NAIVE

A freeform by Axelle Cazeneuve

Adapted from the eponym minilarp: Naive

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Concept

This freeform larp for four to twelve players stages a training program of advanced artificial intelligence, represented by androids (players). Volunteers, having agreed to participate in the program, are asked - without having prepared for it - by the android facing them what sex is. After twenty to thirty minutes (depending on the number of participants), the session ends and the volunteer goes to the next android. The android starts the interview with the next person, keeping in mind what he learned with its previous interlocutor.

In this game, the naivety of the android is used to question the perceptions that the player-volonteer has of sexuality: it is a journey through representations of sex, desire, and humanity.

Note about androids

The role of android, although it is no less interesting than that of volunteer, is a "play-to-lift" role, playing to support and encourage. Thus, it is a predominantly intellectual game, which provides little space for emotional or introspective play.

Approach to sexuality

Sex is the simplest thing. It is natural, innate, and self-evident - or so we're told. In practice, however, humans don't have an instinct for how to perform sex, nor do they have immediate access to open sexual performances as they grow up. Contrary to most animal species, human sexuality is woven with fantasies, power relations, and taboos. It is an intricate social phenomenon, for which we soon form representations - preconceptions, images, or opinions of any kind - that evolve from our early childhood into old age, changing, slightly or drastically, with every experience of sexuality. The religious background we may have, the stories we read or watch, conversations with friends or family, global health policies, erotic or pornographic content, public discourses, news, scientific or medical statements, etc. can all constitute experiences of *what sex is* and alter the individual's vision and their relation to sex.

We are used to hearing moral and hygienic statements about sex: what is good, bad, unhealthy or virtuous. But if, for instance, some conservative discourses can be oddly specific about what sex is *not* supposed to be, there is hardly a positive statement to make up for the lack of guidelines to sexuality. Is "penis in vagina" sex? Is oral sex sex? Is masturbation sex? Is it sex if there's no-one else? What makes a sex partner? Is online sex sex? Does sex necessarily involve the anogenital area? What kind of pleasure does sex provide? Those questions are not commonly asked,

and even less frequently answered. As we talk, and largely as we think, sexuality is addressed as self-evident: we *know* what sex is, right? Our concerns are elsewhere: are we doing it right? Should we have it or not? What do we really want, and how can we - or should we - get it? Is it okay to desire certain things or people?

By providing the volunteer player with a neutral interface devoid of any preconceptions (the android), this game means to work against the feeling of evidence associated with sexuality and to dive into the volunteer player's implicits and prejudices through the alibi provided by the character.

The hypothesis at the core of this game is that there is no such thing as sex - or rather, that consensus is impossible. We live in a time when the status quo and the very limits or definition of humanity are constantly challenged: sex is no exception. Instead of trying to set limits to what sexuality is or should be - always counting, measuring, labeling -, we should take this opportunity to increase the range of possibilities, to explore and expand our horizons of experience and understanding.

It starts with interrogating our beliefs... And continues with sharing them. That is why *Naive* encourages participants to upload recordings of their sessions on the free platform archive.org. In doing so, the game provides the other players, and eventually, any person curious enough to listen, with a collection of more or less naive, more or less sincere, but always singular and rich, representations of sexuality.

Public discourses around sex are dominated by moral, legal, or medical judgements: let's help make it a little more than that.

The Mosaic

The two-player version offers the participants to record their sessions. The Internet Archive is used to allow them to upload the recordings, with the aim of creating a virtual library presenting diverse visions of sexuality, in the form of a myriad of subjective conceptions. The Mosaic aims to contribute to sexuality education and a positive approach to sex by deconstructing dominant discourses. More info here or directly on archive.org to listen to sessions.

STRUCTURE

What we aim for

Naive is a three-to-four hour freeform, including a few workshops and a debriefing. A GM-character is in charge of the game structure (timing, launch the start/end music, etc.).

There are two scenarios for people who play volunteers:

★ They received their character in advance, with directions for stepping into their head and shoes. An effort in costuming is asked, but it is not demanding.
★ They draw their character at random, based on gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, family situation and other specificities. The age of the character and their name are left to their discretion.

Players who play androids must familiarize themselves beforehand with the Protocol (common with the two-player version of the GN) which will help them to direct their questions. They are plainly dressed in a light color (no black, navy blue, brown). They can, if they wish, wear a simple mask (i.e. white cardboard mask) or sunglasses to reinforce the artificial side.

To run it, you need:

★ A number of tables and chairs appropriate to the number of participants (one table and two chairs per pair), preferably in a room large enough to be able to leave space between them.
★ If available, a second, smaller room, which will serve as a rest room for volunteers.
★ Printed Protocols in case the players forgot to bring theirs.
★ In the event that the characters are drawn at random at the start of the game, the cards printed and cut out.
★ "Medical forms" to be filled by each volunteer.
★ For each table, a water pitcher, glasses, and something to take notes for the android.
★ A white blouse for the GM.
★ Name-tags with the name of the character and that of the player.
★ A device with speakers for playing the start and end sound.

Workshops

Calibration

As the game invites to have respectful and sincere discussions about sexuality, it is important to encourage players to share their views and expectations before the game. The GM therefore asks a list of indicative questions, to which the players can respond if they wish (there is no obligation). The others listen respectfully.

★ Why did you want to participate in this game?
★ How do you feel about the game now? Are you nervous, enthusiastic, a bit of both?
★ What are you expecting?
★ Are you comfortable talking about sex with other players, considering that the game is just an alibi?
★ Is there anything we can do to make you feel more comfortable during the game?

Talking weird

For this game, we will assume that an android, especially one that is still in training, will not try to imitate human expressions. Furthermore, the android's purpose is to provide as neutral an interface as possible for the alibi to work: indeed, as this game aims to work against the volunteer players' preconceptions about sex, it is important that they can suspend their ordinary attitude towards sexuality and "sex talk", and immerse themselves in an uncanny encounter with a blank learning program. For this, the android player must put efforts in maintaining a blank expression as well. Moreover, this workshop might help creating a reverse feeling of "uncanny valley", a phenomenon of reject that occurs when a robot looks too human, as the volunteer interacts with the android.

The players are paired by android/volunteer for this workshop. In case the volunteer characters are established on the spot, the androids could lead this workshop between them to save time.

During this exercise, the volunteer player (or the one acting the part) makes factual statements about random things, as if they were self-evident (meaning that a human wouldn't generally question the axioms behind it). *"I ate pears for breakfast" "I saw a child with a weird face on the bus today" "The weather's messed up, innit?"*, etc.

Keeping a straight face and still hands, the android player then proceeds to question those statements, using procedural language (it can be exaggerated at first, so it comesmore naturally during the course of the game). *"Are fruits necessary to the morning feeding process?" "What do you define as "a weird face"?" "The current temperature and precipitation levels are consistent with the season. There doesn't seem to be anything disorderly with the weather."*

You may take a few moments to answer at first. Not only can it be useful for you as a person, to familiarize yourself with the logic, but it can also support the feeling of "uncanny" for the volunteer player, as long as you keep a straight face. Dark sunglasses, a simple white mask, or similar device can be used to dissimulate the eyes and support a neutral expression.

This workshop can be comical to a level: indeed, humor is a natural way to react to unusual or uncomfortable situations. During the game, the volunteer player may feel like laughing: their character might too, after all - confronted with a disturbingly human, yet impossibly alien, android. It is my wish as a designer that the participants still try to explore sex-related conceptions with a serious mindset, and thus, that the android player would not encourage comedic behaviors: however, a session can only be what the participants make of it, and there is no way (nor desire) for me to impose anything on them.

Mechanics

Safewords

This game uses two safewords: *"cancel"* and *"cut"*.

Cancel is used by the player (as player or as character) to cancel the last question the android asked if they feel uncomfortable about it. The GM-as-android then ignores its last question and continues on a different topic. *Cancel* can be used both diegetically and extradiegetically, as it makes sense an android would have built-in safeguards (think of the commands that deactivate the hosts in *Westworld*). As such, you may use it as part of your character – the GM doesn't have to know whether it is your character feeling uncomfortable, or yourself.

> — *Sexual intercourse appears to be the way through which the human species achieves reproduction. In that perspective, is it considered acceptable to engage in intercourse without the intention to perpetuate the species?*
>
> — *Cancel that.*
>
> — *What are the organs involved in human sexual pleasure?*

Cut can be used both by the player and the GM to stop the game. It indicates a discomfort that cannot be overcome simply by avoiding a topic, and manifests the need for offgame support. If one participant uses *cut*, the other immediately goes offgame and asks them how they are doing, and if there is anything they need.

Interruption

Since it is easy to go on an endless speech, but much less so to make sense of it when you can only intervene at the end, the android may raise a hand while the volunteer is speaking to signify it has a question. The volunteer then tries to wrap up their explanation and let the android speak. Conversely, the volunteer may want

to speak to themself, not addressing the android directly, in which case the android should not intervene (except if what seems to be a rich game opportunity rises).

The Protocol

A word cloud is provided based on actual game sessions (developed through beta-testing, and later by implementing elements from recordings uploaded on the platform) to help direct the android's questions. The protocol is by no means binding: it is merely here to provide guidelines or ideas to help the android player. It aims to favor associations of idea and support a naive approach, to try to cancel out the android player's own preconceptions.

The android's goal is to learn what sexuality is to human beings: ultimately, its assimilation of human features could lead it to question whether it can, itself, have sex. This questioning broadens the perspective of the game, diving into the perceived limits of the notion of humanity.

The Protocol is common with the two-player version and can be downloaded here.

During the game

The androids are seated, each in front of a different table, lined up but not too close to each other, slumped (face down). The GM-character, dressed in a white coat, invites the volunteers to come forward and conducts the briefing. This is when volunteers learn the theme of this training session: sex.

The volunteers are then distributed in front of each android. A short music signals the start of the session and wakes the androids up, who look up and say, "*Hello. I am glad to meet you. Can you teach me what sex is?*"

When a music plays again, the androids are turned off. The GM-character tells the volunteers to take a short break, during which they are invited to go, if possible, to an adjoining room where there are some refreshments. They can then interact in characters between them.

During this break, the GM-character awakens the androids in "analysis" mode. Each android is invited individually to respond briefly (one to two minutes depending on the number of participants) to the question *"What have you learned about sexuality?"*. Androids incorporate other people's responses and can use them in their subsequent interviews.

A real break in the game can be arranged for the needs of the participants (going to the bathroom for example, smoking if imperative).

At the end of this break, which can last from five to fifteen minutes at most, volunteers are invited to return to the room and take their seats facing the next android.

This process will be repeated two or three times during the game. At the end of the game, the GM-character will thank the participants and accompany them to the debriefing room, where they will enjoy a final break. They will then be joined by the android-players to conduct an offgame debriefing.

Debriefing

The GM will first lead a guided debriefing. One by one, participants will be able to answer the following questions if they wish. It is imperative that everyone be respectful of and attentive to other players' answers.

★ How do you feel ?
★ Do you need something ?
★ Do you want to share something about your character, their experience?
★ What do you get out of this game?

Group debriefing

Then, the participants will be invited, if they wish, to regroup in groups of characters (volunteers on one side, androids on the other) to conduct a free debriefing.

Debriefing in pairs

The GM will save about twenty minutes for participants to conduct private debriefings, in pairs, if they feel the need (for example, following an unpleasant interaction, in game, with a person in particular). If necessary, the GM can act as a mediator.

Note about an online run

NAIVE - Freeform can be run online, for example on <u>Discord</u>. In which case, the GM must first create an adequate number of written and vocal channels and make sure to adapt the rules appropriately (random card draws using a bot, etc.). Copy/pasting the various important information (workshops, mechanics, etc.) in a dedicated channel will also allow players to follow more easily. During the game, the GM can move from room to room, and pay attention to the possible presence of a person in the Safe Zone in order to meet their needs.

Figure: Example of an appropriate Discord servor.
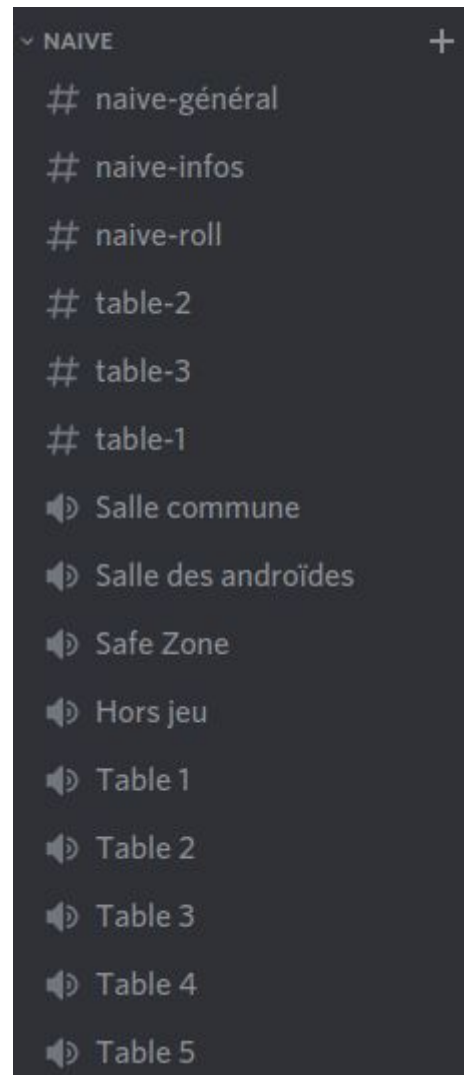
CHARACTERS

Those we aim to be

The characters are minimalistic, and require involvement on the part of the players, who are responsible for researching and giving shape to the different traits of their characters. The players are free to deviate from the character, interpret them, rewrite them, etc.: they are only alibis, intended to provide a basis on which to develop representations of sexuality.

There are two ways to determine the characters: by distributing them in advance, on the basis of the list suggested below, from your own list or the choices of the players, or by randomly drawing their gender, sexual orientation, spirituality, conjugality/parenthood and, optionally, one or two conditions (social or medical) at the start of the game using these cards, to be printed on both sides. It is of course possible to draw another card if one of the cards makes the player uncomfortable or if they seem to disagree too much with what was drawn about the character. If you're playing online, you may use this sheet to generate random characters.

In both cases, it is necessary to dedicate time for the players to appropriate their characters individually, relying in particular on Narrative aids. This time can be left either before the game, if the characters are known in advance, or on site after the distribution of the characters and before the workshops. When on site, it can last from fifteen to thirty minutes depending on the needs of the participants.

Note: The definitions on the cards are _not_ universal truths. In addition, the same identity has often been defined in several different ways on the cards, in order to represent diversity in how they are conceived. The author apologizes if certain definitions offend people despite their genuine intention of inclusivity and respect for all identities.

During this time, android-players familiarize themselves with the Protocol. They can also start the workshop Talking weird or take the time to get in character.

Characters

- ★ Samir, 21, gay trans guy, atheist
- ★ Margot, 18, straight cis girl, practicing catholic
- ★ Lilian, 27, cis bi guy, protestant
- ★ Ming, 19, non-binary asexual, wiccan
- ★ Anna, 35, trans lesbian girl, agnostic
- ★ Samuel, 22, questioning cis guy, muslim
- ★ Ash, 24, gender-fluid and pan, rejecting their evangelical education
- ★ Ibrahima, 31, male-presenting agender person, panromantic graysexual, Buddhist

Narrative aids

It is possible that the android's questions put you and your character in difficulty: in this perspective, it is in your interest to step in the shoes of your character… or to choose one that is not too far from you. ;)

To give shape to your character, ask yourself questions about their life, their tastes, their hobbies… Here are some examples (for inspiration):

- ★ (When random) What's their name? How old are they?
- ★ (When random) What is their relationship with spirituality? Are they observant?
- ★ (When random) What's their relationship to their body? Their condition?
- ★ What's their occupation? Their city of origins?
- ★ What are their family relations? Who are the members of their family?
- ★ When was their first sexual encounter? In what context?
- ★ Are they in a relationship at the moment? With whom, in which terms, etc.
- ★ Do they have hobbies? A favorite book? A favorite song?
- ★ Did they ever have to come-out (as their gender, sexuality, or other)?
- ★ What is their relationship to belief/spirituality?

Medical form

Volunteer players complete a "medical form" to be placed in front of each android at the start of the interview (or at the end of the previous interview, before taking a break). This sheet includes ingame information (name, age, gender, sexuality, spirituality) and offgame information concerning the topics not to be tackled.