MASTERS OF FINE ARTS (By Coursework)

RESEARCH REPORT

GAMING IN ART: A CASE STUDY OF TWO EXAMPLES OF THE ARTISTIC APPROPRIATION OF COMPUTER GAMES AND THE MAPPING OF HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES OF 'ART GAMES' VERSUS MAINSTREAM COMPUTER GAMES.

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ABSTRACT

This essay will explore the existing definitions of art games that are currently being used in the art game/art mod genre. It will identify the leading theorists within the field, and take into account their definitions whilst at the same time establishing a set of categories within which can be defined the dominant trends in the development of the field. It will also situate art games within an historical context, both within the commercial computer game field as well as the digital art field and attempt to establish some sort of timeline within which we can see the development and emergence of art games in relation to these two disciplines. Two examples of art games, both from different categories will be examined and critiqued in the context of Artistic Computer Game Modification – A 3D game called Escape From Woomera and an art mod or patch called SOD. The art game as an entity will be examined in relation to ideas of the 'interactive' and 'play', and the implications and potential for fine art practice will be investigated.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted towards the degree of Master of Fine Arts by Coursework in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination.

PHILLIPA JANE STALKER_____.

_____ day of _____2005.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

"TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE 'ART GAME'?"

Art games, art mods, art patches, hacker art – these are just some of the names given to the topic of this paper. Although different scholars use varying definitions and categorisations, this paper will attempt to explore some sort of categorisation that will perhaps gives us a broader idea of the manifestations of Artistic Computer Game Appropriation.

For the purposes of this paper it is fitting to start with a definition of the term 'art games', specifically 'art video games'. Tiffany Holmes defines art games as, "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." (46) She goes on to say, "To be more specific art games contain at least two of the following: a defined way to win or experience success in a mental challenge, passage through a series of levels (that may or may not be hierarchical), or a central character or icon that represents the player." (46)

Similarly Rebecca Cannon states,

> Art games may be made in a variety of media, sometimes from scratch without the use of a prior existing game. They always comprise an entire, (to some degree) playable game… Art games are always interactive – and that interactivity is based on the needs of competing… Although both forms follow the lineage of fine art and computer games, art games explore the game *format* primarily as a new mode for structuring narrative, cultural critique. Challenges, levels and the central character are all employed as tools for exploring the game theme within the context of competition-based play. (Cannon: Introduction to Artistic Computer Game Modification)

However, Cannon goes further as to distinguish between “art games” and “art mods”[i]. She states,

> Art mods on the other hand, always modify or reuse an existing computer game. They rarely result in a playable game… Many art mods are not interactive, and those that are often employ interactivity for non-competitive means… [they] employ game *media* attributes, such as game engines, maps, code, hardware, interfaces, etc, for a very broad range of artistic expressions – abstract, formal and narrative, as well as cultural, political and social. Art mods do not necessarily have anything to do with the competitive theme of games. (Cannon: Introduction)[ii]

Although Holmes goes on to describe her comparisons between art games and commercial games with regards to gameplay and mental stimulation that is something that will be discussed later. Cannon goes on to discuss Art Mods in-depth, and likewise this is something that will be dealt with in a later chapter. This definition is with regards to an art discourse as opposed to a video gaming discourse. Situating art games within a video gaming discourse would involve discussion of very different principles as opposed to an art discourse, as well as a completely different approach. It would involve a discussion of the structures of a video game, including aspects such as narrative, time/space, the idea of the save game and hyper-identities. Because we are situating this discussion within an art discourse, the focus shifts to issues that are relevant only to the game within which they appear and the relevant modes of art critical discourse as opposed to videogame critical discourse as discussed in The Video Game Theory Reader and The Medium of the Video Game[iii]. This discussion centres on what is relevant to the work being discussed, as opposed to discussing things such as narrative, which are relative to most commercial video games. Although commercial video games are being discussed in this context, they are merely to illustrate the differences between art games and the commercial industry.

Tiffany Holmes is an Assistant Professor of Art and Technology at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she teaches courses in interactivity and the history and theory of electronic

media. Her paper Arcade Classics Spawn Art? Current Trends in the Art Game Genre was written for the Melbourne Digital Art and Culture Conference (DAC) in 2003. Holmes' description of art games is one of the few definitions available. Often the discussion around videogames centres on commercial games as an art form[iv], so to find a definition that is actually related to the academic side of art gaming, without becoming fixated on the 'art of videogames', is refreshing. Holmes' analysis of the art game genre is critical and thorough, and a good base on which to build this papers definition of art games. Her earlier paper, Art games and Breakout: New media meets the American arcade, written in 2002, similarly investigates the surge in 'game-inspired interactive art works.' This paper explores the emergence of art games, whereas the 2003 paper Arcade Classics delves deeper into the genre and explores a definition of art games. Holmes' definition is therefore probably one of the most comprehensive so far. Shuen-shing Lee in his paper I Lose Therefore I Think: A Search for Contemplation amid Wars of Push-Button Glare states that, "Holmes might be the first scholar to use the term "art games" to designate these particular examples." (2003) As the medium develops, no doubt new definitions will surface and be expanded upon in order to create a definitive genre within which artists will confidently emerge and operate.

In light of the above statement, it is therefore necessary to begin to comment on Holmes' definition within this paper. In the context of this paper, an 'art game' is specifically a video game, normally PC as opposed to console based, that generally but not exclusively explores social or political issues through the medium of video games. This artistic appropriation of the video game medium, normally manifests in the form of a patch or modification on an existing commercial game, and is designed to change the way the game functions and thereby the way that the player/viewer interacts with the game. There are three parts to Holmes' definition, which manifest themselves in different ways within different artworks. The ways in which this becomes apparent will be explored in the examples that this paper deals with in later chapters.

It is also perhaps useful to differentiate between what can be termed 'aesthetic art games' and 'political art games'. Although many people insist on some sort of differentiation between these

two genres, it is entirely possible that they are merely different categories within the larger art game genre. There is no differentiation made in art between art that is aesthetic and art that is politically motivated. Whether it is used for propaganda purposes still does not negate its status as art, regardless of motivation. Therefore by implication, although one may speak of 'political games' or 'aesthetic games', they still fall into the category of 'art games'. Examples of both aesthetic art games and political art games will be examined in this paper. This paper will also explore, in relation to these examples, the ways in which the manifestation of these games is important to the manner in which we think about art and computer games as symbiotic media.

Rebecca Cannon can also be defined as one of the more influential writers on the 'Art Mod' subject. As the curator of SelectParks.net, she collects together various artworks made with computer games, whether by artists or by gamers. She says,

> Software mods/hardware hacks, machinima, musical instruments, installations, video artworks, vj tools, etc… Pretty much the main defining factor is whether or not the artist who made it thinks of it as an artwork. Many people who make mods don't want anything to do with the art scene. (Online Posting)

Their archive is comprehensive and deals with many different categories of artistic intervention and appropriation of computer games. She has also spoken at a number of games conferences on art mods.

At this point clarification of the terms 'computer games' and 'video games' is needed. Although there is to an extent a difference between the two[v], in this paper they are used fairly interchangeably as video games include not only games played on a PC, but also on consoles. Art games however, tend to be more PC or MAC based as opposed to console based probably because of the accessibility of technology and information via the Internet. If a specific distinction should be made, it will be mentioned in relation to the context.

The commercial practice of making games is a collaborative project, with many different artists and technical personnel working on a project for months, sometimes years before it is ready for release. It is a highly industrial process, motivated by commercial interests and the desire to produce entertainment. It requires large amounts of funding and long hours to get the finished product to an acceptable level, and to break new ground and introduce an idea that is new and original and not just an adaptation of a million other games is particularly difficult, especially within long established genres of games.[vi] Often however, commercial games are seen to be somehow inferior when it comes to intellectual understanding and as a comment on society, although undoubtedly they require skill to produce. No one doubts the technical skill that goes into making the product, but there is some doubt as to the intellectual properties of the game/work and its ability to be considered as art on an intellectual basis.

When artists begin to take an interest in the gaming world, and look to intervene into games, it is often to make some sort of social or political statement, as well as often having a playful element to it. Consequently this genre is sometimes known as 'serious' games as well as the aforementioned 'art' games. Game developers such as Chris Crawford, author of The Art of Computer Game Design, see their work as art and not as merely commercial entertainment, although undoubtedly it fulfils both roles.

Game designer Raph Koster states,

> Game design is an art and a craft, and like all arts and crafts, it has techniques and approaches, and that implies that it can support a criticism; said criticism exists though it is not very sophisticated. MUD[vii] design is also an art and a craft, and it also has techniques and approaches, but there is no criticism, no self-evaluation, no standards defined, no study of what has gone before. And without self-critique, it cannot improve except in fits and starts. If this genre is to evolve into more than game design, which I firmly believe it has already begun to do, then it will have to support at least the critical apparatus of game design, and preferably the critical apparatus of many disciplines that

> most people do not bother to link: server design, and writing, and hypertextual theory, and art… (Video Games and Online Worlds as Art: 2004)

There is a crossover between art games and commercial computer games. Chris Crawford writes on the art of making computer games and yet many game developers see what they do as pure entertainment, with no artistic intention at all. Frans Mäyrä, editor of the Computer Games and Digital Culture Conference Proceedings[viii], claims,

> Games have established themselves as a traditional "low" cultural form with self-anarchic freedom to explore bad taste, sexual stereotypes and simple competitive or violent confrontations without the restraints of established culture. (6)

He later asks,

> Can games develop into new forms of art and entertainment that can both inspire, challenge *and* offer escape and multiform relaxation for their increasingly diverse audience. (6)

In relation to the commercial computer game, there is no denying the creative merit of these games. The talent and innovation that goes into making a commercial game can by no means be denied, however an elevation of commercial games to a high art status is by no means implied. They rarely make a socio-political comment and criticism more often than not is directed at the gameplay or violence of the game. Neither is there any suggestion that by placing commercial games in a gallery such as in a retrospective exhibition like Hot Pursuits (1989) are they by default elevated to high art status. And yet with regards to Hot Pursuits, they are placed in such a way that they are perceived and intended not only to be seen as games, but as aesthetic art objects. Assuredly this is the curator's intention, but it ultimately comes down to just this – intention.

Axel Stockburger states,

> Obviously there is a large grey area between the phenomenon of patching or modding a game and the creation of a new game. Numerous unique games on the market are based on the same game engine. What makes them different is the game-play in relation to the aesthetic appearance. (Gamepads in the Gallery)

It is an ongoing debate with gamers and academics alike as to whether or not commercial games can be considered art, so unsurprisingly as soon as the art world begins to produce some sort of computer game derivative, the debate is refuelled. Mike Salmond, a lecturer at the University of South Florida is running a course that deals with the critique and dissection of commercial video games as an art form. He states that, "It's not an art form yet like film or theatre… I think right now it's being exploited in a very corporate manner. (But) if we start trying to legitimise the medium of video games, then hopefully we can start creating games that are art-based." (qtd. in Gussow: 2004) Similarly, Stewart Woods in his paper on Game Studies.org, Loading the Dice: The Challenge of Serious Videogames, quotes game designer Raph Koster[ix] as saying, "the fact that most games are merely entertainment does not mean that this is all they are deemed to be." (Woods: 2004)

Even in film a distinction can be made between commercial films and art films, and performance art is a derivation of theatre, so surely the natural progression of video games to diverge into the arts can be considered the equivalent. This does not negate the fact that although they can be critiqued, video games cannot at this point be considered high art, similarly as commercial films cannot be considered high art on the same level as art based films. The main purpose of this research paper is at this point documentation, clarification and the exploration of the types of artistic interventions that are being made by fine artists. The term artist itself is also neither clear cut nor definitive, but in this scenario it means artists active in the high art community. The art game genre, and certainly in the examples that will be explored in this paper, is on the whole frequented by members of the 'high art' academic community. Participation from the public is encouraged although not publicised and therefore

interest from the community is seen as minimal. This is not to suggest that the games do not require interaction or participation, but it suggests that the general public is unaware of videogames as anything other than commercial. In fact, Holmes states that,

> Art games are decidedly non-commercial in that they function primarily as single-use, or even disposable experiences due to their limited playability… Like many other forms of creative production, art games are primarily designed for an educated, academically orientated audience. Art games rarely attract serious gamers – their interfaces are not designed to withstand hours of use. (47)

Similarly, Cannon states that,

> The other influencing factor in people's judgment of works made with computer games – whether they are games themselves or artworks made with games, or political statements made with games – is the association of games with commercial enterprise. (Online Posting)

She also states,

> We associate [computer games with] time wastage, sedentariness, youth culture. Even though vast percentage of people playing games are adults. Games carry cultural baggage. (Online Posting)

Robert Nideffer states in his essay Mediating the Process of Academic Exhibitionism, written for the exhibition Shift-Ctrl,

> In the academy arts, the interest is in shifting the perceived role of the artist from that of mere practitioner, who is gifted a space in the academy due to an innate ability to reproduce socially sanctioned displays of wonder and beauty… to that of critically informed researcher who strategically participates in shaping contemporary culture by whatever means necessary. (SHIFT-CTRL)

This definition of the artist as a critical researcher is perhaps more fitting than the 'perceived role of the artist', especially in relation to art games. It is practically essential for any artist to

do research when producing work in contemporary social structures, purely because the implications of a badly designed work are simply too great to be left unplanned. With regards to art games however, and indeed all digitally motivated work, it is also essential to do some quite extensive research because the artist must be able to grapple with the technology itself. This is not to deny the skill involved in being a master sculptor or painter, but the way in which these skills are mastered is decidedly different. The role of the artist is therefore no longer simply that of 'creative genius', but rather of academic as well. No contemporary artist can survive by merely producing art. An understanding of critical theory is imperative.

The categories that fall within the Art Game or perhaps Artistic Computer Game Appropriation genre vary depending on the type of artistic intervention. At least four categories can confidently be established, which include:

1. Art Mod. A patch or modification (mod) that deals with the intervention of the artist into the actual coding of the game files. Therefore certain aspects of the game can be changed by modifying these files to varying levels of extremity.

2. Physical Manifestation. The player is actively involved physically in the game, often experiencing physical consequences, such as pain, for their actions.

3. Machinima[x]. The removing of the interactive element of a game. The artist draws on the game experiences and produces an artwork that looks like a game but in which the player has no influence.

4. 3D Real-time Game. An art game that displays all the characteristics of a complete level based commercial game, both on a programming and creative side. These games normally have some sort of political or social comments attached to.

SelectParks.net is a website devoted to the exploration of art games and art game modding. They specifically make the distinction between Art Mods and Art Games as well as Political Games. Although these distinctions can indeed be made, it can also be said that they all fall under the Art Game category. The manifestation of the art game phenomena as a genre could therefore be similar to that of film, which is defined as a category and then divided into

separate genres.[xi] SelectParks.net's categorisations are useful as they serve to illustrate the different manifestations that art games can take. Many of the games featured on their website can be said to exhibit some of the characteristics that Holmes defines: namely interactivity; the challenge of cultural stereotypes; meaningful social or historical critique; or novel story telling.

This is not to say that there might not be many sub-categories of games within these four main categories, but most art games can generally fit into one (and sometimes more) of the above. The fourth category is in itself a rarity, as most artists do not have the necessary skills available[xii] in order to produce this kind of game. In fact the example that will be explored in this paper is a demo[xiii] version and therefore at this point actually falls into Category One. This paper also to a certain extent discounts retro-styled games that involve simpler programming although technically they do fall into this category.[xiv] This is because the kinds of games that are currently commercially available are rarely two dimensional like older computer games. Most are three-dimensional real-time scenarios and there are teams of programmers and artists working together in order to make this happen. Very few art games exhibit these characteristics, simply because it is not viable, financially and with regards to the skill needed to produce a game of that magnitude.

Examples from categories One and Four will be examined in this paper. The first category's game, a patch called SOD, produced by artist collaborative JODI, falls under what this paper would define as 'aesthetic art games', games produced for their artistic intention and merit, as well as falling under the Art Mod definition. The fourth category's game, Escape From Woomera, falls under what could be termed a 'political art game', and is being put together by a team of artists, game designers and programmers in Australia. It explores social and political commentary as well as being a fully functional three-dimensional real-time scenario.

So bearing in mind what we know about the definition of 'Art Games', it is imperative that we situate art games within an historical context in order to understand how they have arisen between the worlds of commercial computer games and contemporary fine art practice.

CHAPTER TWO

"THE ROOTS OF ART GAMES – AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE"

A history of commercial video games is fairly easy to establish. However easy it maybe, nevertheless it is vital that it be explored within this paper. What is equally important is the way in which the trajectory of commercial games diverges to form the history of art games. The historical trajectories of these two genres are therefore inextricably linked, and the roots of the art game genre lie within the commercial game genre, both historically and technologically. We must therefore trace the origins of the commercial game genre from its beginning until present day in order to establish a timeline within which to place the art game genre. Similarly, the roots of the art game genre also lie within the field of contemporary art, particularly within the digital sphere. This chapter will therefore attempt to explore the way in which art games situate themselves between these two fields – contemporary art and commercial computer games.

To begin, we must look at the origins of contemporary art beginning with Duchamp, and explore the Surrealist group's use of the idea of play and games. They also produced a number of art games and it is perhaps from these origins that the art game genre evolved. To construct more than a brief timeline unfortunately will not be possible, as it is beyond the scope of this paper to do so; however it is important in relation to the context of art games to situate them within contemporary art and commercial gaming. Therefore to situate art games within a contemporary art context, we must establish some sort of timeline within which to contextualize them. We must undoubtedly begin with Duchamp and his questioning of the notion of art.

Although this timeline will not be as structured as the commercial game timeline, largely due to the nature of art movements (if they can still be called such) as being intersecting, it will explore briefly the digital genres in art, which have arisen in the 20th Century.

CONTEMPORARY ART

Michael Rush in his book New Media in Late 20th-Century Art states, "While the use of new media in art does have a history, it is not easily delineated. This history has yet to be written, largely because it is always developing."(9) This indeed is true also of art games. Although within the new media genre Michael Rush has attempted to compile an art historical perspective, a similar approach has not yet been taken within the art game field, perhaps due to its newly emerging status. Janet H. Murray, in an introduction to The New Media Reader, states, "The term 'new media' is a sign of our current confusion about where these efforts are leading and our breathlessness at the pace of change, particularly in the last two decades of the 20th century." (3)

This statement of Murray's is particularly pertinent when it comes to dealing with the pace with which new media has grown. The 'breathlessness' that she describes is the sense that things are changing so fast as to become overwhelming. Where indeed must we find a place to categorise all the different strains of digital art that are arising? Do some works and genres not defy categorisation? Although, as we shall explore later, Rush categorises Digital Art into a number of different categories, are those categories truly all encompassing? Do they hold within them all the many different kinds of digital art that has been produced in recent years? The answer is no. As an example, as this is the pertinent subject of this paper, art games are not defined as fitting into any of his categories. At best they might fit into the genre of Interactive Art as he describes it, but in reality they are somewhere in between his Interactive Art category and his Virtual Reality category. And yet the art game genre has developed enough in recent years for it to merit some sort of mention within these categorisations. This is not to fault Rush's art historical perspective in New Media in Late 20th-Century Art, but merely to illustrate the 'breathlessness' that Murray talks about. The sense that technology is moving so fast and being embraced in art so quickly, that we cannot grasp it swiftly enough.

Rush comments that, "One of the characteristic perceptions of twentieth-century art has been of its persistent tendency to question the long tradition of painting as the privileged medium of

representation." (7) He states further that this "'struggle with the canvas' pointed the way for scores of twentieth century artists…" (7) Rush describes the inclusiveness of the everyday in art and gives a brief overview of New Media when he states,

> This inclusiveness bespeaks a central preoccupation of the contemporary artist, which is to find the best possible means of making a personal statement in art… The manner in which expression is conveyed and the means used to achieve it have led to such proliferation of materials that one critic Arthur Danto, has declared 'the end of art' as we have known it… The final avant-garde, if one should call it that, of the twentieth century is that art which engages the most enduring revolution in a century of revolution: the technological revolution. Initiated by inventions outside the world of art, technology-based art… has directed art into areas once dominated by engineers and technicians. (7-8)

Rush states that,

> How one feels about Marcel Duchamp is, essentially, how one feels about late twentieth-century art, so profound was his influence. He stepped outside any confining notion of art, and with his ready-mades forced the question 'What is art?' to its deepest level. (21)

This is indeed true of some of the more technological art that we are seeing in the present day. To situate art games in particular we must look at not only contemporary art, but also the new media genre in particular within that context. Therefore, the art game genre needs to be situated in such a way that we gain a clear understanding of how it fits into new media within a contemporary art context. The impact of Duchamp is therefore paramount to all contemporary art.

Since computer games are situated within the digital sphere, it seems logical that art games would indeed be situated within the digital art sphere. An in-depth discussion of Digital Art within the New Media genre must therefore ensue. Michael Rush discusses Walter Benjamin's

essay The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction as the quintessential reference when it comes to dealing with art and technology. He states that,

> For Benjamin, technology, especially that of the still and moving camera, raised issues of authorship and the very uniqueness of the art object whose 'aura' is lost in reproduction. If an image can be reproduced easily, wherein lies the art? The issue of 'reproducing' images via moving or still cameras has little to do with the radically new capabilities now of creating work that has no referent in a non-digital world; indeed, that has no referent in the three-dimensional world as we know it… Using digital technology artists are now able to introduce new forms of 'production' not 'reproduction'. (168)

Rush divides his chapter on Digital Art up into five basic categories. These are Computer Art, Digitally Altered Photography, Art of the Worldwide Web, Interactive Digital Art and Virtual Reality. The potential for digital art to be used for any number of things is therefore limitless. All of these categories, although still in use, move in a fairly chronological manner, and enable us to see the ways in which digital technology has evolved. The genre of art games would logically be situated somewhere in between Interactive Digital Art and Virtual Reality. It is not quite at the stage where the idea of virtual reality is commonplace, and yet it cannot be placed in the same category as Interactive Art, mainly because it has a foot partially in the field of entertainment as well. Whereas Interactive Art deals mainly with the art world, art games reference popular culture by their very nature as computer/video games.

The premise of the traditional 'viewer' when it comes to art falls away when we start to look at digital art. Most digital art relies on the viewer as an integral part of the work. Whether it is with regards to digital photography and the role of the viewer in interpreting the photograph as constructed, or in terms of interactive art and the role of the viewer as the mediator between the artwork and the artist. Michael Rush states,

> In art, visual literacy is no longer limited to 'the object'. It must embrace the fluid, ever-changing universe that exists inside the computer and the new world the computer facilitates: an interactive art world that can be virtual in its reality and radically

> independent in its incorporation of the 'viewer' into the completion of the work of art. When Duchamp suggested that the work of art depended on the viewer to complete the concept, little did he know that by the end of the century some works of art (such as interactive films) would literally depend on the viewer, not only to complete them, but to initiate them and give them content. (171)

He states further that, "'Interactive' has emerged as the most inclusive term to describe the type of art of the digital age."(171) This statement is indeed at the crux of digital art. Very often it is required of the digital artwork to be 'interactive' or more simply put, able to be interacted with. However, it is the interactivity that is prevalent in digital art that makes digital art as a genre so unique. This by no means implies that all digital art is interactive, but it is, particularly in the later part of the Twentieth Century and often also in the Twenty-First Century, implied that 'digital' or 'multimedia' deals with 'interactivity'. The ways in which traditional art is 'interacted' with is by no means the same as the way in which most digital art is interacted with. With traditional art such as painting or sculpture, the interaction by the viewer is on a purely sensory, particularly visual, basis. The viewer looks at the work, but does little else, except possibly critique it. Interactive art on the other hand requires a physical, bodily interaction with the work, whether it is on a computer and in the sense of using the mouse, or in other ways such as the play of projections or movement in relation to the viewers' body.

We must therefore start to engage with the implied interactivity of most digital art by going through Rush's categories as defined in New Media in Late 20th Century Art. Not all of the works of the digital art period are completely interactive. Some are merely digital reproductions, or perhaps productions in themselves, of more traditional media. But a searching critique and discussion of interactivity will not be discussed in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of an historical perspective within which to situate the art game genre. A more comprehensive look at the idea of the 'interactive' will be discussed in a later chapter.

His first category is defined at Computer Art. For the layman, computer art is often perceived as the same as digital art. The idea of the digital is often automatically associated with computers and the two for most people are integrally linked. Granted that is often the case, but it is also a fact that a large amount of artists conceptualise their work within the computer and translate it into a far more traditional, visual medium. For example Richard Prince's 1996 work My Best[xv], a painting in which the multiple abstract squirrels were designed in his computer and then silk-screened onto the canvas. (7) Early computer artists can claim no well-known artists, as opposed to early video art, which included artists such as Richard Serra and John Baldessari. (176) Rush states that this is due to, "in part … the anti-technology sentiment among counter-culturalists and artists in the mid-1960's and 1970's." (176) There is often an abstract quality to the work of computer artists, and often animations, such as John Whitney's Catalog in 1961, was a short film, "consisting of computer-produced abstract images." (177) Catalog was produced using outdated military computing equipment. Rush comments that French artist Michaël Gaumnitz created,

> A series of personal animations on the computer… entitled Sketches, Portraits, and Homage. Utilizing the easily available techniques of pasting, erasing, displacement, and multiplication the artist developed an 'electronic palette' with which he improvised on themes related to personal memory. (177)

Rush also details the innovative use of technology by artists that has led to the development and advancement of technology itself. For example,

> In the mid-1970's artists Manfred Mohr, John Dunn, Dan Sandin, and Woody Vasulka developed software for the creation of two-and three-dimensional imaging. Composers Herbert Brun and Lejaren Hiller devised compositional tools for the computer that anticipated keyboard synthesizers now used by all mainstream musicians. Vera Molnar, considered a pioneer in computer art, translated a Minimalist sensibility to computer images, in intricate, highly controlled works on the computer… Although other innovations occurred in computer art through the mid to late 1970's it is generally

> agreed that computer art languished after the first burst of energy in the early 1970's. In the 1980's when computers became more affordable and accessible computers began to be used by a wide spectrum of artists, including those whose primary work was in other media. (178)

These advancements in technology detail the embracement of the technological by the art world, even to its advancement and benefit. Computers have subsequently become readily available and so are used by far more artists than during the computer art era. The increased availability of computers in the 1980's brought with it an interest and broadening of the computer-based art genre. Abstraction still has a large part in computer-generated images.

Rush's next category is Digitally Altered Photography. This mainly deals with the manipulation of images by artists in order to subvert and alter the preconceptions arising out of the traditional photographic medium. For example, those notions that deals with the photographic image as a representation of reality and truth. These sorts of ideas have been around since before digital photography and digitally altered images, but the advent of digital technology has really questioned concepts surrounding the photographic surface and its integrity. It is interesting that Rush quotes Anthony Aziz and Sammy Cucher as saying, "'with the end of truth in photography has come a corresponding loss of trust, every image, every representation, is now a potential fraud.'"(187-188) This distrust of the photographic surface is one that still prevails in contemporary art. The nature of the photographic surface lends itself to the way in which digital photography and digitally altered photographs challenge the medium of photography. Rush also notes that, " It is interesting that, despite the abstract nature of several notable early computer art works, the representational image made a big comeback with digitally altered art in the 1980's as artists toyed with the mechanical possibilities of computer imaging techniques." (184) He further notes, "In painting or sculpture, it is the concepts and uses of materials that change in the art. With technology-based art, the medium itself radically changes when the technology changes. The excitement… in being able to

capture movement… is now replaced by an enthusiasm for altering reality, for making the real illusory." (192)

This is perhaps the most telling statement when it comes to a discussion of technology or computer based art. The continuing excitement as the technology changes and the possibilities that it reveals to perceptive minds is really the basis of a large potion of digital art. It is ultimately the ways in which artists embrace and subvert existing technology that is essentially the topic of this paper.

The next category Rush defines is Art of the Worldwide Web. With the availability of information through the Internet, art – particularly that which is digitally based – has become able to be widely distributed cheaply and easily. The category of art games to a large extent falls into that of web-based art as well as the following two categories. The distribution of patch art and political games like Escape From Woomera, is largely available over the Internet, often for free, which in turn subverts the notion of the 'elite' artwork, much as Pop Art and the notion of mass production did. The concept of cheap, widely available art is one that has been explored by many artists in many different movements and genres throughout the history of contemporary art. Rachel Greene has since written Internet Art, a volume devoting itself entirely to the exploration of the evolution of web-based art as an independent genre. This book, written in 2004, as opposed to Rush's book written in 1999, actually begins to deal with art games distributed over the Internet. This enables us to see that these sorts of games are drawing more notice in 2004, as opposed to just five years previously, once again illustrating the 'breathlessness' that Janet Murray spoke of earlier.

The next category is Interactive Art. The interactivity of most digitally produced art for many is seen as a given. This is not the case however as we have seen in the explorations of the above categories. The interactive element in art, although in most cases a purely sensory and particularly visual experience, is expanded upon in the case of Interactive Art. It is not merely a 'click and gain satisfaction' experience as with most web-based art, but rather an experience

that enables the viewer or participant to engage in the artwork, and thereby become an integral part of the artwork itself. Anne-Marie Schleiner in her curatorial statement for the online exhibition Cracking the Maze, to be discussed later in this paper mentions that to describe an interactive artwork as too game-like is a common pejorative. This statement illustrates some of the art-world's attitude to computer games and their spreading influence. To describe something as "too game-like" demonstrates an elitist attitude. The fact that certain art movements, for example Surrealism and Dada, embraced games as part of the artistic process, surely demonstrates their validity? The fact is that the idea of play, which will also be discussed later in this paper, is central to many artists' work. The embracing of the inner child is an idea that is explored by many artists' and often by psychoanalysts such as Freud. Surely to describe an art object as too game-like is negating a large portion of artistic exploration in the process?

The last category is Virtual Reality. The idea of virtual reality (VR), since its inception, has been used in numerous science fiction movies, as some sort of predictor of our future. It is the interaction of the user in a virtual environment – one in which they are immersed so deeply within that environment that they can interact fully with a counterfeit or 'virtual' reality. The question, particularly after the release of films like The Matrix trilogy, is how deeply we can immerse ourselves within that environment so as to believe that it is real. It in essence raises the question – If reality can be constructed, what then is reality? Whilst Rush discusses the costs of VR tools and the un-likelihood of most artists ever being able to afford to delve deeply into this medium, he also discusses the advancements that are being made within the virtual reality sphere, particularly in academic and research institutions, and more particularly in the medical field. This is not to say that there aren't examples of virtual reality environments, or at least works that are close to VR environments. Jeffery Shaw's interactive installation The Legible City is a virtual recreation of cities like Manhattan or Amsterdam. The viewer pedals a bicycle and takes a virtual tour around these cities. Although this is not a truly VR environment, being largely video based as opposed to VR, it is a hint of the future real-time actions that could be anticipated. (Rush: 212)

These categories as defined by Rush, although assuredly not the only categorisations available, serve to provide us with some sort of background as to the history and development of Digital Art. The purpose of this paper is not to reiterate a history of digital art and new media as it stands in Michael Rush's book. It is to provide an historical perspective. As stated previously, Art Games could perhaps be situated somewhere in between Interactive Art and Virtual Reality. By the same token, Machinima, Category Three as defined in the previous chapter, could also perhaps be said to occupy a space in Computer Art because it is non-interactive. The intersecting and overlapping nature of much digital art, as well as its 'breathless' development, therefore makes it difficult to class in a single category.

COMMERCIAL COMPUTER GAMES

When we start to situate art games within the commercial game context, we must first examine albeit briefly, a history of commercial video games and their development. Although this paper will feature only a basic timeline of events, a more thorough and complex history can be found at the website The Dot Eaters. If we start with a brief timeline (based on a timeline featured on PS3Land.com) we can identify all the major developments within the commercial gaming industries development and then start to identify those that might have had the greatest significance on the art game genre. This commercial timeline is far more chronological, perhaps due to the rapid rate and categorisation of game developments due to its popular culture status. In an industry and perhaps even culture, obsessed with technology and the new, it is not surprising that there is a more documented historical timeline than that of digital art.

1958 – Willy Higinbotham designs the first video game as a distraction for visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory in New York. This game is labelled "Tennis for Two" and was played on an oscilloscope. According to the website The Dot Eaters, William Hunter states that Higinbotham's idea was "to use a small analog (sic) computer in the lab to graph and display the trajectory of a moving ball on an oscilloscope, with which users can interact." (Hunter)

1961 – Steve Russell designs the game Spacewar! on a PDP-1 mainframe computer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Spacewar! becomes 'the world's first fully interactive videogame… Two spaceships called the wedge and the needle, according to their shapes, are rendered in rough, outlined graphics." (Hunter) Similarly, history is also made when two MIT Spacewar! enthusiasts wire together a joystick to replace the control switches. Unfortunately this game was only accessible to those within MIT. According to The Dot Eaters,

> It is such a huge hit with the computer community that copies are quickly spread around to other educational facilities in the U.S. across the then burgeoning Internet precursor ARPAnet, and DEC even uses the program to demonstrate the capabilities of its PDP-1 to new clients and includes it free with every installed system. (Hunter)

1963 – The move of Nintendo Co. Ltd. from the playing cards market into the video games market. Nintendo, originally founded in 1889 as a playing card manufacturer, became famous for the game Donkey Kong – released in 1981.

1967 – Ralph Baer designs the first video game to be played on a television set. It is called 'Chase' and is designed for Sanders Associates. With the help of technician Bill Harrison, they build the first multi-game unit. They called it the Home TV Game. After receiving additional funding, they team up with engineer Bill Rusch. Rusch designs a 'catch' game which Harrison and Baer refine into a ping-pong game.

> In early 1968 Baer files for the first videogame patent, and by the end of that year they again demonstrate the system, capable of switching between ping-pong, volleyball, handball, hockey and even several shooting games to be used with a newly designed light-gun. (Hunter)

Ultimately, the system is deemed not viable with all interest turned to the emergence of the cable TV market, but in a demonstration of new gaming hardware to TV manufacturers in the hopes of finding a licensee; there is interest but no takers. (Hunter)

1971 – Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney design the first arcade game based on Russell's Spacewar!, and title it Computer Space. Bushnell is a student at the University of Utah who plays Computer Space, and decided that it would make a viable arcade game. He works for eight years on turning Computer Space into an arcade coin-operated game. His co-worker at Ampex becomes involved in the project and in 1971 he leaves Ampex to work on Computer Space fulltime. When he finally completes it in 1971 he finds a buyer in Nutting Associates. 1,500 units are built with a futuristic design and fibreglass cabinet. The game unfortunately does not sell well as the controls are too complicated for many patrons to comprehend. (Hunter)

1972 – Ralph Baer designs the Odyssey console for Magnavox. The Magnavox Odyssey becomes the first home game console. Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney form Atari. Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney originally named their company Syzygy, "a term from astronomy meaning the Earth, Moon and Sun in perfect alignment." (Hunter) Unfortunately a roofing company had already registered that name and so they changed the name to Atari, after a term in a Japanese game called Go. Atari is the equivalent of 'check' in the game. They hire Al Alcorn who designs the arcade game PONG. They make a prototype and install the prototype at a bar in Sunnyvale. Later that evening, Alcorn gets a phone call from the bar's owner telling him the game is broken and to come and collect it. When he gets there he finds that the machine doesn't work because it is jammed full of money. Atari decides to build PONG itself instead of finding a distributor. They sell 8,500 machines in one year. The cabinets have a production cost of 500 dollars a unit and a selling price of 1 200 dollars. Atari designs Pong Doubles that becomes the first arcade game to allow 4-player simultaneous play.

Bill Benders, who has seen Baer's Home TV Game system demonstration, takes a Vice-President post at Magnavox and convinces the company of the TV Game system's value. "Magnavox licenses the device and all rights to patents in 1971," states Hunter and "after further developing the system they release the first ever commercially available home

videogame to Magnavox dealers as the Odyssey in May 1972" (Hunter). Magnavox sells 100 000 units in the first year of its release. Hunter states further some of the problems with the Magnavox system, for example,

> The game needs a Magnavox TV to play them. As well initial distribution is limited to official Magnavox dealers, seriously limiting the Odyssey's sales potential. But thanks to the fact that they now hold the first videogame patent… Magnavox is able to collect nearly one-hundred million dollars in licence fees and legal judgments resulting from various lawsuits against companies designing their own game systems, including a $700,000 payout from Atari over PONG and foreign rights. (Hunter)

After Computer Space the next hugely popular game was Hunt the Wumpus by Gregory Yob. It was a text-based game in which you moved around a system of connected caves. You are armed with only five arrows and must hunt the elusive Wumpus. In each room you are given clues as to your surroundings. The object is to fire an arrow into the room that contains the Wumpus. (Hunter)

Also in 1972 came Adventure developed by Willie Crowther on a PDP-1[xvi]. It was later expanded upon by Don Woods. Adventure is a complete text-based adventure game. The object of the game is to explore the Colossal Caves and return with as many treasures as possible.

1975 – PONG becomes Atari's first home video product. Atari employees Bob Brown and Harold Lee propose a home version of PONG in 1974. By Christmas, Atari's home PONG console, retailing at $100 becomes Sears's biggest selling item. (Hunter) Midway releases Gun Fight, their first game to use a microprocessor.

It is interesting to note at this point that Hunter states,

> Between 1971 and 1973, 30 videogames are produced for the arcade by 11 manufacturers. From 1974 to 1975, 57 games are released. And 1976 alone sees 53

> videogames by 15 companies hit the market… one of these being Exidy… It is their Death Race, designed by the company's prolific gamemaker Howell Ivey that sparks the first controversy over videogame violence. (Hunter)

1976 – Coleco releases their home video game console Telstar. Fairchild releases the first programmable home video game console, the Fairchild Video Entertainment System. This would later be renamed Channel F.

1977 – Atari releases the Atari Video Computer System (VCS), later known as the Atari 2600. Nintendo releases their first home video game product - TV Game 6. Cinematronics develops the first vector graphics game, Space Wars. It has obvious reference to Computer Space and Spacewar! and a reference to one of the popular movie of the time – Star Wars. Hunter states that,

> Space Wars is also unique in that it offers the players a myriad of selectable play options, such as variable ship speed and gravity effects. Also featured is a damage model, causing ships to exhibit reduced performance after being grazed by a shot… Space Wars not only encourages head to head combat, it requires it as there is no single player option… pioneered here in Space Wars, vector graphics and its method of drawing sharp geometric shapes with straight lines will soon become a hot trend in videogames. (Hunter)

Also in 1977 came Zork, a nonsense word used by the designers used to describe the coding in progress. According to Hunter, "Sitting on MIT's PDP-10, Zork… undergoes the obligatory mass dissemination across the ARPAnet[xvii]. Hundreds of users become fixated on the game, and the developers use the many suggestions that pour in for improvements and puzzle additions to the game… The final puzzle is added to Zork in 1979…" (Hunter) A whole host of refinements and sequels are added to the series such as Beyond Zork and Return to Zork.

1978 – Midway releases Space Invaders, the first game to be able to keep track of high scores. According to The Dot Eaters, "Space Invaders practically causes riots in Japan and becomes responsible for a nation-wide coin shortage that forces the government to quadruple Yen production." (Hunter) Bally releases the Bally Professional Arcade. This would later be sold to Astrovision and marketed as the Astrocade in 1980. APF releases the M-1000 and MP-1000. Magnavox releases the Odyssey2.

1979 – Atari releases their first home computer system, the Atari 400. They also release the arcade game Asteroids. Asteroids is a run-away hit and adding to its popularity was a high score system that allowed players to enter their initials. Texas Instruments release the TI-99/4A home computer.

1980 – Namco releases Pac-Man. It becomes the first animated main character in an arcade game. Originally called Puckman, its name was changed when it was released in the U.S. because of the potential for vandalism. Pac-Man has gone on to become the most popular arcade game of all time. On-Line Systems is founded by Ken and Roberta Williams. They later change their name to Sierra On-Line.

1981 – Nintendo releases the arcade game Donkey Kong. IBM releases their very first PC. Its 8088 processor runs at 4.77 MHz. According to Hunter, Miyamoto, the creator of Donkey Kong,

> Is much more into another idea he has had for an arcade game, the impetus of which is the classic movie King Kong. He starts with a drawing of a rotund little carpenter with a big bulbous nose and bushy moustache… Donley Kong becomes the biggest selling arcade game of 1981, selling 65,000 units in North America alone. (Hunter)

Further spin-offs from the original Donkey Kong include Mario Bros. in 1983 and Super Mario Bros. in 1985.

1982 – GCE releases the first vector-based, portable home video game system Vectrex. Coleco releases the system ColecoVision. Atari releases the Atari 5200 Super System.

Commodore releases their home computer the Commodore 64. Emmerson release the Arcadia 2001. It is also significant that the Disney movie Tron was released in this year. (ACMI) It was a complete failure.

1983 – Mattel releases their home computer the Aquarius. The ColecoVision system is a complete failure and the company almost goes under. Sega Enterprises is formed, flops and is sold off to Bally.

1984 – Apple releases the Macintosh home computer. The machine sports a black and white screen and a 7.83 MHz processor. Sierra release King's Quest. Atari releases the Atari ST home computer. IBM releases the IBM PC AT line of home computers. Bally closes Sega Enterprises. Sega Japan is sold to investors who re-launch Sega in the US as Sega of America. The home video game market crashes and many hardware and software companies fold. Hunter states,

> By 1983, commercial videogames have been around for 12 years, and while this may seem like a pretty long span, its an incredibly short time for an industry to go from non-existence to total domination of the entertainment sector… its complete destruction only takes about 6 months… A public that had once seemed to possess an insatiable appetite for any new game or console to come down the pike now collectively turns its back on the gamemakers. (The Dot Eaters)

The fact that Atari comprises of most of the home video game market means that they take the brunt of the damage. The first problems arise with their conversion of Pac-Man for the Atari 2600 in 1981. Although the title is the same the graphics are awful and it was, "painfully apparent that the game is a rush job to make the 1981 Christmas season, in order to quickly recoup the money paid by Atari for the Pac-Man licence." (Hunter) The next disaster is E.T. based on the movie, E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial by Steven Spielberg. Hunter states,

> The game is torture to play, featuring frustrating control over the lost alien, along with endlessly confusing gameplay. Expecting a windfall of sales, Atari manufactures a huge

> amount of carts, reportedly making more than there are 2600 machines to play them. Five million are released to stores, only one million eventually sell. They are left with a massive inventory of unsold cartridges, as the game becomes one of the greatest videogame flops in history… The trucks [loaded with unsold merchandise] are driven to a secret landfill site in Alamogordo, New Mexico, and buried in huge cement sarcophagi. Atari later insists the midnight burial was done to dispose of 'defective' merchandise. (Hunter)

Although other companies such as Activision are producing some better games for the 2600, Atari feel that they are losing control of the market and so get involved in some legal incidents with Activision and Imagic. Atari eventually lose the case and so,

> [Open] the floodgates for third-party manufacturers of games for their system… [but] little concern is given for their quality… before long cartridges are being dumped onto the shelves at a fraction of previous price, at some retail stores for as low as a dollar… and Atari finds their main source of income drastically reduced. Rivals Mattel and Coleco both have to slash the prices of their systems and games in order to compete with the ever-increasing videogame glut. (Hunter)

The third factor in the videogame decline can be attributed to the growing popularity of the home computer. By 1984 Commodore are selling 300,000 computers a month. Many people sell their consoles and move to computers.

> Atari loses 356 million dollars in 1983, bleeding out $2 million daily… After the market crash of 83-84, the corporate love affair with videogames vanishes, and no North American company will touch the things with a ten-metre joystick. In Kyoto, Japan, however, a little 100 year-old former playing card company has other ideas. (Hunter)

1985 – According to J.C. Herz in Joystick Nation, in 1985, the U.S. videogame industry is virtually non-existent. (20) Subsequently, new forms begin to emerge in the PC. Nintendo releases the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). Microsoft releases their first version of

Windows v1.0. Alex Pajitnov designs the first PC game Tetris. The first CD-Rom drive for the PC is released. It is a 1x speed. Commodore releases the first in their Amiga computer line.

Interestingly, although PS3Land.com documents Tetris as being designed in 1985, Herz only documents it as being designed in 1989. Perhaps there is a discrepancy because of release dates versus design dates? Regardless, Herz defines Tetris as, "possibly the most addictive videogame of all time, inducing a trancelike state with sufficient practice." (21)

1986 – Sega releases the Sega Master System. Atari releases the Atari 7800. It is the first system to feature backwards compatibility.[xviii] Herz also states that Nintendo and Super Mario Bros. take America by storm. (20) Sierra release Space Quest.

1987 – NEC releases the first 16-bit home video game system PC engine (although according to PS3Land.com, this is widely disputed) in Japan. Atari releases the Atari XE, which is internally compatible with their 8-bit computer line but is marketed as a game console. Sierra releases Leisure Suit Larry by Al Lowe. Hunter states, "The goal off the game is to get the sleazy title character into bed with three different women. The game is a particular hit with bored male office workers, and it introduces the 'Boss' key, which instantly clears the screen of any evidence of the game in case the manager walks by." (Hunter)

1988 – The first CD-Rom game, The Manhole by Mediagenic is released. Two ex-Commodore 64 programmers form Codemasters.

1989 – Nintendo releases the handheld video game system Game Boy. NEC releases the Turbografx-16. Sega releases the Sega Genesis. Atari releases the first colour handheld video game system, the Atari Lynx. Tetris 'cracks the female gamer market' and SimCity is released by Maxis. (ACMI)

1990 – SNK releases the Neo-Geo (AES). Its insides are same as its arcade counterpart, the MVS, and so truly bringing arcade games home. Sega releases the handheld system Game Gear. Squaresoft releases the first in what will become one of the best selling RPG's[xix] of all time - Final Fantasy.

1991 – Nintendo releases the Super Nintendo. Commodore releases the CD-based home video game system CDTV. Fujitsu releases the FM Towns Marty, first 32-bit console. It was a games console based on their FM Towns computer that they released in 1989. Sega introduces Sonic the Hedgehog.

1993 – Atari releases the first 64-bit (although again according to PS3Land.com, this is widely disputed) Atari Jaguar. Commodore releases the Amiga CD32, a 32-bit game console based on the Amiga 1200 computer. Sega releases the Sega 32x expansion module for Genesis owners, upgrading the systems processing power to 32-bit and featuring all new games. One of the most influential computer games, Myst, is released (ACMI)

1994 – Sony releases the 32-bit CD-based Sony Playstation in Japan. Doom is released. (ACMI) Along with Doom, the makers released its source code, making it possible for gamers to modify the game.

1995 – Sega releases the Saga Saturn. Sony releases the Playstation in the US. Nintendo releases the first 32-bit portable video game system, the Virtual Boy. It produces real 3D effects in shades of red. Sega releases a handheld version of their Genesis console, completely compatible with its cartridges. They call it Nomad.

1996 – Nintendo releases the Nintendo 64. This is the last home console to use cartridge media. ACMI states that, "Quake popularises the multi-player first person shooter." The first MMORPG[xx], Meridian 59, is released. (ACMI)

1997 – Ultima Online popularises the MMORPG. (ACMI)

1998 – Sega releases the Sega Dreamcast in Japan. Nintendo releases the Game Boy Colour. It is backwards compatible with existing Game Boy cartridges.

1999 – Sega releases the Sega Dreamcast in US. SNK releases a colour handheld Neo-Geo Pocket. The Counter Strike mod for Half-Life is released. (ACMI)

2000 – Sony releases the Playstation 2. It is backwards compatible with Playstation games. The Sims is released. (ACMI)

2001 – Microsoft releases its first home video game system, the Xbox. Nintendo releases the GameCube. Nintendo releases the Game Boy Advance handheld, backwards compatible with Game Boy and Game Boy Colour cartridges. Halo is released. (ACMI)

2002 – Every video game console in production now has an online broadband-ready option. Sega leaves the console industry and becomes a software-only designer.

2003 – Sony releases the PSX, which combines a TV tuner, DVD recorder, and PS2 into single box. Sony also releases the EyeToy USB camera. (ACMI)

2004 – Sony unveils the PSP[xxi] handheld system. PSP is scheduled for a 2004 launch in Japan, followed by U.S. and European launches in early 2005. Nintendo release the Game Boy Advance SP. They also release the Nintendo DS in late 2004/early 2005. It is the first handheld gaming system to feature a touch screen and dual-view screens.
(This timeline (sans 2004) is referenced to PS3Land.com unless otherwise stated.)

A MERGING OF THE COMMERCIAL AND CONTEMPORARY – ART GAMES

This timeline looks at not only the games that were produced during the history of video games, but also the consoles and home computers that were produced during this time. These aspects of the video game history are included because it is vital to understand the pace of developments in such a short time. A game system, whether console, computer or handheld, has been released almost every year since 1976. Even with the home video game market crash in 1984, dozens of consoles and then computers and handhelds, were being produced by different companies at an extremely rapid rate. At a time now when the gross annual product of computer and video games exceeds that of the movie industry, computer game systems have flourished, particularly within the past five years, beginning with the Sony Playstation.

What is interesting to note about this timeline, is that all the references from the ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image) deal with the kinds of games that are significant to those people within the art community that deal in modding. For example, Doom, Quake etc. The online possibilities of many games are exciting for artists. These are the kinds of computer games that are significant in an art game timeline, because these are references for many artists in the art/computer game/art game debate. Games such as Myst are games that are always almost brought up in papers regarding the study of games, i.e. ludology.

Obviously this timeline is a brief one and does not include nearly as many games as have been made and were successful. Conversely it does not include the unsuccessful games. What it serves to illustrate however, is that there have been remarkable turning points within the video games history. Many of the artists working with video and computer games now have been affected by this history. In particular those artists whose work explores a retro, pixellated feel. This history also serves to illustrate the rapidity with which computer games have expanded and evolved. We have moved from PONG a mere thirty-two years ago, to almost photo real games like Max Payne and Getaway. Also, from two paddles hitting a dot to sophisticated

Artificial Intelligence such as in Grand Theft Auto –Vice City. All this in the space of approximately thirty years. And we are still advancing.

Many of us grew up with these games – admiring the next step in the graphical revolution when a new game was released. And conversely looking back at our old games and scoffing at the graphics of two, three years ago. So is it therefore unsurprising that when we come of an age when we recognise the potential of these games, we would want to make reference to these things of our childhood and teenage years? Not only because they have the potential to evoke nostalgia, but also because they are easily accessible to us. For those of us who didn't grow up to be computer science whizzes, the skills are – by comparison to today's programming skills, easily obtainable. And for the willing, the knowledge (if not the skill) is still relatively easily attainable over the Internet.

Whilst PC games have a tendency to be the most commonly modified and hacked, console games have the possibility, with the right software, to be potentially 'hackable'. Unfortunately, the technology is not readily available, and also very expensive, and so with easily accessible personal computer access, it is not surprising the many artists have not only chosen, but perhaps been forced into the realm of PC art modification.

The ways in which art games situate themselves within these two, seemingly opposite, genres is such that art games take on characteristics of both strains. They assume the technological advances of commercial computer gaming, whilst at the same time retaining the self-criticality that is evident in contemporary art. This self-critical as well as socially critical voice that appears in the guise of political art games such as Escape From Woomera and aesthetic art game patches such SOD (both of which will be discussed in this paper), ties in the entertainment world in the form of computer games, and subverts it in a critical way in order to carry influence within the art world.

Rebecca Cannon states in paper Introduction to Artistic Computer Game Modification,

> Art modding… was initiated in the nineteen-nineties when artists began to appreciate the aesthetic and technical qualities of computer games, and decided to make use of these resources in their own artistic practice. The first art mod listed in the SelectParks Art Mod Archive was made in 1993 – when Takahiko Iimura worked with Sony's 'System G' game technology to produce an interactive CD-ROM titled IEOUNN. Art modding picked up full swing in the late nineteen-nineties when innovative game developers like ID Software released free software tools that allowed players to customise the levels and characters in their games. These tools were used by many fans, and also appropriated by artists. (Introduction)

It can therefore be seen that there is some sort of historical perspective on art games already in place, but for art games to be truly recognised and understood as a medium, there needs to be a far more comprehensive art game history available. Unfortunately, such a history at this time does not exist, but until such time as the medium gains in momentum and recognition, we will have to content ourselves with merely situating art games in both commercial gaming and contemporary art.

Perhaps it would be useful to define categories of art games, similar to those defined by Michael Rush. Although, these categories are by no means definitive, we can define art games as a genre in two essential ways. The first is to split it up into 'game type' categories as seen in Chapter One. The second way is to define them via a thematic approach. Therefore, each art game would fall essentially into two sub-categories – the first being a game type, and the second being a theme. The game type category has essentially already been discussed in Chapter One, and therefore, it would seem pertinent to discuss the second category in this chapter.

The most essential divisions within the thematic categories are perhaps the divide between Political Art Games and Aesthetic Art Games. These are the two main categories within this

thematic approach although doubtless others could be defined. Political Art Games could perhaps better be defined as Agenda-based Art Games. This would include games that are not necessarily politically motivated, but have some sort of ulterior motive other than aesthetics. Aesthetic games would include games that deal with using the game medium to express an artistic purpose. Whether it be merely the beauty of the structural surroundings within the game or the beauty of the 'code' as in many of the works made by JODI, this category looks at the motivations by artists that have little to do with the world of man and everything to do with the world of computers and games.

Therefore Agenda-based Art Games becomes our first art game thematic category. Although many of the games fitting into this category are politically motivated such as Escape From Woomera and Under Ash, this is not to say that all games that fall under this heading are such. The basis behind this definition would be using the medium of the computer games to bring an issue to the publics, or at least the art worlds, attention in order to attract support and understanding for a cause. Often the medium of the game itself is merely the messenger, and unfortunately, not all of these games can claim great gameplay. The game itself is often sacrificed at the expense of the message. Whilst this is not necessarily true for all agenda-based games, it is a common problem that is encountered, and unfortunately boredom sets in very quickly. The problem lies therein. Surely people would pay more attention to the message itself if the game play were interesting and engaging to the player? If you sacrifice most of the attempt at engaging gameplay, there is essentially nothing left and the player's attention will not be held for any significant length of time. Therefore, your message is sacrificed as well. Conversely, if your message is gotten across quickly and succinctly, then there is perhaps no need for complicated gameplay.

Aesthetic Art Games is a category that is somewhat universal. It includes most art games, and provides a kind of blanket definition. However, it is also perhaps the most interesting category because it allows flexibility. The games themselves have no ulterior motives other than being pieces of art. They comment not on the artists' political views but rather on the complexity of

the code that the artist is working with. The attraction of making a work that embraces a huge part of contemporary culture – one that is seen as generally inaccessible to the general public, with regards to the process of making a game, is very appealing.

This does not annul the potential and the cultural impact of Agenda-based games, but it does call in to question the development of the two concurrent categories. Which of the two is more advanced? It is very difficult for 3D games to have a critical voice as well as a coherent aesthetic. This conflict is a result largely of funding. Independent game developers, who are often self-funded or working on a tight budget, either have to develop the game according to the publishers' requirements, or risk losing their funding or running out of money. Although commercial games are accessible to buy, they are not accessible to make.

Because art games are still such an emerging medium, it is difficult to identify key events in the process of establishing video games as art. It would be easier to establish the key theorists and websites i.e. Tiffany Holmes and Rebecca Cannon, and SelectParks.net respectively. Although exhibitions have been mounted that deal with art games, for example Cracking the Maze, as well as other gallery space exhibitions, there are no particular key exhibitions. Exhibitions such as Arcadia in New Zealand, as well as Shift-Ctrl at the Beall Centre in Irvine, California, are just some of the exhibitions that have dealt with computer games in an art context.

In the forthcoming chapters, this paper will examine different examples of some of the manifestations of art games, as defined by the categorisations in Chapter One. It is imperative that we begin to understand the different ways in which artists appropriate games, and the forms that these appropriations take. The art game genre lies between the two worlds of commercial culture and contemporary art. It embraces the technology of computer games in such as way that they attract the attention of those interested in that genre, and yet does not attract enough attention in either the art or commercial gaming world. Their field is, although critically not limited, not yet advanced enough to become a major critical force.

CHAPTER THREE

"UNDRESSING THE GAME"

The focus of this chapter will be the 1999 online exhibition Cracking the Maze – Game Plug-Ins as Hacker Art, curated by Anne-Marie Schleiner. Within that exhibition, specific examples will be analysed, primarily SOD by JODI.org. Before launching into an analysis of Cracking the Maze and the mods that will be examined in this chapter, it is essential to provide some sort of explanation of Category One – Art Mods.

ART MOD CATEGORISATION

Rebecca Cannon defines art mods and art games and makes the distinction between art mods and fan mods. Her paper, Introduction to Artistic Computer Game Modification explores art mods, fan mods and art games. Fan mods generally are mods of games produced by avid players of that game. They don't necessarily have an artistic bent to them, although outsiders might perceive them as such. Cannon states,

> Art mods are not exactly the same as fan mods – i.e., modifications made to computer games by game fans – even though some do fall into that category, as the artists in question are similarly fans of games… The genre of Artistic Computer Game Modification covers a much broader range of projects than the homogenous software add-ons produced by fans… *Machinima* art mods, like machinima fan mods, are animations made using computer games. However when employed by artists, they may be used for more conceptual, abstracted and/or purely aesthetic uses. *Site-specific installation* art mods compare real worlds with their virtual replicas, exploring the most subtle to the most extreme differences between them. *Performative intervention* art mods intervene into online games and other game contexts to perform unexpected and sometimes disruptive behaviours that expose underlying functions of normative game play. *Real time performance instruments* allow audio and visual artists to create stunning, live aesthetics by making use of the real-time 3D vision and sound engines upon which games run. (Introduction)

Cannon goes on to explore the differences between an art mod and an art game, some of which have been stated in Chapter One. She does however, comment on the treatment of mods as art, and how this "comparatively reveals overly-critical, non-art attitudes towards games, which has affected art mods." (Introduction)

Within the Art Mod category, various subgenres exist, as defined by Rebecca Cannon. She classifies these as Interactive and Non-Interactive. Within these two subcategories, various other subgenres exist.

Cannon's first class distinction within the Non-Interactive category is Machinima, which in this paper is classified as a Category Three art game. As stated in Chapter One, Machinima is a combination word, derived from mechanical animation and mechanical cinema. It usually is produced by recording video sequences 'acted' out by in game characters, and often edited in post production. A more detailed kind of machinima involves making new maps, models etc. within the game and then getting the characters to act out a kind of 'script'.[xxii]

Cannon's second category of Non-Interactive mods is what she terms Abstract Animation. She claims that they cannot correctly be termed machinima because of their lack of 'perceivable or inferable narrative.' (Introduction) She claims,

> These works are formal inquiries into methods of abstraction. They have resulted in fully abstracted experiments aimed at decoding and removing functional elements from the game. The fully abstracted variety follow a similar pattern to the evolution of visual media within the modernist period of painting and sculpture, and are hence of limited historical or conceptual importance. (Introduction)

Cannon's next set of categorisation is the Interactive mods. Her opening paragraph to the interactive section states, "Many creations in the second division of mod art works: those that can be considered interactive, or at least reactive to user intervention (Mortenson, 2002), also

focus on deconstructive techniques for the purposes of exposing the greater functioning of game mechanics and their true, or hidden power over players." (Introduction)

The last category worthy of note of the Non-Interactive mods is what Cannon calls Consol Mods. (Introduction) Interestingly she states that she only knows of one such mod[xxiii], but considering the nature of art modding to be mainly PC based, it is a fascinating addition, particularly because it is Non-Interactive. As shall be seen later, consol modding is slightly more prevalent when it comes to Interactive mods, but it is still in the minority.

Cannon has divided her Interactive sub-categories into five classes. Abstracted Interactives; Site Specific/Site Relative; Consol and Emulator Hacks and Mods; Online Interventions and Real Time Performance Instruments. Falling into the first category would be the main subject of this chapter, SOD by JODI. Cannon argues that, "These usually employ deconstructive techniques to further explore the mechanics of the game, and expose the true/hidden power of the game over the player. They usually require some degree of technical proficiency to execute." (Introduction)

The second class, Site Specific Interactive mods, often replicate real spaces, particularly the gallery spaces in which the work is exhibited. The participants of the game are exposed to both the virtual gallery space as well as the real space and its constraints. A wonderful example is 911 Survivor, by Mike Caloud, Jeff Cole, John Brennon and Aaron Kwon (USA 2003). Although this paper is not going to go into detail regarding this work, it is a replica of the World Trade Centre. "A lone survivor walks around one of the top stories, contemplating his fate before jumping out of the building. Viewers cannot control the bot, but they can control the view of his fall, and they can jump with him." (Cannon: Introduction)

The third class is Consol and Emulator Hacks and Mods and they usually deal with intervention into an existing game. Occasionally, they also involve making new games. Cannon defines

these as, “Rewriting the code of a Gameboy emulator, or re-wiring the circuit board of a Nintendo Entertainment System.” (Cannon: Introduction) As stated earlier, this is not a dominant manifestation of art mods or games, presumably because of the nature of computers being more accessible and more easily modifiable.

The fourth class, Online Interventions deals with mods such as Velvet Strike. Making interventions into online games, Anne Marie Schleiner, curator of Cracking the Maze, sprayed virtual anti-war slogans onto assorted walls in various online Counter Strike games, ‘much to the confusion of many gamers’ in a kind of performative intervention. (Cannon: Introduction)

The last class featured in Cannon’s Interactive category is Real Time Performance Instruments. Cannon states that they are, “usually audio-visual generative units, either hardware or software, that are playable in much the same way as a musical instrument.” (Introduction) A fitting example of this category is Painstation by Volker Morawe and Tilman Reiff. It is not a musical type instrument but cannot adequately be classified in any other category, as it is essentially a live performance instrument. This would be classified as a Category Two Physical Manifestation under the classes in Chapter One. The Painstation is a PONG game to which the players’ hands are strapped to a PEU or Pain Execution Unit. When either the player or his opponent misses a point, both are punished by either electric shock, whips or burning. Therefore both players are punished for losing, demonstrating the physical consequences of their actions within the game in a real-life setting.

The above categorisations are useful for introducing us to the various different manifestations that artistic intervention and appropriation of computer games can take. This illustrates that it is a diverse and varied medium that has the potential for a great amount of growth, as well as the potential to influence others, both within and without the art world.

CRACKING THE MAZE

The opening paragraph of the editorial notes of Cracking the Maze state that,

> Computer Gaming is emerging as the dominant form of media interpolation into shared social apparatuses even at the expense of television and film. As an entertainment form linked to online network data flow, computer gaming is at the present time more open than television ever was to reinvention and rearticulation of its genres and modes of interactivity, sign systems and politics of representation. The time seems ripe for critical intervention from artists and theorists, who follow in the wake of the fervid cultural sabotage and shape shifting of the game fan players and hackers themselves. (Schleiner: 1999)

It is in exhibitions and statements such as these that a subversion of commercial gaming into art appears. The appropriation of commercial technologies by artists is a common practice, seen even in Dada with Duchamp's ready-mades and in Modernism with Donald Judd. Both of these artists used items not immediately made by themselves, and subverted them into art through their intent. The artists featured in this exhibition use games and technology made available by others, into which they have hacked and changed the intent of the original products. The 'undressing of the game', as stated by JODI, and the baring of its code, gives artists an opportunity to make their intentions known and to subvert the product into something very different. And it is this 'undressing' of the code that is the core of patch art, and therefore the focus of the Cracking the Maze exhibition.

The curatorial statement sets the tone for this purely online exhibit, telling us what discourses the exhibition deals with and the reasons that, for the curator, computer gaming and hacking has become so important. The fact that the exhibition itself is exclusively online deals with the fact that game patches and hacks are normally available within the online gaming community, and developed within that community. The ways in which games and their mods evolve and are distributed are an almost exclusively online practice. Even commercial gaming companies post patches for their games to fix bugs online. With the fact that modding/patching has

become such an accepted phenomenon, it is not surprising that more critical, conceptually artistic mods would begin to emerge, both from artists and from gamers themselves. These issues are what Cracking the Maze investigates. It is also interesting to note that the curator Anne-Marie Schleiner is also one of the curators of Velvet Strike, another online intervention as discussed in the art mod definition. The exhibition and its associated Art and Games issue of Switch, an online journal,

> Offer a variety of perspectives on issues pertaining to computer games and art, gender, game hacking, game interface history, networked game play and opportunities for new modes of game interaction, navigation and narrative. (Schleiner: 1999)

The exhibition itself features fourteen different modifications or 'mods', all dealing with different aspects of game modding and socio-political issues. Whilst this paper is not going to explore the exhibition itself in full, it attempts to present the context within which this work is situated. The accompanying essays to the exhibition all deal with game patch art as a genre which

> Refer to alterations of pre-existing source code in terms of graphics, game characters, architecture, sound and game play… Game patch artists often subvert prevailing gaming genres and character stereotypes. (Schleiner: 1999)

Schleiner states,

> In the fall of 1998, after a few years of immersion in Silicon Valley computer gaming geek culture and a more recent exposure to game patching, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to organize an on-line exhibit of game patches. I was interested in inviting artists to create game patches as well as exhibiting some of the more unique and subversive game patches already floating around the web. I contacted a number of game software companies and found one that was willing to donate games and patching software to the artists… I released a "Call for Submissions" on the Internet and over the next few months received responses from a diverse range of international artists. (Parasitic Interventions)

She states further,

> The game patches included in the Cracking the Maze exhibit are both patches created by game patch artists who circulate their patches through online gaming venues and by artists from outside the usual game culture enclaves… Cracking the Maze initiates a discourse at the point of intersection between the hacker, the avid gamer, the artist and the cultural interventionist. (Schleiner: 1999)

NUDE RAIDER I AND II PATCHES

Within the scope of this exhibition, fourteen patches are exhibited, each dealing with different forms of game intervention. They range from female skin packs to patched patches, in the form of Robert Nideffer's Tomb Raider I and II Patches. Some of them deal with social or political issues like world domination of the Disney Corporation, whilst other's like JODI.org's SOD and Parangari Cutiri's Epileptic Virus Patch, deal with aesthetic subversions of original games within the information age.

The Tomb Raider patches deal specifically with the Nude Raider patch that was circulated when Tomb Raider was first released. They are patches of a patch, thereby bringing a new dimension to the typical intervention of a patch or mod – an intervention into an intervention. Laura Trippi in her essay for Cracking the Maze, states that,

> …they are patches of the original "Nude Raider" patch, which was rumoured to have been released as a marketing ploy by the game's publisher. He characterizes his patches as a Duchampian reappropriation, "hosting" one might say, the false "guest" that "Nude Raider" seems to have been. (Trippi: 1999)

Jon Thomson states,

> Robert Nideffer's Tomb Raider I and II Patches also make changes to the central character, but instead of replacing the ludicrously proportioned Lara Croft with someone or something else, Nideffer makes alterations to her sexual orientation presenting us

> with “Transsexual Lara”, “Butch Lara” and “Lara in Drag”. In so doing Nideffer erodes the somewhat absurd status of Croft as a heterosexual sex symbol, while acknowledging that there are people already fantasising about her polygons. (The Games We Play)

The appropriation of existing games by artists and the subversion of their content into something new and exciting brings into being something that infiltrates existing cultural substructures. They are appropriating our ideas of gaming culture and turning them into ‘high’ art. Granted, gaming itself does not exist within the high art realm, but as stated by Thomson, “Artists have always been questioning conventional uses of technology long after their passing into the wake of the corporate avant-garde.” (The Games We Play) This questioning of technology is a widespread artistic practice that commonly subverts popular culture and in so doing, elevates the work to a high art status. However, the game patch phenomenon falls into an interesting space between high art and commercial gaming. As Schleiner states in her curatorial notes,

> Many artists, art critics, new media critics and theoreticians have expressed a disdain for games and game style interactivity, in fact, to describe an interactive computer art piece as “too game-like” is a common pejorative. (1999)

Similarly, Rebecca Cannon states,

> Several art mods have been compromised by critical evaluations that fail to grasp the artistic framework within which they culturally operate; largely due to the source media of computer games from which they derive. The syntax and ethology applied to the analysis if computer games often forms the basis for interpretations of art mods. Although these criteria are of some significance, on their own they too easily map a finite context that situates are mods within the services of entertainment media. This contextualisation impacts upon the reading of art mods by reducing their perceived

suitability as a vehicle for critical evaluation, predominantly because of computer games' emphasis upon the pursuit of 'play'. (Introduction)

SOD

Schleiner includes both ends of the spectrum in her curatorial endeavour. Although exhibiting certain game-like characteristics, JODI's SOD moves away from the critique of popular gaming culture like Tomb Raider, and turns towards a more aesthetic interpretation of computer technology, modifying Wolfenstein 3D almost purely because of its 'abandonware'[xxiv] status and the editing capabilities included by the developers within the game. Schleiner comments that, "Not all the patches included in Cracking the Maze are subversive in a political sense; some offer alternatives in game ontology and aesthetics." (Parasitic Interventions) SOD by JODI is one such patch.

In contrast to Nideffer's Tomb Raider Patches, JODI.org has modified the first person shooter Wolfenstein 3D into something completely devoid of any visual or cultural reference. JODI or JODI.org is an art collective of two Internet artists: Joan Heemskerk from the Netherlands and Dirk Paesmans from Belgium. Both have a background in photography and video art and in the mid-1990's they started to create artworks for the World Wide Web. (The Free Dictionary.com)

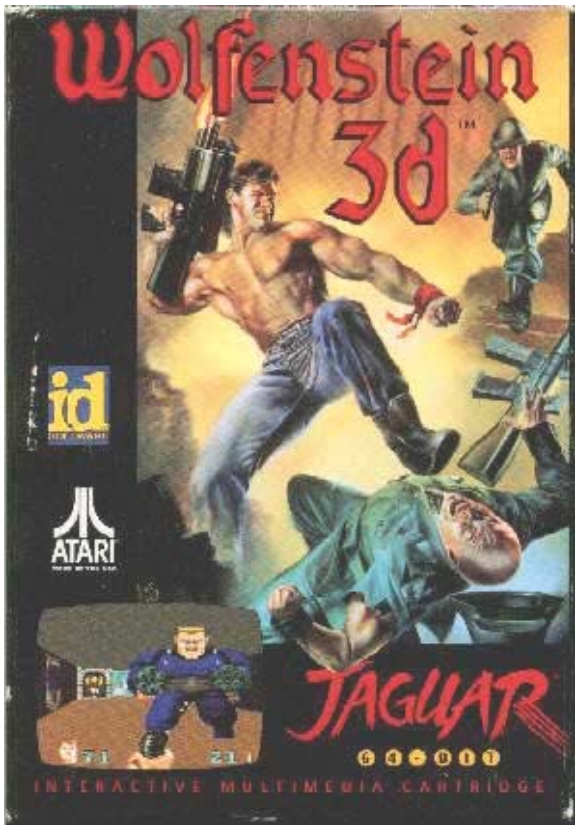

Figure 1 The Wolfenstein 3D cover.

The Free Dictionary.com states that,

> JODI's works seem inaccessible and impenetrable, appearing to make the user's computer run amok. JODI's art consists of – amongst others – meaningless texts and blinking graphics, visual elements in primary colors (sic) that refer to old GUIs[xxv] or computer crashes, dead links and references to computer viruses… [They] defy the surface of well-designed interfaces and demonstrate the ugly side of technology. (2004/05/27)

SOD by JODI has been featured as an online artwork, but most prominently as a part of the online exhibition Cracking the Maze. The game itself is a mod of the popular but dated commercial video game, Wolfenstein 3D, transforming the 3d environment of the game into a series of abstract black, white and grey images, all the while keeping the original sound track of digitised Nazi German.

SOD falls into this category of gaming patches, Category One as defined in Chapter One. The modifying of commercial game code in order to affect the manifestation of the game. By this I mean that the artist directly intervenes into the gaming code and modifies it to make the game conform to his directions. This directly influences the way that the player/viewer experiences the game. Often, in the case of commercial game mods, this is done in order to enhance enjoyment of the game. Grand Theft Auto 3 and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, two highly successful commercial video games developed by Rockstar Games, are among some of the most recent to develop a highly sophisticated modding community. They involve large numbers of people modelling and developing new cars, player skins, environment mapping and behaviour characteristics for the game in order to leach as much enjoyment out of it as possible. It helps that the game itself has been designed as extremely modifiable, and so is also used by many animators and those in the gaming industry to refine their modelling and coding skills.

The skills necessary for modding are therefore widely available on the Internet, through means of tutorials and forums that discuss and help aspirant 'modders' to work their way through early modding experiences. Normally these 'modders' then return the favour and make their skills available to those up and coming into the modding community. In fact, Schleiner states, "Following the hacker ethics of software and open source code, the game patch artist will usually offer his work free of charge from his personal home page or gaming site." (Parasitic Interventions) It is no surprise then that for many artists it is viable without any additional training to develop the skills necessary to modify the game code of a commercial game.

Patches or mods made by artists normally deal with either socio-political issues in the real world or with issues that surround the politics of gaming itself, including that of aesthetics. In the case of JODI, they have deconstructed Wolfenstein 3D into a series of aesthetically pleasing screens in black, white and grey. This abstract, disorientating environment is heightened by the fact that the original soundtrack of the game has been left as is, and so the player, not

knowing where he is or what he is doing, is dying over and over again, killed by some unseen force that shouts at him in digitised German.

Figure 2 An original Wolfenstein 3D screen

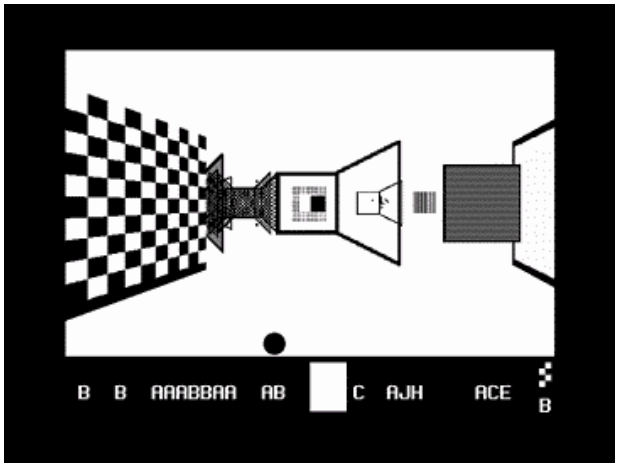

Figure 3 JODI; SOD; Wolfenstein deconstruct; <http://sod.jodi.org>

Cannon quotes two SOD users as saying,

> Every 'wall' of the maze is rendered in black and white geometric patterns, while the main enemy in the game appears as two inverted triangles. Weapon's use is signified by an animated black circle, and each game level is marked as 'Untitled 1', 'Untitled 2', and so on. There is no specific scenario, and no coherent game instructions. All that remains of the original is the typically dramatic soundtrack, and the sound effects when you lose a life or start hitting the fire button... With its stark elegance, SOD offers a

> compelling alternative to the computer game industry's mindless pursuit of representational realism. (Introduction)

In her book Internet Art, Rachel Greene states that,

> JODI.org's SOD (1999) radically modified the classic computer game Castle Wolfenstein, establishing abstracted spaces for gaming. With a jaunty score and limited palette of grey, black and white, the game space at first appears approachable. However, within the minimal environment it is difficult to ascertain the targets one is supposed to shoot, and easy to get lost in its disorientating, Kafka-esque space. Combining confusion, interactivity and a simple graphic environment, SOD hints at private emotions, all the while taking gaming back to its more primitive, computerized core. (151)

The deconstruction of the traditional 3D space of the computer game environment becomes, in its disorientation of the player, beautiful and aesthetically pleasing – more reminiscent of traditional paintings or prints as opposed to digital art. As commercial games are rarely, if ever, elevated to high art status, no matter how accomplished they may be, SOD with its traditionally aesthetic screens that are only possible to play (and not die continuously) in god mode, defy the conventional playability of commercial games and yet visually embrace abstract aesthetics more reminiscent of modern art. As the objective of games is to be able to play them, how does SOD fit into this dynamic? There is a certain amount of frustration that ensues from the un-playability of this game, and yet the player continues to try and get further than the last time. Taking a different approach at each rebirth, modifying their strategy at each death, trying and trying, as in a traditional video game, to get further with each attempt. The repetition that is cultivated in the endless dying and rebirthing is typical of many aspects of more traditional art, particularly video based work.

Similarly Cannon argues that,

> By testing the semiotics for navigation; by reducing mobility, enemy identification, narrative cognition, reward systems, landscape and even gravity – to mere symbolic fragments, JODI leaves the user without any sense, objective or intention. "Without the competitive element, the entire notion of game is lost.[xxvi]" (De.Constructive.Integrity)

JODI in an interview with Tilman Baumgaertel on Rhizome.org, explain that,

> …we started to make things on the computer about things inside the computer." They go on to explain in relation to another artwork, OSS, that, "[OSS] manipulates the surface of your system… an error can be most interesting. (qtd. in Baumgaertel: 2001)

Interestingly, what is fascinating about SOD is the manipulation of the game itself in order to make it almost completely non-representational. The only aspect of this mod that links the user to reality is the German shouts, a dog barking and the sound of gunfire. JODI.org manipulates the player by in turn manipulating the game interface, visual representation and understanding of the traditional medium of video games that we are used to. The fact that the original game was an achievement of 3D representation in the gaming world perhaps makes it more interesting because of the annihilation of any recognisable form of the original game.

JODI themselves refer to their mods as,

> …abstractions of existing popular code, and we dress/undress this code with graphics we believe express the underlying code better. A formalist exploration of reduction, opening up a view to the underlying codes to better understand our own user/player behaviour… With the older games, we can get deeper inside and make real contradictory changes or at least undress the rules, the visuals and the code as bare as we want… What you see and believe is only how the code is dressed. (qtd. in Baumgaertel: 2001)

These patches or "hacker art" as Schleiner calls them, 'undress' the game code, or as Schleiner puts it, "infiltrate the source code of games" (Parasitic Interventions) and exploit its

vulnerability to manipulation by artists. Erkki Huhtamo in his essay for Cracking the Maze, writes,

> A game patch artist may be motivated by ideological concerns, an urge to re-assert the role of the player as a (co) creator, or to subvert the prevailing gender relations, particularly the depiction of women as game characters. Yet the political determination should not be overemphasized. Humour and Parody are important motives; the game patch artists don't seem to believe in the politically correct position of suppressing pleasure… (1999)

Schleiner states in Parasitic Interventions: Game Patches and Hacker Art on her site Opensorcery.net,

> The game patch artist manipulates the prefab semiotics of the game engine, a kind of 'versioning' that recognizes along both paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes… game hacking and distribution of game hacks online are art strategies that offer the possibility for artists to participate in cultural intervention outside of a closed art world sphere. Patch art structurally couples itself in symbiotic or parasitic relations to the host technocultural systems of the industrial game engine and online fan networks, an art form whose tentacles reach outward into the fabric of technocultural subdomains with the capacity for effecting the evolution of popular gaming culture. (Parasitic Interventions)

This 'undressing' of the game as JODI refers to it, is the essence of much hacker and patch art. Cannon refers to JODI's, "complete reduction of navigational cues in a 3D game" (Introduction) when she points to the way that JODI have hacked different aspects of various gaming engines such as Wolfenstein and Quake, "to produce standalone games that are hardcore minimalist reductions of the original 3D parent games… producing hallucinatory op-art effects as one tries to move about… JODI's work is an excellent example of the potential for reductive techniques to impose upon us an awareness of the cognitive processes being affected by the artificial physics of virtual worlds." (Introduction)

The removal of navigable elements from a game, reducing the ability for competitive play is an issue that will discussed in Chapter Five, along with the idea of play and the interactive. JODI's appropriation of existing videogame technology is exciting and stimulating. Their removal of recognisable elements is reminiscent of many non-representational art movements in art history. The availability of their work on the web for free is also an important factor, and enables widescale distribution throughout the art and gaming community. Greene comments,

> The ways in which artists have worked with games – creating new material for free widescale distribution into communities with feedback channels, and inflecting existing games with more personal and political and less homogenized content – have helped to produce a new dimension to an existing entertainment sector. (151)

Art mods such as SOD are not the only form of art games that 'produce a new dimension to an existing entertainment sector'. The subject of the next chapter Escape From Woomera, is another manifestation of an art game, in this case a 3D game, that deals with computer games within the art sector.

CHAPTER FOUR

"ESCAPE FROM WOOMERA"

This chapter will examine a game that is an example of Category Four, Escape From Woomera. Escape From Woomera is a 3D first person action-adventure game developed by a team of Australian game developers and artists. The Escape From Woomera Collective includes a large assortment of people from backgrounds as diverse as journalism and animation. This game is explicitly political and addresses the issue and implications of the Australian detention centres, particularly the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre. Although Woomera was closed down in April 2003, it is the most infamous of the detention centres in Australia – Baxter, Port Hedland, Maribyrnong and Villawood still being active. The game demo falls into Category One as defined in Chapter One, but the full game, if released will fall into Category Four. The demo is actually a patch on the popular commercial first person shooter Half-Life.

Category Four was defined as an art game that displays all the characteristics of a complete level based commercial game, both on a programming and creative side. Category Four games normally have some sort of political or social comments attached to them and are not purely based on aesthetic merit. It was also stated that these sorts of games are not very prevalent, particularly the 3D type games. The fact is that it is unusual for artists to have the resources or the time and funding to be able to develop a game of this magnitude. Although there are more retro styled games that fall into Category Four, the 3D ones are the most ambitious and most fascinating, due to the reasons mentioned above. Another 3D game made by C-Level deals with the Waco Texas Massacre and the Branch Davidian leader David Koresh in Waco Resurrection. This game allows players to only play as David Koresh as they defend the Branch Davidian compound from the inevitable penetration of government agents as well as from other, rival, David Koreshes.

Waco Resurrection's developers, C-Level, commented when questioned regarding their game;

> We think that games have the capacity to take on historical content without trivialising them for the sake of gameplay. We see that the gaming community is ready for gaming to become a more serious and even critical form of expression… In this way, the evolution of games as a cultural medium will follow the same path as any medium. (qtd. in Rossignol: 67)

They state further that,

> Waco Resurrection may depict an historical event about a radical subculture, but the idea of a medium presenting a subjective interpretation of a complex historical event is not in itself subversive – not in the current context of gaming… Waco is often perceived as a subversive game only because games so rarely stray from the same themes and topics we see again and again. It is subversive in that it offers an alternative to the predominant content choices: war, fantasy, sports… It's time for games to make proportional leaps in content to the ones made in technological innovation. (67)

This observation by the makers of Waco Resurrection is particularly insightful, and something that should be borne in mind whilst examining Escape From Woomera. Waco Resurrection's manufacturers C-Level eventually want to market their products commercially. Waco Resurrection is the first in a series of games called Endgames. The subversive nature of EFW is not only because of the subject matter it presents, but also because of the medium in which it manifests.

The amount of time and work that goes into these games is astounding. This is not to discount the merit of retro styled games, many of them Flash-based, but often it is only one or two people who work on these games. More often, in contrast to the 3D games, it is only the artist. For example, Escape From Woomera (EFW) has artists working in conjunction with game developers in order to achieve their objectives. The size of an undertaking such as this requires a massive financial outlay, especially since EFW will never be commercially marketable and therefore will never receive compensation for its time and financial outlays.

In fact there was a huge outcry about funding for the game when the Australia Council for the Arts granted The Escape From Woomera Collective AUD$25,000 in order to develop their game. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock was outraged and he and Arts Minister Rod Kemp "have been highly critical of the Australia Council's decision… with Kemp demanding an urgent explanation from the Council." (Swalwell: 2003) Ruddock's stated that, "The decision reflects poorly upon the Australia Council and its judgement, that the organisation should lend its name to the promotion of unlawful behaviour." (qtd. in Nicholls: 2003)

The developers themselves state that, "There's no way in hell a commercial game publisher would touch us…" (EFWC*:* 2003) The game will therefore be available for download off their website, and freely available to anyone who wishes to play it. This concept of politically activist games is an exciting one – particularly when the developers are receiving little or no remuneration for their efforts.

EFW's website[xxvii] leaves no doubt as to their political views regarding refugees and the detention centres. In order to examine the game itself, a closer examination of the site and its structure is necessary. This is because the demo has only recently been released, and therefore it is important to understand the background that gained them the funding and publicity first. Because the website is the first thing most people will hear or experience of this game, it is important to gain an understanding of the way that the website functions first before moving on to the game mechanics.

Rebecca Cannon quotes EFW developer Julian Oliver as saying,

> Escape From Woomera is all about taking a highly representative impression of life in a detention centre, mobilising it throughout public networks, and installing it onto people's desktop computers inside their homes. Games are an ideal medium to engage with this kind of content because to play is to become a subject of the content. (De.Constructive.Integrity)

THE ESCAPE FROM WOOMERA WEBSITE

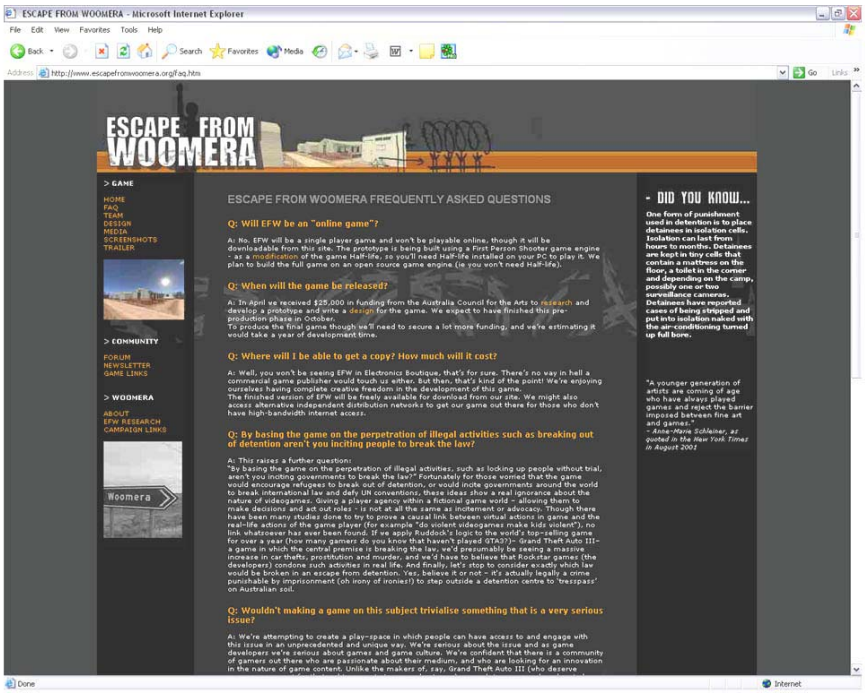

Figure 4 Escape From Woomera Collective; Escape From Woomera website.

Their opening page has a news section in the middle column and with every page change to another section of the site; facts pop up on the right hand column about the Australian detention centres. The left-hand side of the page provides navigation to the other areas of the site. The navigation side of the site is divided into three sections, each dealing with different aspects of Woomera. The first is the GAME, which holds the titles of HOME, FAQ, TEAM, DESIGN, MEDIA, SCREENSHOTS and TRAILER. The next section is COMMUNITY, which holds links to the FORUM and GAME LINKS as well as a NEWSLETTER link. The last section is WOOMERA, which apart from an ABOUT section, includes all the political CAMPAIGN LINKS, including an interesting section titled EFW RESEARCH. These research files include all the various facts about Woomera that are displayed on the right-hand side of the page throughout navigation. Many of these are facts about life within the detention centres such as the kinds of anti-depressants prescribed and the fact that family photographs are not officially allowed and are confiscated.

Figure 5 Escape From Woomera Collective; Escape From Woomera website detail.

The FAQ section shows a combination of questions from "When will the game be released?" to "By having escape as the main premise (and the title!) of the game aren't you compounding the view of many Australians that asylum-seekers are criminals?" (EFWC*:* 2003*)* The answers to all of the questions, especially the politically motivated ones, are comprehensive and well thought out, clearly asserting their point of view. The DESIGN page displays all the relevant details of a few of the character models and the blueprints of Woomera detention centre circa 2000. They outline the design of the game using references to their research regarding Woomera.

> Utilising the familiar environment of a first person 3D action-adventure game, Escape From Woomera invites gamers to assume the character of a modern day detainee, seeing the world through their eyes… Players will be compelled to learn more about their character's situation and environment, in order to solve the game's puzzles, thereby allowing further progress. Rewards will be based on unlocking new sections of the game, and a variety of outcomes will become available to the player… Many of the real-life challenges faced by refugees within the mandatory detention system and the asylum application process will be translated into game-play elements to be experienced 'first hand' by the player. (EFWC*:* 2003)

In personal correspondence, Kate Wild, one of the developers, indicated that the design of the detention centre itself is reconstructed from research, as there has been limited access to the detention centre itself. She also indicated that some parts have had to be constructed fictitiously however when information has been unavailable.

The TEAM page details all the participating members and their background qualifications and the MEDIA page holds links to all of the major newspaper and online article that reference them and the controversiality of the game. The fact that the Escape From Woomera Collective embraces the criticism of their game and their principles only serves to highlight the reactionary responses of people in authority. As Michael Snelling of the New Media Arts Board told the media, "We're well aware the project could be controversial." (qtd. in The Age) He stated however that the application had ranked competitively and had met all the criteria for funding. (Swalwell: 2003)

PROPAGANDA?

Also included in the site are two sections that are fairly self-explanatory – SCREENSHOTS and TRAILER. Before the demo was released these provided some means for the public to get a glimpse of what the project looked like visually. Although the trailer is understandably propagandistic regarding their political views, it also provides viewers a glimpse into the visuals

of the game. It starts with slogans interspersed with visual shots of the empty Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre from the view of a detainee. An eerie soundtrack plays the whole way through the approximately 5 second trailer, evoking a feeling of desolation. The full slogan reads, "Your country is in chaos… You leave your life behind in search of freedom… When you arrive you are treated like a criminal… Your only weapon is… hope." (EFWC*:* 2003)

The music and slogans are used to evoke sympathy for the detainees as the players put themselves in their positions, but the viewer is aware of the attempt to sway their opinion. It is not a subtle attempt and one is left with the definite feeling they have just viewed a propaganda video. The slogan itself, whilst emotive, is a bit cliché, and the trailer doesn't really show much action of the game, rather a kind of fly-through of the empty detention centre. The screenshots are typical in game visuals that display some of the characters. The characters are all characteristically modelled and textured game models, thereby reinforcing the playability of EFW as a 3D first person action-adventure game as well as a politically motivated art game. This very issue is perhaps why EFW is such a fitting case study. It is playable as a game in its own right, but within the structures and confines of the gaming world, it has a clear political message that is untempered by the action of the game as an entity. Escape From Woomera*'s* demo is now available free on their website to download. The full version of the game is still in production as funding, apart from the $25,000, has yet to be secured. The final game has been conceptualised with its own gaming engine i.e. it will not be a patch on another game and won't rely on a game such as Half Life in order to be played.

According to the website, the player/viewer plays as a detainee of Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre. The story develops as they try to escape from the detention centre in a variety of ways. You have a limited period of time in which to gain asylum, or if that fails, then you must plan and execute your escape. The player must use all his wits to escape and a variety of strategies are encouraged, often through replaying the game to affect the

outcome. As the players' character develops, they unlock information that is key to revealing secrets/puzzles within the game.

The significance of the development of a game such as this, in any country, and particularly the significance of the funding they received must not be overlooked. Michael Snelling agreed there was "some irony in one arm of the government paying for something critical of another." (qtd. in Nicholls: 2003) Melanie Swalwell, a media theorist at the University of Technology in Sydney, states that the funding "indicates that the New Media Arts Board also recognises the maturing of games as a medium, and the significant potential of games for contemporary art." (Swalwell: 2003)

The design of the game itself, although based on Half-Life, does not conform to the first person shooter type style that is to be expected. The EFWC have used only the game engine of Half-Life. The gameplay itself unfortunately borders on the propagandistic. Although it is designed as an activist game, and is intended to evoke sympathy, it has a tendency to become overly dramatic. The answers that the characters give when interacted with become too sentimental and cliché and unfortunately draw attention to their sentimentality. A game that draws attention to the plight of these refugees would be better served by providing text that states the facts without becoming overly dramatic. Many of EFW's opponents have criticised the use of refugees in a game as diminishing and trivialising the plight of these people. The EFWC explain their viewpoint on their website, and Rebecca Cannon has commented in many articles that the reason for this is that they thought it was a commercially available game. Once that misconception was resolved, there was a great deal of support for the idea. This paper is not criticising the idea, but rather the way in which it is portrayed.

For example, when asking the character Shala "What happened to the children?" she replies, "For the first time since they were locked up, they were taken outside for an excursion. This was the only activity available to them for months! And we were all called by our real names

for the first time. It's dehumanising enough for us, but imagine how it must feel for the children, addressed as just a number every day."

Similarly, to the statement, "To be honest I'm feeling pretty depressed…" Hassan replies, "What is happening to us in here? All the time people, children even, are attempting to commit suicide! Everyone is taking antidepressants, it shouldn't be like this! Animals in Australia have more rights than we do! They are valued more than we are."

The Commissioner of Human Rights issued a statement in a press release saying that EFW 'trivialises the plight of asylum seekers' and is 'tasteless', and 'at best, insensitive'. (qtd. In Cannon: De.Constructive.Integrity) This paper is not supporting these arguments, but is rather critiquing the way in which the gameplay itself has manifest as a political statement. Whilst there is no dispute that some sort of statement must be made and that traditional theatrical techniques could be employed to do that, it detracts from the game and seems overly dramatic in a computer game context. The game developers are trying to emphasise the poor conditions to which these people are confined, but surely the dramatic wording of their responses makes people feel that they are overemphasising and over dramatising the refugees' plight? Obviously that is not the case, but a less dramatic wording of the facts might help to make people recognise the plight of these refugees as real and demanding attention.

Rebecca Cannon argues that the reactions of people like the Commissioner are,

> Based on the presumption that as a computer game, Escape From Woomera must be a commercial project. From this perspective, any intention to economically profit from the refugee issue automatically undermines other potential experiential effects of playing the game. Once these critics are informed that the game will be free, their reactions are invariably supportive. The fact that most of the development crew are from a fine arts background holds little relevance in either reading. People are simply unaware of the significance of computer games as an artistic medium – of the effects that can result

> from interaction with a computer game that are not possible with any other medium. (De.Constructive.Integrity)

The purpose of the game is to try and escape through different levels by completing different tasks before your hope runs out. The longer you take to complete a task, the more your hope drains. If you get caught doing something illegal, like trying to escape for example, you are placed in solitary confinement and your hope drains by two bars, as per the number of days you were in solitary. If your hope eventually goes down to nothing and drains completely, you are deported and forced to start the game again. Hope can be gained though, such as when you complete a certain task. In the first level for example, you have to find and hide a pair of pliers, and after that you are called to the Administration Office and given a package containing things you can trade with the other prisoners, such as a sim card and washing powder. Your hope bar on the left hand side of the screen is then topped up, so you have longer to try and complete your other tasks. The hope meter is an original idea; one that whilst it functions similarly to a time limit counter, it is an interesting representation of time within the structure of the game itself. The player normally has to try a couple of times to accomplish the mission, as the first few tries are spent finding out exactly what they have to do in order to escape.

The character design of EFW contains very few women, and the look of the male characters is very generic, with the exception of the characters with names, and even these are not particularly distinguishable except by facial hair. Most of the male characters are simply 'detainee', with no distinguishing features other than different clothes. Their answers are generic, and once the player has interacted with one, there is no need to interact with the others, as they are of no use to the story line, simply there to flesh out the number of characters the player can interact with. By contrast, it is possible to interact with all the few women characters, and although children are mentioned in conversation, there is no sign of any children in the first level.

Figure 6 Escape From Woomera Collective; Escape From Woomera; Laleh.

Figure 7 Escape From Woomera Collective; Escape From Woomera; Hassan.

GAMEPLAY

The actual gameplay of EFW is regrettably quite dull. With such an opportunity to create a game that has both a political message as well as good gameplay, it unfortunately falls short. In comparison, SCI released an escape game called The Great Escape, based on the movie of the same name starring Steve McQueen. The Great Escape was also based on the idea of a prisoner of war, a 'hero', being captured by an enemy and having to escape. Similarly EFW involves 'unsung heroes' having to escape from their captors. The gameplay of The Great Escape is exciting and involves intricacies such as being on time for role call, not being in the wrong dormitory at the wrong time etc. Although EFW to a certain extent involves the same kind of thing with regards to the pass card being needed to go into another compound, and tasks that need to be completed in order for someone else to take your pass card back into your compound, the game quickly loses its appeal. Although it is stated on EFW's website that in the actual detention centre, a pass card is required to go anywhere in the compounds and that families are separated. Strangely, it contains many of the same elements as The Great Escape, and yet the pace of the game is not as interesting. EFW's hope metre runs out very quickly, not really giving the player enough time to complete the tasks, meaning that the first level alone has to be played a couple of times in order for the player to be able to complete the tasks without 'running out of hope'. Perhaps that is actually the problem with EFW – time runs out too quickly. The player has so much information to find out, people to meet and surroundings to explore, that because they are on such a strict time limit, interest quickly wanes when they are required to repeat it again and again in order to accomplish even the simplest of goals. Saving doesn't seem to be possible either. Although the player can go and save within the game, when it comes time to load, their hope is half of what it used to be and the game doesn't always load where it is supposed to.

The actual gameplay in terms of controls and ease of movement in relatively easy. Since it is a patch on Half Life, it employs the same gaming engine and controls. Perhaps if the EFWC ever get the funding to develop the complete game, the gaming engine of their own that is proposed

might employ different interaction strategies that could have the potential to interact on the gameplay itself.

SERIOUS VIDEOGAMES

Gonzalo Frasca, editor of Ludology.org, comments in his paper 'Ephemeral games: Is it barbaric to design videogames after Auschwitz?'[xxviii] on the idea of 'serious' videogames. He uses the 'serious'[xxix] topic of Auschwitz as an example for developing a 'real-life' game in which there are consequences for your actions, and games cannot be saved and replayed in order to ensure success. He comments that there is a lack of serious videogames and 'an absolute lack of 'seriousness' in the computer game industry'. (Frasca: 2000)

For his example of the Holocaust, he does not deny that many computer games deal with WWII, however, "as far as we know, the only games that explore the Holocaust are underground pro-Nazi videogames… In one game in particular, which was available in many European BBS during the early nineties, the player was offered to take the role of a concentration camp administrator and had to coordinate mass murders." (Frasca: 2000) He states further that, "a computer game through the eyes of a Holocaust victim might be perceived as even more monstrous than a neo-Nazi game. A comic book representation of an historical drama could be socially accepted. However, an ergodic[xxx] representation, such as a videogame, is a whole different story." (Frasca: 2000)

Therefore it is the manifestation of the topic that is the issue. EFW is addressing a controversial domestic issue within their country, and the opposition, surprisingly coming often from refugee activists, has claimed that the game is 'trivialising' the plight of the refugees. From the government side, they are stating that the game promotes 'unlawful behaviour'. Does a game where a prisoner has to escape constitute contribution to unlawful behaviour? EFW is a relatively underground game, as opposed to commercial successes like SCI's The Great Escape, and even games that didn't do quite so well, such as Codemasters' Prisoner of War. Both of these games deal with World War II and the main characters are prisoners of war

required to escape from the Nazi's. Is it because these games deal with 'heroes'? Refugees, as is pointed out by the EFW Collective, are not in the normal course of things considered heroes. Especially since, as EFW claims, most Australians consider them to be criminals. In the ABOUT section of their website, they state, "Contrary to the way the Australian government wants us to see refugees – as *'queue-jumpers'* and *'illegals'*, we must recognise these people as victims. But they are also heroes." (EFW: 2003)

Frasca's comment on seeing the game through the eyes of a Holocaust victim subsequently raises even more questions, since EFW is simulated through the eyes of victims, but since it is not equivalent to the Holocaust, can it be considered less monstrous? Is the topic then less 'serious' than the horrors of Auschwitz? Although most of us might answer yes to that question, we must bear in mind that Frasca's subject matter was chosen purely because Auschwitz is a 'serious' topic. He did not choose that topic based on any degree of monstrousness, but rather on its ability to illustrate his point. Therefore, the issue of 'serious' games, regardless of their varying forms of manifestation, are games that adjust our perspective to include those that we would not normally see as 'heroes' – videogame or otherwise.

Frasca states,

> Let's now describe our imaginary Holocaust videogame, based on current game design conventions. Basically, it would simulate a character that is a prisoner in a concentration camp. Through his eyes but also through his actions, we will try to make the player feel and think about life in such an extreme condition. As designers, we will be particularly interested in creating an environment for exploring such concepts as morals, hate, solidarity, suffering and justice. (Frasca: 2000)

Indeed Escape From Woomera attempts to do a similar simulation, but not to the extreme level suggested by Frasca. Frasca suggests an online game in which no restarting is possible. No saving is possible, so no choices would ever be able to be remade. If you should you betray

your comrades you will suffer the consequences and be unable to restore to an earlier save point in order to nullify that choice. Frasca's suggestions are essentially designed as a 'Happening', in order to prevent players from restarting. Players would have to log in at a specific time to play and there would be no way to redeem that time should they miss the deadline. Should they not log in at that time, they would not be able to play, much as if you missed seeing a once-off play or exhibition.

In another of Frasca's papers 'Rethinking Agency and Immersion: videogames as a means of consciousness-raising' he comments on how 'current simulations could be enhanced to allow more room to discussion and critical thinking by changing the way games deal with character use and design." (Frasca: 2001)

The consciousness-raising element of this game has to some extent generated discussion in forums surrounding the reactionary responses of mainly governmental agents. Mostly the responses are directed at the idea of the game being positive, although there are those who use the opportunity to agree with the EFW Collective's views and to make known their opinions. Unfortunately the game has not received much publicity outside Australia. Although featured in the online exhibition re:Play, curated by Radioqualia, it has not received worldwide attention. Consciousness-raising surely indicates at the very least notoriety. But by the same token, perhaps it has laid the groundwork for other games in the future.

EFW is commenting on a 'serious' situation, but as game designers, the EFW Collective see the final product as a continuously playable game, where you can replay as different characters and make different decisions in order to get the full experience, and make your own decisions regarding the refugee issue in Australia. Although the gameplay itself might not be up to the standard expected by someone who is familiar with commercial 3D computer games, perhaps the role of the game was not necessarily to have a continuously playable politically activist game. Perhaps the role of the game was merely a 'consciousness-raising' tool that was used in order to illustrate both the potential for computer games as a medium, as well as to attract

criticism and thereby raise awareness of the plight of refugees in detention centres. If that was indeed the role of the game, it is unimportant whether or not the EFWC gain funding for their complete game. If that was only perhaps part of their intention, any additional funding would be an added bonus. If we examine the team who produced the game, it can be seen that artists involved in EFW such as Julian Oliver are already interested in and promoting computer games as an artistic medium, so for him to be involved in a project like this not only exposes a controversial subject, but also draws attention to computer games as a medium for artistic and political expression.

If it is not the goal of the EFWC to become an object of controversy through the game and the issues surrounding funding, then a critique of the reasons for choosing a 3D format such as this must be questioned. EFW, although a patch or 'mod', requires large amounts of teamwork in a co-ordinated effort to produce the characters and environment in a 3D format particularly because it has been conceptualised as a full game. Added to this is a script and some notion of gameplay, and we must ask ourselves why the EFWC chose to produce a 3D game, when another kind of game would have potentially evoked the same criticism and ensuing support.

The gameplay itself is stilted and dull, and as a commercial game, EFW would probably not sell very well. But the medium is key to this politically aware game. The fact that this game is FREE draws our attention to the fact that perhaps the message behind the game is what is important. We are aware within a few minutes are playing the game that this is not an ordinary 3D action-adventure game. Although the conversations are overly dramatic, if the purpose of the game is merely to play it for a while to understand the plight of the refugees, then the EFWC's purpose has been achieved. Although it was stated earlier that perhaps it was detrimental to the message for the conversation to be theatrical, the message is, to be sure, communicated very quickly. Unfortunately if that is not the case, then the game still needs a great deal of work in order to make it exciting enough for the public to play enthusiastically.

Cannon, in an online posting, makes a comparison between computer games and film as media through which social, political and philosophical issues can be raised and argued. She argues that film is considered suitable for portraying sensitive subject matter, and yet film is considered a passive medium. She also argues that,

> The emphasis on participation in computer games is considered too demanding of our 'lower' perceptual faculties, immersing players in the pursuit of selfish, short term goals, that are dependent on trained hand-eye reflexes rather than philosophical or ethical enquiry. Art mods that employ characteristics of computer games, such as interactivity, team-based problem solving, hand-eye co-ordination, emergent authorship and competition (as an ideology itself) to address political, social and philosophical issues, counter these common perceptions. These art mods reveal that the activity involved in game play is capable of arousing far more intellectual engagement than do films, which, overall, are designed to appeal to an audience's desire for passivity. (Online Posting)

Cannon's argument is obviously very pro EFW, understandably so, since because she is one of the curators of SelectParks.net, she works closely with Julian Oliver, who aside from being one of the producers of EFW, also co-curates SelectParks. However, regardless of her involvement with the game, she makes a valid point in her comparison. The implications of computer games being more engaging intellectually than film, which is considered an art form, are only valid if there is recognition within the art community of the potential for computer games to be an artistic medium. So far this is not a common perception, but with the increase of art games and art mods such as EFW, hopefully artistically modified games will soon establish themselves as a new medium for expression. In Cannon's online posting, she argued that we associate computer games with time wastage and a sedentary lifestyle. If computer games are understood to be an intellectual, challenging medium that have the potential for critical comment, both in the commercial and in the art sector, then the model established by EFW can only be improved upon, and given the opportunity to receive recognition.

After personal correspondence with the EFW Collective, it was revealed that it was unlikely that they would ever get enough funding in order to make the full game. This is an indication that the arts still do not take games with a political message seriously, once again enforcing the perception of 'time wastage' and 'sedentariness'. If the arts were to invest significantly in this game, the opportunity for the EFWC to improve the gameplay and the way the characters are portrayed, would allow their game to make a serious impact, and perhaps the public would begin to take 'serious videogames' seriously.

The influences of videogames such as EFW and patches such SOD on contemporary fine art practice are far reaching and deal with a number of different issues such as the ideas of 'play', 'game' and 'interactivity', all of which are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THE IMPLICATIONS OF ART GAMES FOR CONTEMPORARY FINE ART PRACTICE"

This chapter will explore the influences that computer and video games have had on contemporary fine art practice and the way in which this has influenced the way in which art and games interact. It will also deal with the implications of reading computer games in a gallery context.

Cannon, in her paper Introduction to Artistic Computer Game Modification, argues that,

> Many artists working with art modding as a medium have encountered problems when showing their work to the public. This has been for two reasons – firstly, the nascency of the medium in which they work. Art modding as an artistic medium remains relatively unknown to many practitioners of the arts. Even amongst those who have heard of it, only a rare few understand the breadth of activity which is occurring in this field. The second problem which art modding artists encounter is the fact they are working with a cultural medium which is not yet given much credence as a platform for creative expression… Computer games are also thought of mechanisms for commercial exploitation. Unlike films, they are not considered to be made purely for aesthetic or experimental reasons, nor for the sharing of knowledge or debate of social issues. Rather computer games are deemed purely immoral, unartistic, money-making ventures. (Introduction)

This statement is perhaps the most pertinent when it comes to addressing the issues of Artistic Computer Game Appropriation. The lack of understanding and knowledge in the area is an issue that needs to be addressed if we wish to see further development in this area. Hopefully, with art games starting to draw notice, they will advance to a stage where the demand to be recognised will be undeniable.

Axel Stockburger notes in his paper Gamepads in the Gallery: Tracing the relationship between computer games and contemporary fine art practice, "In order to understand how and why contemporary artist practice is moving towards games it is necessary to take a step back and take a look at the mutual attraction between the fields of games and art." (Gamepads in the Gallery)

This statement demonstrates that there is certain recognition within a section of the art community that realises the implications that video gaming and popular culture has had and is still having on contemporary fine art practice. The way in which games have influenced contemporary society and in particular the way we think about space. Tobias O. Meissner states in his article Perceptual Phenomena and Computer Games, "The more computer games you've played, the easier it becomes to see through the narrative "if…then" system of a game." (2)

With this statement Meissner comments on the definable narrative within commercial games. There are certain set patterns that are followed within games that define the role and movement of the player. It often depends on the kind of game, whether it be strategy, role-playing etc. but there is always a visible pattern that becomes easier and easier to recognise once a player has had enough experience playing games to recognise these models. For many artists it is the questioning of this pattern that is important. They recognise the pattern and try to subvert it by making the player aware of his status as a pawn. For that is indeed what most of us are when we play computer games – pawns following a designated set of moves in order to complete the game. We follow the rules of the game because the purpose of the game is to be played and fulfil the objective in order to beat the game and win. This is the objective of all commercial computer games; and this is why we buy them – in order to fulfil our desire to beat the game – beat the generic nemesis that surely becomes representative of all our frustrations. There is little free choice in our decisions. We might think that we are making our own choices but this is far from the truth, we are following a predefined pattern of "if…then".

It is subsequently interesting to note that many of the artists who are starting to venture into 'art games' are of the younger generation that spent their youth playing arcade games and later, PC or console games. The venture into the realm of computer games and art has therefore largely been initiated by this same generation, just as the field of academic research into games is also largely initiated by the younger generation. Stockburger states that, "At present only a small proportion of the art audience is familiar with computer games." (9) We must ask why this is, and perhaps the reason once again lies in the generation of those who have grown up playing video games.

Rochelle Slovin writes in her essay on the 1989 video game exhibition Hot Circuits,

> What was particularly notable was that the exhibition attracted an unusually large number of older visitors – people who clearly would have had no previous contact with video games… Indeed, the number of older visitors provided us with a chance to observe the interaction of the non-digital generation with the digital world. Devoid of contact with video games for most of their lives, the older visitors had never acquired fluency in the basic disconnect of computer space. (qtd. in Wolf: 145)

The fact that she particularly notes the difference between the reactions of the older generation in relation to that of the younger generation goes to show how markedly pronounced that difference must be. The younger generation of artists, growing up playing video games would logically extend their thoughts into computer game technology. Just as those who grew up within the struggle of Apartheid manifested their thoughts and emotions in the 'struggle' art of Apartheid South Africa, so do the next generation embrace concerns and technologies relevant to their era.

The way in which art relates to and yet is different to computer gaming is significant. There are indeed similarities, as Stockburger states, "Both are generating spatiotemporal zones which are perceived as different from everyday life. Furthermore, art as well as games, are said to be on the one hand governed by rules and on the other hand related to notions of freedom." (2)

Stockburger states further that,

> Whether one adheres to the notion of computer games as an art form or denies their potential for creating high art, it remains obvious that they have a number of characteristics, which are not entirely shared by fine art. First of all they are a mass medium attempting to deliver compelling entertainment for a fixed prize on a PC or console. Furthermore they demand a high level of participation and engagement… As games they have to be played. (Gamepads in the Gallery)

These differences and similarities as noted by Stockburger, are undeniably valid, however similar characteristics might be witnessed in another form of interactive digital art. So ultimately what is the major difference between computer games, whether commercial or art based, and interactive digital art in general? Interactivity requires a level of engagement and participation as stated by Stockburger, but they are not a mass entertainment medium, although they do demand to be interacted with. Any interactive works that do exhibit these characteristics can be likened to games. Referring back to Schleiner's curatorial statement for Cracking the Maze, "Many artists, art critics, new media critics and theoreticians have expressed a disdain for games and game style interactivity, in fact, to describe an interactive computer art piece as "too game-like" is a common pejorative." (Schleiner: 1999) Therefore the most basic characteristic that sets games apart from art (for this is the comparison) is the demand to be *played* as opposed to interacted with. The merging of these two media forms therefore involves the discussion of 'play', one that has long been of interest to artists.

THE CONCEPT OF PLAY

There is a need to digress at this point in order to indulge in a brief explanation of 'play'. There are two dominant explanations of 'play' in the psychoanalytic field of psychology that have been instigated by Freud and Piaget. Scott Brewster states in an essay for Literary Encyclopedia on Freud's work Creative Writers and Daydreaming,

> In essence Freud equates the function of creative writing with the motive force of dreams: the work of art, like a dream, involves the '(disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish. He treats the artist as an egotist shaping infantile phantasies into acceptable adult form… The child is able to distinguish the boundaries between play and reality, and can readily link imagined objects to tangible reality. Unlike the child at play, however, adults tend to be ashamed of their phantasies and secret wishes and have to mask or conceal them because they may conflict with or be impermissible in the social world… Thus creative writing becomes a substitute or surrogate for this childhood play. Just as children construct alternative worlds to fulfil their wishes, so writers play out their latent desires in fictional form. (Literary Encyclopedia)

Susanna Millar states that, "Freud's theory in his work Creative Writers and Daydreaming concerns the relation between imaginative play and emotion. Piaget deals with play as an aspect of intellectual development" (58). Neither of them is, however, particularly approving of adult play. David Cohen states in relation to successful writers on adult games, that, "The adult who plays games is doing something slightly disreputable… Isn't it a bit silly, or childish, for adults to play?" (154)

Albeit this book was written in 1987, and many of the theories on play were evolved even before that, however, it seems to still be a common misconception that the average target market for computer games are young, white males. In fact, a recent International Digital Software Association (IDSA) survey in 2000 found that, "The vast majority of online gamers are adults. Seventy percent of online gamers are between the ages of 25-55, with 60 percent of

these in the 25-44 year old age bracket." (IDSA) Similarly they stated that, "Online gamers are an affluent and well-educated group. Nearly 40 percent of online game players have household incomes of $60,000 or more. Eighty-eight percent of online gamers have at least some college education and 17 percent have a post-graduate degree." (IDSA)

Therefore if the perceived market for computer games is not what it seems, then how does the theory of play fit into this equation? If computer games are considered to be children's pastimes then the theory of play still holds validity, but as soon as we move away from that premise then we are faced with some difficulty. Cohen states, "Psychology finds it hard to explain this general surge of playfulness. If the purpose of play is to prepare the child in various ways for adult life, what is the motive for adult play?" (155) Since the idea of adult play has caused some difficulties with psychoanalysis, it is unsurprising that artists have found the idea so interesting. Therefore within the realm of art games it is encouraging that many artists are moving in this direction. Brewster quotes Freud in saying, "The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal – that is, aesthetic – yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies." (Literary Encyclopedia)

If adult games and play are considered something to be ashamed of, is it any wonder that few people regard computer games as anything other than a purely entertainment medium with no potential for artistic or critical expression? And yet if play is something to be ashamed of, why are the majority of gamers over the age of 25? Surely not all these people are acting out phantasies? Brewster in fact states at the end of his paper with regards to Creative Writers and Daydreaming,

> This essay has attracted much criticism for its relative neglect, and limited understanding, of aesthetic form, but Freud does consider to some extent the relationship between a writer's technique and the pleasurable effects produced by a literary work. By locating a 'textual unconscious' in the pathology of the author rather than concentrating on the forms taken by desire or the role of the reader, 'Creative

> writers and Daydreaming' establishes the 'classic' Freudian approach that dominated earlier psychoanalytic literary criticism. (Literary Encyclopedia)

Cohen is not quite as disapproving of the idea of adult play as the likes of Freud and Piaget. He discusses writers who he terms "two of the most successful writers on adult games… Eric Berne and Stephen Potter" (153) and details the fact that although both from different backgrounds, Berne is a therapist and Potter a comic writer, they both disapprove of adult play. (153) He himself however, seems, whilst not overtly disapproving of adult play in general, disapproving of computer games. He states, "Computer and role-playing games are fun but they can also lead to problems… The connection thread is that the user becomes so obsessed with the computer game as to lose perspective." (160)

Although this book was released in 1987, it seems that some of these ideas that computer games are children's entertainment still persist. However, it is now claimed in some studies that computer games now gross more in sales than the film industry[xxxi], so it is unsurprising that they have become such a dominant form of popular culture, and are now being subverted and used critically in the academic and art arena.

In an email to the [-empyre-] mailing list, Rebecca Cannon defines her notion of play with respect to art games. Cannon's definition, although not a theoretical one, is very relevant to this paper. She states,

> Games – as Play – Are thought of as cultural environments in which 'serious' issues can not find deep and meaningful critique. Why? Because play is whimsical. Play is for children. Although in play, as children, we develop many valuable life skills, social interaction, role playing, collaboration, compromise, competition, the ability to accept success gracefully, the ability to accept failure – these characteristics are not those that we associate with play in the long term. At least in virtual environments. We associate time wastage, sedentariness, youth culture. Even though vast percentages of people playing games are adults. Games carry cultural baggage. (Online Posting)

Interestingly, Robert Wälder in his essay The Psychoanalytic Theory of Play discusses the idea of the pleasure principle and states that, “The psychoanalytic theory of play is not able to supply a unitary explanation for the phenomenon called “play”, by which all games and all manifestations arising from them can be interpreted.” (36 in Müller-Schwarze: Evolution of Play Behaviour) The idea of pleasure and satisfaction in a computer game that deals with instant gratification in the way of interactivity becomes paramount when it comes to discussing the role of art games such as Escape From Woomera. The pleasure of the player in liberating and interacting with the refugees is gratified instantly without having to fulfil those requirements in real life. What then does this say about us? Are we more content to interact with a computer game than with real people? Are we more content to feel instant gratification in our pleasure of liberating imaginary people than in actually helping real refugees?

Wälder refers to Bühler when he says, “play is pleasurable and consequently, according to Bühler’s theory, is connected with a form of pleasure other than the pleasure of gratification.”(38) He quotes Freud in saying,

> We know that the child takes the same attitude to all impressions painful to him, reproducing them in the form of a game; through this manner of proceeding from passivity to activity he seeks to master mentally the impressions received from life... In the play of children we seem to arrive at the conclusion that the child repeats even the unpleasant experiences because through his own activity he gains a far more thorough mastery of the strong impression than was possible by mere passive experience. (43)

When we relate this back to Gonzalo Frasca’s idea of the ‘serious’ computer game in Chapter Four, we can begin to look at the idea of computer games dealing with disturbing or painful subject matter in order to enable people to understand and deal with the subject matter. In EFW, the game developers are exposing a subject that is controversial, but are they not in some way helping players of the game to both assuage their guilt and take a more proactive interest in the subject matter?

Wälder quotes Freud as saying, “The antithesis of play is reality, not seriousness.” (51) This statement refers to perhaps the bulk of computer games in general. They do not necessarily invoke the ‘obsessive’ non-reality that Cohen seems to think they do. In fact he states, “For adults, playing remains hard to do.” (161) Perhaps in 1987, but in 2004, when the majority of game players are over 25, what can be classified as adult in this case? And if age still defines ‘adultness’ then playing for many people is not quite as difficult as it once was. The vast majority of gamers have grown up playing computer games, and in this day when computers themselves are an integral part of daily life, their ‘obsessive’ qualities are overlooked in favour of their advantages. What we should perhaps be trying to determine is the definition of play in today’s society – for it is perhaps the definition of play that has changed as opposed to the definition of adult.

What is also important at this stage in a discussion regarding play and videogames is a discussion of Gonzalo Frasca’s Masters Thesis Videogames of the Oppressed, particularly his chapter on Johannes Huizinga’s essay Homo Ludens. This particular chapter involves discussion of the terms *paidea* and *ludus*, ‘play’ and ‘game’ respectively.

Frasca reviews his own earlier paper (which is not available in English) where he discusses Caillois and Piaget’s works with respect to the different categories of games, and the difference between *paidea* games and *ludus* games. The basic distinction is that games without rules (or at least less complex rules or ‘regularities’) are referred to as *paidea* and games with more complex rules are referred to as *ludus*. Although Frasca’s argument is more complicated and explores the difference between the two theories, for the purposes of this paper we will only explore Frasca’s definition of the two terms. He declares,

> While Caillois stated the difference between *paidea* and *ludus* was the complexity of their rules, I will use the term *ludus* to refer the games that have a result that defines a winner or a loser… On the other hand, I understand by *paidea* all the games that are based on Piaget’s ‘regularities’ and do not define a winner and a loser. (9)

He states further,

> The problem with the categories of paidea and ludus is that they are not easy to distinguish for an external observer. For example, a child who is jumping on one foot is following a *paidea* rule: to maintain her equilibrium without using both feet. But if the child has a watch and wants to see if she can stand jumping during 10 minutes, she has created a *ludus*. As we can see, it is easy to switch from *paidea* to *ludus*. (10)

He then moves on to a discussion of *paidea* and *ludus* in the computer. He discusses two French videogame critics, the Le Diberder brothers' classification of videogames categories: "arcade, simulations and adaptations." (11) Although he later discusses Canadian media theorist Jean Paul Lafrance's view that these categories are invalid, he does argue that he finds their 'simulation' description particularly useful. He states, "The Le Diberder brothers describe the genre as having three main characteristics: they represent a 'world', they pay great attention to detail and they have no clear goals." (11)

Frasca argues that a game such as Microsoft Solitaire is a *ludus* game because it is goal orientated. A game such as Sim City, based on the Le Diberder brothers' definition, is a *paidea* game. "As the Le Diberder brothers state, Sim City has a complex set of rules and no clear goal. The player can set her own goals: to create the smallest city without becoming dysfunctional, or to create the richest city, or the biggest city, or the most aesthetically beautiful urban organization. It is impossible to win in Sim City: it is a *paidea* videogame." (13)

He also discusses the way in which the player can switch between *paidea* and *ludus*, as illustrated in an earlier example. He uses Microsoft Flight Simulator as an example, when he argues that a player is involved in *paidea* when they are merely piloting in the simulator, but as soon as they set themselves a goal, such as not to crash into a bridge, they define a rule of *ludus*. (13)

This difficulty where the player can define their own goals creates problems in defining *ludus* and *paidea* videogames. If the player can switch whenever they want from playing around in a simulation and randomly building cities, to coherently shaping a goal of whether it must be the biggest city, how do we make the distinction between what is 'play' or 'game'? This is not an argument that can be easily resolved. But if we apply the idea of *paidea* and *ludus* as they stand to patches such as SOD, we arrive at an interesting point, where the goal might be to win or traverse to the next level, but because of JODI's intervention into the original game itself, that goal is next to impossible. What are the implications of not being able to complete that *ludus* goal or rule?

The idea of competition is what drives most commercial games. Whether it is competition with the game itself or competition with ourselves in the case of a game like Sim City, the idea of competition is the driving force behind playing games. In the case of a game like Sim City, there are no fixed goals and so we define our own to give us some sort of satisfaction.

With the above definitions of *paidea* and *ludus* in mind, it is particularly interesting to note Scott Brewster's summary of Freud's Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming[xxxii]. He states that, "The German language preserves the link between childhood play ('spiel') and imaginative writing in terms such as *Lustspiel* ('comedy', or literally, 'pleasure play') and *Trauerspiel* ('tragedy', or literally, 'mourning play')." (Literary Encyclopedia)

THE INTERACTIVE ARTWORK AND INTERACTIVITY

Before we start to explore the idea of the interactive artwork, we must first discuss the concept of interactivity, and a definition of the term 'interactive'. This does not mean a dictionary definition of the word interactive, but rather a critique of what defines interactive in the context of the art world. Lev Manovich in his book The Language of New Media, titles one of his subheadings "The Myth of Interactivity." He states,

> As with *digital* I avoid using the word *interactive* in this book without qualifying it, for the same reason – I find the concept to be too broad to be truly useful… Once an object is represented in a computer, it automatically becomes interactive. Therefore, to call computer media 'interactive' is meaningless – it simply means stating the most basic fact about computers. (55)

Similarly, Espen Aarseth in Cybertexts: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature refrains from using the word 'interactive', preferring instead to use the term 'ergodic'. He defines 'ergodic' literature as texts where, "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text." (1) Frasca defines Aarseth's nontrivial to mean, "Active participations – like clicking or typing – rather than traditional actions associated with reading – like turning pages – which does not modify the shape of the text itself." (20) He also argues that Aarseth's arguments can be applied to games, and illustrates that Aarseth actually applies his model to 'adventure textual-based games.' (20)

Manovich uses different terms when he talks about the concept of interactivity. He discusses concepts such as "menu-based interactivity, scalability, simulation, image-interface, and image-instrument, to describe different kinds of interactive structures and operations." (56) Manovich states that, "All classical, and even moreso modern, art is 'interactive' in a number of ways." (56) He discusses ellipses in literary narration and poetry as examples of this, as well as the viewer's body in relation to sculpture and architecture. But he also argues that, "Modern media and art pushed each of these techniques further, placing new cognitive and physical demands on the viewer." (56)

But Manovich also argues that,

> When we use the concept of 'interactive media' exclusively in relation to computer-based media, there is the danger that we will interpret 'interaction' literally, equating it with physical interaction between a user and a media object… at the expense of psychological interaction. The psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis formation, recall, and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image at all, are mistakenly identified with an objectively existing structure of interactive links. (57)

Manovich also briefly deals with gaming and the idea of patching as described by Anne Marie Schleiner in Cracking the Maze. He argues that, "On the level of new media products, the overlap between producers and users can be illustrated by computer games. Game companies often release so-called 'level editors', special software that allows players to create their own game environments for the game they purchased." (120) This idea of patching is directly relevant to Schleiner and Cracking the Maze, as well as to EFW, and their demo patch on Half-Life which recreates a whole new environment using only the gaming engine of the original game.

Perhaps the way to go when it comes to a way to grapple with the idea of the interactive in this paper is to follow Rebecca Cannon's premise when she quotes Mortenson. "Interactive, or at least reactive to user intervention." (qtd. in Cannon: Introduction to Artistic Computer Game Modification) For the sake of the argument of this paper, the term interactive shall continue to be used, regardless of its broad, buzzword status. But throughout the chapter, the above definitions must be kept in mind, to enable a broader understanding of the topic. Computer artwork is not merely interactive in the broadest sense, but also 'reactive to user intervention'.

The interactive cannot only be used in relation to computer based art. But then why is it that 'interactive' has become a buzzword in the art world, implying computer interactivity when it essentially could mean a bodily interaction, or even a psychological one, with an artwork?

Jason Spingarn-Koff in his article Considering Cutting Edge Art, quotes Stephen Wilson, an artist and author and a professor at San Francisco State University, as saying, “Artists cannot afford to accept the current definition of what is relevant or what is at the cutting edge.” (qtd. in Spingarn-Koff: Wired News) Spingarn-Koff then states in reference to Wilson, “He said artists who think they are up-to-date, just because they use digital technologies, are making a ‘critical error’.” (Wired News) In fact, Wilson’s statement is very relevant to the current surge of ‘interactive’ art that is currently flourishing. What many artists perhaps need to consider is what ‘interactive’ means in relation to their artwork. What most people understand as ‘interactive’ is perhaps merely as Mortenson puts it. ‘Reactive to user intervention’.

Although Manovich’s critique of the word ‘interactive’ is certainly valid, as indeed is Aarseth’s, it would be unreasonable and beyond the scope of this paper to substitute another word in this instance. Certainly ‘ergodic’ would be a reasonable substitute, as would any of the specific terms used by Manovich mentioned above. But for the purposes of this argument, it should be understood that ‘interactive’ in relation to art games and mods means ‘reactive to user intervention.’

Central to the art game is the idea of interactivity, for although interactive artworks do not share the idea of the ‘game’ with computer games; computer games share interactivity with interactive artworks. For a game to be played it must be interacted with. Not to play a game is negating the purpose it was designed for. The nature of the game is to be played even if, as in the case of SOD, its playability is questionable. So this merging into interactive play, two ideas that are often central to contemporary fine art practice, manifests in the form of ‘art games’. There is an ongoing interest in play and the interest in interactivity is demonstrated by the current upsurge of interactive art that has been produced in recent years.

“Interactivity also provides for artists concerned with social issues the opportunity to involve viewers in very heightened ways.” (Rush: 203) So states Rush in New Media in Late 20th-Century Art. This is indeed evident in Escape From Woomera, which uses an interactive game

medium to investigate an issue that deals with social change and controversial political views. The way in which the EFW Collective use the interactive experience with the detainees in Woomera as a means through which to interact with an institution that is no longer operative, demonstrates their realisation that 'experience' of the situation is the only way that people might come to agree with their point of view and thus act.

This experiential way in which artists articulate their point of view is perhaps far more far-reaching than many realise. The experience of the artwork has always been central, whether to a painting or an interactive work, and so to be able to immerse oneself in the artwork experientially perhaps delivers more of an impact as opposed to simply viewing and appreciating the aesthetic of a more traditional artwork. This is not to say that traditional art does not have its place in the art world, and certainly, there is something tactile and stimulating about viewing the physicality of a painting or sculpture that is not evident in the digitised world of interactive art. But the strength of interactive art is being able to immerse oneself and experience the encounter 'firsthand', drawing your own conclusion from 'experience'.

Conversely this is not to say that all interactive art is digital. Duchamp's Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics) for example, made in conjunction with Man Ray in 1920, "require the viewer to turn on the optical machine and stand one meter away." (Rush: 201) Art is capable of being interactive without digital connections. In fact, it could be said to be interactive simply by interacting with the piece on a personal, bodily level. The 'interaction' of the body with a piece of art, whether by standing and viewing a painting, or walking around a sculpture is equally as valid as interacting digitally with an 'interactive artwork'. However it is the instant gratification aspect of 'Interactive Art', the click of the mouse that immediately precipitates an action that makes it so unique.

In gaming then, the idea of interactivity is taken a step further. The viewer no longer simply views the results of predetermined actions, but rather they identify physically with the

character and perpetrate the actions themselves. An example of this is the way in which players refer to their avatar as 'me' rather than by the characters name, regardless of race, species or gender. The immersive narrative of games is what attracts us to them – the ability to not only identify with the characters but to become them.

The idea of 'art' must then be explored, particularly within the context of games and the gallery. The placing of commercial games in a gallery context does not immediately elevate them to a high art status. It is not acceptable, as Stockburger suggests, "That every profane object that is transported into the museum at some point in time is thereby valorised and transformed into a work of art."(3) By this statement, Stockburger is classifying 'high art' as the sacred and popular culture as the profane. Although a similar tactic was executed by Duchamp in his placement of a urinal in Fountain, Stockburger quotes Boris Groys as saying, "the less an artwork differs visually from a profane object, the more necessary it becomes to draw a clear distinction between the art context and the profane, everyday, non-museum context of its occurrence." (qtd. in Stockburger: Gamepads) Although Stockburger uses this point to elevate the popular culture into an art context, this is clearly not the intent of Groys.

In 1989, Rochelle Slovin proposed that the American Museum of the Moving Image mount a retrospective exhibition Hot Circuits: A Video Arcade, that exhibited arcade video games. They put together a number of original video games in their original cases, including PONG and Asteroids. She states,

> I commissioned an exhibition design that would allow games to be presented in our 6,200-square-foot third floor, elegantly but in classic arcade style, lined up against the wall. Museum visitors were given five free tokens to encourage them to play the games; they could also purchase more tokens… The designer, Stephanie Tevonian, placed the games seven or eight feet apart and at a precise 45-degree angle from the wall, the better to allow visitors to appreciate the cabinet art. (qtd. in Rush: 144)

The games are arranged in art-like context, and in this case given status as art objects. They are placed in such a way as to show them off to full advantage, and yet they still embody the arcade style that so many who grew up playing them remember. So ultimately what we need to ask is what sets these types of elevated art objects apart from the profane?

INTENTION

Placing an object in a gallery setting does not automatically classify it as an art object. If we do not classify the 'profane', as Stockburger puts it, as being art when placed in a gallery, do we reclassify art as the profane when we place it in our homes? However, the difficulty arises in the entertainment value of computer games in popular culture. We must ask the question "Does placing computer games in a high art context automatically designate them as art?" In Hot Circuits, the game was exhibited more in an historical retrospective sense, as was intended, than as artworks themselves. Slovin says, "Video game critic J.C. Herz described the sensation as a visitor in her book Joystick Nation," and quotes her as saying,

> Yes, you get to play with all the old machines, and they're aligned almost the same way they were when you were a teenager. But not quite, because the consoles are farther apart than an arcade owner would plant them. They are privileged with space, like statues or really expensive clothing, and thus become Design Objects. And this is when you realize, for the first time, that these cabinets, apart from containing your favourite video games, are really just goddamn beautiful. (Herz: 61-62)[xxxiii]

The answer however, is "No." What elevates the objects in the Hot Circuits exhibition to a high art status is the intention behind Rochelle Slovin's exhibition. This is the crux of much of contemporary art, beginning with Dada and Duchamp's Fountain (1917). What is of importance is not the object; it is the intention behind the object. For a commercial computer game to be simply placed as an object on display within a high art context does not automatically assign it high art status. It is ultimately the reasoning behind why it has been placed there in the first

place. Contentious this issue might be – what remains to be discussed is the how and why behind it.

High art demands an author; therefore it is the intention behind the artist's motivations that make the work art. Duchamp's Fountain was art purely because he was an artist, and this was the point that he was trying to make when he produced this 'ready-made'. Duchamp wished to question the omnipotence of the artist, and to try and define within the 'anti-art' Dada movement the role of the artist in producing 'original' artwork.

Therefore it is the intention of Rochelle Slovin to create an art exhibition of old arcade games, and to make viewers perceive them as art objects, much as Duchamp's Fountain was perceived as an artwork albeit the fact that it was indeed an upside down urinal placed in a gallery space. The way in which art games therefore subvert the popular culture status of computer games and are placed in a gallery space by implication of the artist creates an interesting dynamic, especially in the case of a game like Escape From Woomera or Waco Resurrection. Games like these that manifest in the form of commercial games, but then comment on political issues remains the domain of the art game. This is not to say that commercial game developers do not have political opinions, but very often the developer's message is overridden by the requirements of the publishers, and so they fall into the realm of commercial entertainment as opposed to political comment.

The intention of games like EFW and SOD, although unrelated except in medium, is to subvert the ways that viewers/players interact with the medium of videogames, and force them to examine their pre-conceived ideas regarding the role of videogames in contemporary society. SOD makes the game completely unplayable and yet highly addictive, whilst at the same time commenting on the interesting way in which games can be changed so as to become unrecognisable. What JODI wishes to explore is the way in which the things that go wrong within the computer can sometimes be more interesting than the slick, finished result that is

intended. They are therefore subverting the game developer's intention into something new and different.

EFW's intention is, through popular culture, intended to subvert the way in which the Australian Government treats refugees and to enable people to become proactive about the situation. They are expressing their opinion by a self-actualising viewer/player/detainee relationship that enables the player to see inside the detention centre as much as possible, particularly in the year since it was closed down.

Both JODI and the EFWC embrace the fields of play and interactivity in order to manifest an intention that is art. The field of art games is a playful one, and yet there is a critical edge. In contrast to many commercial games, where the play is counted as pure entertainment, art games often have a double edge. The ability to enable the viewer/player to move past any uncomfortable feelings when it comes to a critical issue and to engage and overcome by means of interactive play. With this in mind, we must understand that art games often don't deal with issues of pure entertainment. They address real world issues and use the medium of video games, a medium of entertainment, in order to bring about awareness and critical engagement with complex issues.

As Freud states, "The antithesis of play is reality, not seriousness." (qtd. in Wälder: 51) Although the topic of this paper is indeed 'serious videogames', the idea behind them is an imitation of reality. The categorisation of Art Games into different classes, whether it be the categories discussed in this paper in Chapter One or the categorisation implemented by Rebecca Cannon, is imperative in order to enable our understanding of this emerging medium. It is understood that the categorisations defined in Chapter One are perhaps not as other scholars would classify them; however this report attempts to explore a different alternative to these classifications. The classification of 3D games and art mods as interrelated and within the same system is one that must be acknowledged – regardless of their inherent differences. What must also be acknowledged is the place of Art Games within the high art realm and the

potential for computer games to be something other than a ‘time wastage’ entertainment medium.

ENDNOTES

[i] 'Mod' meaning modification.

[ii] It is interesting to note that Rebecca Cannon separates Art Mods and Art Games into entirely different categories. Whilst it is acknowledged that some academics take this route, for the purposes of this paper, the classification of the genre will be referred to as "Art Games". Each class or category of game will be defined within that genre later in this chapter.

[iii] The Video Game Theory Reader; edited by Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron and The Medium of the Video Game; edited by Mark J.P. Wolf

[iv] Chris Crawford's book 'The Art of Computer Game Design' discusses the making of computer games as an art form.

[v] Videogames are console-based games such as Sony Playstation; Microsoft Xbox etc. Games that are designed for those consoles can only be played on those specific consoles. Computer games can be played on a multitude of machines regardless of their internal specifications. As long as the computer meets the minimum requirements of the game, (i.e. graphics card, RAM, processor speed) it can be played. It is also much easier to modify files on a computer than on a consol. In order to modify console games, development platforms from the console companies are needed, whereas anybody with a good knowledge of scripting (and the right programs that can be downloaded from the Internet) can modify computer game files.

[vi] For example: FPS (First Person Shooter), RPG (Role Playing Game), Strategy Games etc.

[vii] Multi User Dungeon

[viii] June 6-8, 2002; Tampere, Finland

[ix] Koster, Raph. (1999) Video Games and Online Worlds as Art. [Website], http://www.gignews.com/raph1.htm

[x] According to Cannon, "The word Machinima is an amalgam of the terms machine animation and machine cinema. Machinima is a method of film making that involves the use of a 3D computer game engine." (Cannon: 2004)

[xi] For example: Action, Art, Drama, Romance etc. Similarly in commercial gaming these genres would be First Person Shooter, Role Playing Game, Strategy, Simulation etc. In Art Games this could perhaps be divided into categories like Political Games, Aesthetic Games, Art Mods etc.

[xii] For example, the skills that would be available to a commercial gaming company.

[xiii] I.e. demonstration.

[xiv] Many retro styled games are made with Flash or Java based scripting and so often fall under the domain of web design or web based games, and therefore not under the traditional videogame format.

[xv] Seen in Michael Rush's book, New Media.

[xvi] Interestingly the Australian Centre for the Moving Image lists this game as being released in 1975 as Advent (or Adventure) A Short History of Computer Games http://www.acmi.net.au

[xvii] The ARPAnet is the precursor to the Internet.

[xviii] Backwards compatibility means that games or cartridges that are designed for earlier systems are still playable on the newer systems once the old ones have been discontinued. This was a great advantage because users would upgrade their game systems to a newer model, whilst at the same time still be able to play all their favourite games.

[xix] RPG – Role Playing Game

[xx] Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game.

[xxi] Playstation Portable.

[xxii] More information on machinima can be found at what Cannon reckons is one of the best online resources for this genre, Machinima.com.

[xxiii] Video Ravings by Cory Arcangel.

[xxiv] Abandonware is generally the term given to old games or software that has been 'abandoned' and can be used free without any copyright issues. This usually applies to games, but also applies to software that might still be available but whose support and development has been discontinued.

[xxv] Graphical User Interface E.g. Windows as opposed to DOS.

[xxvi] Mediatecaonline.net/artijoc/eng/level1_1.htm.

[xxvii] <www.escapefromwoomera.org >

[xxviii] The title is based on Theodore Adorno's statement, "it would be barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz." (Frasca: 2000)

[xxix]Frasca defines his definition of serious in his paper, but essentially it means a subject, such as the Holocaust, about which it would be insensitive to be blasé about.

[xxx] Ergodic, loosely, means 'interactive', based on Espen Aarseth's definition in Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature. The idea of the interactive however, including the term ergodic, will be discussed in-depth in the next chapter.

[xxxi] Although these figures do not include DVD and video sales.

[xxxii] Or Der Dichter und das Phantasiren in German.

[xxxiii] Although this reference is quoted from Wolf, the original reference from Herz's book Joystick Nation has been included.

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