, the reader is ready to become a writer ... Literary competence is no longer founded on specialised higher education, but on polytechnic training, and thus is common property."³ Benjamin outlines the shift in broader participation of writing and infers that this waters down the process of writing as expression.

Looking at it from Kapur's lens, perhaps this post-modernist approach to game design could lead to the democratisation of gameplay in many new genres. When analysing City Simulation games, it becomes clear that the genre is ripe for reimagining. Distribution networks for games continue to expand, while young developers are being encouraged to take game design into their own hands. Sim City has the potential to alienate communities who may not align with a colonised approach to 'city development'. Perhaps this democratisation of gameplay opens new pathways to consider what we do with land, in general. Do we develop a city straight out of the post-industrial revolution, or do we consider alternative or hybrid structures that govern the land and politics of the people within these worlds?

³ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *In Illuminations* (New York: Random House, 1968), 114.

Week 4: Critical Approaches to Community

One of the components that is missing from Sim City, as discussed in Week 1: Liberalism and its Discontents is the lack of community and society building within the framework of the game design. Despite 20 years of technical, creative and hardware evolution, designers still have not built in deep cultural collisions or individual identities into the game. While this was the eventual goal of creator, Will Wright, as evidenced by the development of Sim City Societies and through evolution of other simulation games, such as the Sims, those models of gameplay were never successfully incubated. Under the direction and control of game developer behemoth, Electronic Arts, Will Wright's concepts of simulating the world around us have historically been cut open and filled with mechanisms to monetise on the gameplay as much as possible. This was evidenced in The Sims genre by releasing "Stuff Packs", where users would pay \$20USD to expand their game to include Furniture from Ikea, outfits from H&M, or items for 'glamour'. This is discussed more in Week 12: Capital Economy and the Market.

Outside of the boundaries of the game design framework that Sim City and city simulation games have, of Residential, Commercial and Industrial development, the game genre itself has attracted a number of independent developers, or 'modders' who extend the gameplay that is offered. According to Rimi Khan in "From Consensual to Open-Ended Communities", "The term community is used in both everyday and political rhetoric to describe the relationships that give rise to structures of attachment and collective belonging. The word refers to a range of groups and sites, such as geographical communities, communities of interest and identity- based communities."⁴ The modding community develop assets, features and tools that build upon the existing framework of the game. Paradox Interactive, the creator of Cities Skylines, the evolution of the Sim City city simulation genre welcomes modders, through the Steam distribution network. According to the Steam network, to date, there are almost 116,935 mods that have been created by users to extend gameplay, indicating that the modding community for Cities Skylines is robust and growing. There is significant public interest in participating in the extension of gameplay and helping build a game that is more suited for them.

This community acts as an incubation space for new ideas, that can be developed by the public and put into public circulation without needed approval or financial support by Paradox Interactive. This space for 'incubation' of ideas is expressed by Khan in reference to Footscray Community Arts Centre, saying: "FCAC became an incubator for a range of these kinds of community groups, and one former staff member comments that this organic approach meant that

People actually came to us and said, I've got this good idea, does it work? Can it fit in here? So people were actually coming to us with ideas.

⁴ Rimi Khan, "From Consensual to Open-Ended Communities", in *Art in Community, The Provisional Citizen* (Palgrave, 2015), 16.

Importantly, FCAC did not just engage with a community that already existed, 'out there', beyond the Centre walls, but it provided a site for the construction of these communities."

In future iterations of Cities Skylines, through official expansions and updates, the game company took the best of the modding communities ideas and implemented them directly into the game. This democratisation of gameplay is in its early stages with development platforms, such as Steam, offering some of the first robust spaces for this kind of community development to occur. In the future, one can see how the trajectory of game design might move towards a more public sphere and away from a single development team.

Week 5: Qualitative Research, the Ethnographic Eye and the Politics of Knowledge

One of the central components to Sim City, since its original creation in 1986, has been disasters. This has been a main gameplay element, introduced by Will Wright and partially explaining the gameplay element as we like to destroy what we create.

This is a voyeuristic element of the game, in which we, as spectators, can sit back and watch the destruction unfold in front of us. What does this tell us about our own human-nature, when we like to see such distraction and chaos? This coincides with the writing of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in “R-Words: Refusing Research”, in which they describe, “Social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification.”⁵ In the city simulation genre, this is evidenced by the most recent release in the game genre, Cities Skylines. The developers of the game, released in 2014, intentionally did not include disasters in the city simulation. Players were not happy and demanded the feature of destruction in the cities they were creating. What fun is creating a city, when you can’t then have a monster destroy it for you?



Kate Kligman, *Alien Attack in Sim City 2000*, 2013, Digital Screenshot,
<http://www.katekligman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SimCity2000Monster.png>

⁵ Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang, “R-Words: Refusing Research.” *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities* (Ed. Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 223.

Paradox Interactive responded by announcing an expansion pack, set to release in December of 2016, including a set of comprehensive gameplay around disasters. Perhaps developers were trying to remove Cities Skylines from the traditional game design elements of Will Wright in Sim City, or perhaps the designers saw the potential danger in perpetuating the stereotype that we must destroy what we create.

While disasters are fun to watch in a carefully constructed city that you have spent hours on, similarly to destroying the Lego castle you built, it is important to note that voyeuristic observation is not the only role that disasters play. As Tuck and Yang point out, “Logics of pain focus on events, sometimes hiding structure, always adhering to a teleological trajectory of pain, brokenness, repair, or irreparability—from unbroken, to broken, and then to unbroken again. Logics of pain require time to be organized as linear and rigid, in which the pained body (or community or people) is set back or delayed on some kind of path of humanization, and now must catch up (but never can) to the settler/unpained/abled body (or community or people or society or philosophy or knowledge system).”⁶

The purpose of disasters in city simulation games is to test you, the player, or God, and the design of your city. How well does your fire department stop the spread of fires, the police from preventing riots and your utility infrastructure to prevent water or power disruption? What is your response, as Mayor, after the disaster has occurred, how do you rebuild your communities, connect utilities and re-establish order? How might this help you in future planning of your city through gained knowledge. Disasters in Sim City and city simulation games are a cycle. This ties into qualitative research - it is research about the response.

⁶ Ibid., 231

Week 6: Mythology, Story and Narrative

In Sim City, you, as the player, are the outside actor. Without your divine intervention, your game is left with a flat piece of land with no development, people, pollution, or budget. This is a duality between presence and absence, as outlined in the mythological stories discussed by Thomas King in 'You'll Never believe What Happened' is a great way to start".⁷

Often described as 'God-style games', in open ended simulation games such as Sim City, the player assumes the role of a God-like character, positioning themselves to control the creation, design and development of the worlds they govern. In the case of Sim City, your God-like role is framed as being a Mayor of the city. In your role, you must choose between many dual roles, such as good vs evil, in relation to crime and education, or light and dark, through utility power and water. As the player, you control the evolution of either increasing or decreasing chaos. If the 'sims' could identify you as the player, they might well consider you to be their 'God'. The mythology narrative is interactive through the gameplay and story.

Narrative is driven by the mechanical design of the game. Your struggle against many different factors, such as pollution, fiscal mismanagement, fires, nature, development and others which are all narratives of the game. While Sim City has a narrative, it does not have a direct story. This ties into the larger theme for this week of Mythology, Story and Narrative, providing an unconventional way to progress through a story through nonlinear game design, giving the player control over the land that they govern. Though this power as a player might seem endless, and as discussed in other sections, the system dynamics of game design dictate the limitations of your role as a player.

⁷ Thomas King, *The truth about stories: A Native narrative* (Toronto, ON: Anansi Press, 2003), 1-12.

Week 7: Art and Health

While the majority of this essay problematises the gameplay elements of Sim City and city simulation games, it is important to keep in mind the positive potential that game and play has for people's health, wellbeing and education. Will Wright, the creator of Sim City and the original founder of the simulation game genre, conceives of open world environments in which you can solve problems, design and express creativity in a 'sim' environment which is removed from reality.

In education, one can see how these worlds provide a level of interactivity not commonly found in traditional media. Through the writing of Peter Jenkins et al. in "Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century", he expresses, "Part of what makes play valuable as a mode of problem solving and learning is that it lowers the emotional stakes of failing: players are encouraged to suspend some of the real-world consequences of represented actions, to take risks and learn through trial and error. The underlying logic is one of die and do over ... children often feel locked out of the worlds described in their textbooks through the depersonalised and abstract prose used to describe them." Understanding how a capitalist society can crumble by experiencing it through play is a powerful learning tool. In this book, Jenkins references Will Wright in which Wright describes the game-making process and value of gameplay: "In some sense, a game is nothing but a set of problems. We're actually selling people problems for 40 bucks a pop ... And the more interesting games in my opinion are the ones that have a larger solution space. In other words, there's not one specific way to solve a puzzle, but ,in fact, there's an infinite range of solutions ... The game world becomes an external artefact of their internal representation of the problem space."⁸

Taking the writing of Jenkins further, we can turn to "Online Video Game Therapy for Mental Health Concerns: A Review" by Nathan Wilkinson et al. In this article, Wilkinson talks about the role video games can play for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, expressing that "Video game therapy for children with ADHD has elicited a relatively large amount of scholarly attention, because many children who do not inhibit their hyperactivity in other contexts will do so when playing intrinsically motivating video games."⁹ He goes on to describe how video games are a useful tool for assessment of ADHD among control groups because of the measurable outcomes intrinsic to video game design. As someone who grew up with ADHD and whose ADHD continued into adulthood, video game spaces continue to be an important therapy for me as a creative output and to build motivation.

The concept of using video game design in health and wellbeing has been heavily researched. Further applications for aggression, anxiety disorders, autism, personality and psychotic disorders and in elderly populations are also discussed by Wilkinson and by

⁸ Henry Jenkins et al., *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century* (Mit Press, 2009), 38.

⁹ Nathan Wilkinson, Rebecca P. Ang, and Dion H. Goh, *Online video game therapy for mental health concerns: a review* (International journal of social psychiatry 54, no. 4, 2008), 373.

Brenda Kay Wiederhold in "A Game a Day Keeps the Doctor Away: A Short Review of Computer Games in Mental Healthcare". Kay discusses the development of games for elderly people saying, "ElderGames (Gamberini et al., 2006) is oriented to develop games with advanced visualisation and interaction tabletop interfaces to enhance the cognitive, functional and social skills of elderly through health monitoring, mental exercise and engagement. It implements also a communication system for multiplayer entertainment from a distance."¹⁰

From design of simulation games through to applications of video game design, one can see how Sim City and similar games can be useful tools for health and wellbeing, providing immersive learning, therapy, motivation and social interaction.

¹⁰ Luciano Gamberini, Giacinto Barresi, A. Maier, and Fabiola Scarpetta, *A game a day keeps the doctor away: A short review of computer games in mental healthcare*. (Journal of CyberTherapy and Rehabilitation 1, no. 2, 2008), 135.

Week 8: Nation, Culture and Citizenship

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's, "Culture Alive", she explains how culture is formed through habit and ritual, describing how "Culture is a package of largely unacknowledged assumptions, loosely held by a loosely outlined group of people, mapping negotiations between the sacred and the profane, and the relationship between the sexes. On the level of these loosely held assumptions and presuppositions, change is incessant. But, as they change, these unwitting pre-suppositions become belief systems, organized suppositions. Rituals coalesce to match, support, and advance beliefs and suppositions."¹¹ While this process of creating culture is always evolving and moving forward, there isn't necessarily a driving, central vision that defines what is, and is not culture. Everything is culture. Culture is assumed.

In the case of Sim City, designers of the game assume much about its players, either by design or unintentionally. It assumes that players identify with the values of capitalism, and becoming 'successful' by developing and building wealth. Designers are pre-supposing that you want a lot of land, a lot of capital and a lot of people. What if you don't?

Sim City is set in a simulated environment, which looks like land, but it is not land. It is not connected to larger systems, ecosystems, economic systems and cultural dynamics. It is as if players are developing a city on an alien planet, in isolation from all other Earthly elements, under the guise of a modernist civilisation. Designers could have used other frameworks to progress players through the narrative of development and progress. In the case of Native American cultures, land is valued, protected and restricted. In Aboriginal Australian cultures, animals are one with people. What would City Simulation look like from the context of communities associated with Jainism, who believe in non-violence and non-attachment?

Sim City doesn't fit into any of those cultures or communities. It is assumed that as a player of the game that you do not identify with those cultural constructs. Perhaps there is a sub-genre of city simulation in which the role of human beings is to live in balance with the land and animals. Can this still be considered 'city simulation', or is it a different genre of game entirely?

¹¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Culture Alive* (Theory, Culture & Society 23. 2-3, May, 2006), 359.

Week 9: Ethics

In Sim City, there is an assumption that you use every square of land on earth, and this is 'good'. If you achieve this, in some regards, you 'win'. Looking at the game in this way, one might view Sim City as a game about colonisation. What ethical questions does this raise for our view on what the role of our cities play?

Development in the game is centralised through a main component of Residential, Commercial and Industrial zones. Residential zones hold people and houses, who feed businesses in the Industrial district, which produce products for the Commercial district, which feeds the Residential district. This component, RCI, has been the central component in every city simulation game in the genre since the first Sim City in 1986. As discussed in Week 2: Human Rights and Human Development, there are unified structures that are assumed among all 'sims' that you, the player, represent. Is this representation of producing goods and consumption healthy for us to view our role as collective populations?

Additional gameplay elements have been added over time that help visualise the impact of the cities to some degree, also adding more layers of complexity and complication to the existing models of gameplay. Environmental factors, for example, such as water pollution, noise pollution, deforestation and trash collection became components of gameplay that affects the greater success of the city's population and economic growth, through contributions to land value, health and wellbeing of citizens. These elements, however, do not change the main component that drives gameplay: development, production and consumption.

As discussed in Week 11: Governance, Bureaucracy and Evaluation, the central aim of the game is to grow the budget and population. This is reminiscent of the IXIA matrix discussed in "Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation", by Katherine Gressel in that this model for Sim City may not accurately, or ethically represent the role of citizens and cities in the greater context of the world.¹² Rather than changing the components, developers of the city simulation genre have slapped on additional game element challenges, such as environmental factors, but which still boil down to the central RCI, economic and population growth model. What other purposes might our cities have, other than this development and consumption model?

¹² Katherine Gressel, *Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation* (Createquity, January 7, 2012).

Week 10: Aesthetics, Creativity and Affect

Through the design of Sim City, players are presented with an open world, a blank canvas. The city simulation genre and the broader genre of open ended games offer a framework that illustrates the writings of Sara Ahmed in “The Cultural Politics of Emotion” and Nicolas Bourriaud in “Relational Aesthetics”.

Coinciding with Bourriaud’s arguments that artwork is just an object, the true art is the interaction with the artwork, the social impetus, individual reactions and emotions, without a player ‘doing’ something within the framework of the game, the game itself is just a collection of code and graphical objects.¹³ It is static and dead. The true art of Sim City is the interaction with the game framework, designing, building, destroying, talking about, sharing online and all other forms of experience facilitated by the game design. What drives a player to build, develop and continue in a game, which doesn’t otherwise ‘instruct’ us to do anything?. Perhaps it is in our nature to want to create something out of nothing. There are social influences, such as our cultural biases, which tell us what to do with the land. It seems obvious to players that if one builds a power plant on land 20 kilometres away from an industrial zoned area, that you would want to use the land in-between to build a road. These concepts are illustrated by Ahmed.

As she illustrates, “Of course, emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the ‘where’ of its inhabitants, but connects bodies to other bodies: attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others.”¹⁴ Emotions are not reactive and based on ‘evidence’, such as the IXIA matrixes presented in “Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation”, by Katherine Gressel, they can be seen as enlightenment, in the contrasting “Beyond the Toolkit Approach”, by Elenora Belfiore.¹⁵ ¹⁶ Emotion creates boundaries and guides for us to move, which feeds our emotion in an evolving interplay and cycle of progress. This emotional design is built into the gameplay of open ended games, such as Sim City, Minecraft or Roller Coaster Tycoon, where a player might feel excited to create, fearful of death or driven to expand.

¹³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998), 26.

¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Introduction: Feel Your Way”, from *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 11.

¹⁵ Gressel, *Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation*, 10.

¹⁶ Eleonora Belfiore, and Oliver Bennett. *Beyond the “Toolkit Approach”: Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy Making* (Journal for Cultural Research 14.2, March 24, 2010), 137.

Week 11: Governance, Bureaucracy and Evaluation

Evaluation and gameplay go hand in hand. Most games on the market use some form of evaluation to determine how successful a user is in participating in the game. This is evidenced in traditional first-person shooters, such as Doom, in which your evaluative model is based on your overall health and ammo. In a game like Mario Bros., evaluation is based on number of lives your player has, and what level you have reached. These are all linear and scientific models of evaluation, taking into consideration a number or boolean to represent progress. One might assume that open-ended gameplay, such as Sim City, would be different - that it might be an enlightenment-based policy, but that is not the case.

The basis of success in Sim City is determined on a number of scientific factors: how much money you are making and how large your population is growing. More complex evaluative frameworks exist to ensure those statistics are continuing to rise, not fall. Land value determines the richness of the people and businesses who enter the city, which affects the financial growth of the city. Pollution, traffic and social factors, such as health, crime and education, determines how much the land value will rise or fall. Access to utilities, such as power and water, drive whether or not people will live in certain parts of your city, affecting population levels. These frameworks have the illusion of being 'open-ended', but they restrict gameplay a great deal.

In "Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation", Katherine Gressel illustrates a IXIA's scientific approach to public art evaluation.¹⁷ This matrix is similar to that Sim City uses, in that they are all boxes to tick, rather than being adaptive or evolving forms of evaluation. Contrasting these models with that from the "Beyond the Toolkit Approach", by Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, where evaluation can be seen as more dynamic and individual, not evidence-based, one might see new ways of evaluating gameplay success in city simulation gameplay.¹⁸ Perhaps models based mainly on population and finance are not what the player of the game want to base their gameplay or cities on. Is this relevant when our world currently does view these frameworks as driving factors for 'success' of cities internationally? If we choose different evaluative methods, does this genre cease to be one of city simulation?

Gameplay is determined on evaluative frameworks, and the design of Sim City and city simulation evaluative models have been the same for 20-years. Perhaps reimagining these methods of evaluation opens up new forms of interactivity to visualise what our 'cities' actually look like.

¹⁷ Gressel, *Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation*.

¹⁸ Belfiore and Bennett, *Beyond the "Toolkit Approach"*, 137.

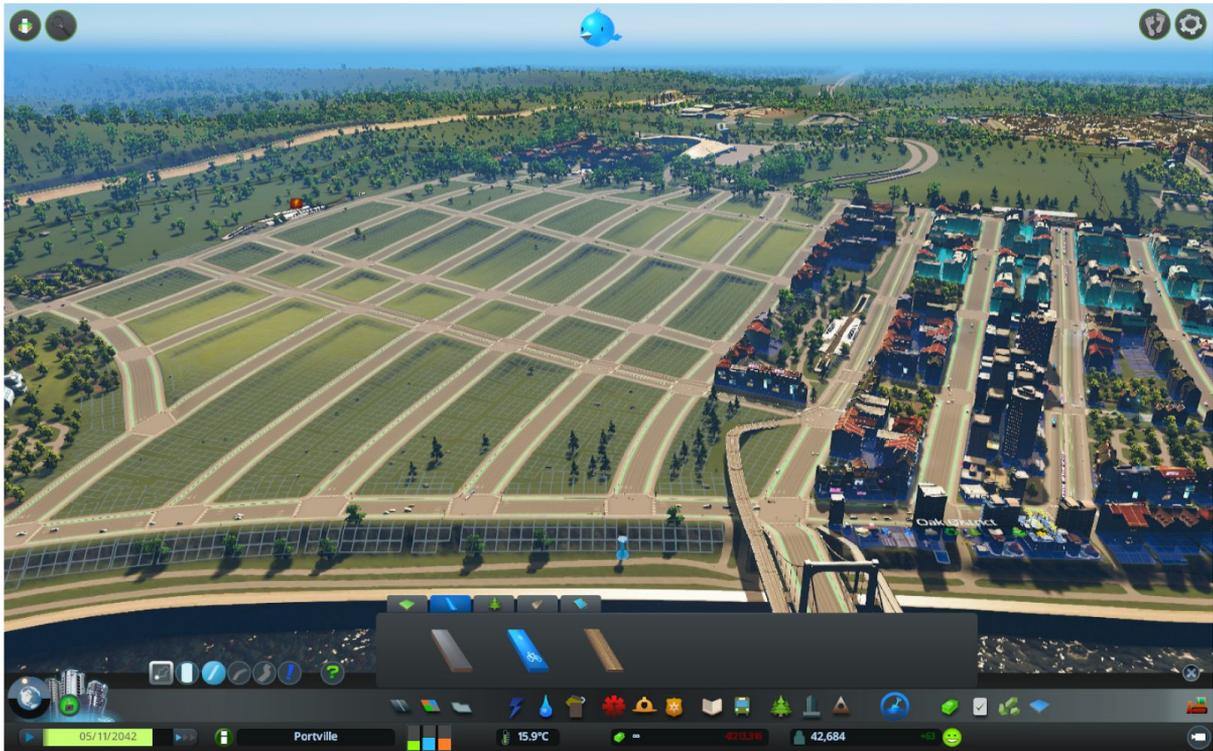
Week 12: Capital, Economy and the Market

In Purves, T., and S. A. Selzer's article, "What We Want Is Free, Second Edition: Critical Exchanges in Recent Art", Purves discusses the three different economies, known as a 'system of exchange'. This system of exchange consists of three economies, a social economy, redistributive economy and capital economy. Social economies help guide us towards responsibilities in a social system, Purves giving the example of driving a neighbour to the grocery store, or making a meal for your child. Redistributive economies take existing resources, such as public transportation, and distributes the cost of such services among groups of public. Capital economies determine market price for goods and services based on demand, cost of production and cost of overhead, such as staff. While art may fall into any one of these categories, most video games fall into the category of capital economy in which buyers pay for the intellectual property of designers, the cost of the distribution networks, technologies, infrastructures and for the presumed demand, based on market research. This is what drives gameplay, not social or redistributive economies. As Purves explains, "These systems of exchange are the ground upon which the artists' projects assembled and investigated in this book are constructed. It is the landscape that they occur within, as well as what they are attempting to make meaning of and from." In the case of Sim City and city simulation games, this 'landscape' is the reality of the context the game rests within, that it is driven by a capital economy.¹⁹

Historically, producer, Electronic Arts, has often exploited the gameplay concepts developed by Will Wright, as evidenced by the introduction of superficial gameplay elements, such as McDonald's Kiosks in The Sims and Nissan Leaf electric car charging stations in the New Sim City, developed in 2012. Through the article by John Colapinto, "The Real-Estate Artist", we can see how exploitation can be a powerful tool to break into a capital market. Artist, Theaster Gates, misrepresented himself as the producer of Shoji Yamaguchi's pottery, Colapinto explaining that "Yamaguchi and his wife died in a car accident, and their son founded the Yamaguchi Institute to house his father's ceramics. At the show, Gates enlisted a mixed-race actor to impersonate Yamaguchi's son, and presented himself as the potter's protégé."²⁰ This misrepresentation acts as an interesting metaphor to that of Electronic Arts as the producer for games such as Sim City and The Sims, hiding behind the original artistry of designers, such as Will Wright, in order to sell work. In the case of Wright, he left Maxis, owned by Electronic Arts, in order to pursue his own professional work outside of the realm of video games, ending his long-standing career as the 'father of simulation games'.

¹⁹ T. Purves and S. A. Selzer, "What We Want Is Free", *Critical Exchanges in Recent Art* (State University of New York Press, 2014), 4-5.

²⁰ John Colapinto, *The Real-Estate Artist* (The New Yorker, January 29, 2015), 6.



Jared Kuvent, *Cities Skylines Development*, 2016, Digital Screenshot

While the design of Sim City and city simulation games themselves are problematic, as discussed in this paper, it is important to note that there are greater forces at play that drive the development of the game genre. While the modding community is active and vibrant, contributors in that community are bound by the game frameworks set up by developers of the game, such as Electronic Arts or Paradox Interactive, and producers of the distribution platforms, such as Steam. Though this democratisation is an important step towards greater participation among developers, producers and public, the powerful systems of capitalism and the market create challenges for gameplay to shift towards a more socially-balanced dynamic, both in-game in for the communities of players.

Bibliography

Ahmed Sara. "Introduction: Feel Your Way", from *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Arendt, Hannah. "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Orlando: Harvest, 1966.

Belfiore, Eleonora, and Oliver Bennett. *Beyond the "Toolkit Approach": Arts Impact Evaluation Research and the Realities of Cultural Policy Making*. Journal for Cultural Research 14.2, March 24, 2010.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*. New York: Random House, 1968.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. France: Les Presse Du Reel, 1998.

Colapinto, John. *The Real-Estate Artist*. The New Yorker, January 29, 2015.

Gamberini, Luciano, Giacinto Barresi, A. Maier, and Fabiola Scarpetta. *A game a day keeps the doctor away: A short review of computer games in mental healthcare*. Journal of CyberTherapy and Rehabilitation 1, no. 2, 2008.

GameSpot *Sim City*, Digital Photograph,
http://static3.gamespot.com/uploads/scale_medium/box/3/9/2/5/5927-23925.jpg

Gressel, Katherine. *Public Art and the Challenge of Evaluation*. Createquity, January 7, 2012.

Jenkins, Henry, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, Katie Clinton, and Alice J. Robison. *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Mit Press, 2009.

Kligman, Kate *Alien Attack in Sim City 2000*, 2013, Digital Screenshot,
<http://www.katekligman.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/SimCity2000Monster.png>

Khan, Rimi. "From Consensual to Open-Ended Communities", in *Art in Community, The Provisional Citizen*. Palgrave, 2015.

King, Thomas. *The truth about stories: A Native narrative*. Toronto, ON: Anansi Press, 2003.

Kuvent, Jared *Cities Skylines Development*, 2016, Digital Screenshot

Purves, T. and S. A. Selzer. "What We Want Is Free", *Critical Exchanges in Recent Art*. State University of New York Press, 2014.

Sen, Amartya. *Human Rights and Capabilities*. *Journal of Human Development* 6, 2005.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Culture Alive*. *Theory, Culture & Society* 23. 2-3, May, 2006.

TheAlmightyGuru *Sim City 2000 - DOS - Newspaper*, 2013, Digital Screenshot,
http://www.vgmpf.com/Wiki/images/b/b5/Sim_City_2000_-_DOS_-_Newspaper.png

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "R-Words: Refusing Research." *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*. Ed. Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.

Wilkinson, Nathan, Rebecca P. Ang, and Dion H. Goh. *Online video game therapy for mental health concerns: a review*. *International journal of social psychiatry* 54, no. 4, 2008.