

Bodily Pleasures of Repetitive Labour and Rhythm in Finnish Cottage Simulator

Johan Kalmanlehto

Tampere University
johan.kalmanlehto@tuni.fi

Haron Walliander

University of Turku
haron.walliander@utu.fi / haron.walliander@gmail.com

Keywords

rhythm, game mechanics, repetition, labour, leisure, embodiment, close playing

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigate how the rhythms of game mechanics in Finnish Cottage Simulator (Ranela Games 2024) convey a sense of Finnish cottage life through rhythmic variations. Drawing from theories of gameplay rhythms, we analyse how repetitive gameplay loops operate on the levels of the body, affect and nonconceptual meaning to create a mood that reflects the pleasures of laborious acts in Finnish cottage life. By connecting the close playing method (Bizzocchi & Tanenbaum 2011, Fullerton & Farber 2025) to theoretical reflection, we explore how the game mechanics as algorithmic systems can be used to construct an idea of Finnishness by evoking embodied and affective aesthetic experiences. By combining the rhythmic elements of the procedural system with distinct representational content, the game produces meaning for Finnishness and Finnish cottage life.

Finnish lifestyle simulators, such as My Summer Car (Amistech Games 2025), Finnish Army Simulator (Please Be Patient 2023), or Finnish Cottage Simulator (Ranela Games 2024), often engage players through the rhythms of laborious and difficult game mechanics. This paper focuses on Finnish Cottage Simulator and its representation of Finnish cottage life. According to the developers, the game aims to simulate Finnish cottage life but with a relaxed attitude – the game’s advertisement explicitly underlines that it is not a survival game, positioning it against the notoriously difficult My Summer Car. Finnish cottage life is often perceived as a time for leisure and relaxation, but it also serves as a place for tinkering, small tasks, and manual labour.

In Finnish Cottage Simulator, this manifests as chores in cottage life that the player undertakes, with the goal of earning in-game currency. While the game may externally appear to be merely a traditional cozy game (Boudreau 2024, Short et al. 2018, Waszkiewicz & Bakun 2020), the rhythmic mechanics of precisely timed busywork render the experience laborious and even challenging, creating a sense of Finnish

Proceedings of DiGRA 2026

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cottage life not only through visual aesthetics but also on the level of rhythms of practical agency. In Finnish Cottage Simulator, the idyllic Finnish summer cottage becomes a space that requires player action rather than passive idleness. As in real cottage life, “doing nothing” actually means engaging in self-chosen tasks.

The rhythms of gaming can be approached from various perspectives, such as the local and global societal contexts and rhythms of everyday life (Anable 2018, Apperley 2010, Meriläinen 2022), and the micro-level rhythms of game interactions (Costello 2018, Kalmanlehto 2024, Keogh 2018). Following Meschonnic’s (1982, 2019) philosophical theory of rhythm, we focus on how the rhythmic experiences of game mechanics produce sense outside verbal or conceptual meaning. Instead of repetition of the same pattern, Meschonnic’s conception of rhythm refers to the production of difference, similarly to Benveniste’s (1971) interpretation of rhythm as a momentary and changeable form, and Lefebvre’s (1992) conception of difference inherent to all repetition.

According to Meschonnic, language is not only a system of signs but encompasses all human activity. Instead of only verbal meaning, this activity produces nonconceptual sense, which is organised by rhythm, like the rhythm of poetry organises its sense outside the meanings of the words. Kalmanlehto (2024) argued that in difficult gameplay, rhythm organises the sense of the player’s agency related to practical, goal-oriented actions, working on the level of the body and affect instead of visual imagery or verbal meaning. Focusing on casual games, Anable (2018, p. 88) highlighted that meaning and pleasure are produced in the disjuncture between images and the rhythms of game mechanics that address the labouring body. In Finnish Cottage Simulator, the rhythms of different repetitive interactions construct an embodied sense of Finnish cottage life.

Although playing the Finnish Cottage Simulator involves repetitive rhythms of daily chores, such as chopping wood through a laborious and clumsy control scheme, a rhythmic variation is introduced by the player’s choice upon the numerous activities present in the game. Tosca (2023) differentiated between micro- and mesoactions; the former comprises basic gameplay actions that are often executed with one click of a button, whereas the latter consists of sequences of microactions, e.g. strategy, traversal through levels or specific quests. In Finnish Cottage Simulator, the variations between the repetitive and laborious rhythms of microactions are disturbed by the seemingly aimless wandering between different locations and mesoactions they afford.

We argue that such rhythmic variation constructs an embodied sense of Finnish cottage life, in which people engage with a variety of different chores without an actual need to do so – given that cottage life is usually considered leisure. As Tosca (2023) argued, gameplay can also be viewed as a resistance to dressage – Lefebvre’s (1992) term for the process in which state and capital impose disciplined rhythms. Engaging in monotonous, laborious and possibly even boring manual tasks of cottage life without any clear goal constructs the meaning of Finnish cottage life as a retreat from the demands of daily life, but can also involve biases, such as gendered interpretations of labour.

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