

The Sims[™] 4

A Research Process Document



Simulation can be described as the imitation of a situation or process which employs the action of deception, effectively pretending to be something, a representation of sorts. It can also be seen as the approach or angle I took while navigating this project, a red thread running through my smaller research projects and ultimate goals. At first, completely unintentional, but ultimately an idea I end up with at every turn. To me, simulation is a form of imitation, a way of riffing from an already well known process or design in order to convey a brand new message. But to what means does it become a visual language within itself?

Within the society of the spectacle, the emphasis is on image and visual representation, so by simulating well known interfaces and items, we also simulate a reality, in which the public becomes a part of. Appearances become currency and can be easily deceived.





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Availability: September - December

Operating System: MAC

Publisher: Kendal Beynon

Developer: 0968503

SIMULATION

Noun

1. imitation of a situation or process.
2. the action of pretending; deception.
3. the production of a computer model of something, especially for the purpose of study.



“The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true.”

-- Ecclesiastes

To introduce the idea of simulation, it seems inevitable to mention Jean Baudrillard and his book, *Simulacra & Simulation*, but, to do that, we must make the distinction between these two terms “Simulacra are copies that depict things that either had no original, or that no longer have an original. Simulation is the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time.”

Throughout this project, I've indulged in both of these processes, both by using common traits to create a fake personality, or by replicating existing design processes to communicate a message. Though simulation is normally associated with computer processes and algorithms, I decided to take an analog approach and refrain from simple automated replications. Baudrillard says “Abstraction today is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”

But was is hyperreality? Put simply it is the imaginary concealing the reality, reality no longer exists within the artificial parameters. Within my project, I used recognizable forms and designs to encode my own messages and found when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.

Another word that often is thrown up within the context of simulation is representation. Again, Baudrillard has a succinct way of summarizing the differences. He states that representation is the principle of equivalence of the sign and of the real whereas simulation stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value.

As you navigate through these projects, you will see my progression through simulation as just a form of mimicking, a design style, before using it as a way to encode my own messages, effectively turning it into a mode of communication.

“It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself.....”

INTERVENTIONS

The first intervention I staged in a small group, we took the language and imagery of Instagram influencers in order to create the ultimate deception of appearing of a certain status online, sure this has also been employed by performance artists such as Amelia Ulman, but by going through these motions of a rich trust fund baby, we were able to simulate a very believable character, one of status and wealth.

With my group mates, we simulated a typical Instagram 'haul' by exploiting the use of makeup testers and appearing wealthy through trying on but not purchasing designer clothes. The goal was to show how easy it is to deceive a public online.



Using the social media function in game to post 'Simstagram' stories and acquiring a social media following.

FAKE INFLUENCER AND ARTIST

After this idea of simulation came through as a way to not only deceive but communicate, our second intervention involved creating a false artist and staging an exhibition in the centre of Rotterdam. Knowing that to truly imitate the well known traditions of contemporary art, we used an online generator to create a convincing backstory and an exhibition text using famous art buzzwords to give depth to our character. We employed the design traits of famous art institutes to create a visual identity completely believable to a public already doubting the validity of contemporary art and its themes.

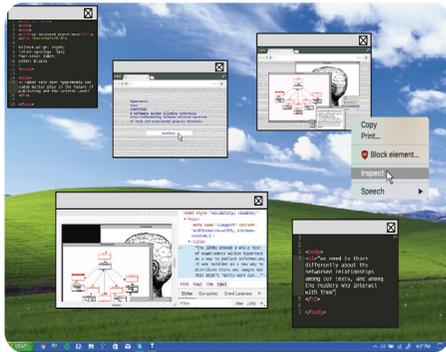
It ignited my interest within simulation as a communication tool and then served as a starting point for all of my following endeavours.



We created an exhibition text, artwork labels, and a backstory to create a believable Dutch artist called Koen Visser. We also posed as an art agency representing him, and created social media events for added authenticity.



With my visual essay, I wanted to research the role hypermedia and coded matter play in the future of publishing and the written word.



I created a simulation of a desktop background as a way to frame my research and reflect the nature and context of the subject of digital publishing.



I used the dialect of code to explore the possible route publishing can go down using hyperlinks and coded matter. The focus is on how these forms influence and change our way of publishing information and how this could pertain to a new way of gathering and documenting subject matter.

My contemporary example was the Death Grips release of *No Love For Deep Web*, an album leaked via an ARG, the contemporary form of a hypertext, and look into modern forms. The final essay is constructed in the style of a graphic novel, but with code as its main language and signifier for the narrative style.

Here was where I made the shift from simulation as a design style, into using the method as a way to hide and reveal information. This directly fed into my interest within the field of experiment & hybrid publishing.



At its core The Sims is a sandbox; in The Sims 4 we've created gameplay in the form of Aspirations and Whims that can guide players who are looking for a more structured experience.

All-new technology such as multitasking, head tracking, social grouping, emotive walks and idles, and improved routing make your Sims feel more human and believable than ever before.

Memefluence

- meme
noun

1. an element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means.
2. an image, video, piece of text, etc., typically humorous in nature, that is copied and spread rapidly by Internet users, often with slight variations.

We are surrounded by memes.

They infiltrate our facebook, they attach themselves to our email and they disrupt our heavily curated instagram feed. But when they deal in politics, what do they really mean? Its easy to disregard a meme as a low quality image with some funny text, but undeniably memes have power and influence. They are our new political language. And they are arriving in droves.

Through Memefluence, we explore memes as a vessel for a new kind of political propaganda. Taking a richly appropriated and re-appropriated meme, we explore how they came to be and look into the visual and verbal language of memes. Through this, we uncover the true social and political ramifications of the medium.

By reframing this famous image, we can fully explore how memes function and spread, and how we can appropriate them for our own needs.



What

We chose to recontextualise memes within the museum sphere. This was an attempt to approach something widely known through a different perspective and play with ideas of simulation.

It also added:

- A new layer of importance. Art is considered 'high-brow' culture so we could reposition the medium
- An opportunity to see memes recreated as paintings and art objects.
- A way to isolate them from their digital space and original intent.
- A way to play with form and simulation of a gallery environment.



How

Ways in which we simulated the gallery/museum space.

- Painted the memes chosen to highlight in our exhibition. Complete with gallery tags naming the artist and title of the painting
- Created an exhibition text but in the style of a macbook desktop to link back to the digital beginnings of the meme.
- Created a bookshelf with related material as seen in many exhibitions. Complete with our own book of research.
- Create exhibition navigation in a consistent clear style reminiscent of that of the Stedelijk.

Matt Furie (b. 1975, Ohio)
Funeral Pepe, May 9th 2017

Belongs To: The People



There are many approaches to creating an event. The notion of simulation came when formulating a one sentence goal.

Why

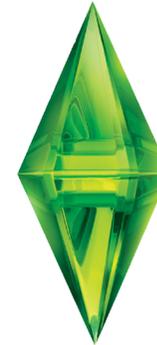
But why did I choose this medium and approach to formulate a successful event?

- I wanted to use the knowledge I acquired through my years in exhibition design to play with tropes and devices.
- I also wanted to find out how simulation of design processes and imagery can impact and recontextualise a subject. It was a way of playing with common nostalgic references but to create something new.
- Simulation can have a great effect on new forms of communication. Memes are in themselves a simulation of an existing notion, so by using simulation as the overall approach of presentation, added a new layer to the communication of our message.



Drawbacks of The Theme

Using a device that can be so easily recognised and understood also draws some pitfalls. For example, the use of recognisable imagery can fast become gimmicky and each design decision had to be carefully considered in order to stray on the right side of riffing. One clear example is when formulating the spatial design of our exhibition event, we realised the adage of golden ornate frames to our paintings would seem less simulation and more parody. This became a constant theme within my explorations, what is the line and how easy is it to cross?



From my research within the realm of simulation, there is no concrete conclusion. It is a complex tool to communicate with as it a successful way to distribute knowledge. This is, in part, because an audience can more comfortably react to something they are already familiar with, whether that be a design or a concept. Parts that were surprising were how much humour can be employed within this approach. This has always appealed to me as a designer, as I am interested in the dynamics of play.

In terms of future research, I would love to push the boundaries and limits of hiding things within the disguise of simulation. I am interested in the notion of encoding, especially from an experimental publishing perspective. I feel that using this device could offer interesting results in later projects. Simulation is often about content, even strictly aesthetics, but I am more interested in simulation in context. Exploring what could happen if you mix messages, does it become ironic or just confusing? This is an idea I would like to play with in future. When are we in on the joke?



Every Sim is unique.

1 x Aspiration (+ bonus trait) + 3 Traits = a million possibilities!

Throughout the process, I have employed a number of methods to get closer to the theme of simulation and create well thought out concepts.

- “Mimicking” - Copying and referencing existing design structures in order to communicate
- “Encoding” - Through the simulation of recognisable processes, I was able to hide messages within the structures to add a layer of communication.
- “Data Collection” - Collected examples of exhibition design and post structures.
- “Contemporary References” - Creating visual and verbal communication through alphabet of memes within exhibition
- “Interaction Design” - Looking at spatial processes to create an effective navigation strategy.
- “Remixing” - Visual riffing off nostalgic imagery, i.e desktop simulation and The Sims as a form of presentation
- “Analysis” - Doing copious research into the nature of simulation and common design practices within well known projects such as museum design.



