

Tekken's Mokujin and the Disjunctive Synthesis of Gender Performativity

Vasileios Galanos

Science, Technology, and Innovation Studies Subject Group

School of Social and Political Sciences

University of Edinburgh

Abstract

Given the ever-growing array of available choices of genders in games, this paper investigates how novel gender types emerge and how the performative transition from one gender to another occurs. A fighting video game character, *Tekken's* Mokujin, is employed as a metaphor to explain such processes because of the character's ability to imitate every other character's fighting style according to an algorithm which randomly switches Mokujin's fighting performance in the beginning of every game round. The Mokujin-gender metaphor is then strengthened by philosopher Gilles Deleuze's notion of disjunctive synthesis, as an attempt to provide a more robust theoretical explanatory framework for the processes of novel gender generation and selection of gender performativity. Therefore, the contribution of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, the specific area of gender performativity is enriched through the study of a video game character acting as a metaphor. On the other, while traditional game studies often intersects with gender studies, mostly in negative cases of the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, this paper shows that the opposite is also possible: Gender studies can benefit from the study of fictitious video game characters that enact, embody, and enable different possibilities.

Keywords

Disjunctive synthesis; game studies; Mokujin; performative gender; Tekken

Press Start 2020 | Volume 6 | Issue 1

ISSN: 2055-8198

URL: <http://press-start.gla.ac.uk>



Press Start is an open access student journal that publishes the best undergraduate and postgraduate research, essays and dissertations from across the multidisciplinary subject of game studies. Press Start is published by HATII at the University of Glasgow.

Introduction

Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles. (Suits, 1978, p.41)

From an interdisciplinary and experimental mix of gender studies, game studies, and philosophy of logic perspective, this paper examines Mokujin, a character from the *Tekken* video game series (Bandai Namco Studios, 1994–2017), in order to build upon Judith Butler's (2006) theory of gender performativity. The quotation above reflects the overall rationale behind this paper, suggesting that taking games seriously and treating life playfully may help overcome various problematic paradoxes. Given the playful character of performative gender, as advanced, for example, in the recent work by Ruberg (2019) in the context of games,¹ but also in the classic work of Butler (2006), analysed below, the proposed model draws from the interdisciplinary field of game studies. The paradox this paper is concerned with is the understanding of gender performativity as a decision process, especially in the context of it being simultaneously unprovable and irrefutable: No one can deny my right to perform any gender I wish, yet I cannot deny the obscurity of the forces underlying my decision. If gender is performed, and that is taken for granted in the context of this paper, and if genders are multiplying (or at least their names are multiplying),² then how do we "decide" to perform one gender over another and what happens in this momentary process of qualitative transformation?

The main suggestion of this paper is that we can learn about this process by using a video game character as an analogy. And if this analogy is found adequate, this might be one of the first cases where game studies shapes gender studies instead of the opposite. That is, we are very much used to game studies scholars focusing on gender stereotypes or imbalances in the universe of games; for example, the study on the perpetuation of various cultural biases through Nintendo and Atari video games in Gailey (1993); the "examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games" and their "implications for gender socialization and aggressive behavior" in Dietz (1998, p. 425); the study on "clothing as an indicator of gender role stereotyping in video games" in Beasley and Collins Standley (2002, p. 279); or the

¹ Without forgetting Ruberg's (2015) important assertion's that queer games are not necessarily fun games.

² Recent surveys show that the amount of gender options increases quite frequently. In 2014, ABC News gathered a list of 58 gender options (Goldman, 2014)—a list which can be enriched by at least six more types identified by Kelly (2016) and the addition of homovestites and other postgender identifications. It should be noted, however, that for some people several of the labels mean the same thing and that one's gender might be a combination of any of these. The Nonbinary Wiki (2020, launched in 2017), informed by the annual Gender Census, although without providing a full list, contains valuable information and descriptions of gender identities and concepts.

content analysis of video games proven to be male-orientated thus perpetuating the male dominance in gamer populations (cf. Apperley, 2006; Calleja, 2007; Ivory, 2006; Waggoner, 2013). However, we are not used to cases where the study of video games inspires new ways to see the world, at least in the way queer theorists have used the study of literary figures, as in Sedwick's (1990) study of queerness in Proust's characters. Recently, the game scholarship of Harper, Adams, and Taylor (2018) and Gray, Voorhees, and Vossen (2018) has offered new directions towards positive queer and feminist interventions into game studies, and the present paper can be situated within this context of subversive readings of existing structures.

This paper unfolds in the following sections. First, some definitional remarks are provided on the concept of performative gender and an initial proposal is made to view gender performance as revealing information about gender itself, and being further constructed according to available information about gender. Second, the main question of how gender selection and generation happens is examined through the presentation of Mokujin and an analysis of the character as an analogy of performative gender. Third, this analysis is expanded upon through a discussion based on the Deleuzian concept of disjunctive synthesis, leading to the proposal of systematic gender gymnastics similar to the mastery of the *Tekken* video games in light of Mokujin's ability to perform different fighting styles. Finally, the conclusion section summarises the findings and points to future work on the gamification of gender literacy and the importance of more frequent moments of gender performativity in games.

This paper can be situated within a framework of subversive readings of existing hegemonies and hierarchies. In accordance with Nicholas Mirzoeff's right to look differently, where "the 'realism' of countervisuality is the means by which one tries to make sense of the unreality created by visuality's authority while at the same time proposing a real alternative" (2011, p. 485), and building on Adrienne Shaw's aim at "subverting existing hierarchies and finding the hidden affordances of hegemonic processes" (2017, p. 600), Mokujin is employed as a point of departure for postgender studies. The main methodological suggestion presented by this paper is that video game characters, much like literary characters, may act as examples or drivers of social change. Fictional characters, be they film-, novel-, or game-based (e.g., Newman, 2002), express hopeful or fearful possibilities of existential becoming. To the extent that Mokujin has been a popular video game character, it is worth examining how that character may be used as a model of everyday discourses. Following Newman's (2002) approach, Mokujin's transformations are turned into a proposed model for navigating the world of gender performativity.

Judith Butler and Performative Gender

Judith Butler, whose work is mostly associated with the concept of gender performativity, suggests that gender options are not determined by one's sexual or biological make-up, but are rather similar to clothing or to roles performed by an individual (Butler, 2006). Every individual has the right and the capacity to explore their gender of preference and categories such as biological femaleness or maleness (or otherwise) are not determinant of social categories such as femininity or masculinity (or otherwise). For Butler, assuming different types of gender is like wearing masks; hence, she employs the metaphor of the drag performer to discuss her theory of gender as a performance (Butler, 2006, p. 173). But how does the process of changing these roles work? For example, how can we describe the process underlying the decision of a genderqueer-femme to transform into an androgynous woman (as in empirical case studies described in Shapiro, 2007, pp. 257–259)? That is, what happens in the backstage of this gender performance?

The objective of this section is to summarise performative gender theory.³ Performativity is a difficult term to define as its meaning ironically denotes slippery and transformative situations. Butler, in the 1999 preface to her foundational book *Gender Trouble*, already acknowledges that:

It is difficult to say precisely what performativity is not only because my own views on what "performativity" might mean have changed over time, most often in response to excellent criticisms, but because so many others have taken it up and given it their own formulations. (Butler, 2006, p. xiv)

Straightforwardly, performativity in gender has to do with role-playing: One performs a gender as one performs a song or an act on stage. For Butler, the drag play acts as a concise example on how one's body is anatomically distinguished from the performance of the gender during the act (Butler, 2006, p. 147). As every role played has specific characteristics (the clothes one wears, linguistic elements, scripts to be learned, gestures), gender roles bring their own characteristics similar to those of an actor's role. As stated earlier, humans, so far, have associated such gender traits to biological makeup—that is, one's gender ontology was determined by social expectations relating to bodily traits and their naming, which differs from generation to generation or region

³ The following volumes might be of great service to the reader interested in gender scholarly work, and these are the ones that have chiefly shaped my understanding of contemporary ongoing discussions about gender. One of the first classic texts—theoretical predecessor of Butler's theory—is West & Zimmerman's *Doing Gender* (1987). Some notable more recent works include the *Transgender Studies Reader* edited by Stryker & Whittle (2006), Morrish & Sauntson's treatise on language and sexual identity (2007), and Lindsay's exhaustive *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective* (2015).

to region. The institutionalisation of sexual and therefore gender difference is, for Butler, partly the result of a feedback loop between linguistic repetition feeding into social norms, and vice versa:

Collectively considered, the repeated practice of naming sexual difference has created this appearance of natural division. The “naming” of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference. (Butler, 2006, p.147)

However, judging from the examples used throughout her 1992 book, when Butler spoke of gender, she implied two options: femininity and masculinity. No third (or fourth, or...) option was there. Possibly, and most probably, due to her work (but also due to historical advances), the negation or simultaneous acceptance of the two options became a third option. It was only in her 1999 preface that Butler added to the gender map different gender configurations of the hetero-, bi-, and homo- inclinations as related to drag or transgender and sexual practice, however without exploring these areas in depth (Butler, 2006, p. xiv). Since then, gender labels have been growing exponentially, while attempts have been made at conducting cartographies of all possible genders (Devor, 1994) as well as explaining the lived construction of such identities (Eliason & Schope, 2007).

It is important to stress how Butler associates performativity with mimicking: “If gender is drag, and if it is an *imitation* that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that produces the *illusion* of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core” (Butler, 1993a, p. 317, italics added). While I will not enter the discussion about the relation between the imitation of gender in relation to an illusion of inner sex (for an early thorough discussion, see Butler, 1992), for the purposes of this paper I am focusing on mimicry as a simultaneous social constraint and as a means of transgressing such obstacles. If gender is mimicry, on the one hand, it is conditioned by sociocultural discourses in which every person is born and raised. But on the other hand, if gender is mimicry, it further means that it is liquid, flexible, and performative. This simultaneous acceptance of gender being performed as a result of deliberate randomness and socially conditioned necessity (e.g., the postfeminist perspective in Lewis & Simpson, 2017) is the basis of the proposed Mokujin model in the next section. Moreover, and as explained in detail below, the process of Mokujin’s transformations is confined within the limitations of the examined game; likewise, in gender studies, Halberstam (1998) and Browne (2004) have examined the proscription and policing of gender by other performers of it. Gender is a polyvalent and messy social structure that does not exist in isolation from other structures. The present study of a video game will act as a simplifying heuristic to navigate in this complexity. Nonetheless, video games are

also embedded within existing social structures, as shown for example in Kerr's (2003) research.

To summarise, it is my pragmatic view that gender is *information about gender*. This becomes a key factor for the applicability of Butler's gender theory, if one accepts the validity of gender mimicry. Information about *possible gender options* and information about *the possibility of constructing novel types of gender* allows an individual to select an identity and to perceive gender as a performance in general, as a result of their culture or their *a priori* knowledge about gender.⁴ To put it as plainly as possible, performative gender is relationally produced as an expression of the ratio:

$$\frac{\text{Number of selected favourable performed genders}}{\text{Total number of given or possible genders}}$$

This imitation, this constant mimicking, becomes the point of departure for the further exploration of performative gender through the examination of Mokujin. But what kind of process decides which gender is to be performed at each time? Physicist James Clerk Maxwell, explaining the general relevance of his concept of "singular points," highlighted the importance of such infinitesimally small moments or points which bear great potential, leading to exponentially greater outcomes:

The rock loosed by frost and balanced on a singular point of the mountain-side, the little spark which kindles the great forest, the little word which sets the world a fighting, the little scruple which prevents a man [sic] from doing his [sic] will, the little spore which blights all the potatoes, the little gemmule which makes us philosophers or idiots. ... At these points, influences whose physical magnitude is too small to be taken account of by a finite being, may produce results of the greatest importance. (Maxwell, as cited in Campbell & Garnett, 1882, p. 443)

To adopt a gender identity is a relatively stable condition (involving decision and action, and the given social constraints) of great magnitude, susceptible however to change. This "singular point" between assuming gender identity A (or A plus B plus X...) and assuming gender identity C (or C plus D plus Y...), as well as the process of adding options to these singular points of decision when it comes to gender, is what I aim to explain through Mokujin.

⁴ This partly adheres to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1990 work on queer theory, but further analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. I remind the interested reader of her axiom that "*The paths of allo-identification are likely to be strange and recalcitrant. So are the paths of self-identification*" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 59, original emphasis). The task of understanding the other and the self, in terms of gender, is not easy. This paper offers a playful heuristic towards that.

In other words, if gender is information about gender, what is the criterion of selection (why is one identity preferred over others) and what adds options to the map (gender generation; how does a new identity occur)? Mokujin's story becomes surprisingly relevant at this point of ambiguity between imitation and intuition, subject and society, gender fixation and gender transformation, stability and change, and of standardisation and performativity. An analogy posited in the following section, further analysed through a particular Deleuzian lens, will offer a new way to think about these processes.⁵

Mokujin's Algorithm as Gender Generation, Selection, and Performance

In this section, I will give a brief introduction to *Tekken* as a fighting game series, with emphasis upon its third instalment, and will flag its sociological importance in being studied in the context of identity. I will present existing literature on Mokujin, introducing the character's traits and explaining how the present subversive reading of Mokujin can contribute to a more creative way of understanding gender, based on the theories outlined above.

Tekken's success since its initial release in 1994 (e.g., Game Rankings, 2017; Metacritic, 2017) renders it worthwhile to investigate, to the extent that successful games can be seen as mirrors of the societies in which they were produced and vice versa. *Tekken's* success, in comparison to less successful fighting games, can be partly explained by its storyline and characters. The player, within a virtual environment of interesting stories and significantly advanced graphics for the time, can identify with drifters, martial artists, scientists, ex-prisoners, gods, angels, demons, police officers, robots, even animals and dinosaurs (the wide "we" society Butler describes). Nonetheless, fighting video game characters are abstractions, caricatures, or archetypical figures of the *socius*. While there is no empirical study to ascertain that, it is safe to assume that gamers who select which characters to use go through a psychological process involving decision and action within the constraints of the available choices in a process similar to the aforementioned gender identity selection. *Tekken's* violence, like that in most fighting games, and its range of character identities might be explained through media theorist Marshall McLuhan's genuine analogy between violence and identity: "Violence, whether spiritual or physical, is a quest for identity and the meaningful. The less identity, the more

⁵ Before continuing, a final note on my understanding of gender performativity and its relation to gender fluidity: I personally treat them as nearly synonymous. However, "gender-fluid" is already a gender type, thus becoming a subset within a broader map of available gender types to perform. In a sense, the question of this paper is the understanding of the points of relative fluidity between two or more points of relatively stable gender performances, including the possibility of a performance being that of a gender-fluid type.

violence" (McLuhan, 1976, p. 9). In the same way a society offers an individual a relatively finite array of options and roles for them to compete for (a gender to fit in, an education degree to complete among many, a political position to take, and so on), a fighting game offers a finite array of characters to select from and then use to compete against the others.

To give a technical description of the game, *Tekken* is a one-on-one fighting game. In line with that genre's conventions, the player begins by selecting one character out of an array of options (Wolf, 2008, p. 267). While playing as one character, the player is called to defeat in battle the rest of the game's characters, and by doing so, "secret" characters are unlocked, so that the player can choose among a broader range of possibilities (recall here the exponential growth of gender identity options; as more discussions on gender unfold, it is as if more identities are "unlocked"—such identities are previously unsought, but once available, they seem as if they have been there forever). A player needs to win an entire session of battles with one character in order to unlock that character's secret equivalent. Every battle consists of "rounds," the number of which varies according to the selected level of difficulty. Each character is designed to simulate an existing fighting style, while some characters have fighting styles unique to the game. Every character has some standard fighting moves, controlled by the various keys available in the controller (kicks, punches, jumps, etc.), while combinations of buttons can result in more complex moves ("combos" such as uppercuts). The game also offers unique moves for each character which represent the distinctive features of their fighting style (emblematic of every gender identity's particularities which make it different from other identities).

Mokujin, and *Tekken* in general, have been relatively underexplored academically. Two papers, at the time of writing, mention Mokujin, and are excellent points of departure for the exploration of the theme. The first paper, by Mateusz Woźniak (2012), uses Mokujin as an example of virtual reality's ability in dissociating traditional understandings of the body while opening a field of potentialities, and by doing so, assists the present use of Mokujin as a model of gender performativity and its dissociation from sex. The second paper, by Leland Fecher (2012), includes both an excellent description of Mokujin's characteristics, but also contains a thesis concerning—surprisingly—Mokujin's gender. Fecher critiques *Tekken's* attempt at including gender-neutral characters, proposing in his abstract that such an "inclusion of an androgynous character in a well-established game franchise context did more harm than good" (Fecher, 2012), given that certain signifiers do perpetuate gender biases instead of transcending them. It is worth reading Fecher's description and critique of Mokujin:

The most bizarre case of the gendering of a gender-neutral entity is Mokujin. In appearance, Mokujin is literally a blank slate. ... There

are no physical signifiers that could be applied to this manikin. However, the game designers managed to give it a male gender. Players know that Mokujin is male, because his alternative costume is a visually female version of himself. This female Mokujin (they have been depicted as having an entire family of logs in previous games) has feminine signifiers such as wooden breasts, a flower coming from her head instead of a sprout, and a wooden skirt built into her torso. This means that even in cases where a gender neutral slate had the potential to exist, the game designers chose to create a definitive binary. Because one character has breasts, a skirt, and a flower, the player could then assume that the original Mokujin is male. (Fecher, 2012, para. 24)

Indeed, the alternative “skins” reinforce a binary appearance for the training dummy; moreover, the standard version of Mokujin is the “unbreasted” one—the player who wishes to use the alternative skin must press additional buttons, hence, there is a tacit dominance of the “masculine” version. However, Fecher’s analysis of Mokujin’s external characteristics does not analyse Mokujin’s defining characteristic: the fluid fighting style.

Mokujin’s fighting style is actually—being a training dummy—a *lack* of any fighting style. According to the game’s storyline, Mokujin learns the other characters’ fighting styles after they use the dummy’s wooden body to train. A player who is able to win the game using Mokujin is a player who can adapt smoothly from style to style at the beginning of every round (the importance of this aspect will be further highlighted later). The game designers have developed a supposedly randomising algorithm which equips Mokujin with one of the other characters’ fighting styles and postures in every round. At the beginning of a new round, players are therefore tasked with figuring out which character Mokujin mimics using the assumed posture or the fighting style evident in the first few seconds of gameplay as clues. The fact that Mokujin is able to assume every other character’s fighting style and posture (be they “feminine” or “masculine” despite the external signifiers) while playing is evidence of Mokujin’s clear dissociative ability to separate physical signifiers from gender traits (rendering Mokujin a Butlerian character). In other words, using the “feminine” skin of Mokujin can result in its synthesis with very “masculine” postures of fighting and/or vice versa. If one has associated the very “macho” posture and fighting style of Paul Phoenix (one of the most aggressive characters in the game) with masculinity, the playfulness of a “feminine” Mokujin assuming this style results in a two-step dissociation between appearance and style and re-association of possibilities. This process will be described in more concise philosophical terminology in the following section. For now, let me present the main analogy I suggest:

1. Mokujin represents each individual susceptible to gender performativity.

2. The various *Tekken* fighting styles (not the characters, but their fighting techniques) represent the various types of gender. Each gender type, in order to be made a type and be recognised as such, comes with a certain set of descriptors and expectations of performance (although negotiated across groups). In *Tekken's* simpler reality, fighting styles and postures are seen here as abstractions of such descriptors, whereas the player's ability to adapt to these and win the game is analogous to the social expectations.
3. Each round in the game represents a definable period during which a certain gender is performed by an individual.
4. The algorithmic function, which assures that the fighting style assumed by Mokujin will belong to one of the game's characters but its seriality remains random, is the equivalent to the unexpectedness of one's will to assume a certain gender or another, and of the uncertainty state between two rounds of gender performances (recall the above assertion by Maxwell). While preferring one gender over another is a decision socially constrained and hence appears necessary, the singular moment of complying with binary gender expectations or assuming a less expected identity is quite unpredictable and falls within the realm of chance. Mokujin's computational randomness is a good indicator of the social uncertainty between predictability and unpredictability of gender type assumption.

We can further establish an analogous tool of comparison for the steady growth of gender options. In the fourth instalment of the *Tekken* series, Mokujin's repertoire was enriched and altered in relation to the character's original appearance in *Tekken 3*, as a number of characters were added for Mokujin to mimic their styles, while some were removed. We can think both of an analogy of added gender options in the map of gender performativity, as well as the removal of certain genders in the case of the gradual replacement of previously accepted male and female genders by their terminologically refined cisgender versions. Some queer groups would not accept sets of terminologies that involve labels such as "male" or "female" and they would replace them by novel accounts such as "cismale" or "cisfemale"; for such groups, previous labels have disappeared from the gender spectrum/map. For other groups, however, such terms are acceptable, and if one is to make a relatively complete list of all available gender identity labels, one is to include both cisfemale/cismale and female/male variations, as their descriptions might differ from group to group or even from individual to individual. Similarly, in different instalments of *Tekken*, various characters have been introduced and retracted, occasionally reintroduced and occasionally re-retracted. Some have appeared only once, and some have remained throughout the series' entire history. To the extent that human brains and human societies create both gender identities and video game characters, I observe a homology of pattern based on this common social and brain ancestry.

Drawing the parallel further in terms of time evolution, it is useful to note that humans performing their gender 50 years ago *appeared* to have fewer options than they have now (while of course the different identities have been in a constant process of negotiation) and Mokujin had fewer fighting styles to mimic in 1997's *Tekken 3* than in 2016's *Tekken 7*.⁶ It seems that gender conception, gender selection, and gender performance are indissociable and in constant interaction, as in the cases of character design, performance, and Mokujin's assumption of styles. That being said, how is a gender role conceived and selected before it is performed? This simultaneity of heterogeneous interacting elements brings us to the relevance of Deleuze's notion of disjunctive synthesis as a rigid theoretical guideline.

Deleuze's Disjunctive Synthesis and Performative Mokujin-Gender Mastery

This multiplicity of choices brings me to the Deleuzian analysis of disjunctive synthesis, as explained in his book *The Logic of Sense* (1969). By introducing this, I am not adding an additional theoretical framework (this is only but a tiny chunk of Deleuze's broad work). Instead, I find the vocabulary Deleuze employs in explaining processes of selection and generation of choices, and the examples he provides, useful for understanding Mokujin's computer-based, random algorithm, and applying it to the more organic, dynamic process of gender performativity. As explained above, statements about performative gender may seem paradoxical, chiefly because of an apparent contradiction: An individual has to accept simultaneously that genders exist in a spectrum and at the same time is invited to select at least one of them at each time. In other words, if all is one within the unity of the spectrum and identities exist in a continuum, then there is no multiplicity of gender options, which goes against the basic premise of selecting a particular gender identity. Therefore, the introduction of Deleuze's notion of disjunctive synthesis is useful, since, according to him, this process of selection among given choices often results in confusing and absurd mental schemes, and needs to be thoroughly understood. The main reversal Deleuze makes with his suggestion, in order to break the paradox, is to perceive multiplicity of choices as affirmation of a univocal being (Deleuze, 2015, pp. 70–71). In the context of gender types, if they all exist within a single spectrum (a univocal being of different genders), the ability to choose one (or more) at a time acts as an affirmation of that being. Likewise, if the multiplicity of all fighting styles and postures coexist in the univocal being of the *Tekken* game, the ability to adopt any of them at different rounds affirms the game's value.

⁶ The Tekken Wiki (2020) offers an exhaustive table that compares the appearance of different characters across different editions of the game, including descriptions of the characters' fighting styles and techniques.

Mokujin, by randomly performing as a fighting character each time, affirms the possibility of performing *any* fighting style—this is the defining characteristic of Mokujin, so players may take into account this randomness in their selection process. The same can be said of gender. Performative gender (and Mokujin), in that sense, carries a radical message about inclusion: To choose to become something means to preserve the possibility of becoming anything else, as long as “divergence or difference become objects of pure affirmation, and ‘either-or’ becomes the power of affirmation” (Deleuze, 2015, p. 306). Deleuze, then, asserts that while an organism exists in its rather unshaped stages and several features exist in the plane of a virtual or potential condition (for example, when a paw is about to be developed), an internal organic mechanism in tandem with the environmental conditioning becomes responsible for the growth of a *left* or a *right* paw (Deleuze, 2015, pp. 291–292). The overall mechanism “considers” the available options, discards the ones that are less useful or have already been selected, and selects the final option according to a disjunctive syllogistic process. This, I suggest, is a good description of gender and Mokujin combat style selection, albeit taking into account that gender selection is far more complex and requires more intentionality than Mokujin’s style selection. While the ability and liberty to perform a gender is constrained by social obstacles or sources of inspiration, *Tekken’s* setting and Mokujin’s particularity invites us to develop the skill to adapt to different forms of performance. I recommend the introduction of the latter pattern into the former’s environment.

To reiterate, gender is information about gender. That is, information about gender within a certain social context. Gender options are confined within the limits of what our social contexts have to offer, and what various forms of discipline allow, prohibit, recommend, or do not care about (consider different application forms, from passports to Facebook profiles and the different degrees of options in selecting preferred gender or the freedom to disclose this or not). Although possibilities appear to be infinite, limitations can also be imagined or imposed. And no matter the amount of discipline, a driving power of affirmation may generate a new gender type in order for new information to flow within the entropic map of limited identity types. Recall the epigram of this article’s introduction: “playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits, 1978, p. 41). Like adaptation, fluidity and performativity can then be considered as virtues in the gender landscape (or gendered landscape). Likewise, Mokujin’s styles are confined within the limitations of a game and its different instalments. The player is confined and disciplined within the game’s rules and limitations; however, like in every game, constraints allow for the player’s imagination to exercise in different styles and create previously unthought combinations of moves, and, pragmatically speaking, inform game designers for future improvements. This exercise is something I wish to borrow from the realm of *Tekken*, through

Mokujin's style that involves transitions to all styles, and import to gender studies.⁷ Understanding Mokujin as a combat-fluid character allows us to understand humans as gender-fluid beings. The Deleuzian theorisation about disjunction includes one further component which is relevant to this discussion: the possibility of a subject's mastery over disjunctive syllogism, which is the ability to pass through every option and be able to select one at each time (Deleuze, 2015, pp. 305–307).

Deleuze suggests that the reception of external intensities (say, the genders we know) should be transformed into intentionalities (genders we perform). To master the game of disjunctive synthesis is to be able to mimic external stimuli, and then transform them according to one's own needs. The absolute test in order to become a master of the *Tekken* game, as was explained in the previous section, is to be able to play as Mokujin, for it is through this character that a player's adaptability to every character's fighting style is evidenced. Mokujin, then, becomes a good metaphor for mastery over gender performativity. As a game reviewer suggests, "this wooden fighter would change into a different character after every round, providing a challenge to expert players who want to prove they've mastered everyone in the game" (Crisan, 2010, para. 12). Or as another one puts it, "Mokujin's the perfect character to pick if you're an expert at *Tekken* or if you simply have no idea who to pick" (Mokujin, 2017). "Mastery" is of course a loaded word, often opposed to "slavery." I am not using it in this sense, and I wish to believe Deleuze or video game players do not use it in this sense either. Mastery of a game and mastery of gender styles is not the absolute goal of the game or of assuming a gender identity. Imagine, then, how different the debates about gender would be (debates that often have to do with discrimination, violence, and stigma) if more "players" have mastered the game of gender performativity. If I offer one normative suggestion with this analysis, it is that more gender gymnastics through more frequent attempts at mastering different identities might result in a better understanding of the world. Mokujin acts like an abstraction of this process.

Gender performativity does not prioritise the importance of any gender over another, as much as Mokujin does not prioritise a certain fighting style over another. To master the game of gender performativity is to develop a greater ability to move between various genders and adapt to their particularities, as I explained earlier. A Mokujin-gender is the perfect gender to pick if you are an "expert" of all genders or if you simply have no idea which gender to assume. It should be kept in mind,

⁷ This process might be found similar to what Leonie R. Stickland calls "gender gymnastics"—that is, the understanding of gender as something that can be susceptible to change at any time, without however losing the aspect of identity; the fact that something is not stable, fixed, or eternal, like attributes conventionally attached to gender, does not lessen its value. On the contrary, flexibility can be considered as a virtue (Stickland, 2007).

nonetheless, that the variable fighting style becomes the player's object of mastery *only but also immediately after* the player realises Mokujin has assumed that style (out of recognisable gestures, gait, and movements). The entire process of gender selection and creation becomes, like within Mokujin's assumed styles within the game's context and its different editions, a process of foreseeability and unforeseeability—one knows, more or less, what to expect, but one has to be ready to adapt. At the same time, one never knows what to expect, but if they are able to adapt or inform their environment through novel combinations, the more positive the outcomes will be. The faster the adaptation, the greater the mastery over the game of gender performativity.

Conclusions and Considerations: Minimal Requirements for the Establishment of a Performative Mokujin-Gender

This paper presented a conceptual model suggesting that the selection of a performed gender is dependent upon a combination of social determinants, available information, and chance, while novel gender options occur when this dialectic poses paradoxes (e.g., the available information is not compatible with social needs so a "new" gender label is created). Performativity of gender could be further thought of then in terms of informational predictability. In other words, the performativity of an individual's gender lies in the impossibility of exact expectation of knowing its coming identity on the basis of past identities. Mokujin-gender would constantly oscillate between originality and intelligibility, and between unforeseeability and foreseeability.

To conclude this paper's suggestion concerning mastery of disjunctive syllogism, there is a moral or normative imperative in the assumption of performative gender: We ought to become good performers. We need to train, practice, and rehearse all of our potential roles if we are to position ourselves within the ontological terrain of performativity. To establish a Mokujin-gender performativity further requires the existence of a common repertoire among every participant in the game of genders, something which means performative gender literacy across the entire fabric of the social layer. If gender is information about gender, this information has to be widely circulated and validated across, or adapted through, different cultures, needs, and practices, and then be exercised. What is a good age for children to learn about gender performativity at school? How dissociated can gender performativity be from sex education? Can it be conducted in a playful manner through role playing? Can video games, then, be a medium of learning about gender types, *maybe*, through patterns similar to the role playing of *Tekken* and Mokujin, in a context where violence is replaced by the celebration of difference? More work is to be done in mapping a tentative spectrum of genders, as a resource for a Mokujin-gender selection process, and to disseminate such a taxonomy in academic and non-academic contexts. More work, in other words, towards the

construction of an all-encompassing, all-transformative, univocal society: a performative “Mokujender” society.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Maria Koumarianou for her invaluable suggestions concerning the format of the text’s initial draft. I am further grateful to the referees for their detailed feedback, and to previous and current members of *Press Start*’s editorial board, as well as Carina Assunção and Reece Thomson for inviting me to contribute to the journal. Nonetheless, I withhold all responsibility for every potential mistake or unclarified passage.

References

- Apperley, T. H. (2006). Genre and game studies: Toward a critical approach to video game genres. *Simulation & Gaming*, 37(1), 6–23.
- Bandai Namco Studios. (1994–2017). *Tekken*. Bandai Namco Entertainment.
- Beasley, B., & Collins Standley, T. (2002). Shirts vs. skins: Clothing as an indicator of gender role stereotyping in video games. *Mass Communication & Society*, 5(3), 279–293.
- Browne, K. (2004). Genderism and the bathroom problem: (Re) materialising sexed sites, (re) creating sexed bodies. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 11(3), 331–346.
- Butler, J. (1992). Imitation and gender insubordination. In H. Abelow, M. A. Barale, & D. M. Halperin (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay studies reader* (pp. 307–320). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of “sex.”* New York, NY: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2006 [1990]). *Gender trouble*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Calleja, G. (2007). Digital game involvement: A conceptual model. *Games and Culture*, 2(3), 236–260.
- Campbell, L., & Garnett, W. (1882). *The life of James Clerk Maxwell with a selection from his correspondence and occasional writings and a sketch of his contributions to science*. London, England: Macmillan.
- Crisan, N. (2010, July 30). Speculation: What we know, and want, for Street Fighter X Tekken. *1UP.com* [Website]. Retrieved 12-09-2017 from <https://archive.is/20121206023129/http://www.1up.com/previews/speculation-street-fighter-tekken?pager.offset=1#selection-589.0-589.64> [Archived Version]

- Deleuze, G. (2015 [1969]). *Logic of sense*. London, England: Bloomsbury.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1988). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London, England: The Athlone Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1994). *What is philosophy?* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Devor, H. (1994). Toward a taxonomy of gendered sexuality. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 6(1), 23–56.
- Dietz, T. L. (1998). An examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games: Implications for gender socialization and aggressive behavior. *Sex Roles*, 38(5), 425–442.
- Eliason, M. J., & Schope, R. (2007). Shifting sands or solid foundation? Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identity formation. In I. H. Mayer & M. E. Northridge (Eds.), *The health of sexual minorities: Public health perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations* (pp. 3–26). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer International.
- Fecher, D. L. (2012). Gender issues, fighting games, and progress: Finding a place for a genderless character in Tekken 6. *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*, 12(2).
- Gailey, C. W. (1993). Mediated messages: Gender, class, and cosmos in home video games. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 27(1), 81–98.
- Game Rankings. (2017). Tekken 3. *Game Rankings* [Website]. Retrieved 12-09-2017 from <http://www.gamerankings.com/ps/198900-tekken-3/index.html/index.html>
- Goldman, R. (2014, February 13). Here's a list of 58 gender options for Facebook users. *ABC News* [Website]. Retrieved 10-09-2017 from <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2014/02/heres-a-list-of-58-gender-options-for-facebook-users/>
- Gray, K., Voorhees, G., & Vossen, E. (Eds.). (2018). *Feminism in play*. Palgrave Games in Context series. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hacking, I. (1999). *The social construction of what?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Halberstam, J. (1998). Transgender butch: Butch/FTM border wars and the masculine continuum. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 4(2), 287–310.
- Harper, T., Adams, M., & Taylor, N. (Eds.). (2018). *Queerness in play*. Palgrave Games in Context series. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ivory, J. D. (2006). Still a man's game: Gender representation in online reviews of video games. *Mass Communication & Society*, 9(1), 103–114.

Kelly, G. (2016, May 24). A (nearly) complete glossary of gender identities for your next census. *The Telegraph* [Website]. Retrieved 10-09-2017 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/a-nearly-complete-glossary-of-gender-identities-for-your-next-ce/>

Kerr, A. (2003, November). GirlsWomen just want to have fun: A study of adult female players of digital games. In M. Copier, & J. Raessens (Eds.), *Level up: Digital Games Research Conference*, 4–6 November, 2003, Utrecht University. Faculty of Arts, Utrecht University.

Lankoski, P., & Björk, S. (2008). Character-driven game design: Characters, conflicts and gameplay. In M. Merabti (Ed.), *GDTW, Sixth International Conference in Game Design and Technology*, 12–13 November 2008 Liverpool, U.K. School of Computing & Mathematical Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University. Retrieved 10-01-2018 from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Petri_Lankoski2/publication/236680480_Character-Driven_Game_Design_Characters_Conflicts_and_Gameplay/links/00b7d518f43faa9f93000000.pdf

Lewis, P., & Simpson, R. (2017). Hakim revisited: Preference, choice and the postfeminist gender regime. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 24(2), 115–133.

Lindsey, L. L. (2015 [2005]). *Gender roles: A sociological perspective*. Oxon, England: Routledge.

McLuhan, M. (1976). The violence of the media. *Canadian Forum* 56(September), 9–12.

Metacritic. (2017). Tekken 3. *Metacritic* [Website]. Retrieved 12-09-2017 from <http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation/tekken-3/details>

Mirzoeff, N. (2011). The right to look. *Critical Inquiry*, 37(3), 473–496.

Mokujin. (2017). *FightersGeneration.com* [Website]. Retrieved 12-09-2017 from <https://www.fightersgeneration.com/characters2/mokujin.html>

Morrish, E., & Sauntson, H. (2007). *New perspectives on language and sexual identity*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Newman, J. (2002). The myth of the ergodic videogame. *Game Studies*, 2(1), 1–17.

Nonbinary Wiki. (2020). Main Page. Retrieved 07-03-2020 from https://nonbinary.wiki/wiki/Main_Page

- Ruberg, B. (2015). No fun: The queer potential of video games that annoy, anger, disappoint, sadden, and hurt. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 2(2), 108–124.
- Ruberg, B. (2019). *Video games have always been queer*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shapiro, E. (2007). Drag kinging and the transformation of gender identities. *Gender & Society*, 21(2), 250–271.
- Shaw, A. (2017). Encoding and decoding affordances: Stuart Hall and interactive media technologies. *Media, Culture & Society*, 39(4), 592–602.
- Stickland, L. R. (2008). *Gender gymnastics: Performing and consuming Japan's Takarazuka Revue*. Melbourne, Australia: Trans Pacific Press.
- Stryker, S., & Whittle, S. (Eds.). (2006). *The transgender studies reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Suits, B. (1978) *The grasshopper: Games, life, and utopia*. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Tekken Wiki. (2020). Characters. *Fandom.com* [Website]. Retrieved 23-04-2020 from <https://tekken.fandom.com/wiki/Characters>
- Waggoner, Z. (2013). *My avatar, my self: Identity in video role-playing games*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125–151.
- Wolf, M. J. P. (2008). Video game genres. In M. J. P. Wolf (Ed.), *The video game explosion: A history from PONG to PlayStation® and beyond* (pp. 259–274). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Woźniak, M. (2012). Pictures of me: Possibilities of shaping our body image through virtual reality. *Limes: Borderland Studies*, 5(1), 1–10.