hello!

soft games, sex, and you

*Why our current game mechanics are limited, and how **you** can help expand them*

super cool thesis slide:

- I think more talks should have a thesis

- What do I want to cover in this talk?
  - Our game mechanics are predominantly based on a binary model
  - This model leaves a lot of interesting and atypical ideas unexplorable

- What do I want **you** to take away from this talk?
  - A better understanding of the limits of our popular game mechanics
  - Some basic tools to get you started with going *beyond binary*
  - Maybe inspiration to try something new or tackle a problem from a different angle!

"CRED CHECK"

Why should you listen to anything I say?

- Taught myself programming to make games at 13

- Went to DePaul University for Game Design in 2010

- Made some weird stuff there, got talked into being a programmer

Fists of Oog (Kinect Game)

Groovy Tuesday (musical exploration)

- Programmer @ Iron Galaxy Studios (2012-Present)
- Worked on… just a whole mess of stuff
- On the side helped make critically acclaimed* indie darling**
  REAL WINNERS: VICTORYBALL

- *my mom said it was "really neat, honey"
- **sold 160 units (only 10 of which were our moms)

ANYWAY………

enough about me

Preface: What's a "hard game"?

- Doesn't relate to difficulty!

- "Hard" or Binary Mechanics: "success" and "fail" outcome states

- Hard games focus on **winning**

- Few games are *exclusively* success/fail based, but their systems are built around this principle

- Natural evolution from IRL physical games and the nature of Magic Circle Rules
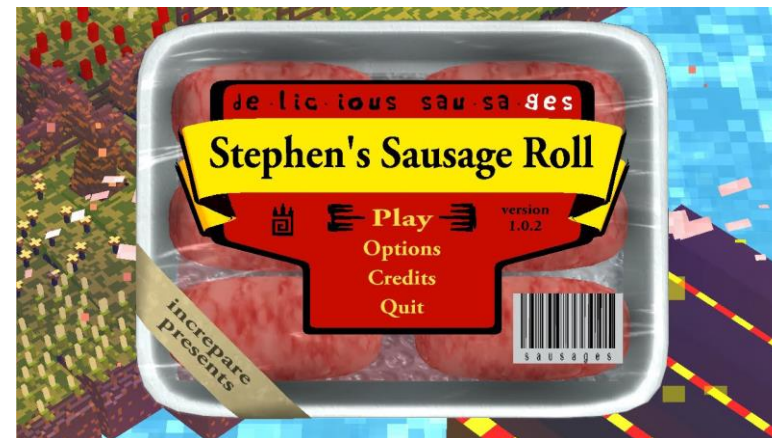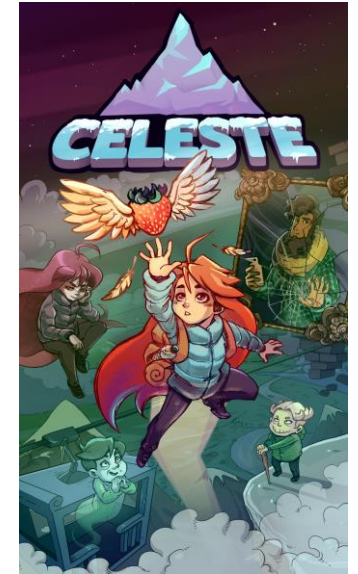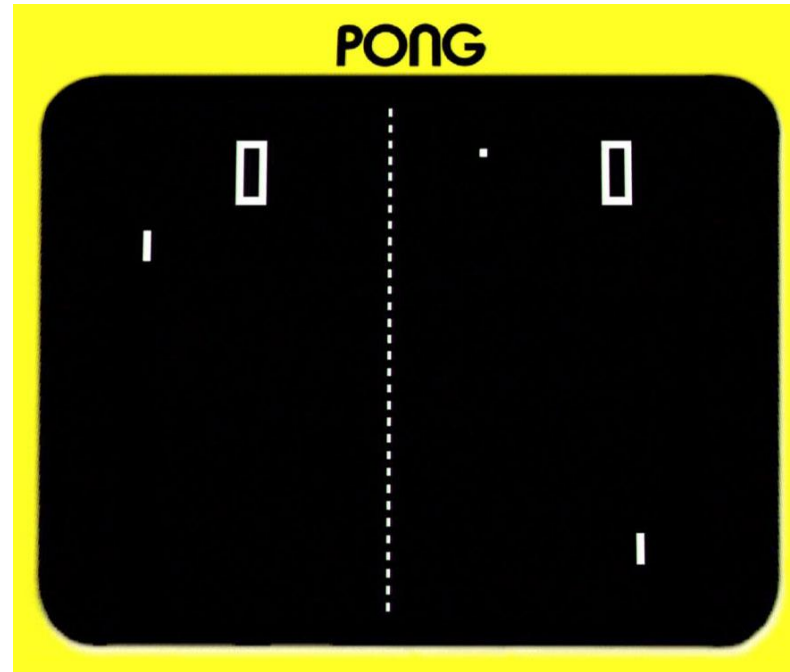
Components of a "hard mechanic"
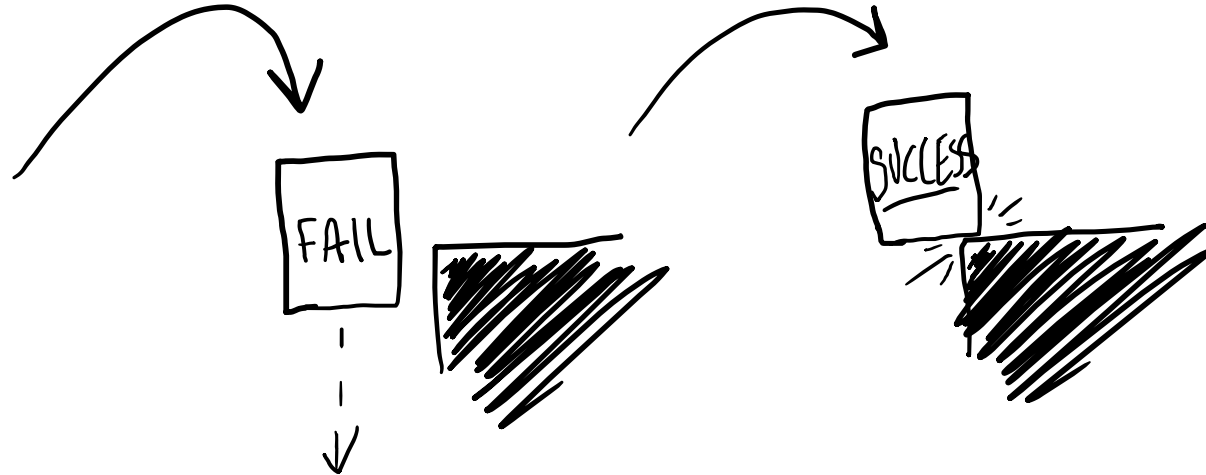

INTERACTION

CONDITION CHECK

"SUCCESS" OR "FAIL"

Graph time!

HARD MECHANIC
EXAMPLE:

INTERACTION → CONDITION
CHECK → SUCCESS!
FAIL!

FAIL

SUCCESS

So... what's a "soft game"?

- Soft (Non-Binary) Mechanics: 3+ outcome states
- Soft games focus on **goals** and **consequences**
- Goals can be partially achieved, met, or even exceeded
- Methods taken to accomplish a goal can have positive and negative progress towards the goal
- Not a new concept – board games have had them for a while*
- Multiple outcomes means more uncertainty and nuance

BOOST

ABILITY

PROFICIENCY

SETBACK

DIFFICULTY

CHALLENGE

THE ACTION TABLE

ROLL	RESULT
0 or less	Mishap
1 - 5	Failure
6 - 10	Partial Success
11 - 19	Full Success
20 or more	Critical Success

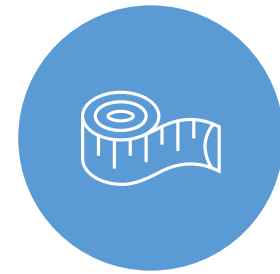# Components of a "soft mechanic"

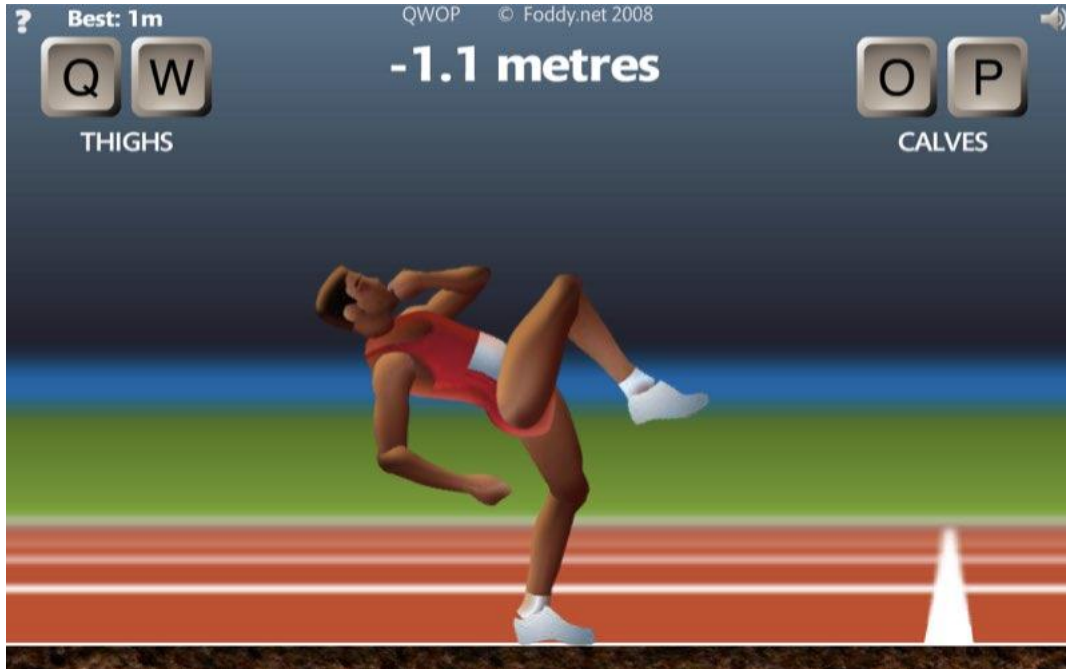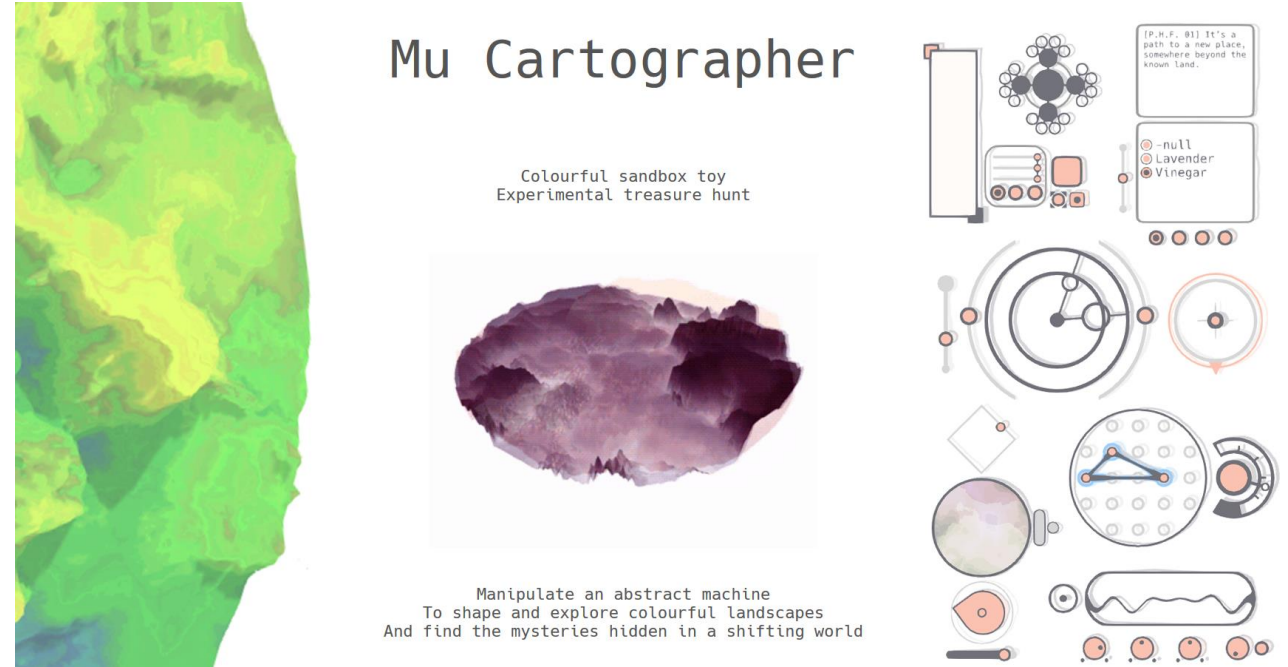INTERACTION   EVALUATION(S)   CONSEQUENCE(S)   GOAL(S) %

(3+)

*They've been the main mechanics in some games before, too!
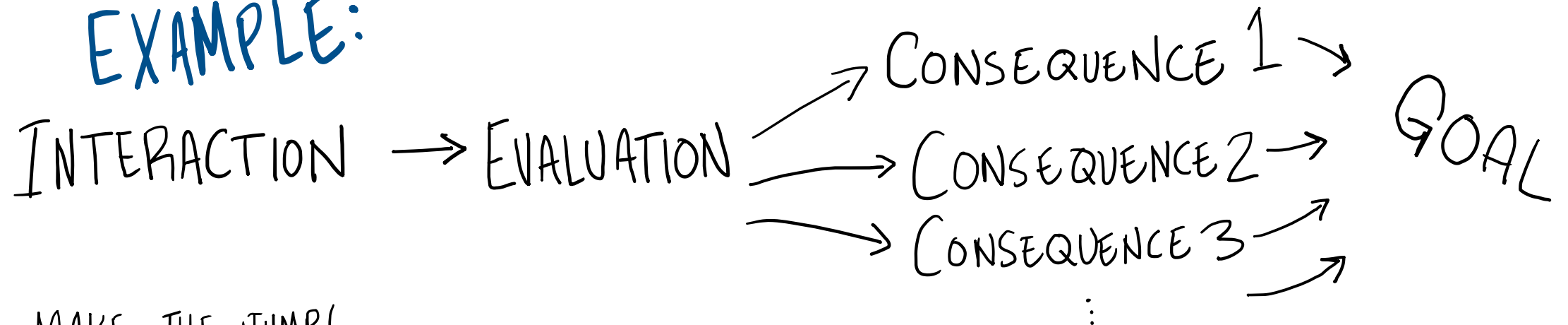

QWOP: goal-based (how far can you go!) and the mechanics (moving your legs) create consequences that impact your goal – are not directly success/fail oriented

Mu Cartographer: Manipulate machines (with no inherent success/fail mechanics) to influence the world around you and uncover artifacts and logs

SOFT MECHANIC EXAMPLE:
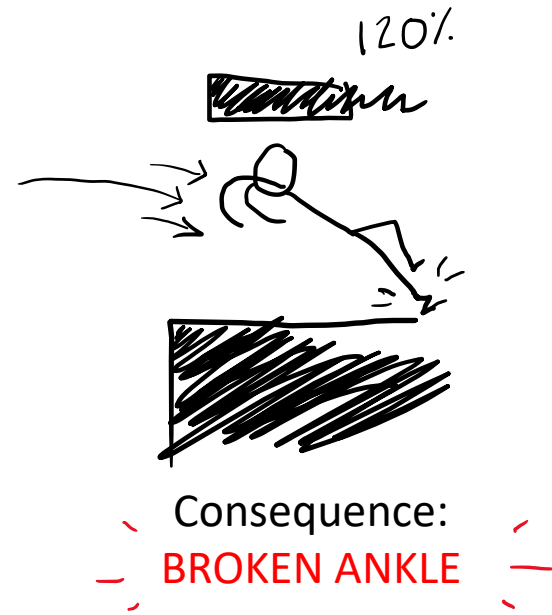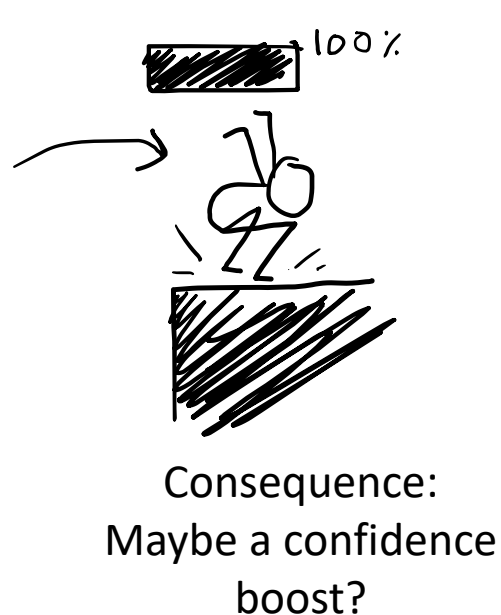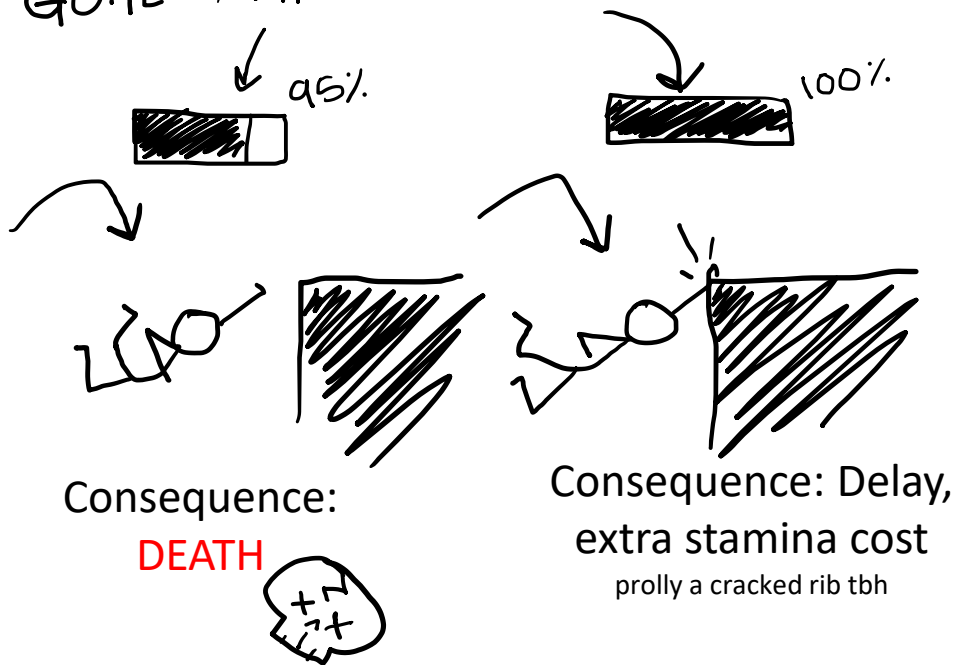
INTERACTION → EVALUATION → CONSEQUENCE 1 →
CONSEQUENCE 2 → GOAL
CONSEQUENCE 3 →
⋮

GOAL: MAKE THE JUMP!

95%

Consequence:
DEATH

100%

Consequence: Delay,
extra stamina cost
prolly a cracked rib tbh

100%

Consequence:
Maybe a confidence
boost?

120%

Consequence:
BROKEN ANKLE

…this seems pretty easy

- You just add more possible outcomes to game interactions!
- Counterpoint: ***NUH-UH!!!!!!1!***
- Hard (binary) interactions are much simpler to write and control than soft (non-binary) interactions
- Making soft games have 2 immediate inherent hurdles
- how to *design* them
- how to *write* them

So... how do we do that?

Let's try a "case study"

- Games are based on human experiences and interactions (write what you know)
- There's lots of human experiences and interactions that are not represented well (or at all!) in our video games
- Partially because we don't have good tools / historical references for making those experiences "fun"
- I think soft games can help represent our missing experiences

CONTENT WARNING:

- In the next few slides I will be talking about sex as an example of a human experience that soft mechanics could model better than binary mechanics
- I approach this at a high-level, with no explicit text and no explicit content
- I understand that sex is a complicated part of human nature and everyone's experience with it is different, I wish to approach this topic with the utmost respect

Why is sex a good case study for soft mechanics?

- Sex is undeniably popular & common in our media (presently and historically)

- HOWEVER: Video games have very few *engaging* interactive sex experiences*

- (Porn games are just choose-your-own adventure games if all branches ended in the exact same way with zero consequences)

- *(FITE ME)*

- Sex does not have "success" and "fail" states

- Sex's "goal" is a fulfilling experience for those involved

- Sex is a nuanced and layered experience, different each time, theoretically unsolveable

*this is an excellent time to note that there are a handful of games that have done a great job with making sex games that are more interactive:

Fingle
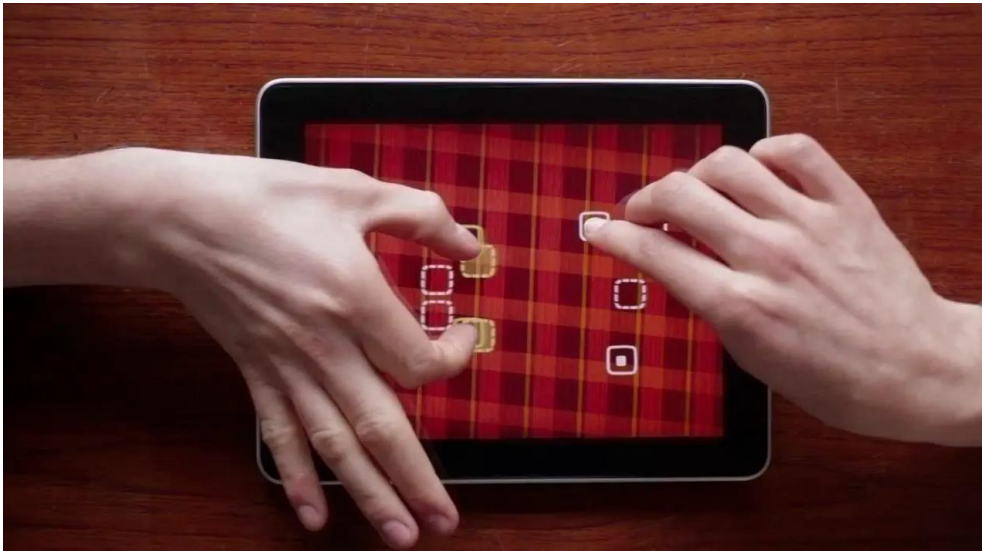
Luxuria Superbia

(these are just examples)

Quick Rules:

- For the purposes of this exercise this game is not explicit

- I think this is more interesting as a game development premise

- (Is a sex game fun or engaging without explicit content?)

How do you *design* soft sex mechanics?

- How does the player *interact*?
  - Touch
  - Rhythm
  - Verbal Communication
- How are those interactions *evaluated*?
  - Do they feel good? Too much, too little? Too fast, too slow, too erratic?
  - Does it match the current "mood"? (set of expectations)
- What are the *consequences* of your actions?
  - Interactions can increase or decrease Arousal, Pleasure
  - Interactions can set the "mood" – drastic changes in those patterns can ruin a mood or alter it
  - Partner can climax! Or stop the experience altogether.

How do you *design* soft sex mechanics? PART II

- How do you communicate goal progress to the player?
  - Can be "boring" and include a meter – but could be distracting, still puts the focus on achieving or not achieving goal, instead of playing and experimenting
  - Haptic feedback! Players know the difference between a "good" rumble and a "bad" rumble
  - Visual feedback (could be explicit, but personally I think it can be just as interesting if not more so to try to abstract-ly represent growing arousal / pleasure)
  - Audio feedback (also could be explicit, but there is precedent in games to dynamically shifting music based on intensity or rhythm)

How do you *write* soft sex mechanics?

- What inputs map well to Touch?
  - Touchscreens! Joysticks! Triggers!
- What about Rhythm?
  - Evaluating the pace, intensity, and repetition of Touch
- How do we evaluate those inputs?
  - A virtual partner that has "preferences" – what is the range of rhythms that is acceptable?
  - What is their favorite rhythm(s)?
  - Where do they like/dislike to be touched? Do they have types of touching patterns they like?
  - Different "moods" can change what your partner is looking for

How do you *write* soft sex mechanics?
PART II

- What are the consequences?
  - If you find what your partner likes, it will increase their (Arousal, Pleasure)
  - If you can't find what they like, they will lose interest (Arousal)
  - If your find what they don't like, they will be upset (negative Pleasure, could end the experience)
  - If your touch and rhythm patterns change, it can shift your partner's mood and expectations
  - If the shift is too drastic, it can kill the mood (resetting arousal)
- How is the goal achieved?
  - If pleasure reaches the threshold, climax can be achieved!

Example: How can we evaluate shifts in Rhythm?
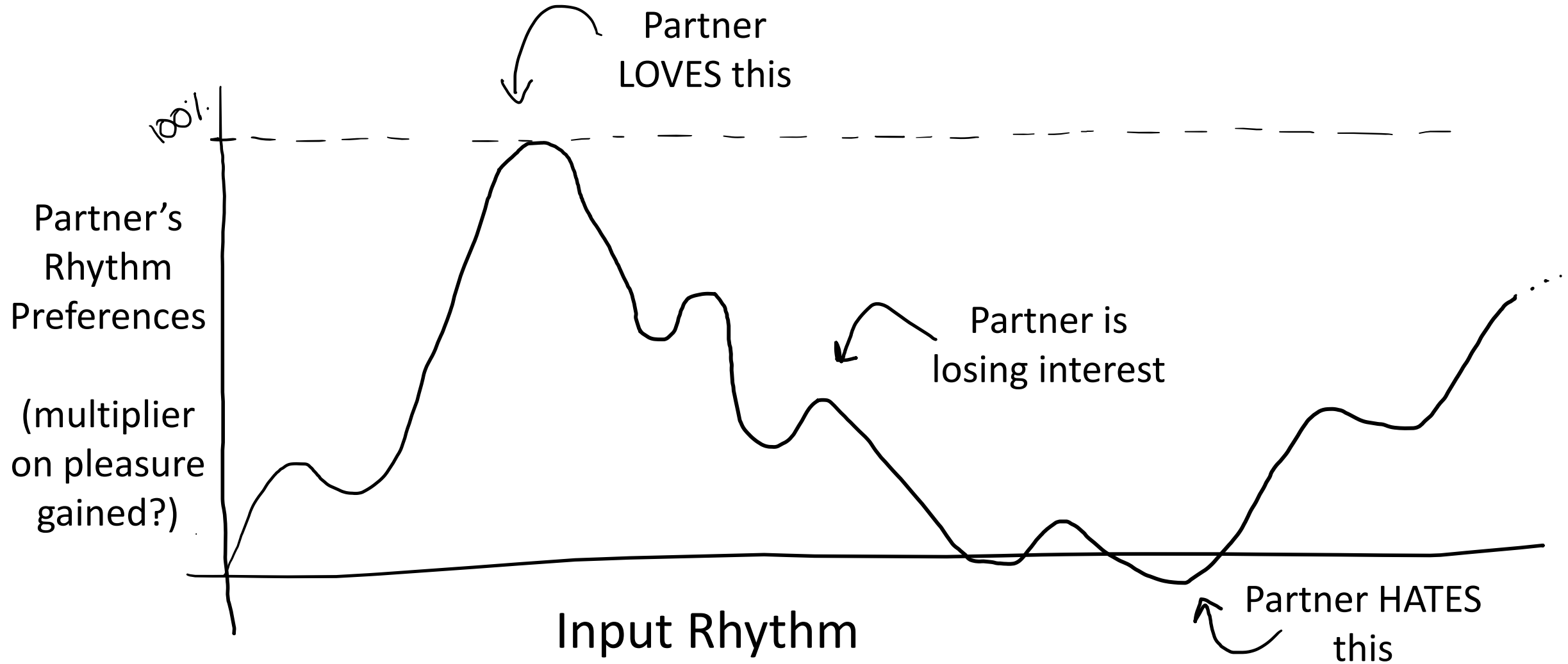
What do we end up with?

- A sex game about exploration and experimentation
  - Changing partners' preferences or moods alters the requirements for achieving your goal
  - Engaging and Replayable
- A sex game that represents the work necessary to be a good partner
  - Not focused on self-fulfillment
  - Emulates empathy and attentiveness
- A sex game that more accurately represents the spectrum of a sexual experience!

QUICK RECAP

Soft Game Design Tips:

- Ask Questions:
  - What are the player's *goals*?
  - What are the potential *interactions*?
  - What *consequences* can those interactions have?
  - How do you *evaluate* those results compared to the goal?
- Look for how one interaction can result in multiple (or simultaneous) consequences
- Provide constant feedback RE: goals / gamestate
  - (doesn't have to be easily discernable, as long as it's consistent)

More concrete design advice

- Don't punish failure or setbacks (within reason)

- Celebrate personal bests / improvements

- K.I.S.S.:
  - I lied – you TOTALLY can just add additional states to interaction outcomes! (very common, lots of games do this!)

- Study simulation games
  - Lots of interdependent systems, driven by starting variables (MATH!)
  - Encourage play and experimenting, creative problem solving

Soft Game Logic Tips:

- Imagine writing a shader or simulation
  - Be intentional about using conditionals (always binary results!)
  - Study data-driven paradigms
- Interactions are not single-purpose
  - Interactions can be evaluated more than once, or by multiple different systems
  - Consequences of input can generate their own interactions (Touch input generates a Rhythm)
- Avoid conditional / dead inputs
  - "Well you're not near anything so pressing square does nothing…"
- Form goals out of multiple variables, or allow multiple ways to progress towards a goal

Why should we even try to make these new-fangled Soft Games?

- People are attracted to *novelty*

- Soft games have already proven they can be popular (think: QWOP!)

- Soft games stand out from the sea of genre games

- Soft mechanics naturally lend themselves to a higher level of mastery

- Because you're **ARTISTS** and you want to *PUSH THE LIMITS*

- Because

I JUST THINK THEY'RE NEAT!

Q&A

Various Sources

- Blitz3D is still around! Released for free on itch.io: https://blitzresearch.itch.io/blitz3d/

- Zombie Yoga: https://deepgameslab.com/projects/zombie-yoga/

- Groovy Tuesday: https://www.indiedb.com/games/groovy-tuesday

- Real Winners: http://realwinnersgame.com/

- Asexuality: https://health.usnews.com/health-news/health-wellness/articles/2015/05/04/asexuality-the-invisible-orientation

- Fingle: http://gameovenstudios.com/fingle/

- Luxuria Superbia: http://luxuria-superbia.com/

- Mu Cartographer: http://titouanm.com/mucartographer/

- Qwop: http://www.foddy.net/Athletics.html

- If you want to prove me wrong about our current sex games, look through Nutaku. I don't want to, but it's possible there's some very engaging sex games that I overlooked.

- If you want to chat more, contact me! https://twitter.com/FiveOutOfKevin