

WILL WRIGHT | CHAPTER 05

Exploring Player Psychology

TERMS

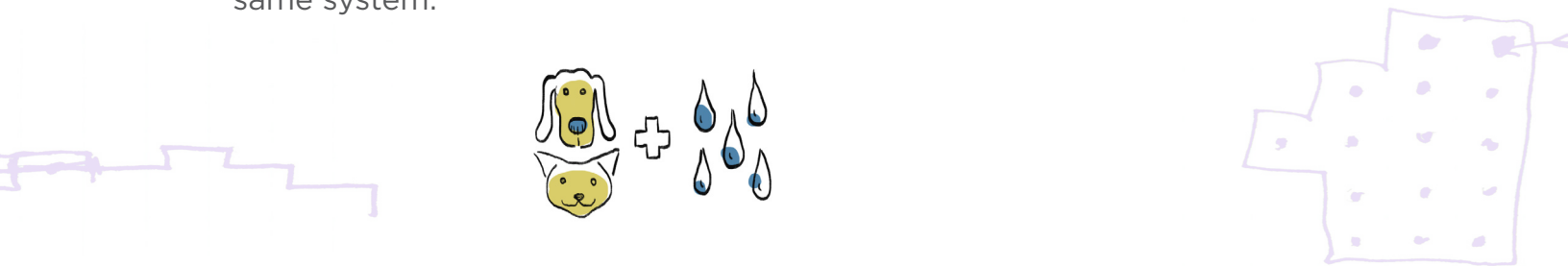
agency (n.) The power to control your own actions, accompanied by the knowledge that you are able to do so.

schema (n.) A mental framework of expectations used to perceive and respond to a given experience.

feedback (n.) - Outputs of a system, returned as inputs into that same system.

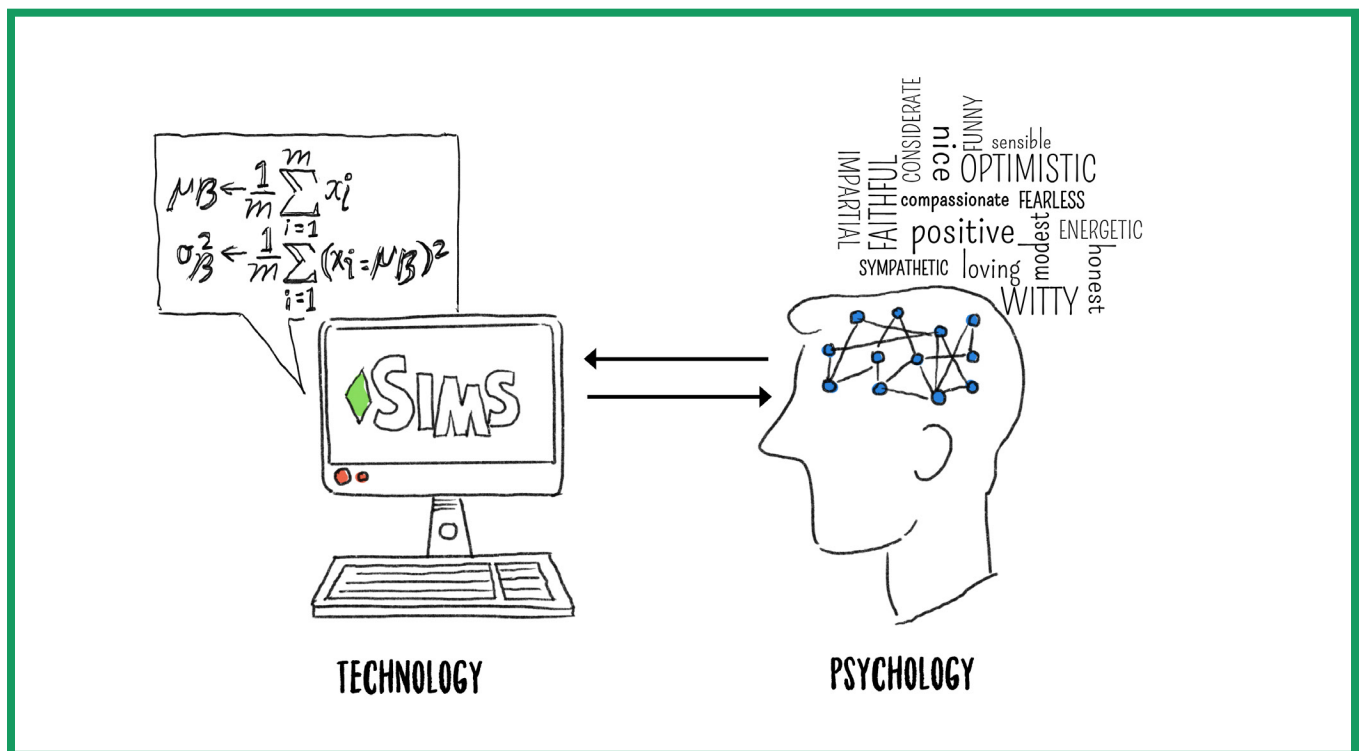
game loop (n.) A closed feedback loop in which a player is introduced to a challenge, attempts to overcome that challenge, and adjusts their future behavior based on success or failure.

mental model (n.) The interior structure of motivation your game builds in the mind of the player.



A robust game experience creates an entire system of limitations and freedoms, goals and rewards, challenges and joys in the player's mind. For the duration of game-play, this new psychology replaces the player's typical real-world motivation. Game development is as much about programming the player's brain as it is about programming the game itself.

"Games, for a lot of people, become... a very integral part of their identity."

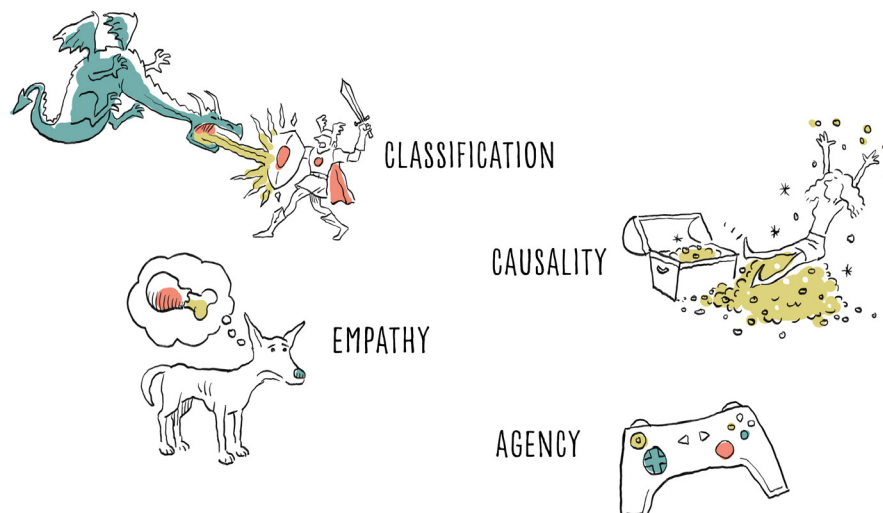


If your game design is compelling enough, your player will find themselves pursuing behaviors they would never pursue in their regular life. Will calls this interior system the “mental model.” The system of motivation in *The Sims*’ is based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs pyramid, which Will used to structure objectives for the player.

SCHEMA



SCHEMA WITHIN GAMES

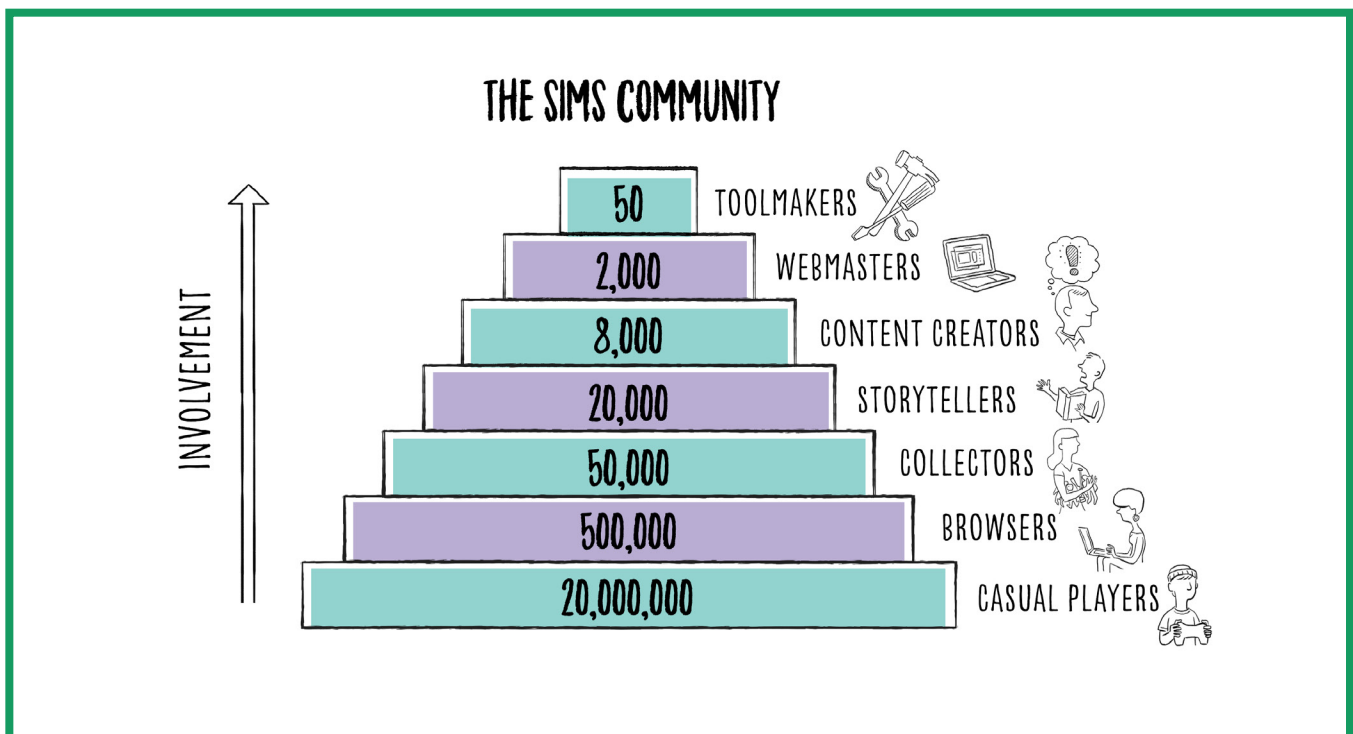


Keep in mind the following when thinking about the mental model for your game:

1. Players will have expectations of how your game model works, and you should be aware of them as a designer. These expectations are based mainly on what they have seen and experienced in other games. If you have a strong sense of the mental model your game creates for the player, you will be able to better direct their behavior toward the most fun aspects of the experience.

2. Don't limit your model to what's possible in the real world. Only pure simulators have to strive for accuracy. Create systems that are responsive, whimsical, and humorous.

3. Take note of the roles that form in your game's community, and design toward them. If you notice a network of players who like to collect certain items, for example, add a rarity structure into your game to encourage that behavior. Support players as they organically create roles for themselves, because they can become evangelists for your game.



LEARN MORE

Learn to interpret player psychology by playing your games with a tester. Return to one of the prototypes you built in Chapter 4: The Relationship Between Story and Games, and play it with a friend. While playing, discover a moment of fun you didn't intend to create as a designer. Pay particular attention to moments where your friend is electing to spend more time than you expected, or pushing the boundaries of a certain mechanic to see how far it can go. Take note of those moments in your Concept Book, and consider them for possible core mechanics in a future prototype.

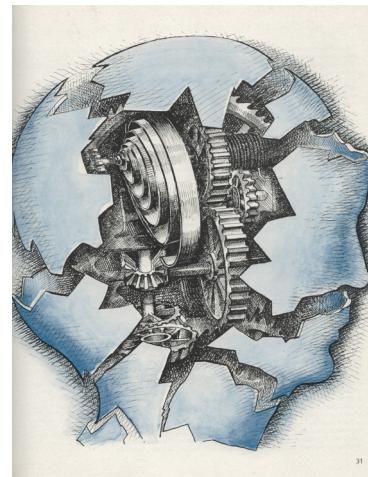
ASSIGNMENTS

Select one of the illustrations from *Maps of the Mind* by Charles Hampden-Turner, shown in the introduction to this chapter and reproduced on the right and the following page. Use it to develop a game concept. Record that game concept in your Concept Book.

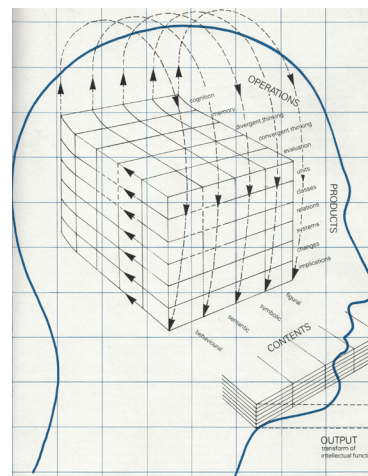
Illustrations by Charles Hampden-Turner



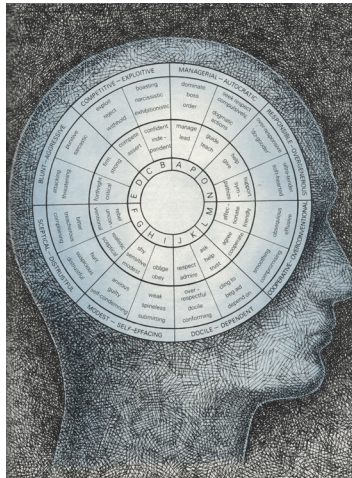
Psyche and Polycentrism: The View of James Hillman



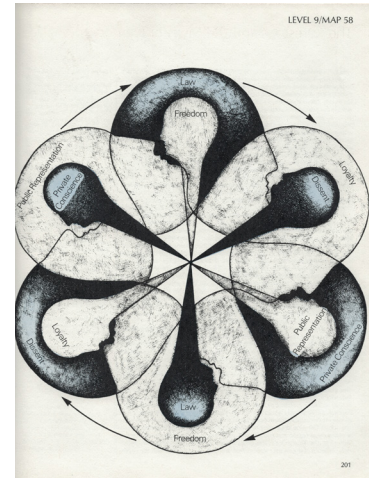
The Broken Image: Floyd Matson's view of Descartes, Newton, and Darwin



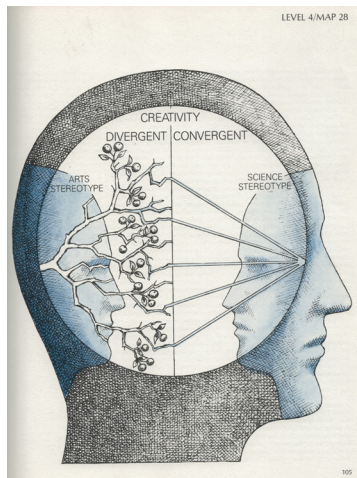
The Structure of Intellect: J.P. Guilford's Cubic Factors



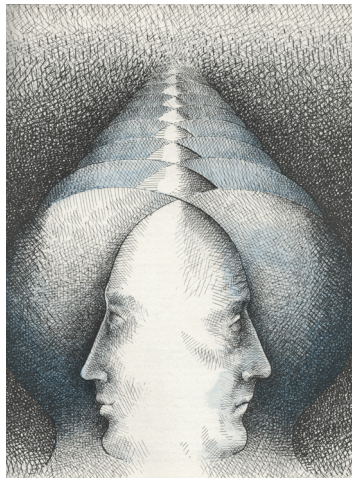
The Etchings of Interpersonal Anxiety: The Dynamisms of Henry Stack Sullivan



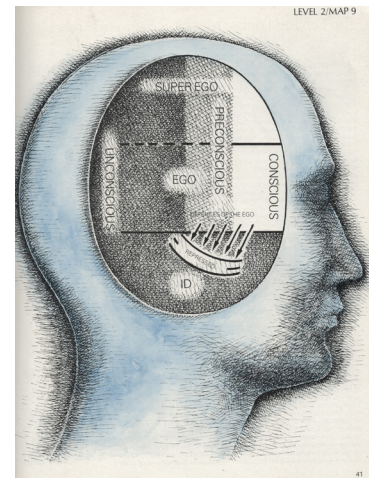
The Oresteia and the Myth of Democracy of Aeschylus



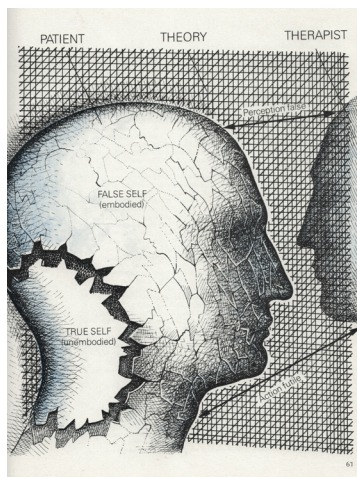
The Two Cultures Controversy: Getzels, Jackson, and Hudson



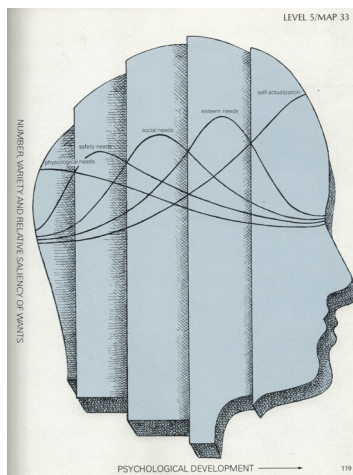
Encounter on the Narrow Ridge: Martin Buber Interpreted by Maurice Friedman



The Limited Energy Model of Sigmund Freud



The Divided Self: Jean-Paul Sartre to R.D. Laing



Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs