Art Games: Performativity and Interactivity

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Abstract

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Art Games: Performativity and Interactivity

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This research’s intention is to define and classify what art games are and how these three particular games rely on the audience to activate the artworks, thus making the audience’s interactions essential to complete the artworks. Technology has always impacted the art world and shaped the media that artists experiment with and use. Today, there are many artists who use games as their method for conveying their ideas and messages. This paper will examine how three artists use gaming structures to critique historical and social topics through the audience’s interactions with the artworks’ gaming structures. The three case studies about Pippin Barr’s The Artist is Present, Tale of Tales’ The Path and Wafaa Bilal’s performance Domestic Tension will examine how these artworks exemplify and use the elements of the particular genre of games, art games. Through looking at research done on digital space and the case studies this paper will address how these artworks create a shift from the focus of the artwork being on the creator or artist to how the interactions and performance of the audience complete the works.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my dogs, Conor, Paladin and Smokey for always being happy to see me when I come home. Also, my boyfriend, Jesse, and my parents for always being supportive throughout this stressful time.
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This thesis would not have been possible without the help from my head advisor Dr. Jennie Klein and my other committee members, Professor Mark Franz and Dr. Marion Lee. I am also indebted to many of my fellow Art History colleagues for their support throughout this process, especially Hannah Thome for being by my side during this 2-year program.
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Chapter One: Art Games, What Are They?

Introduction

This research aims to look at the three different art games and demonstrate how they foster interactivity of the audience to raise challenging social issues. Technology has always impacted the art world and shaped the media that artists experiment with and use. Today, there are many artists who use games as their method for conveying their ideas and messages. This paper will examine how artists use gaming structures to critique historical and social topics through the audience’s interactions with the artworks’ gaming structures. The three case studies, Pippin Barr’s *The Artist is Present*, Tale of Tales’ *The Path* and Wafaa Bilal’s performance *Domestic Tension*, will examine how these artworks distinctively exemplify elements of art games. By looking at research done on digital space and the case studies this thesis paper will address how these artworks create a shift from the focus of the artwork being on the creator or artist to how the interactions and performance of the audience complete the works.

What Are Art Games? How Do They Differ from Other Digital Games?

A general definition of a game is “a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.”¹ Due to the wide range of what games encompass, this term must be flexible. Consider how make-believe games work described by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman as there being “no fixed or rigid rules exist for playing with dolls, for playing soldiers, cops and robbers,

horses, locomotives, and airplanes.” However, many card games require strict rules to become more than a deck of cards. Some types of games give you strict rules to follow, like card games, while other games are more lenient relying on the imagination of the players, such as role-playing games. Games can use a wide range of materials. As computers became more available to the public, software developers created ways to make games within these digital platforms. Digital games take these formats and apply them to their own platform, which is similar to how other artists have used the concepts behind games and play to inform their work. Digital games differ from more traditional games because of their program code and that they are played on a computer or machines dedicated to a specific game (for example: arcade games). Rules may be similar, but the “internal functioning of formal game logic is also part of the rules of a digital game.”

Artists have always been implementing new technologies. For example, Bauhaus artists experimented with new technology, mediums and performance. Additionally, Italian Futurists embraced combining new technologies with their performances and artistic practices. German Bauhaus artist and choreographer Oskar Schlemmer experimented with “light plays” in 1923. Futurist painting and photography have striking similarities to digital motion effects. Since the invention of computers and gaming consoles in the 1980s and the subsequent advancements of technology, games have been

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3 Such as the artist groups of the past like, Fluxus.
6 Ibid., 38 & 50.
a part of the digital multi-media spectrum for some time. This does not change what a
game is, but instead it changes the medium where and how the game is played. The
change in medium gives game creators new ways to approach traditional game formats.
Furthermore, this gives game designers the ability to create new environments and
experiences for players than that of non-digital games. Commercial video games caught
on quickly with the public, becoming one of the most popular forms of entertainment
today. As commercial video games continue to be popular and embrace newer
technologies, such as virtual reality, there are some contemporary artists taking elements
and formats from traditional style video games to create new games that do not quite fit
in with traditional commercial video games. Instead these games fit within the fine art
world due to how they typically critique historical and/or social issues through their
gameplay. These games are part of a genre of art called art games. Art games differ from
commercial video games but would still be considered under the larger umbrella of
digital games.

As described by Tiffany Holmes, the scholar who coined the term art games, art
games typically “describe an interactive work, usually humorous, by a visual artist that
does one or more of the following: challenges cultural stereotypes, offers meaningful
social or historical critique, or tells a story in a novel manner.” She also specifies in her
definition that “art games contain at least two of the following: a defined way to win or
experience success in a mental challenge, a passage through a series of levels (that may

8 Holmes, "Arcade Classics Spawn Art."
or may not be hierarchical), or a central character or icon that represents the player.”

While many of these characteristics defined by Holmes are particular to art games these games also overlap with traits of conventional video games. The essential difference is that art games focus on their messages and subject matter rather than an entertainment appeal to the general public. Unlike conventional video games, these games are not made with the intent to compete in the entertainment market. It is crucial to note that these non-commercial video games come in a variety of styles. For example, there is a classification of games called serious games that are used for purposes outside of entertainment, such as training for various branches of the military. Art games are more concerned with similar themes of contemporary art such as creating social and historical critiques about the world. Both serious games and art games fall under the same umbrella as types of digital games, but both serve different purposes outside of the entertainment realm.

Art games differ from other conventional commercial video games through the artist’s intention for a narrow, specific audience. This audience can range from spectators that are informed about the art world to spectators that typically do not go to the museum or galleries, this depends on the artist’s intentions. Conventional commercial video games

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9 Ibid.
10 The name of the genre art games, may feel like it is insinuating that commercial video games are not art—this is not that case, but rather the key difference lies in the content of the games. Both are forms of art.
11 Serious games are broadly defined as, “any piece of software that merges a non-entertaining purpose (serious) with a video game structure (game).” This can encompass a “wide range of fields: healthcare, defense, education, communication, politics, etc.” Damien Djouidi, Julian Alvarez and Jean-Pierre Jessel, “Classifying Serious Games: the G/P/S model,” accessed February 26, 2018, http://www.ludoscience.com/files/ressources/classifying_serious_games.pdf.
are designed for a wider audience with the purpose of profit through the entertainment world. Many commercial video games have story lines with some underlying meaning, but typically these meanings are less significant than the goal of entertaining the player thus getting the audience to buy more games from their company. Art games are not focused on the entertainment of the gamer, but rather on the message they are trying to communicate to the person playing. As Holmes explains, in some art games “wry social commentary sparks interest rather than grandiose landscapes and multi-nodal navigation.”  

This difference can be seen in the magnificent landscapes and details of the game *Fallout 4* in comparison Pippin Barr’s pixelated style (Figure 1 & Figure 2).  

Art games can have beautiful imagery to help them add force behind their message, such as games made by the company Tale of Tales, but this is not a requirement like it is for many games created for solely entertainment purposes. Often art games rely on the aesthetics of the art world to push their conceptual ideas. Through these simpler design strategies, artists play with ways to convey their messages with more cerebral approaches to gaming. For these games, these aesthetic decisions are a critical supporting element of the game’s conceptual idea.

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12 Holmes, “Arcade Classics.”
13 When we view games, we could look at them as “spatial art with its roots in architecture, landscape painting, sculpture, gardening or amusement part design”, but for the purpose of this paper, this is not our focus. This could be a topic on its own. Instead we are focusing on the ideas behind the design rather than solely the artistic skill that it takes to create. Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire, “The Art of Contested Spaces,” in *Game On: The History and Culture of Video Games*, ed. Lucien King (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2002), 65.  
14 It is important to note that the creation of digital play-environments is an art itself. This craft has its own artistic skill and could be looked at as a whole topic alone. The Tale of Tales manifesto does hold this craft as an essential aspect of their games. The environment details are up to the artists and depend on the message of the game.
15 Game design of environments is another art form in its own entirety.
Furthermore, art games are created with “limited playability” unlike most commercial video games.¹⁶ This difference is vital because commercial video games are created to be played through more than once, often hiding Easter eggs, or “hidden treasures and secret areas not initially obvious to casual players,” for players to discover when they play multiple times.¹⁷ This aspect is key to understanding how the audience of art games differs when compared to commercial video games. Gamers who play hundreds of hours of video games would most likely not be interested in playing many of these art games due to their lack of re-playability and shortage of traditional excitement that many commercial games use. Often when someone plays a game they want to win, and in many art games winning is not the same as it is in many commercial games.

Art games often do not focus on hand-eye coordination, but rather on their story line or message unlike how commercial video games function. Similarly, typical video games are created with the intention of creating a fun experience for the player, while art games focus on their subject matter. For art games, the message and experience are the concentration of the game because they are created to challenge the player’s previous conceptions about the content and gameplay. The goal of art games is much different than commercial video games because art games do not rely on consumerism in the same way that commercial video games do. Often art games are created because the artist has a message to communicate, not because they expect to make a lot money from the game.

¹⁶ Ibid., 47.
Another aspect that art games challenge are the conventional norms found within games. Paulius Petraitus argues that art games can “challenge our expectations of what a video game should be and look like.”

Average video games have an obvious way to win while in art games this may be convoluted or non-existent. Many art games function to challenge the viewer’s conceptions of a typical game whether through the medium, gameplay or both. In many art games you do not win or lose in a conventional sense. This means that instead of completing objectives that would end with you ‘winning’ the game, there may be no actual end or satisfying conventional ending. Instead for these games, it is about the experience of playing rather than winning because sometimes that is not even an option. For commercial games it is essential that the players feel satisfied with the game. Otherwise, they may not buy a game from that company again. For art games it is not about consumerism but rather relaying the message to the player, regardless if the player appreciates it or not.

Art games sometimes take concepts from conventional video games and apply them to new media which in turn can create discussion about what constitutes a video game. Artists can make commentary about the media they use by challenging the player’s idea of what establishes a video game. The commentary on the medium can be both the physical and the digital aspects of these games. Also, artists can make their games for multiple players which can create stimulating situations for both the artist and the audience. The anonymous nature of the Internet lets players experiment with their own

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identities. This allows for thought-provoking situations to occur. It also allows the audience to act outside of themselves and can create strange situations for the artist and other audience members to reflect on. This is one strong similarity between commercial games and art games that use multi-player formats. This element can highlight human nature and how people act differently when they are anonymous and communicating through devices rather than in person.

Often the concepts of design ideas taken from conventional video games relies on the nostalgia of the creator. For example, the pixelated style seen in Pippin Barr’s work is reminiscent of games like *Super Mario Brothers* or *Frogger*. Many of the artists that work within these media played with these technologies or similar technologies during their youth. This adds an element of nostalgia to these games not only for the artist, but often for the player as well. Many players who encounter these games are familiar with these older platforms and technologies. Through the implementation of gaming structures that are out of date, or nostalgic, adds a personal touch to the game by reminding the player and the artist of these older games.

To briefly summarize, art games differ from conventional commercial games primarily due to their subject content and the ways they challenge exactly what a game is by experimenting with what it means to win. These conceptual messages are directed at a small, niche market instead of the wide audience many commercial games advertise to. Art games can address issues that commercial games cannot because these games are not solely created to make a profit. Through using the platforms of commercial games, artists can play into nostalgia of the audience and themselves which can assist to convey their
conceptual message. Art games can have many similarities to commercial games in their aesthetics and gameplay, but conceptually these games differ drastically.

**Pippin Barr: The Artist is Present**

Pippin Barr’s interactive game, *The Artist is Present* (2011), is a humorous digital recreation of Marina Abramović’s original performance, *The Artist is Present* (2010). The original performance of *The Artist is Present* was performed at Marina Abramović’s retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. For this performance Abramović sat at a table while audience members could sit across from her and stare into each other’s eyes during the museum hours. Due to Abramović’s fame in the art world her performance gained the public’s attention.

In Barr’s game version, you can only enter the museum during the actual hours of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Once you visit the webpage where the game is located, during *actual* museum hours, you may enter with your randomly created avatar. This game includes buying your ticket, giving your ticket to the museum guard and waiting in line to sit across from Marina Abramović’s avatar. Unlike most games, this game requires you to stand in line for a similar amount of time that you would have at the real performance. This game challenges what constitutes a game by creating a game that is rather anti-climactic when compared to Abramović’s live performance. This game may be a recreation of a performance but functions differently. Abramović’s performance was intended for a large audience, while Barr’s game was created as a teaching device which attracts a specific niche market on the Internet.
Tale of Tales: The Path

Tale of Tales’ horror game The Path, is based loosely off the fairytale Little Red Riding Hood. Instead of being based off a live performance, it is based on a children’s story. Little Red Riding Hood is a story that originated in the late 1600s. It is about a young girl who goes to grandmother’s house through the woods to discover that her grandmother has been eaten by a wolf, who dresses as her grandmother and devours the little girl as well.19 While this story has been sanitized in popular culture the original story was much darker, and hinted at both Little Red Riding Hood’s sexuality, rape, and sexual predators. These darker, violent elements are found in the game, The Path. Originally this story served to warn children, specifically little girls, to never travel alone and was used as a subtle way to “reinforce the regulation of sexuality in modern Europe.”20 This game departs from the original story, but still uses ideas and themes influenced from the fairy tale. This game looks much closer to a commercial video game than Barr’s Internet-based game due to the graphics and the production value. The graphics, the music and small details are ornate and eerie. (See Figure 3.) Once the player starts playing the player begins to feel how this game is different from other traditional video games. While the end goal of this game is to make it to grandmother’s house the players are required to collect items in the woods to unlock various rooms in her house. There are six girl characters, varying from ages 9-19, and the game requires players to play with all the girl characters since each character has special items only their avatar

can find. Like Barr’s game this game is slow paced and challenges the mental focus of the players.\textsuperscript{21} \textit{The Path} tells a story about the experience of moving from childhood to womanhood through metaphor and interactive material throughout the gameplay. \textit{The Path} gives us a less overtly violent story of how these girls enter womanhood as compared to the original story of \textit{Little Red Riding Hood}.

\textbf{Wafaa Bilal: Domestic Tension}

\textit{Domestic Tension} is a performance that consisted of Wafaa Bilal living in a gallery space for 31 days, the FlatFile Galleries in Chicago. During this time, a paintball gun that was connected through an online platform so visitors of the webpage could click and shoot at Bilal or anywhere in the room either in person at the gallery or via a computer anywhere in the world.\textsuperscript{22} The contrast of experiences offered for Bilal’s performance showed how different people interact in person versus through an online chatroom. This aspect emphasized how impersonal actions can lead people to commit acts with disregard to their consequences. During his performance Bilal essentially created a war zone for himself since this intermedial performance was conducted 24/7 for 31 days which resulted in him ending up with symptoms of PTSD.\textsuperscript{23} Online spectators would spend hours shooting at Bilal and around his gallery space making it difficult for him to get any sleep or peace. \textit{Domestic Tension} created a hostile environment in Bilal’s

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Holmes} Holmes, "Arcade Classics Spawn Art."
\bibitem{Unger} Unger, ‘\textit{SHOOT HIM NOW!!}’, 203.
\bibitem{Stevens} Lara Stevens, “Alienation in the Information Age: Wafaa Bilal’s \textit{Domestic Tension},” \textit{Australasian Drama Studies} \textit{65}, (October 2014): 87.
\end{thebibliography}
studio space which created emphasis on the problems of modern day warfare and how interactions through a computer alter how people interacted with him.

These games all use their digital platforms to critique social and historical issues. These games rely on the audience’s interactions with their digital platforms. These interactions of the audience create a shift from the focus on the artist to a focus on how the audience interacts with each piece. These games create various situations in which the audience can become a performer from anywhere in the world rather than a non-active spectator in a museum or gallery. Through exploration of these three artworks I intend to point out how these art works could be classified in some way as an art game and how they create contrasting opportunities for the audience’s performance to be an essential part of the works.

**Art Games, Performance Art and Interactivity**

This particular genre of video games, art games, require the audience’s active participation. Through their participation similarities between how these games are played and performance art appear. These games change viewers roles from passive audience members to active ones. These games become obsolete without the interaction of the audience members. They are created and intended to be played and interacted with by an audience member.

Interaction is a key element of art games and games in general—it is the element that makes them games. When a player is interacting with a game they are doing more than simply interacting but are also simultaneously performing. As Aaron Smuts explains in terms of computer-based interaction that “recent computer technology has made
interactivity possible for mechanically reproduced art forms, where as previously interactivity in art was restricted to live performances.”24 This statement brings into consideration how these advancements in computer technology bring this form of interaction previously only experienced in live performances to people’s computers. This is because when the audience interacts with these games they are no longer a passive audience but instead a co-creator. Games rely on the audience to interact with them and these interactions transform into a kind of performance of the audience.

Interactivity functions differently within art games because of their association with the art world rather than the entertainment world. For commercial video games play is simply about the amusement of the gamer. For art games play is a more complex construct. Play in art games create a focus on the interactions the player/viewer has with the artwork. While conventional video games also do this, it is not the same since their messages are often very different. This is because by creating focus on the player these games can create commentary on the art world or the everyday world around us. Most of the time art games do not attract serious gamers because “their interfaces are not designed to withstand hours of use” and often function as “one-liner amusements” due to their specific commentary and critique.25 In commercial video games the focus on the player does not always do this, but rather continues to focus on the entertainment of the player which in turn strives for the player to continue to buy and play more of their games.

25 Holmes, "Arcade Classics."
With this focus on the player art games can comment on the art world by beginning to challenge the idea of the artist as a genius who only creates precious objects. As explained by the Coulter-Smiths “…the artist is not a maker of precious objects but the designer of a gamespace which will involve the viewer in a significant interaction.”

This is not a new phenomenon. Fluxus and performance art, in particular Allan Kaprow’s Happenings “were informed by the concept that given a putative deconstruction of the work of art as precious object ‘anyone could be an artist’…‘the recipient can become part of the creative activity.’” This focus on the viewer is essential for these games because the player’s interactions make the game function as the artist intended. The game and the player function together as a partnership. In a way these works are co-creative since they are literally shaped by the artist and the audience activates the game’s final form by playing it. Art games are meant to be played by someone other than the artist. Salen and Zimmerman state “All play is a voluntary activity;” thus, what the viewer gets out of the game depends largely on themselves.

As the spectator becomes an active viewer in these games, the anonymous nature of the Internet and the privacy of playing a game at home alone play into how these games have performative elements. Gabrielle H. Cody explains this by pointing out how within virtual theatres “…they thrive on the anonymity of audience participation. Perhaps more important in relation to the meaning of performance itself is the disappearance of

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27 Ibid., 177.
28 Salen and Zimmerman, The Game Design Reader, 102.
the human body from any frame of signification.”29 Players have the option to act outside of their normal nature. When playing a role-playing video game, you have the option to play the villain. In your real life, you are most likely not a murderer or thief, but in these digital games you can play as whoever you please. You can play games multiple times without real-world consequences.30 This forces us to reconsider what makes a performer and a spectator when it comes to works mediated through the Internet. As Cody writes, “In digital technologies that feature avatars and virtual environments, the audience may nevertheless have a significant impact on the way a performance unfolds; such a disembodied mise-en-scène creates a kind of hybrid spectator, or spectactor, a performer/spectator.”31 Within the genre of art games we are forced to reevaluate what the audience’s participation means in relation to the artwork. The audience becomes more than simply a spectator, but their performance is something different from traditional performance art. Cody explains this difference by pointing out how within virtual theatres “…they thrive on the anonymity of audience participation. Perhaps more important in relation to the meaning of performance itself is the disappearance of the human body from any frame of signification.”32 The disappearance of the human body is a key factor in what makes the performance elements unique in the case of these games. In the

30 This kind of performativity is similar to how American Online Instant Messenger chatrooms (AIM) functioned. Yes, you could enter and tell everyone the truth about yourself. Or you could enter and be anyone you want to.
31 Ibid., 137.
32 Ibid., 137.
Realtime Art Manifesto by the video game development studio, Tale of Tales, they explain this disappearance of the human body eloquently;

Interaction is pivotal
to “put the user in the environment”.
The user is not disembodied but is provided with a device
(similar to a diving suit or astronaut’s outfit)
which allows him
or her
to visit a place that would otherwise not be accessible.
You bring your body with you to this place,
or at least your memories of it.33

While in digital space players do not literally bring their body but the audience’s body still exists. Instead player’s bodies no longer have the same physical effects as it does in physical space. The interactions between the audience and the game become the performance. This is reminiscent of how some artists would give audience members instructions in which the audience could decide to perform or ignore.34 Goldberg points out that “Yoko Ono, in her contribution to the exhibition ‘Information’ at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in the summer of 1970, instructed the reader to ‘draw an imaginary map…go walking on an actual street according to the map.’”35 The player makes the decisions as to how to play these games. These decisions are the player’s responsibilities. Goldberg’s book explains that “‘Art is decision making,’…‘It’s about the eloquence of decisions,’ for artists as much as for viewers.”36 In the case of art games

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36 Ibid., 243.
these decisions are essential for both the artist and the player, and are what makes the player’s interaction with these games performative. Games give players the power to decide the degree of participation they will put in and let the audience decide if they want to perform as themselves or as an alternative personality. This gives the viewers some creative authority thus letting them become an active spectator and co-creator of the artwork’s final form.

The key element that these games require an active player is what transforms the audience into a performer. The Internet can also be understood as a performance space according to Philip Auslander,

Although the Internet is actually an informal series of electronic connections among globally distributed computer networks, it is often described using implicitly spatial metaphors like cyberspace, surfing, and searching. Following this construction, the Internet can be understood as a performance space for both aesthetic and social performances. 37

We typically think of performance art in terms of liveness. However, performance is something that may happen live but does not need to happen in front of a physical audience for it to exist. By considering new digital technologies we are forced to reevaluate what is performance and spectatorship constitute. These digital technologies expand the possibilities of an audience and performers—these technologies “such as the use of telematic systems that unite performers in different locations” and can also widen the range of who can be an audience member. Today it is possible to watch performers live stream their performances from the comfort of your own home.

Performativity of the audience in terms of these art games differs from a traditional form of performance because of the way it is mediated through the computer. The advancements made in technology play a large role, as Cheng and Cody explain that there is a “new understanding of the audience in the digital age: as collaborators in the performance rather than just recipient of it.”  

Art games exemplify this excellently by requiring an audience to interact/perform with them to reach their full potential. The audience in this case becomes a hybrid of a spectator and a performer.

Some examples of how people perform when interacting with a computer include chatrooms, the use of avatars, and chatbots. Whenever someone signs in to a chatroom, uses an avatar, or chats with a bot (robot) they have the option of being whoever they please to be. Auslander writes of these social performances that “the construction and deployment of an avatar is a kind of social performance, a “presentation of self”.” Additionally he uses the great example of the famous New Yorker cartoon by Peter Steiner (1993) of a dog sitting at a computer, talking to another dog, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” (See Figure 4) Which clearly exemplifies the anonymous nature of the Internet.

**Conclusion**

Art games can embody a wide range of games and interactive multi-media artworks. Since they embrace gaming structures art games have many similarities with other types of games and computer games, but the concepts behind why they are created

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38 Ibid., 133.
39 Ibid., 42.
40 Ibid.
often differ drastically from other types of games. Art games can be entertaining to play, but that is not their sole purpose. Artist create them with social and historical critiques lining their gameplay and aesthetics. They use platforms similar or sometimes even identical to other computer games, but they change the subject matter, gameplay, and rules to challenge exactly what makes a game. This is used to explore ways to communicate their message to the audience through interactivity rather than passive viewing.
Chapter 2: Literary Review: Interactivity, Performativity and Digital Space

Introduction

Art games are a special genre of games that are embraced by artists to communicate social and historical critiques through interactivity and participation of the audience. Often performance art and other traditional modes of art focuses on the artist, but in the case of art games this attention shifts to the audience’s participation and interactions. For this research I have had to explore ideas behind art games: interactivity, performativity, and digital space. Through this research I have been able to expand on these theories by applying them to how they function within the context of art games. These terms can be used in various ways and this chapter will explain exactly how this thesis paper will be using them and the research behind those definitions.

Interactivity

Interactivity is a key characteristic of art games and without the interaction of the audience these games become useless and meaningless. However, interactivity is not a term that can easily be defined and is often used differently by scholars which can cause the issue of rendering the word useless. For this thesis, I need to clarify what interactivity means. The scholars Salen and Zimmerman define interactivity as “…one of those words that can mean everything and nothing at once.”41 If we use this word too loosely we can run into the problem of it losing meaning. Through further research of this term I noticed

how interactivity is often used as a synonym for control which is an essential distinction to make.

Aaron Smuts addresses this issue directly in his article, *What is Interactivity?*. In his article he defines interactivity by giving criteria it needs to satisfy: “Something is interactive if and only if it (1) is responsive, (2) does not completely control, (3) is not completely controlled, and (4) does not respond in a completely random fashion.” If we think of interactivity in these terms it is critical to note that interactivity is something completely dissimilar from control. This is a crucial distinction because when you can confidently predict the response of a thing, it is not interaction any more, but rather a form of control. This means we should not call everything we do on a computer an interaction because sometimes it is a form of control. For example, when someone searches for a recipe on Google’s search engine, it is not a form of interaction, but instead a form of control. This is because the user will not be surprised by the search engine’s findings because this is a predictable action. If we called everything we do on computers interactive the term becomes a meaningless term. We should not confuse interactivity with “mere audience activity.” Another way Smuts distinguishes between interactivity and control is through an example of a common misuse of the term interactive. As he writes, “Confusing interactivity with control is the central mistake underlying the counterintuitive suggestions that novels, TVs, and DVD players are interactive.” These

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 65.
45 Ibid., 68.
46 Ibid., 70.
examples exemplify control in the same way using Google’s search engine example does. Smuts definition of interactivity in comparison to control is an essential part of my research. This has made it possible for me to consider when playing art games or looking at a performance that has elements of an art game if the audience is interacting with them or merely controlling them. I have been able to take Smuts’, Salen’s and Zimmerman’s concerns about the misuse of this term into consideration when writing. This term is critical to research on art games and the usage of this word needs to be clear for proper understanding.

Through research about the term interactivity I have also been able to see how interaction is similar between art games and commercial games. Art games and commercial video games are created with the purpose of interactivity rather than control. However, without player interaction these games could not function as games. It is the fact that they respond in ways that are stimulating rather than completely predictive. In art games and commercial video games interactivity is essential for the game to create an experience. These kinds of games rely on creating an experience for the player. These objects would not fall into the category of games without the use of the players’ interactions.

After better understanding the term, interactivity, I began to contemplate ways that interactivity impacts art games. The article, *Art Games: Interactivity and the Embodied Gaze*, by Graham Coutler-Smith and Elizabeth Coutler-Smith outlined how digital games create a shift from the focus of the artist to the audience. In their article they clarify how “digital art can be described as immersive and embodied” and how art
games are under this umbrella of digital art.\textsuperscript{47} Since art games and digital art have a tendency to be described in this way, the Coulter-Smiths further illuminate that “…the artist is not a maker of precious objects but the designer of a gamespace which will involve the viewer in a significant interaction.”\textsuperscript{48} This is nothing new because Fluxus and performance art, in particular Allan Kaprow’s \textit{Happenings}, “were informed by the concept that given a putative deconstruction of the work of art as precious object ‘anyone could be an artist’…‘the recipient can become part of the creative activity.’”\textsuperscript{49} Giannachi also writes about these ideas in her book, \textit{Virtual Theatres: An Introduction}. She explains that “interactive art is a social phenomenon in which the way the viewer encounters the work of art \textit{is} the work of art. It is ‘the dialogue with the system that becomes artistic material’.”\textsuperscript{50} These ideas from these sources are a critical part of the formation of my thesis. This stimulated thoughts about how we could look at the audience in the same way that we look at performance art. These ideas influenced me to further these ideas to describe how the audience’s interactions could better be described through usage of performance art theory, in particular—the idea of performativity.

\textbf{Performativity}

To be able to apply ideas of performativity and performance art to my thesis, I explored ideas written by Philip Auslander in his book, \textit{Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture} and his article, \textit{The Internet} found in Meiling Cheng and Gabrielle H.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Coulter-Smith and Coulter-Smith, “Art Games: Interactivity and the Embodied Gaze,” 176.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 177.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Gabriella Giannachi, \textit{Virtual Theatres: An Introduction} (New York: Routledge, 2004), 28.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Cody’s book, *Reading Contemporary Performance: Theatricality Across Genres*. Cheng and Cody’s book was also integral to research behind performance. Additionally, Clio Unger’s article, ‘*SHOOT HIM NOW!!*’ *Anonymity, Accountability, and Online Spectatorship in Wafaa Bilal’s Domestic Tension* was critical for the discussion about how ‘liveness’ and the way this is mediated through the medium of the Internet can overlap and work together to convey larger ideas behind artworks.\(^5\)

These sources explain performance in terms of liveness and further specify how we can understand the Internet as a performance space. Auslander makes the point in the article *The Internet* that

> Although the Internet is actually an informal series of electronic connections among globally distributed computer networks, it is often described using implicitly spatial metaphors like cyberspace, surfing, and searching. Following this construction, the Internet can be understood as a performance space for both aesthetic and social performances.\(^6\)

Philip Auslander, furthers these ideas in his book, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. In this book he delves into the ideas of how performance is still possible through new technologies and that having a live body is not the only thing that dictates whether something is classified as performance. These ideas inspired my own notions of how the audience can be performing through a computer even in the privacy of their own home when someone interacts with an art game.

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Meiling Cheng’s and Gabrielle H. Cody’s book, *Reading Contemporary Performance: Theatricality Across Genres*, further these ideas. The authors discuss how there is a “new understanding of the audience in the digital age: as collaborators in the performance rather than just recipient of it.” These ideas further confirmed that the concept of the audience has shifted with digital art, and in particular with art games. As I further thought about this I began to think about how the Internet has a special impact on the audience’s performance. Auslander writes about this clearly by describing these interactions as social performances. He writes, “The construction and deployment of an avatar is a kind of social performance, a “presentation of self”, to use Erving Goffman’s phrase.” These ideas exemplify how the Internet is a special social space due to the anonymity it gives people. According to Cody “in digital technologies that feature avatars and virtual environments, the audience may nevertheless have a significant impact on the way a performance unfolds; such a disembodied mise-en-scène creates a kind of hybrid spectator, or spectactor, a performer/spectator.” Unger considers how anonymity played a factor in Wafaa Bilal’s performance, *Domestic Tension* and how interacting with media is a “normative experience” in which we view art and even for everyday tasks. Unger writes that “life in the digital society has become so irrevocably entwined with technology and mediatization that an analysis of spectatorship always has to consider these contexts.” These contexts are unavoidable today. Technology is engrained in our

53 Ibid., 133.
54 Ibid., 137.
55 Unger, ‘*SHOOT HIM NOW!!*’, 204.
56 Ibid., 204.
everyday lives thus we cannot ignore it. It only makes sense that art will embrace these new spaces as they become more accessible for everyone. Creators and artists use them to their advantages to communicate their desired messages or to simply create aesthetic experiences for spectators through our many screens that we encounter in our day-to-day lives.\footnote{As Henry Jenkin’s states in his book, “Convergence Culture”; “Welcome to convergence culture, where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways.” Henry Jenkins, \textit{Convergence Culture}, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.} These ideas are central to my research because the artworks I have been examining are mediated through our interactions with our computers, and our interactions act as a type of performance. These performances and interactions are integral to these artworks because without them, they are incomplete.

These ideas about digital space and how users interact with it written by Auslander, Unger, Cheng and Cody forced my writing to consider how the Internet and digital mediation impacts art games and performances. These scholars highlight how the Internet can function as a social space and let me further these ideas by considering how new technologies expand the possibilities of the audience and the artist. We have the new ability to watch live performance from the comfort of our own homes. When you watch a live performance through media, like a computer or television, these performances are still live just mediated through digital technologies. Additionally, these ideas led me to considering how the audience functions in relation to digital art. The audience or spectators of art are typically considered passive viewers. Nevertheless, this changes...
drastically in interactive digital art. The audience is no longer passive but instead a co-creator and critical to the activation of the art games.

**Digital Space**

Digital space is an essential concept to understand when considering art games and digital art. This is because *most* art games exist on the Internet in virtual space. The Internet is a complex space because it is a real space but is not a real physical space. It creates a divide between “virtual and the ‘real’.”\(^{58}\) The context of interactive digital art games impact these artworks by using the divide as a way of connecting the digital to the “real” world through the physical interactions of the audience/player.

So, what is virtual space and what does it entail? Simply put, virtual space, is not a physical space. Instead it is the metaphorical space that we experience through our screens, digital projections, and other technologies. When we are experiencing this space, we are simply sitting at our computer chairs or even in bed.\(^{59}\) The essential factor is that we are experiencing something more than just staring at a screen. When we are playing games, we are experiencing and interacting with a digital environment through the medium of our computers.

To understand this complex, metaphorical space, Sherry Turkle’s chapter in *The New Media Reader*, titled *Video Games and Computer Holding Power*, Steve Dixon’s large collection titled *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* and Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* were

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59 Ibid., 462.
all integral to understanding what digital space entails. Turkle describes virtual space as “a space where the physical machine and the physical player do not exist.”

I found it helpful to think of this space similar as literary space in a novel, space created when painting on a canvas, or the mental space in which you dream. These are not real, physical places but still function like physical spaces. Henri Lefebvre describes this sort of abstract space as “the space of the philosophers” rather than “the space of people who deal with material things.” These virtual spaces “are unique, purely symbolic spaces, created through the play of information and mathematical calculations.” So, while these spaces are “purely symbolic,” these spaces still feel like real spaces. Dixon’s book furthers this explanation by explaining that “if the virtual is fake, cyberspace is a virtual space because it creates a sense of place, even though it does not exist physically; and the Internet provides the experience of virtuality because it transports the user into the non-existing territory of cyberspace.” While this space is abstract, it is helpful to understand how it functions as a space to better understand how our interactions with it impact the artworks. These definitions of space and digital space helped me think of this space as a constructed environment. Art games are within virtual space and create new environments through coding or modification of already existing games. When players interact with these games, they may be interacting with their computer, but the interaction goes further than that including the virtual environment. Through players’ interaction

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63 Ibid., 463.
64 Ibid., 23.
with the computer, they are in turn are interacting with the game space. The computer becomes the messenger, translating players’ physical communication with their computers into interactions within the virtual space. By better understanding what digital space entails, it makes it easier to explain how our interactions with computers and these spaces could be considered a type of performance. This kind of environment acts like a physical space in that it directs the player’s actions through the design of the space.

**Conclusion**

For my thesis, theories behind interactivity, performativity and digital space are all essential to understand exactly how art games function and how their necessity for audience participation impacts examination of these works. The three artworks that are discussed as case studies rely on the audience’s participation, interactions, and performance for these works to display their full meanings. Art works that exhibit traits of art games rely on the audience to interact with them for spectators to understand why they were created. These terms work together to examine this genre of games, art games. Through better understanding interactivity, performativity, and digital space, my research points to how all three of these terms are vital in comprehending how these three art games use these terms in various ways while still embracing elements of art games. These theories also outline how audience participation and interactivity with these interactive digital artworks function as ways to make the spectators co-creators rather than passive observers. Through the audience’s interactions and performances through digital space we begin to see how art can shift from the focus of the artist as “maker of
precious objects,” but instead to “the designer of a gamespace which will involve the viewer in a significant interaction.”

Chapter 3: Case Study I: Pippin Barr’s The Artist is Present

Introduction

This chapter will look at Pippin Barr’s art game, The Artist is Present (2011) in comparison to Marina Abramović’s original performance of The Artist is Present (2010). Barr’s game is not just a recreation or simulation of sitting across from Abramović and looking into her eyes, but a recreation of the whole experience from going to the museum—during actual museum hours, buying your ticket, to waiting hours in line to sit in front of Marina Abramović’s avatar. This chapter will examine how a game can mimic elements of a live performance and become its own work of art rather than a recreation.

In Barr’s “exquisitely boring game,” as described by Kyle Chayka, players can only play when the actual Museum of Modern Art in New York is open. Players cannot go in and play the game if it is not during the hours of the real museum. Next the players buy their ticket, then get into the back of the line and wait to reach Abramović’s avatar. The waiting in line is the trickiest part. Gamers must gradually move their avatar forward as the line slowly moves forward. If they do not move forward with the line, they will get kicked out of line and must move to the back of the line. It takes hours to make it to the front of the line, not just a few hours, but from five to six hours.

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66 This is actually not the first digital recreation of a Marina Abramović artwork. Eva and Franco Mattes re-stages Imponderabilia (1977) and Rest Energy (1980) on the Internet site, Second Life.
68 It is important to note here that Barr’s game was not intended to be an accurate recreation, but rather more of a joke.
Barr’s game is a recreation and digital simulation of Marina Abramović’s performance, but the experiences are quite different. Additionally, I will explain how the audience becomes essential for the success of either work. Through these discussions, I intend to expose how interactive art games and performance art have a lot more in common than first meets the eye.

**Pippin Barr’s Background**

To better comprehend why Pippin Barr makes these games, it is useful to look at his life. His professional life has made a large impact on the kinds of games he makes. Pippin Barr has a Ph.D. and an M.Sc. from Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand. Barr’s Ph.D. research was about video game values and his M.Sc. was about user-interface metaphors. Currently, Barr is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Design and Computation Arts at Concordia University in Montréal. He is also the associate director of the TAG Lab, part of the Milieux Institute for Arts, Culture, and Technology.

Barr’s games are free and can be played directly on the browser without downloading. The driving force behind Barr continuing to make more games is as he explains, “…I enjoy it and I find that there are certain game ideas that I wish existed. In

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70 Ibid.
the absence of anyone else making those ideas, which are probably more or less peculiar to myself, I feel I should be the one making them. It’s very satisfying.” His desire to make these games comes from being an educator and part of academia. Making games is not his source of income, but instead more like a hobby that ties into his academic interests. This separates his games from other commercial games. He is not creating games to support himself, but instead as a way to educate others and as a form of entertainment for himself.

His games challenge traditional understandings and expectations of what makes a video game by creating games that focus on ideas like boredom, time, and the art world. For most of his games, there is no winning in a traditional sense but instead the games confront the player to think deeper than the surface of the game. In these games, the player is often turned into an active spectator rather than a passive viewer. For example, Barr’s game *It is as if you were doing work* (2017), takes mundane tasks from an office job and makes it into a game. (See Figures 5-8) The player must interact with the fake desktop to move forward in the game. These tasks include writing a fake e-mail, writing a word document and clicking on various pop-up boxes. The player is required to interact with these various tasks to receive a promotion in the game. The player can passively watch the tasks appear but to move the game forward the player must actively participate.

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71 Barr decided that he needed to start making games when he was assigned to teach an experimental game design course at the IT University of Copenhagen. As Barr explains, “The pressure to put my money where my mouth was and actually make games myself instead of only talking about them got the better of me!” He continues to make games today and tries to make about ten games a year. “A Fantastic Angle: Pippin Barr,” Electron Dance, accessed February 5, 2018, http://www.electrondance.com/a-fantastic-angle-pippin-barr/.
This game takes ordinary, boring tasks and creates commentary on how we can feel productive even when we are doing fake work. These tasks are easy and useless, yet there is a feeling of satisfaction from completing them. Another way he forces the viewer to become an active viewer can be seen in his game *The Digital Marina Abramovic Institute*. This game takes methods Marina Abramović uses to prepare for durational performances and puts them within a digital game format. This game requires the players full commitment for an hour. Barr made the decision to have players hold down the shift button throughout their whole game experience to capture their full attention. The viewer cannot finish the game if they lift their finger off the shift key. This aspect forces the viewer to always be conscious of playing the game by requiring their full attention throughout the whole game and is a consistent trait reflected in many of Barr’s games.

**Marina Abramović’s and Her Performance *The Artist is Present* (2010)**

Marina Abramović has been a performance artist for over forty years and is often described as the grandmother of performance art.\(^2\) She was born November 30\(^{th}\), 1946 in Belgrade, Serbia.\(^3\) She studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1970, and for her graduate studies she attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Croatia in 1972.\(^4\) Abramović’s performances often require the audience’s participation and pushes her body to its physical limits. Her performance *Rhythm O* exemplifies these features. This piece was

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\(^4\) Ibid.
performed in the Galleria Studio Mora in Naples early in 1975, she let the audience dictate the performance. James Westcott describes the work as,

For six hours, Abramović simply stood still and allowed herself to be manipulated by the public in any way they chose, using any of seventy-two items laid out on a table, which included a fork, a bottle of perfume, sugar, an axe, a bell, a feather, chains, needles, scissors, a pen, a book, honey, a hammer, a saw, a lamb bone, a newspaper, grapes, olive oil, a Polaroid camera, a rosemary bush, a mirror, a rose, lipstick, a large gold necklace, a bowler hat, and a pistol (and a bullet).75

Her work as a performance artist shifted when she met the artist Ulay (Uwe Laysiepen). For many years this duo created many performances together from 1975 to 1988.76 Such as, Nightsea Crossing (1984), Rest Energy (1980), and Incision (1978).77 These works relied on their relationship together and reflected it as well. Their works together were not a competition, but instead about their relationship together and pushing each other to be better performers. Westcott describes it as being “about relation, pushing each other to go harder and faster and longer in order to break through to the bulletproof performance state of mind they both loved.”78

Eventually they split up but Abramović continued to create works independently. Her art continued to push the boundaries and endurance of her body. Her work is often performed for long durations, such as Rhythm O and many of her other Rhythm

75 James Westcott, When Marina Abramović (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 73-76.
76 Ibid., 83.
77 Nightsea Crossing consisted of 22 performances that took place between 1981 and 1987. Nightsea Crossing involved fasting and silence both during and prior to the performance. It focused on seven daily hours sitting motionless across from each other. Rest Energy consisted of Ulay and Abramović holding their weight on bow and arrow with the arrow pointed at Abramović’s heart. There were microphones over their hearts so they would hear their own heartbeats. This piece focused on trust. Incision has a naked Ulay run toward Abramović, who was wearing clothes. An elastic rope would pull Ulay back and the two would scream at each other. Ibid., 83-86.
78 Westcott, When Marina Abramović, 123.
performances. Her work as a performance artist are critical for the history of performance art. In 2010, she performed *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. *The Artist is Present* required Abramović to sit motionless across from another chair. The other chair is where audience members would sit and stare into Abramović’s eyes.\(^{79}\) This took place in the atrium of MoMA, where there was a square taped off with white tape, the area was well lit, and Abramović and the two chairs and table were placed in the center. (See Figure 10) This exhibit went from March until May. Abramović stared into people’s eyes for a total of 736 hours and 30 minutes. There were 850,000 participants who sat across from her.\(^{80}\) Abramović sat motionless staring at each person occasionally moving her hand to her heart. There was one exception to this, when Ulay sat across from her she reached out to hold his hands. (See Figure 11)

*The Artist is Present* may look effortless but once you begin to deliberate on the discipline it takes to sit still for seven to eight hours straight, Abramović’s willpower becomes evident.\(^{81}\) This performance was difficult because of the duration. The duration of seven to eight hours a day, in addition to the duration of her attending every day the museum was open for three months played a large role in making this an endurance piece. No matter how she felt that day she had to perform the work. The actions of this

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\(^{81}\) For example, Abramović and Ulay did a similar piece, *Nightsea Crossing*, which involved the two artists staring motionless at each other for seven daily hours. These two performances aesthetically look very similar. After performing this piece many times, Ulay slowly became weaker from fasting, while Abramović seemed to get stronger. Ulay eventually quit the performance due to losing so much weight and the pain he was experiencing from his boney body sitting still for hours on end. Abramović continued the performance without him.

performance require more energy than it appears. As Abramović explains in an interview with Iwona Blazwick,

…performance really has this kind of power to change not just the performer’s life but also the one who is witnessing the performance. I truly believe that only long durational work has that kind of power because if you do a performance for one hour, two hours, five hours—you can still pretend. You can still act. You can still be someone else. But if you do something for three months, it’s life itself.\textsuperscript{82}

Originally, she did not expect someone to always be in the seat—instead she thought there would be long moments of her staring at an empty seat.\textsuperscript{83} But instead 850,000 people sat across from her in the three months she was at MoMA. The audience impacted this piece by always having someone sitting across from her. People would sleep over night in front of the museum in hopes to get a ticket in line to \textit{hopefully} sit across from her. Many people waited in line for hours and still did not get to sit across from her.\textsuperscript{84}

This aspect highlights the extent people will go to for art celebrities or other large events. For example, thousands of people go out on Black Friday for shopping sales. \textit{The Artist is Present}’s performance could be looked at in similar terms. People will wait for extreme lengths for events or items they deem worthy.

The performance was not without its critics. Nato Thompson and Amelia Jones point how Abramović uses her performance art to play into our capitalistic society. Jones demonstrates that Abramović is always made very clear guidelines about how her work is

\textsuperscript{82} Marina Abramović, interview by Iwona Blazwick, \textit{The Artist is Present Marina Abramović interviewed by Iwona Blazwick}, Art Monthly-London, 2011.
\textsuperscript{83} Marina Abramović et al., \textit{Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present}, DVD, directed by Matthew Akers (2012, Chicago: Music Box Films, 2012), videorecording.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
to be bought, sold, and reperformed. While economically this makes sense for Abramović, this becomes problematic because it strays away from the original intent of performance art. Originally performance art was created as a way for artists to produce works of art that could not be owned and could only be viewed completely at the moment of its liveness. Abramović has changed this structure by creating a brand name for herself. Adair Rounthwaite expresses how she finds Abramović problematic due to her “celebrity, spectacle and Western decadence.” Rounthwaite explains that due to Abramović’s celebrity status, it is troubling that it seems that she is exploiting this for capital. Her celebrity status and exploitation of it for profit becomes problematic in the world of performance art since she is a key figure in the history of performance art since she is simultaneously shifting performance art into a commodity that can “generate considerable economic value.” This challenging implication in performance art is addressed in Phelan’s statement,

Only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.

Through use of her celebrity status and using her performance art as a commodity, she has made her own work problematic.

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86 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 462.
Regardless of the criticism Abramović has received, *The Artist is Present* is one of the most famous and well-known pieces of contemporary performance artworks. About one year after her performance, artist, scholar, and game designer, Pippin Barr, recreated this performance in an 8-bit or pixelated style game that creates its own commentary on her performance through humor. This game solely focuses on creating social commentary on Abramović’s performance *The Artist is Present* rather than the whole exhibition.

**Pippin Barr’s The Artist is Present**

Barr’s game, *The Artist is Present*, was created when he was teaching a course about experimental game design and Marina Abramović was brought up in a lecture about forms of experimental art from various genres.⁹⁰ As he researched more about Abramović’s *The Artist is Present*, Barr decided it would be funny to make a game version of her performance.⁹¹ (See Figure 9)

The game eventually got some attention mainly because people found it humorous.⁹² Barr’s game got enough attention that Abramović played it and reached out to him to discuss possible collaboration. An ironic twist to her playing this game is that

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⁹¹ Barr explained in an interview with *Format*, “It’s the stupidest thing that you could possibly make a game about.” This points to how the creation of this game is not completely serious, but rather a kind of tongue-in-cheek recreation. He has also done other games on other famous artists such as Donald Judd and Gregor Scheider to highlight questions about navigating digital space. Evans, “Pippin Barr Makes Computer Games About Boredom, Time, and Marina Abramovic.”

⁹² Ibid.
she never actually made it to the front of the queue.\textsuperscript{93} Even though she did not make it through the game, she found the game to be funny—as it was intended.\textsuperscript{94}

This game, like many of Barr’s games, comes off as anti-climactic due to the way they challenge traditional modes of gaming. However, once we consider why Barr is challenging our perception of what makes a game this game becomes much more thought provoking. This game is unique in the way that it simultaneously comments on performance art, the art world, and games in general. It creates commentary on how performance documentation differs from the live performance and on how re-creations of performance art can exist outside of performance art. In Barr’s \textit{The Artist is Present} game the players are confronted with the question of why a game would be designed like this. Initially this seems wrong. Once you consider what the game is about—is it wrong to have to go to the digital museum at the same times at the real one is open; or is it that strange to have to wait in line in a game that is a recreation of a museum experience?

These aspects of the game make the player very aware that they are playing in a game environment. There is a focus on time and the player must devote a good bit of time, 5-7 hours, if they want to complete this game. Additionally, this game challenges traditional rules by confronting what it means to win a game. When you ‘win’ the game, you make it to Marina Abramović’s avatar—which is just the player staring at their computer screen.

\textsuperscript{93} This is ironic because she is well-known for her endurance performance art but did not have the patience to make it through a game that re-enacts her performance.
\textsuperscript{94} After playing his game, Abramović reached out to Pippin Barr to collaborate on creating the Digital Marina Abramović Institute. Which is a game that recreates many of her training techniques and a performance.
Evans, “Pippin Barr Makes Computer Games.”
Barr’s game explores the consequences behind creating a reperformance in a new medium. Adrien Heathfield notes, “Performance art is now variously manifested in global documentary, archival and discursive re-presentations, so much so that we might say that it carries with(in) itself the means of his historicization.”

Barr’s game serves as a re-presentation of Abramović’s performance. He highlights contrasting elements in his performance that were not the focus in the original. Barr’s game gives commentary on the original by creating a new art work.

Barr explains that his games are short, minimalistic, and frustrating to challenge standard rules of traditional computer games. His games are not intended to be boring, but instead he attempts to force the player to change their perspective on what to expect from a game. By making his games this way and challenging our perception of what makes a game are the essential traits that place his games under the genre of art games rather than a commercial video game. Holmes defines art games as a way to “describe an interactive work, usually humorous, by a visual artist that does one or more of the following: challenges cultural stereotypes, offers meaningful social or historical critique, or tells a story in a novel way.” Barr’s game, *The Artist is Present*, offers a humorous

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97 Pippin Barr explains, “They’re short, minimalistic and frustrating, but they’re definitely not suppose to being “boring”…I want to make games that controvert the standard rules…Games you can’t win, games where you just have to wait for a long time, games where you win but it’s not satisfying…These games can be boing if you’re not prepared to embrace a different perspective on things—but if you are prepared to do so, I think they can be quite interesting experiences.” Conditt, “Pippin Barr’s Philosophy of Developing ‘Curious’ Games.”
98 Holmes, “Arcade Classics Spawn Art.”
critique of Abramović’s famous performance while simultaneously commentating on what constitutes a game. Barr’s game does this by forcing the player to ‘play’ waiting in line for hours. In this game waiting in line serves as a reperformance of the audience’s experiences at the original performance by Abramović. Barr clarifies in an interview that this kind of game lets the player in on the joke. He explains that when “You can play it and almost immediately get it, and once you’re in on it, any of the frustrations of the game-as-game kind of go away—you’re an insider now.” This is not just any game, it is an experience that lets the player in on a punchline when you play the game. All these characteristics of Barr’s game, from the aesthetics, content, subject matter, and the type of playability are all key aspects that make his game part of the genre of art games.

Pippin Barr’s *The Artist is Present* Vs. Marina Abramović’s *The Artist is Present*

These two artworks may have the same title and one is a reperformance of the other, but these two artworks create emphasis on opposing aspects. The only other similarity is the time of waiting in line people experienced to reach the chair across from Abramović. Even then, Barr’s game does not completely simulate the lengths at which audience members went to when waiting to see Abramović. Many audience members at the live performance of *The Artist is Present* slept on the sidewalks outside of the museum to better their chances of sitting in front of the artist. Even though Barr’s game does not fully simulate the lengths that audience members went to in hopes of sitting across from Abramović, he gives the players a taste of this waiting experience. His use of time is rather tongue-in-cheek because it makes for a tedious game. For Abramović’s

99 Conditt, “Pippin Barr’s Philosophy of Developing ‘Curious’ Games.”
performance, people waited to sit in front of a famous artist and had expectations of a live-changing art experience due to Abramović’s celebrity status. For Barr’s game, there a digital avatar of a celebrity as a replacement for a real celebrity’s body. Barr’s game is not about the experiencing her celebrity aura, but instead about the duration of waiting in line which ends with an exchange of a moment with a digital avatar of a celebrity.

Time is also a key element for both works because much of Abramović’s performance art centers around duration and endurance. There is a stimulating shift that happens in both works with time. Abramović is the center of her performance since she is the one who sat still for hours on end for three months. However, the audience members who wait to sit in front of her end up performing their own endurance work. They wait numerous hours, many arriving the night before or early in the morning to stand in line with hopes of getting sit in the chair across from Marina Abramović. There is no pause button in Barr’s game. You must pay attention to move your avatar forward or else you will be kicked out of line. This was a conscious decision made by Barr. If you attended the real performance, there were no pause or fast-forward buttons audience members could push.

Pippin Barr’s game is most successful in the way it forces the players to do mundane tasks that they would have been required to do if they had attended the original, real performance. These elements make this game more than simply a game but an experience. Barr’s game creates emphasis on the audience’s experience rather than Abramović’s experience as the artist. The game highlights how the audience experienced their own durational performance at the live event and in his game. Barr’s game also
creates commentary on reperformances. They are never the same as the original but always put weight on the essentiality of being present in the moment. Both the live performance and game version of *The Artist is Present* require audience members to be aware of what they are experiencing. Auslander clarifies “the crucial relationship is on the one between the document and the performance but the one between the document and its audience.”100 The audience for both works function as the final puzzle piece thus completing each artwork.

However, there are many elements of the real performance that do not translate to the game. The other computer-created characters are all silent, standing still in a single file line. There is no interaction with others at the museum, it is simply waiting in line to stare into the digital avatar of Abramović. As documented in the HBO documentary, *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, at the real performance there was a constant mutter between audience members waiting and/or observing. Another key difference is the ability to experiment within Barr’s game. Players can run into people and get kicked out and can try to break the rules without any serious or real consequences. Whereas at the real performance audience members could not do that. Anyone who did anything remotely outside of the rules were forced to leave. In the game, yes, players may have to start over, but can replay as many times as they would like to. One aspect the game lacks is when you reach Marina Abramović it is less than climatic than the live performance at MoMA thus lacking the touch of staring into the real celebrity-status artist’s eyes. (See

Figure 12) This difference is critical to how the game focuses on waiting in line rather than sitting in front of the artist, like in the real performance. The experience of witnessing a live event in person is always different than experiencing it through remediation. Remediation refers to “the representation of one medium in another.”

Yes, the event or experience through your television or computer screen is still live but it lacks the physicality of a live event. When we video chat with a friend overseas this experience is different than when we talk to our friend in person. They are similar experiences but are not the same. Barr’s game focuses on the live experience of the audience while Abramović ‘s performance focuses on herself.

While many people had emotional responses to sitting in front of Abramović during her live performance, other people did not feel this emotional connection. As art historian Amelia Jones describes her experience as feeling as

the object of myriad individual and photographic gazes (including hers), and the experience overall was very strongly one of participating in a spectacle—not an emotional or energetically charged interpersonal relation, but a simulation of relational exchange with others (not just the artist, but other spectators, the guards, the “managers” of the event).

While Jones’ did not have an emotional connection with the work, she still felt the impact from the spectacle of the performance. Barr’s *The Artist is Present* emphasizes Jones’ arguments by placing the focus on the participation of the audience and the parameters of the experience. In Barr’s game, players feel neither an emotional response nor like they are part of a spectacle. This is because when people play a computer game they are

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typically alone or only with a few people. Abramović’s performance manufactured the experience of art authenticity, while Barr’s game creates the whole environment, including the players’ avatar.

While Barr’s game is a digital recreation of her performance it lacks the liveness of the real performance. As Peggy Phelan argues, “Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does it becomes something other than performance.”

Therefore, Barr’s game is not successful at recreating Abramović’s performance instead it is successful at creating a new performance—the audience’s. His game requires a player to play the game. Once the player starts to play it is up to the player how long they will participate. Some people may only make it to the closed museum while others may play for five hours and reach the avatar of Abramović. The audience is in control of the artwork at this point instead of the artist.

Barr’s game let the players experience a kind of mixed reality performance. Mixed reality performance refers to “a term that is intended to express both their mixing of the real and virtual as well as their combination of live performance and interactivity.” There are two performances happening within Barr’s games. These are the performance of the player’s avatar in the digital realm and the performance of the

105 Ibid., 1.
physical player which includes reacting to what happens on the screen and the physical clicking of the keyboard, mouse or controller. As Matthew Causey explains,

> It is important to realize that performance, like the body and its subjectivity which enacts the performative, has been extended, challenged and reconfigured due to its position in the space of technology. Performance has taken on the ontology of the technological.\(^{106}\)

These aspects transform the viewer from a passive audience member to an active performer. Causey further clarifies that through technology “the viewer can enter the work of art, be part of it, as well as interact with it…the viewer can double their presence and be both in the real and the virtual environment simultaneously.”\(^{107}\) Therefore, when someone is playing one of these games they are performing in two ways simultaneously—in the physical world and digital world.

Pippin Barr’s game and Marina Abramović’s performance are fundamentally very different through their use of body versus digital media and through what the audience gets from each experience. However, I believe that both works reflect the importance of the onlookers. In both works the audience also performs an active role by letting them have the choice to interact or not. The audience become a co-creator in both works. Andrea Zapp proposes that in relation to interactive art experiences that “the former audience is lifted out of their seat of distanced contemplation and placed in the limelight of subjective physical involvement: addressed as a storyboard controller, co-author or

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107 Ibid.
self-performer.” While Zapp is primarily referring to digital interactive artworks, I find that this statement rings true for live participatory performance art as well.

Abramović’s performance could still exist without the audience but the audience’s participation is what made this performance into a famous spectacle. People travelled from all over the world to sit across from her. Previously in 2007, she “reenacted five seminal performance works by her peers, dating from 1960’s to the 70’s, and two of her own, interpreting them as one would a musical score.” These performances put her work back in the limelight, thus why her name alone attracted so many audience members. By reenacting and reinterpreting five works by her peers, she brought attention back to her own work as a performance artist. The range of reactions from extremely positive to repulsion played a critical role in Abramović’s performance’s fame. In the case of Pippin Barr’s game, no audience would have made the game obsolete since all games rely on an interactive audience. The player is never passive when playing a game and always active no matter how mundane which moves the game forward through their digital and physical actions.

These two artworks differ from each other vastly while still maintaining parallels between each other. Their different uses of media become key in relaying their opposing experiences to the audience. However, Marina Abramović’s fame is essential in both works. Her fame is what made her performance, The Artist is Present, the famous

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controversial art work it is today and made Pippin Barr’s game even possible. Without her fame, it is very unlikely he would have made this game.

**Conclusion**

Pippin Barr successfully creates games that not only challenges our perception of what a game should be but also forces us to be aware of our performance as a player. The awareness his games create, particularly his game *The Artist is Present*, has similarities to the emotions and feelings created by Marina Abramović’s performance. In these works of art, the audience plays a key role with their active participation. Barr’s game initially seems like it is intended to mimic Abramović’s performance, but after playing the game the audience realizes that this game is an experience of its own. These works exemplify how the use of various media can change the understanding of an artwork.

The next chapter will look at another art game called *The Path* created by the artistic duo Tale of Tales. This game is also an art game but in ways dissimilar to Barr’s *The Artist is Present*. *The Path* focuses on storying-telling and beautiful imagery to convey their messages instead of how *The Artist is Present* uses humor, time, and boredom to express its overarching themes.
Chapter 4: Case Study II: Tale of Tales’ The Path

Introduction

*The Path* uses story-telling and dream-like imagery to convey their ideas to the players. The story-telling in *The Path* draws from the fairy tale, *Little Red Riding Hood*, to retell a familiar story through an interactive videogame. Tale of Tales uses their videogame to let players create their own experience through their exploration of gameplay and the digital environment.

Tale of Tales Background—Who Are They?

In 2003, Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn, founded the videogame development studio Tale of Tales. These two artists do not simply focus on creating video games to make a living, but rather want to “create elegant and emotionally rich art…as artists we focus on beauty and joy.” While they do make money from their games, they try to keep the prices low for the average person. As they explain in their mission statement, “We want to create art for people. That is why we distribute our work online, and cheaply.”

Harvey and Samyn were both trained as artists. Originally, Harvey attended Parson’s in New York with a focus on sculpture, while Samyn studied graphic design in Ghent, Belgium at Sint Lucas. They have collaborated since they met in 1999. At first,

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110 Ibid.  
111 Ibid.  
112 Ibid.  
113 They did not meet through their formal educations, but more appropriately online through their memberships of an online artist collective around the hell.com domain.
they worked on website design and Internet art together, but as their collaboration
became more interactive they moved their focus to creating video games in 2002.\textsuperscript{114} However recently in 2015, Harvey and Samyn left the world of creating these video
games to “devote their lives to the muses.”\textsuperscript{115} Today Harvey studies traditional figure
drawing while Samyn has focused his energy on classical guitar while living together in
Ghent, Belgium.

An essential aspect to note is that Tale of Tales is solely Auriea Harvey and
Michaël Samyn, but this duo has an extensive history of collaboration. This is not
surprising considering that they started as collaborators before forming their studio. On
their webpage they explain that when creating video games, they used this as an
opportunity to join forces with other talented people that they respect. Their collaborators
would help with anything from the sounds, music, vocals, character design,
choreography, concept art, the multiplayer engine, to the logo. The way Tale of Tales
explains creating their art is different than most commercial game companies. This aspect
and their artistic backgrounds are the fundamental reasons their games are made the way
they are. Tale of Tales does hope to make money off their games, but they are not willing
to compromise their original intent and find collaborators to work with who can help
create their artistic visions.

\textsuperscript{114} Harvey and Samyn, “Tale of Tales: About.”
\textsuperscript{115} Part of the reason they no longer continue to create video games is because of the difficulty of making
independent video games and still making a large enough profit support themselves.
Ibid.
The Path—Description of the Game

Before describing the game in detail, a brief description of the original fairy-tale of Little Red Riding Hood is necessary since there are many ties between the story and the game. Little Red Riding Hood is a story that has been reinterpreted over the course of time mainly from the 1697 version by Charles Perrault (1628-1703) and the Grimm brothers’ version published in 1812. The core of the story remains similar throughout the various versions by having cruel, sexual, and tragic themes relating to Little Red Riding Hood’s rape and/or murder. It is about the character Little Red Riding Hood being sent to her grandmother’s house by her mother with a basket of treats. The young girl’s mother warns her to stay on the path and to stay focused, no dilly-dallying. Once Little Red Riding Hood is in the woods, she meets a wolf and she tells him what she is doing. The wolf takes advantage of this situation and beats the little girl to her grandmother’s house. Upon the wolf’s arrival to her grandmother’s house, he eats grandmother and wears her clothing. When the young girl arrives at grandmother’s house the wolf attempts to deceive her by dressing like her grandmother. Little Red Riding Hood is suspicious of her grandmother’s appearance. This is the point in the story where the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood have their famous exchange, “Grandmother dear, what big teeth you have!” “The better to eat you with!”—then she is eaten, eaten and saved, or the wolf is killed depending on the storyteller. This story relays the message of the importance of obedience and punishment. Catherine Orenstein suggests

118 Sarah Bonner, Visualising Red Riding Hood.
[Red Riding Hood’s] tale speaks to enduring themes of family, morality, growing up, growing old, of lighting out into the world, and the relationships between sexes. It brings together archetypal opposites, through which it explores the boundaries of culture, class, and especially, what it means to be a man or woman. The girl and the wolf inhabit a place, call it the forest or call it the human psyche, where the spectrum of human sagas converges and where their social and cultural meanings play out.\textsuperscript{119}

Many feminist readings of this story point out how it is “an unfortunate source of negative stereotypes.”\textsuperscript{120} This oral tale transformed from a story about “the initiation of a young girl into a tragic one of violence in which the girl is blamed for her own violation.”\textsuperscript{121} These transformations made the young girl into an object rather than a character or person. Her character has also served as “a warning to children, particularly girls, as a symbol and embodiment of what happens if they are disobedient and careless.”\textsuperscript{122} These aspects are problematic because it perpetuates ideas of rape culture. It does this by supporting the ideas that women should not walk alone. This story suggests that if something were to happen to lone female, for example being raped, it would be the woman’s fault because she was ‘asking for it’ by walking alone. Over time, this story has transformed to be less overtly violent, sexual, and tragic, but still the story preserves the image of how young girls should act and behave. \textit{The Path} is a game that transforms this story into an interactive game for audiences to experience and draw their own conclusions about the themes emanated through the gameplay and digital environment.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 17.
The Path is a Little Red Riding Hood inspired horror videogame for the computer that was released to the public on March 18, 2009. In this game, there are six different gothic Lolita style girl characters to play with: Ginger, Rose, Scarlet, Ruby, Robin and Carmen. Tale of Tales designed each girl uniquely in their design, from their hair, clothing, accessories, and handwriting. (See Figure 13) The six girls were designed to represent various aspects of a female’s young life from ages 9 to 19. This time frame of ages is representational of the ages leading up to womanhood. At the opening sequence you are in a room with all these girls around a table. (See Figure 14) Here the player picks which character they would like to start the game with. Each character represents a different chapter so eventually the player interacts with all of them to complete all six chapters.

Once the player picks the girl they would like to start with, the game takes the player to a path in the woods. (Figure 15) Here instructions are given, “Go to Grandmother’s House, Stay on the Path.” On either side of the path there is forest that players can explore. Here the player uses the keyboard’s arrow keys to direct the character’s movement. While the game is called, The Path, staying on the path leaves the player with a rather boring game and an unsuccessful ending. If the audience stays on the path eventually they end up at grandmother’s house. The player must walk through the

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123 They classified it has a horror game for selling purposes, but really the game is less of a horror story than the original Little Red Riding Hood. Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem,” accessed February 2, 2018, http://tale-of-tales.com/blog/the-path-post-mortem/.
124 Tale of Tales explains that this style was chosen because this was a trendy style at the time and they felt that this style worked well with who they hired to make the soundtrack, cult rock star Jarboe. Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
125 Ibid.
house and find grandmother in a bed and curl up next to her. It is not clear if grandmother is alive or not. Then the player is given a score (see Figure 16). When I tried to play this way, I received a failing score with none of the required items collected. This indicates that to receive a better score, players must wander off the path. After learning that staying on the path is not the correct way to play, the player is likely to experiment with wandering off the path. This forces the player to go outside of the given rules of the game. This immediately teaches the player that the game requires your own decisions rather than following what they are told to do by the instructions. This is something that is not uncommon for Tale of Tales’ games. In most of their nine games, the instructions originally given are not the intended way to play the game. Tale of Tales’ likes to confront the players by challenging them to experiment with the game outside of the written rules.

As someone plays the game, there is beautiful but eerie music playing. Occasionally the screen glitches which adds to the uncanny aura the game exhibits. When the player presses shift and the forward arrow button, the character runs. When running, the music changes to different music that indicates suspense and paw prints appear on the screen as the camera pans back from the character. As the player strays from the path, the screen becomes darker. The characters move slowly—almost painfully slowly when the character is not running. This lets the player realize this game is not about speed, but instead the interactive experience with the digital environment. As the player wanders through the forest, the characters run into various objects that can be collected. For

126 This screenshot is of a passing score, it is meant to simply demonstrate what the score screen looks like.
instance, there are 144 gold clovers and as they are collected the game keeps count. (See Figure 17) As players explore the forest, players find other objects and scenes. Some objects, like a knife or flowers, players can collect and add to their character’s basket. However, as I played this game, I realized that the objects react depending on which girl you are playing as. It becomes clear that to collect all the objects, the player needs to play as all the girls.

The girls are not the only characters in this game. Since this game draws from the story, Little Red Riding Hood, each girl has her own wolf, or alter-ego. The wolves are not designed to look like a typical wolf, instead they were designed as ordinary men whose appearance is not so large that they would read as overpowering the girls. Tale of Tales explain, “the wolves need to be ordinary thus to raise a question in the player’s mind about who is exactly in control of the encounters in the forest.” Each girl has a set scenario where they meet their wolf which Tale of Tales referred to as “Attractions.” These scenarios can be avoided by simply walking away before interacting with them thus not activating their cut-scenes. Once the player has their character interact with the various wolves, the game goes black and then the character wakes up in the rain, disoriented, on the path right in front of the gates that lead to grandmother’s house. Once the player’s character wakes up, the character moves even slower. This makes further exploration essentially impossible. These blackouts are often

127 Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
128 This is a very different approach than the many versions of the fairy tale. Typically the wolf, is represented as a wolf and is obviously trying to overpower the girl.
129 Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
130 Ibid.
interpreted as rape, but Tale of Tales specifies that for them “those black-out moments after meeting her wolf are the moments of realization. Those are the times when a girl grows.”

The logical next step is to continue to grandmother’s house. Depending on how many rooms the player has unlocked through the collection of items in the forest impacts how much of the house can be seen. After wandering in the woods and meeting the character’s wolf, grandmother’s house becomes much creepier. After exploring the woods and meeting the wolf, the players’ character does not curl up next to grandmother, but instead the character enters womanhood represented through flashes in the house. These flashes are similar to how horror movies flash scenes to create fear and confusion.

While someone plays, they may feel that they have some control over their character as they wander around the forest trying to collect as many objects as possible. However, players really do not have much control other than directing the girl where to go in the forest and how long you play. As Tale of Tales notes,

There is a moment where you realize that all outcomes are the result of her choices. And she could have prevented it by not acting for that one moment, by not seeking the good time of her nemesis. By staying on the path. We force the player into that compromising situation much like a film director does. You don’t have much choice in the matter. Every time it is a choice of letting her go, or doing nothing, or wandering endlessly in the forest, or shutting down the game entirely.

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131 Ibid.
132 Interestingly, the story ends without any mention of huntsmen. The huntsmen were often mentioned in many of versions of the fairy tale as Little Red Riding Hood’s savior. There is no ‘savior’ in Tale of Tales’ game.
133 Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
While players could wander forever, shut the game off or do nothing—these actions leave the game unfinished. The player can interact with the environment, but never has full control and cannot keep the girls from their endings, only delay them. Giannachi explains that this is typical of interactive art since “…observer can affect the flow, alter the structure, interact with the environment or navigate the network, thus becoming directly involved in acts of transformation or creation.” Therefore in this game, the players have the opportunity to interact with the forest environment and create their own story by choosing how much to participate, but can only affect it in small ways and not completely control it. This is also another characteristic commonly found in Tale of Tales’ games. For example, in their other game, *The Graveyard*, the player can explore the graveyard as much as they’d like. However, no matter how players explore the digital space in this game, it is inevitable that the player’s character, an old lady, dies. This is out of the player’s hands. For *The Path* each ending scenario with each character is supposed to read as the girl leaving her childhood behind and entering womanhood, which is out of the players hands after meeting the avatar’s wolf. However, this explanation is still very broad and is often interpreted differently by players.

Tale of Tales states that they want each player to draw their own conclusions through their own life experiences or imagination when playing *The Path*. The game

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135 This is curious because often the fairy tale is read as a warning to girls “of what might happen if they are disobedient and careless.” Since the girls vary in age from 9-19 years old, the game’s ending could still be understood in this way because through the girls actions of going off the path (which they are told not to in the initial instructions) and finding their wolves led them to entering womanhood either at a very young age or a more appropriate age. Zipes, *The Trials & Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, 17.
functions as a means of reflection for the player by letting them add their own real or imaginary experiences into the game. *The Path* becomes an exciting mix of an interactive and responsive story through the combination of little control over the character’s story and the additional meaning given through player’s own personal reflections on the game. Each player’s final result can be identical or at least similar depending on the amount of rooms they unlock, but the reflections players make on the story can completely change what each person takes away from the game. Some players read the blackouts as rape, while others did not.\(^{136}\) This is a plausible theory because the original fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* the story is based around rape and violence.\(^{137}\) However, Tale of Tales explains the encounters with the wolf characters were not rape or death scenes but were intended as a representation of each girl moving from childhood to womanhood.\(^{138}\) Regardless of the explanation given from Tale of Tales, each player is entitled to their own interpretation. As Tale of Tales stated, “if you play on we hope that you will draw your own conclusions…It is beyond amazing to learn of the many ways these scenes impacted and reflected what people felt about their lives and the choices they have made.

\(^{136}\) Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”

\(^{137}\) Some scholars believe that fairy tales were created as a means to “reinforce the regulation of sexuality in modern Europe.” Zipes, *The Trials & Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, xi.

\(^{138}\) Some scholars, such as Yvonne Verdier, suggest that the fairy tale also served as a “celebration of a young girl’s coming of age.” This is because of “the references to the pins and needles were related to the needlework apprenticeship undergone by young peasant girls and designated the arrival of puberty and the initiation into society.” It is often understood that a girl enters womanhood typically either after their first menstruation or after the first time they have sex. So, their encounters with the wolves may not be as overtly violent as it is in versions of the original fairy tale but is still suggestive. This game’s multiple interpretations are similar to the fairy tale because there are also many versions and interpretations of it. Zipes, *The Trials & Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, 24.
The game becomes a tool for this reflection.”¹³⁹ This aspect makes the game more than something for entertainment—it becomes an experience. Giannachi suggests

Interactive art is a social phenomenon in which the ways the viewer encounters the work of art is the work of art. It is ‘the dialogue with the system that becomes the artistic material’...it is left to the viewer either to operate the work of art by entering into some kind of dialogue with it, or simply to maintain a discreet distance by choosing.¹⁴⁰

The artists have made the game and it is solely up to the player and out of the artists’ hands how much the audience will take away from playing. This game relies on the audience to give it the game its full meaning. Not only does the game need the player to activate the artwork, but also relies on the audience to interpret the game based on their own personal life experiences.

**What is Unique About The Path?**

Tale of Tales is an independent videogame development studio. They have made nine different video games.¹⁴¹ Their video games are not like other commercial video games. Tale of Tales intend to make games for the general public rather than experienced gamers. Tale of Tales creates games that can be distributed online and cheaply.¹⁴² *The Path* is not your typical commercial video game, but instead falls more clearly into the genre of art games. The previous chapter examined how Barr’s game, *The Artist is Present*, used Holmes’ definition focusing on a humorous social and historical critique of Marina Abramović’s performance. *The Path* instead focuses on telling a story in a novel

¹³⁹ Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
¹⁴⁰ Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres*, 28. (Original emphasis)
¹⁴¹ They also have made some webpage based art and a cathedral in virtual reality. (webpage, art)
manner, this game is less tongue in cheek and a bit more serious relying on the audience’s own life experiences to impact their playing experience. *The Path* takes a popular fairy-tale and transforms it into an interactive game that tells the original story in a new way by relying on the audience’s interpretation of the events that happen.

Through their *Little Red Riding Hood* horror game, they tell multiple stories about the influential moment in any girl’s life—when they enter womanhood. *The Path* takes the fairy-tale *Little Red Riding Hood* and transforms it into an interactive game that attempts to tell a more positive representation of that story. *The Path* becomes part of the history of the transformation of the original fairy-tale. While Tale of Tales intended to create a less tragic yet still eerie version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, many players still read the game with many of the same themes of the original fairy-tale.

When comparing Barr’s game with Tale of Tales’ game, the contrast is immediately evident. (See Figures 12 and 18-20.) Barr’s simplistic design rings true of Holmes definition of art games, while Tale of Tales’ environment feels much more complicated and grandiose closer to more commercial video games. Regardless of how much more realistic *The Path* appears compared to Barr’s game, it is still not life-like.

Samyn and Harvey explain “it is more important that the place *feel* real rather than *look* real.”\(^{143}\) When playing *The Path*, players can feel that the game is not perfect and there are many intentional glitches within the game they did not take out. Some examples are how when players walk through the forest, the character can walk right through the trees

\(^{143}\) Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
or sometimes the character’s AI did not always work correctly. Tale of Tales explains that they found the chaos produced by these glitches was enjoyable for them, thus why they left them in the game. Correspondingly, these imperfections added to the game’s eerie feel. In a text written by Tale of Tales, they clearly state that “The goal of art is beauty. Our message as artists is simple yet radical: that life is beautiful.” Once we understand that this is a key function of their artworks, the beauty they create in The Path ties into the way they tell a “story in a novel manner.” Thus, their aesthetic choices can play into the conceptual message the game conveys. So, no matter how different these two games look, both of their visual selections push these artworks towards the art game genre and are fundamental to how they convey their overarching themes.

These games use the players as co-creators. In Barr’s game, the audience must decide if they want to stand in line and wait in real time while in The Path the players dictate each girl’s movements and story. For these games, the audience does not have passive interactions, but instead actively participate or perform with the works. Andrea Zapp proposes that, “the former audience is lifted out of their seat of distanced contemplation and placed in the limelight of subjective physical involvement: addressed as a storyboard controller, co-author or self-performer.” The audience can choose to not interact with the game, but in turn, they do not fully experience what the games offer.

144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
147 Holmes, “Arcade Classics Spawn Art.”
As explained by the Coulter-Smiths, “…the artist is not a maker of precious objects but the designer of a gamespace which will involve the viewer in a significant interaction.”\textsuperscript{149} This gamespace is where the interactivity of the audience happens. This is where the players can take away meanings that they have encountered through playing. Salen and Zimmerman clearly echo this by writing, “All play is a voluntary activity” and thus, what the viewer gets out of the game depends largely on themselves.\textsuperscript{150} This key factor is what makes these art games have elements like performance, installation, and participatory art. These artworks do not stand alone, but instead rely on viewers to actively engage and in a sense perform with them for their messages and critiques to be heard. \textit{The Path} takes full advantage of these aspects of interactive artworks. Tale of Tales created a game with their own original intentions, but as players began to play the original intentions shifted to how the audience read them. Tale of Tales clarifies that \textit{The Path} highlights how we can talk about “intimately personal things through the medium of videogames. Not just things that are personal to the authors, but also to each individual player. Through non-linearity, interactivity, and procedural generation, we have created a piece that is really about the player.”\textsuperscript{151} \textit{The Path} requires the audience to participate physically and mentally to reach their end goals.

\textsuperscript{151} Harvey and Samyn, “The Path Post Mortem.”
Conclusion

Characteristics of art games can be found outside of artworks that are specifically games. The next and final chapter will look at how Wafaa Bilal’s performance, *Domestic Tension*, exhibits characteristics of art games due to his use of gaming elements to stimulate audience participation through the Internet which had implications in real time on real bodies. His reliance on the audience and how the audience shaped this performance over the month it was performed are both key elements that have striking similarities to characteristics of art games. Bilal’s performance serves as a comparison to Barr’s *The Artist is Present* and Tale of Tales’ *The Path* to exemplify how characteristics of art games can be utilized in art works that are not solely a game.
Chapter 5: Case Study III: Wafaa Bilal’s *Domestic Tension*

Introduction

This chapter will examine Wafaa Bilal’s performance, *Domestic Tension* (2007), through the lens of art games. Bilal’s performance involved Bilal living in a gallery space for 31 days with a paintball gun that was connected through an online platform so visitors to the webpage could click and shoot at Bilal or anywhere in the room.\(^{152}\) *Domestic Tension* is an example of how an art game can double as a live performance. Through examination and comparison of these drastically different artworks, this chapter will show how these works exhibit many of the traits classified within the genre of art games, due to the way each of them relies on the audience’s participation and performance.

A Short Biography of Wafaa Bilal

Wafaa Bilal is an Iraqi-born artist who teaches at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts.\(^{153}\) When he was living in Iraq, he could not pursue being an artist, because a member of his family was accused of disloyalty to the country. Regardless, while in college studying geography, he made art anyways. His art was political and often spoke against Sadaam Hussein, which resulted in Bilal’s arrest and torture.\(^{154}\) He continued to be outspoken against the government and this resulted in almost getting executed. Instead he was sent to a refugee camp near the Kuwaiti border.\(^{155}\)

\(^{152}\) Unger, ‘*SHOOT HIM NOW!!*’, 203.


\(^{155}\) Ibid.
During his time in the refugee camp, he continued to make art however he could.\textsuperscript{156} Not only would he work to make money to buy new art supplies for himself, but he would also buy the children art supplies for art therapy. These experiences engrained a hatred for violence and oppression which are two aspects addressed in many of his artworks.

It was not until 1992 that Bilal came to the United States and began to study English. In America, he could finally pursue his dream of studying art. Today he is widely known for his art that opens conversation about international politics and internal dynamics through usage interactivity and the Internet.\textsuperscript{157} His experiences in Iraq, a refugee camp, and moving to the United States have greatly influenced his art. The majority of his work focuses on how he was forced to flee his homeland and the experience of “existing simultaneously in two worlds—his home in the “comfort zone” of the U.S. and his consciousness of the “conflict zone” in Iraq.”\textsuperscript{158} Another influence is that he has spent a lot of time separated from his family while he is in the United States, a “comfort zone,” and they are in Iraq, a “conflict zone.” After the murder of his 21 year old brother by “explosives dropped from an American helicopter that flew in after an unmanned U.S. drone had scoped out the area,” Bilal began to consider how there is a

\textsuperscript{156} He made an adobe house while staying in the camp.
\textsuperscript{157} Bilal, “Biography.”
\textsuperscript{158} Wafaa Bilal could not study art in college, due to the fact that someone in his family was accused of disloyalty to the country. While he went to college for geography, he still made art. His art was political and against Sadaam Hussein, this resulted him his being arrested and tortured. As he continued to be open about his distaste for the Iraqi government, through organizing opposition, he was forced to leave his country. Once he was moved to a refugee camp, he continued to work on his art. He would even buy art supplies for children, so they could use art as a means of therapy after all of the horrible experiences they had gone through.

“Wafaa Bilal Domestic Tension Frequently Asked Questions.”
“detachment from the war in Iraq,” both physically and emotionally, due to the new technologies of modern warfare.\footnote{Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen, \textit{Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun} (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008), 10.} Through his performance and interactive art he is constantly forcing his audience, in particular his American audience, to consider what it is like to be outside of your own comfort zone and the implications of a detached presence when it comes to modern day warfare.

**Performance Summary of Bilal’s Domestic Tension**

His performance was influenced by his considerations of what modern warfare entails for both sides, those who fire the guns and receive fire. After he had watched a TV-interview about modern warfare, he began to consider how detached ‘the West’ is from the war. He explains that,

[I saw] a young female American soldier whose job was to drop bombs remotely on Iraqi targets, directing them from a computer console in Colorado. […] It struck me that Haji’s death had be orchestrated by someone just like this young woman, pressing buttons from thousands of miles away, sitting in a comfortable chair in front of a computer, completely oblivious to the terror and destruction they were causing to a family—a whole society—halfway across the world.\footnote{Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen, \textit{Shoot an Iraqi}, 10.}

This moment stimulated the thought process for creating \textit{Domestic Tension}. This performance consisted of Bilal living in a gallery space for 31 days, the FlatFile Galleries in Chicago, with a paintball gun that was connected through an online platform so visitors to the webpage could click and shoot at Bilal or anywhere in the room.\footnote{Clio Unger, ‘\textquote{SHOOT HIM NOW!!!}’ Anonymity, accountability and online spectatorship in Wafaa Bilal’s \textit{Domestic Tension},’ \textit{International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media} 11, no. 2 (2015): 202-203.} Since

\footnote{Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen, \textit{Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun} (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2008), 10.}

\footnote{Clio Unger, ‘\textquote{SHOOT HIM NOW!!}’, 203.}
this intermedial performance was conducted 24/7 for 31 days, Bilal essentially created a war zone for himself. According to Alan Ingram “the web page has received some 80 million hits from 136 countries, more than 65,000 shots had been fired with the gun and the chat room, installed part way into the project, had logged over 65,000 lines of postings.”

People could view this performance by physically going to the gallery, but most people engaged with the work through the Internet. The use of the Internet in this performance made it possible for it to capture the attention of spectators outside of the normal art world. The spectators via the Internet could be referred to as “tele-presents spectators,” which can be described as “someone who ‘inhabits a virtual environment where agency, choice and responsibility are available, but challenged.” This definition of the specific kind of spectator that interacts or engages with art work through mediatized mediums is essential for understanding how art that uses the virtual space changes the audience’s reactions or engagement. For example, in Domestic Tension audience members who physically attended his performance had a harder time aiming directly at him or shooting more than once, according to Bilal. Audience members who interacted with the performance through the webpage had a much more detached interaction with the artwork. Unger discusses this aspect and argues that the difference

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162 He ended up with symptoms of PTSD from this performance. Lara Stevens, “Alienation in the Information Age: Wafaa Bilal’s Domestic Tension,” Australasian Drama Studies 65, (October 2014): 87.
164 Unger, ‘SHOOT HIM NOW!!’, 208.
165 Ibid., 205.
166 Ibid., 205.
between online spectators and physical spectators relied on “the difference in presence that these two types of participants experienced.”167 She explains the variances between the spectator’s presence depended on the difference between shooting a gun while physically being in the same space as the performer and shooting a gun when the spectator was telepresent.168 The telepresence of the spectators lets the audience remain anonymous, thus letting people act outside of their normal personality which can explain why the online audience had an easier time shooting directly at Bilal compared to those who physically visited the gallery.

In Bilal’s chatroom, participants could go by any name or personality they wished to. Since the chatroom had no ties to the participant’s physical bodies it let “the absence of a body and the disengagement of social structures make it possible to perform one’s identity,” and therefore let those engaged shape their own identity.169 This exemplifies how everyone in the chatroom is performing an identity or identities due to how in virtual space it is easy to create multiple identities/personas.170 The fact that people did not have to identify themselves in the chatroom resulted in rather violent and rude behavior. As compared to those who attended in person, participants online “were more likely to leave abusive or degrading comments in the chatroom” and fired more shots at him.171 Cody points out how within virtual theatres “…they thrive on the anonymity of audience

167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 212.
170 Consider how during the time of AIM (AOL Instant Messenger), many people had more than one screensname and would play different identities in chatrooms.
171 Ibid., 208.
participation. Perhaps more important in relation to the meaning of performance itself is
the disappearance of the human body from any frame of signification.\textsuperscript{172} The lack of the
human body for the audience played a large role in the chatroom and firing of the gun. If
their own webcam had to be hooked up to participate, I imagine significantly fewer
people would have participating in shooting at him and commenting racist remarks
towards Bilal. The anonymous nature of the audience was essential to the performance
because Bilal was making commentary about virtual war and how detached war has
become with new technologies. We are now able to push a button from thousands of
miles away and destroy the lives of people across the world while remaining oblivious to
the destruction that button caused. Impersonal actions can lead people to act outside of
their own typical personality. When someone does not witness the consequences of their
own action, they are likely to act differently.\textsuperscript{173} By making the audience anonymous, he
created a live artwork that drew consideration to the close connections between the
American military training and popular entertainment.\textsuperscript{174}

Due to the anonymous nature of the online audience, there were many hateful, racist, and xenophobic comments throughout the chatroom.\textsuperscript{175} However, Bilal would interact with these people, and he experienced that after confronting some of the gamers

\textsuperscript{173} “In the 1960s, Milgram’s (1974) famous experiments in obedience showed that the willingness to shock the ‘learner’ with a ‘deadly voltage’ of 450V went from 65% to 40% when the participants were in the same room as their ‘learners’. This is interesting in this context because it gives weight to the claim that proximity to the performer did influence the participants’ reactions to the project.” Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW’,” 208.
\textsuperscript{174} Lara Stevens, “Alienation in the Information Age,” 81.
\textsuperscript{175} Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW!!!’,” 209.
“who first felt a sense of nonchalance about firing online, felt remorse after interacting with him in the chat room.”

For example, there was someone in the chatroom from Columbus, Ohio and they had been shooting basically non-stop for more than four hours, Bilal is eating his dinner and paint is getting into his dinner. He simply looked into the camera and types into the chatroom, “Hey, Columbus, I am having dinner and your paintballs are falling into it.” Columbus responds, “Ouch, sorry about that” and he stops shooting and tells Bilal his name is Luke. This exemplifies one of the special aspects that performance art has, as Auslander states, “live performance of all kinds entails a process of communication in which the performers influence the audience and the audience influences the performers.”

In the case of Bilal’s performance, he created a game that talks back to the players. However, many people still left aggressively racist or sexual comments regardless of Bilal confronting their actions, which illustrates how the chatroom’s anonymous nature leads people to acting in ways of detachment.

Also, because of the online nature of this performance, someone found a way to hack the gun to use it as an automatic weapon. This spawned an incredible example of cyber activism called the Virtual Human Shield. Cyberactivism is defined by Saskia Sassen in her article as when the Internet is used as a tool “where local issues can become part of a network of global connections while still remaining specific to a local

176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 68.
179 Ibid., 91.
180 Ibid.
concern.”

The Virtual Human Shield was created by people who had never met prior to this performance. This group created a resistance to this hacker by setting up a 24-hour protection schedule by actively clicking the gun to the left of the screen. This resulted in keeping paintballs from directly hitting Bilal. This group was anonymous, like the rest of the chatroom, but instead of acting in an inappropriate manner the Virtual Human Shield created a cyberactivist group that would attempt to protect Bilal. This was a special response in that it proved that not all anonymous online participants had to respond in a violent manner, but instead they used their community to protect Bilal and rejected “alienation, passivity and dehumanization” that many of the other online participants embraced. This group was one of the more positive anonymous interactions Bilal experienced during his 31-day performance by showing that the Internet is not only a place for misanthropic and brutal actions, but also a place that can create communities of resistance and empowerment.

In this performance, *Domestic Tension*, Bilal creates a connection to physical space for the spectators on the Internet, by giving them the ability to interact in a physical manner with his environment and to physically create pain and fear for Bilal. (See Figure 21) He also creates commentary about how different the interactions he encountered were

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182 Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW’,” 211.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Stevens, “Alienation and the Information Age,” 92.
186 Bilal and Lydersen, *Shoot an Iraqi*, 143.
with those via the webpage versus those that physically came to the gallery space. Bilal’s performance highlights how impersonal clicking a button to shoot someone is compared to physically shooting someone. This was one of his goals of this performance since the death of his brother and father stimulated his thought process about these issues in modern warfare. He successfully expresses these ideas through showing how the lack of the physical bodies creates a disconnect from fully understanding what that button click does. When someone does not see the repercussions of their actions, they are likely to follow through with this impersonal action.\textsuperscript{187} To make this interaction even more impersonal, Bilal kept the sensory depth and breadth low.\textsuperscript{188} By keeping these senses low, it distanced the participants’ presence. The only sense the online audience received from the webpage was a live video stream with low resolution and the chatroom.\textsuperscript{189} The online audience was deprived of sound, so they could not hear the gun shoot or Bilal’s reactions. In addition to no sound, the audience could not smell the chemicals from the paint or touch the residue left by the paintballs.\textsuperscript{190} The online audience was denied these senses thus Bilal was able to translate how people involved in modern combat become so detached from their situations. Bilal’s decisions were influenced by his knowledge about how the military uses video games as a means of training new soldiers. Modern warfare relies on this detachment to follow through with their goals. If the experience was too immersive, people are likely to have more empathy for the war situations. However, like

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\textsuperscript{187} Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW’,” 208. 
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 209. 
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid. 
\end{flushright}
in military training games, Bilal positioned his online participants like new soldiers are trained. While most of sense were blocked, the players were given a first-person perspective, like in military training games, which functioned to make players feel as if they were still embodying themselves. Unger clarifies that embodiment through first person perspective acts as a means of promoting agency in the player. She writes,

If a screen image is reminiscent of, or identical to, what one sees when looking out of their own eyes, it relates to one’s own embodied experience of seeing and therefore gives the impression of some semblance of control. This sense of control that is most likely a desired effect to be installed in soldiers also in this situation.\(^{191}\)

This method acted to highlight how players may feel in control of their actions, but their telepresence creates problematic issues for personal responsibility of these actions. Control and personal responsibility are not exclusively connected, especially in the case of telepresence. *Domestic Tension* shows the implications of telepresence and how when people feel less accountable for their actions, this can lead to becoming more violent and hateful. Unger makes clear that these aspects of Bilal’s performance required the audience to “reevaluate their own engagement with communication technologies and their telepresent selves” which in turn emphasized “how the remote detachment (both physically and at the level of responsibility) with which contemporary wars are fought.”\(^{192}\) These issues exemplify the problematic nature of modern warfare in an artistic manner.

\(^{191}\) Unger, “’SHOOT HIM NOW’,” 210. 
\(^{192}\) Ibid.,
Bilal used his performance to show how people are murdered by an impersonal click of a button and how much modern warfare is disconnected from our physical bodies which creates a lack of full understanding of the damage someone could be doing to a society across the world. These elements all demonstrate the problematic nature of modern warfare or virtual wars due to many of technologies impersonal aspects, which are taken advantage in military training games and technology. Today we live in a world where the experience of telepresence is quotidian, and it is critical to not let this new state of consciousness detach and isolate us from our real, physical world.193

Domestic Tension Compared to Tale of Tales’ The Path and Pippin Barr’s The Artist is Present

Both Barr and Tale of Tales wanted to attract audiences outside of the average gaming community. Similarly, Bilal designed his performance to attract viewers outside of the art world and people who typically do not leave their own comfort zones. All three of these artworks try to get viewers involved who would probably not be interested in their style of art otherwise. These works do so by use of the Internet. The Internet makes it possible to reach people who would not be interested in going to an art gallery. It also makes it possible to find audiences outside of the video game community because people of all walks of life use the Internet. It is possible for someone who is not into gaming to stumble upon Pippin Barr’s games and give them a try because they do not require any downloading and are free to play. These games use the Internet to their advantage to find audience members outside of their typical audience. This is something that Wafaa Bilal

193 Ibid.
has continued to experiment within his artistic practice. In 2008, Bilal hacked Al Qaeda’s version of the video game *Quest for Saddam* titled, *The Night of Bush Capturing* and added his own twist to it. Through his own version he tried to highlight the problematic nature of stereotypes of Arab Culture found in video games and many other types of media. In this work, like *Domestic Tension*, Bilal points out to the audience and participants that as Americans we live in a comfort zone and are often desensitized about the tragedies of war because of the nature of modern warfare and how our entertainment market uses violence and negative stereotypes.¹⁹⁴

Without the audience’s interaction, all three of these works would be rendered obsolete. All games require audience interactions. The audience’s interaction is essential for all three because without interaction, their messages would never be read. In Tale of Tales’ and Barr’s games, the interaction is critical because they are overtly games and games are created with the intention of being played. Bilal’s performance’s need for interaction is like the other two games because without participation his performance would not have been as significant. If no one shot the gun or interacted in the chatroom, the performance would have had different results. The way that *Domestic Tension* used interactivity differs from the other two games because audience members could interact with each other and Wafaa Bilal. In Barr and Tale of Tales’ games, the player only interacts with the game.

Bilal’s use of interaction becomes the strongest example of performativity out of these three artworks because his work was truly a performance piece. His own body is

performing by being trapped in his gallery space turned war zone and the audience members are also performing through their interactions. The audience’s physical bodies are not impacted by the performance and they are given anonymity in the chatroom. This anonymity plays a significant role. Many people probably acted in a way they would not if their identities were known. I imagine that many of the audience members who commented horribly racist remarks, were at home in their own comfort zones. They did not have a paintball gun pointed at them and no one knows their identity. This kind of privacy becomes dangerous because people are given the chance to act outside of themselves and social norms due to that the lack of personal responsibility and consequences outside of the online environment.195 The opportunity to act out a different identity or multiple identities is nothing new for digital space.196 Audience members in the chatroom said things from “Shoot him again for Jesus,” “Stone this infidel” to “Where’s the towelhead?,” all of which most people would not say if their identities were connected to these statements.197 These comments were hurtful and made Bilal feel even more of a victim.

The various interactions between audience members became a way for each other to try to surveillance each other’s actions in Domestic Tension.198 While the anonymous

195 Ibid., 212.
196 Consider chatrooms from America Online. (AOL) You could enter a chatroom and be anyone. You could create more than one username and be multiple people if you desired.
197 Wafaa Bilal and Kari Lydersen, Shoot an Iraqi, 80-1.
198 Computers and the Internet are often looked at as tools or something similar. Brenda Laurel describes this in her book, Computers as Theatre, as “Regardless of what people think the are doing (for example, searching a database, playing a game, or designing a cathedral), they are actually using their computers as tools to carry out their commands, just like programmers.” And she continues to further this by explaining that we should “Think of the computer, not as a tool, but as a medium.” This does not negate that we use the computer and the Internet like tools, but it considers that “the medium can be used to represent tools.”
nature of this work had some people react and perform identities that were violent and racist, this is not the case for everyone. His performance let audience members perform identities outside of their normal lives (even if they were offensive and rude) thus creating a commentary on digital society and how there is a “lack of accountability for actions taken in a virtual environment.”\(^\text{199}\) This all wraps back around to his overarching message about the problematic nature of modern warfare. If people were remorseless in this situation, in a real military situation the shooter will also have a detachment from what they are doing due to the implications of not directly seeing the consequences of your impersonal actions.

The audience’s interactions, performances, and participations are all crucial elements of these three artworks, which ties them together and force the viewers to question the worlds around them. Barr’s *The Artist is Present* brings to attention questions about the art world, performance art, and how these two things respond to digital space. *The Path* interrogates interpretations of fairy-tale worlds and how the audience is the one to truly give these stories meaning based on how our own lives impact our interpretation. *Domestic Tension* cross-examines how digital worlds and real worlds collide due to the way technology has impacted our world. All three of these works use gaming formats to express their larger meanings. They highlight how digital space, or the Internet can be used as an extension of our own bodies.\(^\text{200}\) Our interactions with computers act as ways to extend the reach of our physical abilities. In all these

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\(^{199}\) Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW!!!!’,” 212.

\(^{200}\) Unger, “‘SHOOT HIM NOW’,” 213.
games, elements of post-humanism are exhibited in the ways players interact with the games. Unger describes post-humanism by describing that “human/computer interaction is one of the most intuitive examples to describe everyday couplings of humans and machines which together create an entity that is neither human, nor machine, but an assemblage of both that has unique properties not available to either.” In these three artworks, their digital nature acts as a means for the player to extend their reach outside of their normal extents. These games give players a way to act outside of their normal routine and to experiment within these digital realms in ways they cannot in the real world.

These artworks are all very different, but all uses aspects of Holmes’ definition of art games. While Barr’s and Tale of Tales’ games are obviously art games, Bilal’s performance has many similarities. His physical body’s performance is part of the art game, but the digital aspects of his performance are what truly gives this work characteristics of an art game. Many artworks are never classified as only one thing. Especially when it comes to digital interactive and performance art.

Conclusion

Initially, it can be hard to see how a game about Marina Abramovic, a horror game based on Little Red Riding Hood, and a performance critiquing modern warfare and stereotypes of the Middle East could have anything in common. These artworks demonstrate the freedom of the art game parameters. Artists who make art games are not limited to strict confines. This aspect of art games makes them more applicable to a wide

201 Ibid., 214.
range of games and multi-media artworks. While art games can have a wide range of implications, the one feature that keeps them all tied together is the requirement for spectators to have an active involvement. Art games can address topics in contemporary culture and the art world in new, exciting ways through using the audience’s interactions and new technologies.

When an audience is asked to interact or play with a game, the original focus on the artist of the game shifts to the audience’s participation. The audience becomes a co-creator thus adding a performative dimension to the audience’s interactions. As Giannachi states “the interaction between the viewer and the work of art which allows the viewer to be present in both the real and the virtual environment.”

202 These proactive interactions are what shifts the viewer from passive involvement, such as when someone views a painting, to active involvement. Art games shift our attention to ourselves as audience members and force us to consider our everyday interactions in relation to performance. Art games exemplify how when we observe art, our own actions should be considered in relation to the artwork. As viewers we give art its importance.

Throughout my life video games have always been a form of escape from daily life. These kinds of games give players opportunities to do activities that are impossible otherwise. Video games are a special medium that lets not only the artist experiment, but also let the audience experiment. In art games, artists are given the opportunity to create worlds and situations that could not be otherwise created. With the rise of virtual reality, I expect to see artists creating newer, more complex art games addressing a wide range of

topics. As artists embrace the medium of art games, artists will continue to challenge the audience’s own participation and interactions within digital art and new technologies.
Figure 1. Fallout 4 screenshot.
Figure 2. Pippin Barr’s “Let’s Play: Ancient Greek Punishment: Limited Edition!” screenshot.
Figure 3. Screenshot of The Path details in grandmother’s house.
Tale of Tales, The Path screen shots, Video Game, 2009, Accessed: February 15, 2018,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCrtZn0gTA
Figure 5. Screenshot of Pippin Barr’s game, *It is as if you were doing work.*
Figure 6. Screenshot of the opening screen of Barr’s game, *It is as if you were doing work*.

Figure 7. Example of pop-up work boxes in Barr’s game, *It is as if you were doing work*. Pippin, Barr. “It is as if you were doing work” example of pop-up work boxes. July 3, 2017. Accessed: November 11, 2017. http://www.pippinbarr.com/games/2017/07/03/it-is-as-if-you-were-doing-work.html
Figure 8. Screenshot of Barr’s game, *It is as if you were doing work.*
Pippin, Barr. “It is as if you were doing work” Take A Break game. July 3, 2017.
Figure 9. Screenshots from *The Artist is Present* game.

Figure 11. Image of Marina Abramović and Ulay.
7JNLZe-7SYQLL-7PNuba-83q11E-7PQP5C-84UqMk-7Tsdi2-83qwHu-7PPjWK-7PN2gV-7UYitX-7WK6op-7SYYzU-7SVwce-7PSxV7-83mGdM-7PRb53-7PNd1M-7PSBjh-7PM51k-7PP81V-87BtdS-7WN4jJ-7JSPT3-7JNM2t-7PPgW6-7PRbjf-7Z7Bkh-7T33ts-7YDrLV-7Z4ovz-7PPoJK-7PRoyw-83qJzW-84V7Mc-7PR5Cb-7PPnKz-83pPbQ-7TsscR-7SYWj7-87ygrR-7Z7BPY-7PM5QP-84ULng-7UY8ZP-81SUbv-81SUYa-7YfgY2-7JSGoA-7JNLXT
Figure 12. Screenshot from Pippin Barr’s *The Artist is Present*.
http://www.gamescenes.org/pixel-art/page/8/
Figure 13. Image of the six girl characters in *The Path*.
https://www.giantbomb.com/the-path/3030-23677/
Figure 14. Screenshot of the opening screen in *The Path*.
Figure 15. Screenshot of *The Path*.
Figure 16. Screenshot of *The Path*’s end of chapter score.
Figure 17. Screenshot of gold clover.
Tale of Tales, The Path screen shot, Video Game, 2009, Accessed February 15, 2018,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCrtZn0gTAg
Figure 18. Screenshot of part of grandmother’s house in *The Path*. Tale of Tales, *The Path* screen shots, Video Game, 2009, Accessed: February 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCrtZn0gTAa
Figure 19. Screenshot of *The Path*.
Figure 20. Screenshot of *The Path*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCrtZn0gTAg
Figure 21. Image of Bilal’s performance, *Domestic Tension*.
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