GAMING THE SYSTEM

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Gaming the System investigates videogames by artists using the medium for transnational cultural critique, who work by way of disturbing and mobilizing mainstream networks of global cultural production and distribution. I illustrate how the strategies employed by these artists not only draw on playful approaches to cultural critique introduced by the historical vanguards, but also evolved in relation to the emergence of new forms of media culture and market forces. The cross-cultural mobilization and ultimately the redefinition of the avant-gardes’ conceptual and material legacy as a transnational phenomenon informed the rise of play as a technique central to critical intervention in response to the economic and cultural transformations associated with globalization. Under these circumstances, videogames developed as hybrid cultural forms situated in the interstices of artistic, activist, and corporate cultures. This ambiguity, I suggest, has implications for cultural critiques as it both enables new and effective forms of social agency, as well as limits the artists’ abilities to fully exploit these resources for cultural transformation. My analysis shows the need to engage multidisciplinary perspectives in the examination of current and inherently hybrid technological formations.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Claudia Costa Pederson was born in Lisbon, Portugal. She received both a Bachelors and a Masters in Art History, respectively in 2002 and 2004 from California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, California. She completed her PhD at the Art History and Visual Studies Department at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, in 2012. Claudia is a lecturer at the Media Arts, Sciences and Studies Department at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY.
This document is dedicated to all Cornell graduate students.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

*Gaming the System* investigates the history of avant-garde cultural practices that aim to use play to intervene in systems of social control. It reveals the tensions and paradoxes that emerge when using play as a form of countercultural intervention, including the trade-offs between rationality and ludic enjoyment, the possibility for co-option of interventionist games in mainstream economies of entertainment, and working against rationality but also extending it through the focus on critique and upending tradition. A major contribution of this thesis is to show that contemporary art-based videogames are not an entirely new use of play for intervention but draw from and extend other historical forms including avant-garde art practice and the counter-cultural computing movement of the 1960s and 1970s.¹ My

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¹ The term avant-garde was originally a military metaphor referring to the front flank of the army, the forerunners in battle paving the way. As Renato Poggioli put it: “...the avant-garde...functions as an independent and isolated military unit, completely and sharply detached from the public, quick to act, not only to explore but also to battle, conquer, and adventure on its own.” Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 23. The avant-garde is then by definition at the forefront of its time, but not in an evolutionary sense since it is also defined as invariably oppositional. In Peter Bürger’s terms: “It radically questions the very principle of art in bourgeois society according to which the individual is considered the creator of the work of art.” Peter Bürger, *Theory Of The Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Snow (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1992), 52. Additionally for Bürger and Poggioli, the term avant-garde always refers to collective formations collaborating to overturn the status quo of the bourgeois order. The term counter-cultural com-
approach is to explore the different forms this exploration takes through a series of historical case studies leading from avant-garde art practice in the early twentieth-century to contemporary art-based computer games. These case studies show the different strategies actors used to leverage play for cultural interventions and the paradoxes and issues that become apparent in practice.

This thesis is intended to broaden the scope of existing humanist discourses around digital technologies and culture. Views are often framed in binaries—either celebrating the democratic potential of digital technologies or pessimistically fram-

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computing is used here to refer to hacker communities active in the 1960s and 1970s around San Francisco, engaged in claiming computers for individual and social emancipation based on decentralized forms of organization and free-sharing of information at a time in which access to computers was confined to government, academia and business spheres, seen from a counter-culture perspective as centralist and oppressive against the backdrop of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and global, widespread social unrest. The more politicized groups belonging to counter-computing were characterized by journalists Paul Freiberger and Michael Swaine as “technological revolutionaries...actively working to overthrow the hegemony of IBM and the other computer companies, and to breach the ‘computer priesthood’ of programmers, engineers, and computer operators who controlled access to the machines.” In this sense the counter-computing movement can be seen as the counterpart of avant-garde artistic currents, but working with computer technology. See Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* (New York: Dell/Doubleday, 1994); Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), 4; Steven Edward Jones, *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 173; Paul Freiberger and Michael Swaine, *Fire In The Valley: The Making of the Personal Computer* (Berkeley, CA: Osborne/McGraw-Hill, 1984), 99–100.
ing these technologies as tools of control and dehumanization. My research, including interviews conducted with artists whose work I discuss in this thesis, suggests that in actuality these technologies are conceived as both liberatory and restrictive. This ambiguity, I suggest, has implications for cultural critiques as it both enables new and effective forms of social agency, as well as limits the artists’ ability to fully exploit these resources for social transformation. My analysis shows how interventions into digital gaming respond to the rise of commercial gaming as a global cultural phenomenon from within broader historical trajectories in which media is used to address and shape processes of mediatization and social relations. Artistic uses of digital games for interventionist ends follow from these practices, rather than from the desire to enable new modes of sensory experience as an end in and of itself.

1.1 Game Theory

Theoretical perspectives on digital gaming emerged in the last decade of the twentieth-century after three decades dominated by psychological theories hostile to the medium, in which the focus fell on attempts at quantifying and denouncing the perceived relationship between violence, children, and videogames.\(^2\) By and large, studies from this period focused on videogames strictly in relation to children and bore the moral imprint of generalized anxieties about the effects of

\(^2\) See for examples Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxiv–xxv.
computational media on the emerging generation. Exceptions to these narratives include Marsha Kinder’s *Playing with Power* (1991) and Sherry Turkle’s *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1997). Kinder’s work is exceptional in its focus on considering the medium as part of a broader mediascape (movies and television) functioning as the training ground of fluid (postmodern) modes of consumption. Turkle pioneered the study of identity in online games, arguing that these environments signaled a shift from a modern to a postmodern identity, characteristically fluid and multiple, involving the self, others, machine, and world.

The perception of videogames as an adult activity entered public discourse by and large with a wave of generally celebratory accounts of videogames involving fans, designers and artists, many of whom were instrumental in advancing digital gaming as an academic subject.

The majority of historical approaches to the study of videogames from the turn of the century were constructed on the basis of a videogame fan sensibility, employed a journalistic style, and concentrated on devising lineages of industry games. A popular account is Steven Poole’s *Trigger Happy: Videogames and the Entertainment Revolution* (2000), which is an appraisal from the point of view of a gamer tracing the rise of the videogame industry as an entertainment paradigm


through a series of commercial computer games notorious as commercial successes.\(^5\) It argues that the popularity of videogames is due to the medium’s unique immersive features that engage consumers in ways different from older entertainment media, and suggests that these games are semiotic systems that may provoke “the aesthetic emotion of wonder.”\(^6\) Another example is John Seller’s *Arcade fever: The Fan’s Guide to the Golden Age of Video Games* (2001), which details the history of arcade culture in a quasi-encyclopedic model, while highlighting the impact of arcade gaming on other forms of entertainment.\(^7\) Steven L. Kent’s *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokémon* (2001) is an journalistic history of the videogame industry in the United States, in which the focus is on densely detailed episodes and insider views of its development as a commercial enterprise.\(^8\) These books highlight the medium as a new, innovative media form, the videogame industry as a driving cultural and economic force, and videogame players as extremely engaged, obsessed fans. In whole, videogame culture was mapped and portrayed as a North American invention later extending to Japan, and typically portrayed as belonging to young, male and white segments of the population.

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6. Ibid., 226.
The above mentioned accounts developed in tandem with sociological studies of videogame fan cultures focused on examining the impact of the medium on identity formation. Henry Jenkins’s studies, including *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (2000) and *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (2006) stress the value of videogames in the production of group consensus. By contrast, an emerging strand of ethnographic investigations focuses on antagonistic relations between videogame consumers and the industry. Two examples are T. L. Taylor’s *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* (2006) and Mia Consalvo’s *Cheating* (2007). While Taylor is interested in examining the contestational strategies that players employ as groups, Consalvo focuses on individual players responding to the industry’s attempts at defining and curtailing play behaviors on and offline.

*The Video Game Theory Reader* (2003) edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, signaled the arrival of Game Studies as an academic field of study. The perspectives included in this anthology still characterize the current theoretical composition of the field, ranging from historical, ethnographic, pedagogical,

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cal, psycho-analytical, literary, cinematic, informatic, gender, and artistic frameworks.

To date, the thematics of past and present artistic engagement with play and games are a largely marginalized topic in the histories of art. Still the only anthology exclusively focused on artistic uses of videogames, Andy Clarke’s and Grethe Mitchell’s *Videogames and Art* (2007) consists of essays and overviews of various subsets of artistic game genres and discussions about the relationship between artists’ games and industry games as well as includes interviews with renowned artists using the medium for critique.\(^{12}\) The authors focus on conveying a broad snapshot of contemporary western artistic practices in the videogame medium. Of a more recent date, David Getsy’s *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play, and Twentieth-Century Art* (2010) is an anthology that focus on the role of play and games in a variety of Western modernist art practices.\(^{13}\) This collection includes two essays (one previously published) on artistic digital games, but the overall goal is to highlight the significance of playful activity for the development of Western, modernist arts. A broader historical account of the contributions of artistic practices to the development of digital gaming is scattered throughout online and print catalogues of exhibitions dedicated to showcasing instances of artistic, activist and fan engagement with analogue and digital games. To my knowledge, Anne-Marie Schleiner’s “Cracking the Maze: Game Plug-ins and Patches as Hacker


Art” (1999) was the first online curatorial project on the topic of game modifications commissioned by the Kiasma, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland. Since then a vast number of shows presented historical and current work by artists working with games and play concepts. The most prominent include: MASS MoCa’s “Game Show” (2001–2002); “Bitstreams” and “Play’s the Thing: Critical and Transgressive Practices in Contemporary Art” at the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, 2001); “Artcade: Exploring the Relationship Between Videogames and Art” at SF MoMa (San Francisco, 2001); “Pong.Mythos” (Berlin, Germany, 2006); “Gamescenes” (Milan, Italy, 2006); and “Homo Ludens Ludens” (Laboral, Gijón, Spain, 2008). 14 Overall, these exhibitions consider digital games by artists in relation to past and contemporary art and art movements in the West and in light of the cultural impact of mainstream videogames on artistic practices.

Recent literature in Game Studies undertakes comparative approaches in the study of digital games to investigate the nature, social dimensions and potentials of the medium. Examples include Ian Bogost’s Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism (2006), a work by an artist and theorist that argues for a persuasive approach to videogame design inspired on older media forms (literature) as the basis for understanding and manipulating sensorial experiences in videogames. In contrast, Alexander Galloway’s Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Cul-

ture (2006), which consists of a set of separate essays, advances the view that videogames are akin to informatic machines engaging users through input and control, and best articulated in his opinion when connecting virtual and real experiences, though at times he contradicts this premise by drawing on Film Studies literature on “counter-cinema” to understand the medium.15 McKenzie Wark’s Gamer Theory (2007), contends that digital games are key sites wherein the social, cultural, and technological conditions of our times are being developed, refined, and internalized, and that the allegorical nature of the medium offers players ways to compose responses to dominant ideologies.16 Mary Flanagan’s work, including Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture (2002) and Critical Games (2009), engage feminist theory to both challenge the conservatism of mainstream cyberculture and videogames, ultimately bringing these insights to bear on design methodologies for digital games motivated by political, aesthetic, and social critique.17 Jane McGonigal’s Reality is Broken (2011) inverts this premise, arguing from a psychological stance that videogames already offer skills and modes of sociability that are potentially transformative when applied to real life situations.18

16. Wark’s notion of allegory draws on Walter Benjamin’s reflections on avant-garde aesthetics in which the goal is to disrupt “the illusion of bourgeois order [stable meaning], revealing the means by which it is made.” McKenzie Wark, Gamer Theory (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 29.
18. Jane McGonigal, Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the
Most ecletic of all, Jesper Juul’s *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds* (2008) uses a wide range of theories on games, film and literary theory, computer science, and psychology, in order to argue that games are models that traditionally engage players through imagination and experimentation.\(^{19}\) By contrast, Nick Dyer-Witheford’s and Greig de Peuter’s *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (2010) draws on the Autonomist concept of Empire, offering an indicting picture of videogames as media that reflect and cultivate the neo-liberal logic of globalization.\(^{20}\)


1.2 Gaming the System

My study brings together strands approached separately in the aforementioned studies to consider videogames as recombinant, hybrid forms of artistic, activist and corporate cultures, and in relation to the socio-technological histories out of which these formations emerged. While drawing on these approaches in my analysis, my work differs from them in that it focuses on histories and analyses of artistic and activist uses of the medium to intervene in systems of social control; takes these histories to be indicative of the overall transnationalist orientation of practitioners as well as reflective of the historical development of videogames within a complex intermixture of artistic, activist, scientific and entrepreneurial cultures; and considers the interface between videogames and global corporate culture as the impetus for the use of the medium for critique and disturbance by transnational artists. My intent with relating past and present currents of play is neither to reduce contemporary practices to the those of the past, nor to construct a linear history. Rather, my purpose is to attend to the commonalities and differences among these practices to expand the frame of reference of humanistic study of media culture, without which the inclusion of the heterogeneity of these associations would be spurious.

Following this introduction, the central role of playful activities for the avant-gardes’ broader project of societal transformation is examined in chapter 2. The impulse of this project is placed in relation to the historical conditions and artistic sensibilities that lead avantgarde artists to respond to rationalist definitions
of the human and affirm pleasure and ludic energies as the defining impetus of individual and collective life. The definitions of rationalist traditions in the avant-gardes corresponded with those articulated by the Dutch theorist Johan Huizinga, who associated them with *Homo Sapiens*, the wise human of “the Eighteenth Century[’s]...worship of reason and its naive optimism” and its extension in *Homo Faber*, meaning human the creator or maker whom he related to modernist conceptions of the human (Huizinga wrote *Homo Ludens* in 1938). On the verge of World War II, Huizinga noted that “we are not so reasonable after all” in preface of his rejection of thought seeking “to explain every advance in culture in terms of...[the] ‘tyranny of causality’...[and] ‘antiquated utilitarianism.’”

Stressing that culture was at once serious and playful, Huizinga introduced the notion of *Homo Ludens*, meaning human the player, and defined play as “a free activity,” separated from “ordinary life” but nevertheless immersive, connected to “no material profit,” and bound in “time and space.”

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21. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), no page number. Huizinga’s notion of play was cited by members of the Surrealists and Situationists, while more loose interpretations of play appeared in the writings of artists connected with the Fluxus network (see Chapter 2). Members of Zurich Dada, among them Hugo Ball, were familiar with the writings of the French philosopher Henry Bergson, in which the notion of *Homo Faber* appears in relation to intelligence, which Bergson views as the “faculty to create artificial objects, in particular tools to make tools, and to indefinitely varying the manufacture.” Henry Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), 139.


23. Huizinga also pointed out that play was implicated in “the formation of social groupings” with a penchant for “secrecy,” “disguise or other means.” ibid., 13.
to the ludic expressed in playful forms that emphasized spontaneity, imagination, voluntary association, sensuality, and pleasure was indicative of a fundamental critique of the relationship between rationalism, authoritarianism and hierarchy pervading the cultural and sociopolitical spheres, and ultimately speaks of the belief that the liberation of creative forces corresponded with the liberation of the social sphere. Thus the mobilization of play toward overturning the bourgeois art tradition, defining the artist on principles of specialization and authority (the artist genius) and relegating art to transcendental categories (beauty and originality), was conceived in a dialectical relation with the avant-gardes’ distaste for the dominant sociopolitical order, and as a step towards manifesting the means for the expression of the liberated human and social relations. At the same time, the trajectory of artistic avant-gardes was also steeped in the values, structures and goals associated with the tradition against which it was working. Ultimately, the avant-gardes’ playful spirit merged with the developing counter-culture of the 1960s, expressed in deep distrust for centralized power systems. The large, batch-processing computers, at the time machines strictly in the service of academic, government, military and business domains became emblematic of the dehumanizing effects of centralized power. However, some counter-cultural elements saw the decentralization of computer technologies via the development of personal computers as a chief means to achieve democratic development based on decentralized organization.

Chapter 3 examines the central role of the collective in videogames in relation to the transformation of the avant-gardist ludic legacy within the decentralization-
globalization nexus on which developed the cultural, sociopolitical, economic and technological formations typical of today’s knowledge societies based on network configurations. Historically, the creation of computer networks involved the intermixture of counter-culture, institutional and corporate cultures and evolved out of the separation of play and games from pleasure. Amidst the Cold War and widespread unrest, ludic concepts and forms became central to the development of the computer as a dynamic, simulation-based, network communication tool, a project that aligned planners and engineers at governmental, military, academic and industry settings with counterculture currents who saw in these machines the potential to rationally create a communalist society based on free interchange of information among individuals. This vision represented a shift from political action to a focus on rationally driven strategies. The underlying sense of confidence in the power of reason as a touchstone of social transformation was articulated by the engineer and counterculture icon R. Buckminster Fuller thusly: “You never change something by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

The rationalization of play and games as concepts and methods within the project of decentralization and network formation ultimately lent stimulus to the development of new forms of media culture and industry, including videogames and the transnational media corporations associated with the medium. Within processes of globalization at the turn of the twenty-first century, the mobilization of play by videogame devel-

opers re-engaged techniques of the avant-gardes in two senses: first, in reflection of avant-gardist practices of recombination and decentralization, key to globalization’s own processes; and second, in the use of play by artist to call attention to its very imbrication with globalization.

Art-based videogames that mobilize play for intervention can be seen as “exploits,” a term developed by Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker in reference to “the juncture between sovereignty and networks... the place where the apparent contradictions in which we live can best be understood.” These forms of decentralized interventions indicate the development of new modes of social engagement and at the same time are themselves subject to the possibility for co-option in mainstream economies of digital, network-entertainment. The interventions in mainstream gaming examined in chapter 4 are associated with tactical media. The emergence of this form of activism is discussed as a response to the utopian promises of decentralization expressed in the transcendent identity celebrated at the inception of mainstream digital culture. Détournements of videogames by tactical media practitioners are part and parcel of playful inquiry into the instrumentalization of digital technologies to categorize, divide and maintain social boundaries, and into novel, ephemeral forms of social engagement immanent to its expression which bypass the tensions of most avant-garde practices and political organization based on rational models of consensus. Persuasive games, discussed in chapter 5, take a rhetorical approach to the medium as a tool

for social change. The rise of persuasive simulations is connected with concerns about the control of the public sphere by a largely centralized media system, including the videogame industry. Because practitioners associate decentralization with ideals of rational-critical communication in echo of counter-cultural currents, persuasive games advance this model to effect lasting sociopolitical change. These games are modeled on a concept of rational communication based on discourse and consensus, in reflection of much of the basis of normative politics. In practice, the difficulties of waging rationality in response to power are brought to the fore in persuasive games that show discrepancies between players’ responses and the artist’s expectations of and intent to generate reasoned discourse. The conclusion foregrounds the pertinence of interdisciplinary perspectives to the examination of these practices.
CHAPTER 2

HOMO-LUDENS

This chapter analyses the role of play and games for the development of the artistic and social sensibilities of Dada, Surrealism, Situationism, and Fluxus. Discussions and engagements with playful forms and concepts by members of these groups provide points of reference to investigate the function of the ludic as the impulse of artistic experiments that speak of a common desire for new forms of being and association. The use of play and games in the avant-gardes testifies to the search for forms of expression that invoke new visions of both the human and human relations.\(^1\) This project entails on one hand a rejection of the view of the human as Homo Sapiens, the individualist bourgeois associated with rationalism, and on the other hand the affirmation of Homo Ludens, the playful human existing and relating through pleasure and desire.\(^2\) From this follows the avant-gardes’ assault on the ideological role of art under the bourgeois definitions of the artist as a

1. See introduction for an explanation of the term avant-garde as used here.
2. The term Homo Ludens or human player as used here relates to the writings of Dutch cultural theorist Johan Huizinga, who argued that play is an element both predates and defines human culture. Huizinga defined play as an equivalent of freedom; as distinct from “ordinary” or “real” life, both as to locality and duration; and as an organizational principle that negates material interest or profit. Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture, 9–13. Huizinga’s discussion of the game as free action and its relationship with the human condition, which he characterized as “metalogic” (“supralogique”) and his discussion of the game in relation to poetic expression was cited by André Breton. See André Breton, L’un Dans L’autre (Paris: Eric Losfeld, 1970), 8–9. The Situationists cited Huizinga in their definition of the game as surpassing Huizinga’s definition of play as “a perfect delimited temporality,” thereby proposing a definition that sets the game
specialist individual and genius, as creative expressions framed within idealist notions of beauty and originality, and as commodities operating under the premises of the institutionalized cultural apparatus working to fix and distribute creative production and meaning. Instead, the artist was replaced by the collective, and artistic activities took on the character of processes associated with collaboration and gratuity set in motion as agitational acts aimed at ontological transformation. The ludic character of avant-gardes practices relates to the central idea connecting these movements, namely that the liberation of the creative impulse and the transformation of collective life intimated as one and the same project.

2.1 Dada’s Laughter

In 1927, Hugo Ball, a central figure in Zurich Dada, wrote in his memoirs that behind Dada was a “farce ... a play with shabby leftovers,” of “expressionism, futurism, and cubism.” Behind the Dadaist, he described a “childlike, Don Quixotic being ... involved in word games and grammatical figures ... [who] welcomes any kind of mask. Any game of hide-and-seek, with its inherent power to de-

ceive.”3 Zurich Dada emerged from re-casted themes and aesthetics of modernist art and popular culture, an amalgamation of Symbolist “free verse”; Expressionism, as conceived by Wassily Kandinsky’s “total art”; Marinetti’s Futurist “Parole Libre”; Cubism’s simultaneity and interest in African arts; and Yiddish folk theater; cabaret; and the language of propaganda and marketing.4 As Ball implies, Dada’s seizing on the contributions of pre-war stylistic movements served to unhinge their conventionalization, and assert their relevance as an unified platform for propelling art and the artist into the present in grotesque mockeries of the imperialist culture sweeping Europe amidst World War I (1914-1918).

The “total art” of Dada, “pictures, music, dances, poems,” is synonymous with the chaotic conditions of its historical time as addressed by a group of defecting artists and intellectuals coming together in neutral Zurich, Switzerland, in 1914.5 The group included three Germans: Hugo Ball, a playwright and director trained in German literature, history, and philosophy; Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), a dancer, performer, puppeteer, and poet, and Ball’s partner; and Richard Huelsenbeck (né Carl Wilhelm Richard Hülsenbeck, 1982–1974), a medical student from Berlin. Hans/Jean Arp (1886–1966) was a poet, painter and sculptor of German and French descent who came from Paris to Zurich. Tristan Tzara (né Samuel Rosenstock, 1986–1963) a symbolist poet and the brothers Janco (Jules, Marcel,

5. Ball, Flight Out of Time, 104.
George) were Jewish artists from the kingdom of Romania, which while neutral at the inception of World War I, joined in the conflict in 1916. Other members of the Zurich Dada group included the Jewish Romanian painter Arthur Segal (1875–1944), the Jewish Polish painter Marcel Slodki (1892–1943), who was later killed in Auschwitz, and painter and poet Francis Picabia (1879–1953), of French, Spanish, and Cuban descent. Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943), a painter, sculptor, puppeteer, and a trained Laban dancer was the only native Swiss among the Zurich Dadaists. In point of fact, Zurich constitutes an intermittent point in Dada’s trajectory, with its starting point in Romania, among young Jewish artists and intellectuals driving the modernist art currents emerging in this country. Among them were the five Romanians coming together in Zurich, which with the outbreak of the war in 1914 became the focal point of international avant-garde culture in Europe.

9. The atmosphere in the Zurich was still one of a small town. For instance, in 1916, Zurich legislators implemented a night-curfew intended to “strengthen[ed] ... old Swiss liberty” and oppose the “foreign” vices flooding Niederdorf, Zurich’s amusement quarter, home to the cabaret and assembly point for international refugees. Debbie Lewer, “From the Cabaret to the Kaufleutensaal: Mapping Zurich Dada,” in *Dada Zurich: A Clown’s Game from Nothing*, ed. Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996), 45–49. In addition, Huelsenbeck recalls that women were rarely
Ball and Hennings took the initiative to call on exiled artists and audiences to join the Cabaret Voltaire, a nightclub that proved pivotal for the emergence of Dada as Zurich’s agent provocateur (fig. 2.1). Huelsenbeck, who went on later to cofound Berlin Dada, recalls a typical soiree at the Cabaret:

The Cabaret Voltaire was our experimental stage on which we tried to explore what we had in common. Together we made a beautiful negro music with rattles, wooden drumsticks, and many primitive instruments. I played the precentor, a near mythical figure. Trabaja, Trabaja la mojere—with plenty of schmaltz ... We first experimented with our own costumes of coloured cardboard and spangles. Tristan Tzara ... invented the performance of the simultaneous poem for the stage, a poem recited in various languages, rhythms, intonations, by several people at once. I invented the concert of vowels and the bruitist poem, a mix of poem and bruitist music. ... Tzara invented the static poem, a kind of optical poem that one looks at as at a forest; for my part, I initiated the dynamic poem, recited with primitive movements.10

Among the city’s notorious residents at this time was “James Joyce, Romain Rolland, seen in the cabaret, while undercover agents of the Sittenpolizei (vice squad) were often spotted in the audience, prompting the actors to redouble provocation. Richard Huelsenbeck, Reise bis ans Ende der Freiheit: Autobiographische Fragmente (Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung Darmstadt) (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1984), 118.


Es soll die Aktivität und die Interessen des Cabarets bezeichnen, denen ganz Achtung zuteil wird, das über den Krieg und die Vaterländer hinweg an die wenigen Unabhängigen zu erinnern, die anderen Idealen leben.

Das nächste Ziel der hier vereinigten Künstler ist die Herausgabe einer Revue Internationale. La revue paraîtra à Zurich et portera le nom „DADA“. (Dada) Dada Dada Dada Dada.

HUGO BALL

ZÜRICH, 15. Mai 1916

Figure 2.1: Portraits of Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 1916
land, Alexander Archipenko, Franz Werfel, Else Lasker-Schüler, Fritz Brupbacher, Otto Flake, Rudolf von Laban, Viking Eggeling.”¹¹ The Russian exile Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (1870–1924) soon to become Lenin, lived during this time in the Spiegelgasse 12, a few doors down from the Meierei located on number 1, the restaurant that was to host the first Cabaret Voltaire soirees in Zurich, in 1914.¹² Art and Science historian Tom Sandqvist reports that in fact, Lenin was a regular at the Meierei, and cites Marcel Janco’s remarks that his visits to the cabaret were, “to discuss the dadaist ideas, ideas that he was very much opposed to because they could not serve the Communist cause.”¹³ Tzara later said that he did not know about Lenin at the time.¹⁴ Be that as it may, systematized politics were of little interest to the members of the Dada group, save as fodder adding to its subversive glee.

The debut of Dada was timed for July 14, 1916, to coincide with France’s Bastille day, which the group mockingly mimicked in their storming of the stage at the Zunfthaus zur Waag in Zurich.¹⁵ The evening’s program according to

¹¹ Sandqvist, Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire, 30.
¹³ Sandqvist, Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire, 34.
¹⁵ In addition to Dada events, the group produced one magazine Cabaret Voltaire, which was published on June 15, 1916, and featured collages, drawings, and poetry contributed by Tauber, Ball, Janco, Arp, Hennings, Slodki, Max Oppenheimer, Otto van Rees, Filippo Tommaso, Marinetti, Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and Guillaume Apollinaire, among others. The Dada magazine,
Richter, present at this event, consisted of “music...dance, theory, manifestos, poems, pictures, costumes and masks” and involved “Arp, Ball, Hennings, the composer Heusser, Huelsenbeck, Janco and Tzara.”

Huelsenbeck read a “declaration” styled on the Communist Manifesto, inviting all to unite under the banner of Dada, which he proclaimed to not mean a thing, except “the best medicine contributing to a happy marriage.” Tzara read from his manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine, whose title comes from an aspirin brand proclaiming that “Dada is our intensity....within the framework of European weaknesses, it’s still shit, but from now on we want to shit in different colours so as to adorn the zoo of art with all the flags of all the consulates.” Together Tzara and Huelsenbeck recited “Pélamide,” a bruitist poem: “a e ou youyouyou i e ou o...yoyouyouyou...drrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr Stücke von grüner dauer ...” (fig. 2.2). Hennings performed a Dada dance costumed in a cylindrical outfit and a cubist mask made by Janco. Ball dressed similarly with a cylinder on his head recited sound poems, including “Karawane.” The evening ended as the lights dimmed and Ball was “carried down off the stage like

which totalled eight issues published from July 1917 to September 1921, shows the Surrealist turn of Zurich Dada under the direction of Janco, Arp, and Tzara, with increasing contributions by Paris based Surrealists, such as André Breton, Paul Dermée, Paul Éluard, and Louis Aragon. For a reprint of these magazines, see Paul Raabe, ed., “German Literary Expressionism Online,” 2008.

a magical bishop” amidst general hilarity (fig. 2.3).  

Zurich Dada’s ironic sensibility expressed itself in subversive mimicries of the jingoism of propagandist, commercialist, and moralist discourses. In his memoirs, Richter noted that Dada’s ironic appropriations represent a strategy of engagement and distancing:

“We laughed to our heart’s delight. In this way we destroyed, af-fronted, ridiculed and laughed. We laughed at everything. We laughed at ourselves, as we did at the kaiser, king, and fatherland, beerbellies,

Figure 2.3: Hugo Ball in Janco’s Costume at the Cabaret Voltaire, 1916
and pacifiers. We took our laughter seriously; it was our very laughter that guaranteed the seriousness of our anti-art activities in our efforts to find ourselves.\textsuperscript{21}

Henry Bergson, who Ball later cited as an influence for the Cabaret Voltaire, captured the irreverent side of laughter as a marker of “a slight revolt on the surface of social life,” which in this way “instantly adopts the changing forms of the disturbance.”\textsuperscript{22} Ball also associates Dada with the Dyonisian spirit of Nietzschean thought. He saw both as kindred affronts on metaphysics—thought divorced from “the objects of the real world,” underlined by “logic ... made absolute as an end in itself,” citing as examples Kant, Fichte and Marx.\textsuperscript{23} The Dyonisian impulse drove Dada’s distaste for a culture of individuation and detachment reflected in the association of aesthetics with contemplation, refinement, sobriety and superficial appearance: a false representation of reality in perfectly stable form. By contrast, a “Dyonisian” art invites immersion in the undifferentiated nature of life

\textsuperscript{23} Ball, \textit{Flight Out of Time}, 12, 145. Ball wrote his dissertation on Nietzsche; the Nietzschean turn was part of a broader romantic revival at the turn of the twentieth-century and connected with anarchist as well as conservative currents; see Peter Lamborn Wilson, \textit{Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays} (New York: Autonomedia, 1998), 160. For an account about the relationship between Zurich Dada and anarchist thought see Theresa Papanikolas, \textit{Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada} (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 84–105.
by activating passion, immediacy, chance and improvisation, even intoxication: the agents of free will. The concern with the connection of art and life drove the Dadaists’ fascination with non-Western art, also a broader tendency in art at the time. The art theorist Wilhelm Woringer hailed the abstract character of “primitive art” in Abstraction and Empathy in 1907, as Pablo Picasso was finishing his painting Les Demoiselles d’Avignon. In this context, Ball sets Carl Einstein, author of Negro Art (1915) and a collaborator of Berlin Dadaists, in parallel with the ‘primitivist’ resonance of Dada plays.\(^{24}\) Einstein’s anarchism provides the political counterpoint of Dada’s ‘primitivism’ expressed in art linked to immediate experience:

> Primitive art: that means the rejection of the capitalist art tradition. European mediateness and tradition must be destroyed; there must be an end to formalist fictions. If we explode the ideology of capitalism, we will find beneath it the sole valuable remnant of this shattered continent, the precondition for everything new, the masses of simple people, today still burdened by suffering. It is they who are the artist.\(^{25}\)

The dadaists’ resolve to destroy aesthetics—i.e., the separation between reality and artistic expression—lay bare experience and connections as the grounding elements

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\(^{24}\) Ball mentions Carl Einstein’s Dilettanten des Wunders [Dilettantes of the Miracle] as pointing the way for a Kunstlertheater, a model for the theater he envisioned with the Cabaret Voltaire in Flight out of Time, 10.  


28
of the creative process. Zurich Dada brought about this realization in performances and environments through which the perceptual capabilities of the artists and audiences were as a rule extended to their limits, in the process freeing up their underlying (often transgressive) qualities. The energies emerging from these experiments, spontaneity and spontaneous action, failed however to find kindred spirits in neutral Zurich, instead devolving into indifference and internal conflicts among the group.

The end of Dada activity in Zurich, according to Richter, took place at the grand soiree in the Saal zur Kaufleuten on the 9th of April 1919.26 The disbanding of the group after three years is attributed to various factors, of which the audiences’ habituation to the sensory attacks of Dada appears to have played a considerable role. Following the peace treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, Dada’s audiences left Zurich, and the group quietly disbanded. Ball and Hennings had already left in 1917 for Bern, after a dispute with Tzara about the latter’s ambition to systematize Dada as an international art movement.27 In her account of Zurich Dada’s relationship with anarchist thought, Theresa Papanikolas suggests that the conflict was less between Ball and Tzara, both of whom she sees as adhering to an “anarcho individualist” view (filtered through an anti-rationalist and anti-authoritarian vein), but rather between this view and the “anarcho-communist” line of Dadaists belonging to the Bund Radikaler Künstler (Association of Radi-

cal Artists), a splinter group of Zurich Dada which included Richter, Arp, Fritz Baumann, Viking Eggeling, Augusto Giacometti, Emmy Hennings, Walter Helbig, Janco, Otto Morach, and Arthur Segal. According to Papanikolas, this grouping was inspired on the organizational model of Peter Kropotkin’s notion of “mutual aid,” a communist society free of a central government and based on voluntary associations between members. In contrast, she cites Max Stirner, Nietzsche, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Auguste Stindberg, Voltaire and the Marquis de Sade as major influences for Ball’s belief that “real social renewal” ought to be “based on the premise that revolution would inevitably happen at the level of the individual consciousness.” The main function of art would be to “liberate the individual from ‘traditions or laws of any kind’.” This vision as Papanikolas explains was carried through by Tzara, who followed the brothers Janco to Paris in 1921, as a guest of the group of Dadaists headed by André Breton, soon to form the Surrealists. Dadaist tendencies in art developed in parallel to Zurich and Paris at various locations, among them in Tokyo, New York, Zagreb, Belgrade, Georgia,

29. ibid. The Radical Dada group cited “the lack of system” or the decentralized organization of the Cabaret Voltaire as their impetus to form a “collective ‘brotherhood’ of artists” dedicated to “serve towards the formation of the new man” by way of serving as cultural leaders of the “people.” Excerpt from the manifesto of the Bund Radikaler Künstler cited in ibid.
30. Ibid., 89.
2.2 Dada at War

Dada gathered momentum in Berlin around Huelsenbeck, who upon coming back home from Zurich in 1917, sought to establish a club modeled on Cabaret Voltaire. While by and large most Dadaist tendencies concentrated on aesthetic issues, in Berlin, Dada took on a definite political turn due to the conditions affecting the city’s social context. Club Dada was to include, among others, Franz Jung (1889–1963), an expressionist poet and play-writer; George Grosz (1893–1959), a painter and caricaturist; Helmut Herzfeld (John Heartfield) (1891–1968) and his brother Wieland Herzfelde (1896–1988), founders of the Malik-Verlag, a publishing house for left wing literature; Hannah Höch (1889–1978), who was trained as a graphic designer and briefly worked as a fashion designer; and the architect Johannes Baader (1875–1955).33 The painter Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971) was of Austrian origin. These artists were involved with political activism at the time of Huelsenbeck’s arrival amidst widespread agitation for radical social change in Berlin during the war. By 1916 the Hertzfelde brothers were publishing the Neue Jugend, a left wing literary and political paper. At the same time, Franz Jung and Raoul Hausmann were publishing Die Freie Strasse, an anarchist review, with con-

33. Heartfield is the anglicized version of Herzfeld—in a gesture of repudiation of German nationalism.
tributions by Baader. George Grosz was known for his satirical drawing regularly published in various socialist publications.  

34. In effect, many of the expressive techniques and themes of Berlin Dada, such as distortion, juxtaposition, and sociopolitical content, were already budding in these publications under the sign of German Expressionism.

Like the Zurich Dadaists, the Berlin Dadaists had personal experiences with war as soldiers, objectors, and in the case of Höch, as a volunteer for the Red Cross.  

35. Unlike in Zurich, however, their anti-militarist and anti-nationalist sentiment found political reverberation in anarcho-socialist organizations, most notably represented by The Spartacus League, founded in 1916 by Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, and Karl Liebknecht, which in 1917 was to join with the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD), and finally take the form of the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) as a coalition of groups objecting to the support lent by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to the German government’s declaration of war on the Russian Empire in 1914, beginning World War I. Grosz, who had voluntarily enlisted and was discharged; Heartfield, who was dismissed from the Reichswehr film service on account of his support for the strike that followed the assassination of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in 1919; his brother Herzfelde, who briefly served as a conscript; and Jung, a deserter, all became members of the KPD at its founding.  

36. Dada’s political in-
volvement took heart from the news of the Russian revolution (February 1917) leading in Germany to the eruption of general strikes and the formation of autonomous soldiers’ and workers’ councils, and finally to the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1918. This highly volatile atmosphere continued with the bloody suppression of the Sparticists in 1919, and the installation of Weimar Republic (1919–1933) following on the defeat of the German Reich, which resulted in the loss of its military as well as the part of its territories annexed by France. Heavy fines imposed on Germany by the allies (as agreed under the Treaty of Versailles in 1919) compounded the country’s state of disarray, as droves of disabled soldiers returned home to swell the ranks of the dispossessed.37 In response, Dada became in Berlin a set of strategies of dissent positioned between social criticism and propaganda.

Berlin Dada’s propaganda included confrontational public performances, incendiary speeches, manifestos, media hoaxes, spontaneous happenings, revolutionary literature, journals, magazines, posters, leaflets, assemblages, photomontages, and an exhibition, as well as a range of drawings, paintings, and lithographs. These activities were designed to reach a wide audience, to demoralize the existing order, and lastly functioned to create an international network of Dadaists by way of correspondence, journals, and mutual advertising.38 Dada’s campaign differed from communist propaganda in its combination of poetic and political

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elements, though it similarly strove to precipitate the revolutionary process on a global scale. In the same year that Rosa Luxemburg composed The Spartacist Manifesto, the “First Speech of Dada in Germany” was impromptu delivered by Huelsenbeck at a literary reading on January 22, 1918. In it he declared that Dadaism was at “the Fronde of major international art movements.” 39 At the Dada Club official opening event at the Berlin Sezession on April 12, 1918, Huelsenbeck clarified this idea by stressing that Dada and the Dadaist performed in response to the fluidity of life opposed to the rigidity of art, and from this took its form as an ubiquitous cross-cultural attitude:

Dada is a state of mind that can be revealed in any conversation whatever. So that you are compelled to say: this man is a DADAIST—that man is not; the Dada Club consequently has members all over the world, in Honolulu as well as New Orleans and Leseritz. Under certain circumstances to be a Dadaist may mean to be more a business man, more a political partisan than an artist— to be an artist means to let oneself be thrown by things, to oppose all sedimentation. 40

The evening’s uproarious ending, largely provoked by Grosz’s illustrative gesture as he pretended to urinate on nationalist and prowar paintings decorating the hall, foreshadowed subsequent confrontations between the Dadaists and authorities for the following two years.41

With the exception of the group’s first magazine entitled, Club Dada: Prospekt des Verlags freie Strasse published shortly after the event, the publications associated with the Berlin Dadaists were persistently subject to censorship. The distribution of Huelsenbeck’s Phantastische Gebete (Fantastic Prayers) with drawings by Grosz (1917) was ceased on orders by the Reich’s Kommandantur.42 Dada tracts and literature such as newspapers, magazines, and posters were similarly censored. Among these, Baader’s manifestos Dadaisten gegen Weimar (“Dadaists against Weimar”) and Jedermann sein eigner Fussball (“Everyman His Own Soccer Ball”), published by Hertzfeld’s Malik Verlag in protest against the brutal suppression of the Spartacist uprisings, were confiscated (the former sarcastically proclaimed Baader as President of the Earth, while the latter urged counterrevolution). The latter was seized after 7,600 copies were sold by Dada members marching in the streets of Berlin behind a horse-drawn carriage mounted by an orchestra rented for the occasion (the Dadaists were arrested).43 Die Pleite (Bankruptcy) appearing shortly after in March 1919 under the editorship of Heartfield, Herzfelde, Rudolf Muller, 1972), 35.

42. Available at the International Dada Archive (University of Iowa) online: http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/Phantastische/index.htm.
and Grosz, among others, contained drawings and paintings by Grosz alongside communist propaganda. The publication was banned during the first year, though it appeared intermittently in print until 1920.\textsuperscript{44} 1920 was also the year of The Dada Fair in which a dummy with a pig’s head dressed as a German officer was centrally displayed hanging from the ceiling. The show was shut down by the authorities, and the artists as well as the gallerist involved were trailed and fined on grounds of ridiculing the German army.\textsuperscript{45} At issue was the directness of Dada’s oppositional messages and the Dadaists’ alignment with the radical left. In addition, the relentlessness of the Dadaists’ campaign gave the impression that the group stood for an ubiquitous oppositional force. Between 1919 and 1929, Dada members were involved in the publication of two other periodicals, \textit{Der Blutige Ernst} (The Bloody Ernst) and \textit{Der Gegner} (The Opponent), both dealing with political satire pointed at the authorities and institutions of the Weimar Republic.\textsuperscript{46} They also made their opposition visible through twelve official performances, a media campaign consisting of a host of leaflets, programs and posters distributed at these events, and individual publications, which included Huelsenbeck’s \textit{Dada Almanac}, \textit{Dada Triumphs! A Balance-Sheet of Dadaism} and \textit{Germany Must Perish! Remembrances of an Old Dadaist Revolutionary}, all appearing in 1920.\textsuperscript{47} In addition, the group published \textit{Der Dada}, which appeared in three issues between 1919

\textsuperscript{44} Biro, \textit{Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin}, 33–34.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 48–49.
and 1920, and dealt specifically with Dada.\textsuperscript{48} The definitions of Dada in these issues as a “club,” an “advertising company,” and a “savings bank” were underscored by scorn for bourgeois institutions.\textsuperscript{49} In the last number of the periodical, Hausmann’s “Dada in Europe” likewise professed scorn for the media by framing Dada’s activities as “bluff” playing on the “bourgeois” appetite for sensationalism.\textsuperscript{50}

The images and layouts of the journals, books, and materials published by Berlin Dadaists attest to the sophistication and impact striven for by the artists. Among the images accompanying these publications are numerous satirical drawings of Grosz, who focused on developing caricature as a medium through which he conveyed powerful critiques of the social hierarchies of Weimar Germany. Grosz’s portraits of corpulent businessmen and members of the ruling and religious classes are often juxtaposed with images of exposed prostitutes, mutilated soldiers, jobless workers, and scenes of police brutality. He renders class difference visible via archetypes of greed, hypocrisy, and dejection against fragmented and distorted backgrounds that express the chaos and oppressiveness of social conditions. Deeply influenced by expressionist currents, Grosz’s caricatures brilliantly translated into the format of popular print. The fragmentation and jarring characteristics of Grosz’s works resonated in Dada photomontage, an innovative technique of which Heartfield’s cover for Baader’s \textit{Jedermann} is one of the first examples. Though also found in Russian Constructivism, it appears that the source

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 39–48.
\textsuperscript{50} Ades, \textit{The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology}, 92–93.
of Dada photomontage lays in military photography, as Höch explained in an interview post-Dada:

We borrowed the idea from a trick of the official photographers of the Prussian army regiments. They used to have elaborate oleolithographed mounts, representing a group of uniformed men with a barracks or a landscape in the background, but with the faces cut out; in these mounts, the photographers then inserted photographic portraits of the faces of their customers, generally colouring them later by hand. But the aesthetic purpose, if any, of this very primitive kind of photomontage was to idealize reality, whereas the Dada photomonteur set out to give to something entirely unreal all the appearances of something real that had actually been photographed ... our all purpose [sic] was to integrate objects from the world of machines and industry in the world of art.\textsuperscript{51}

Among the Dadaists, Heartfield, Höch, and Hausmann were the most active in developing photomontages composed of reassembled images and texts taken from mass media. Whereas Heartfield’s works in the medium extoll a propagandist intent similar to Grosz’s, Höch and Hausmann focused on producing images that

commented on the rhetorical power of mass media. Dada pioneered photomontage as a modern art form found throughout the avant-gardes and in contemporary media activism in which the mobilization of existing media forms the basis of social commentary and political intervention, as well as in mainstream media from the 1920s onwards up to today’s sanitized postmodern aesthetic of remix. In effect photomontage set the ongoing dialogue between art and life in motion.

Heartfield’s montages mostly revolve around anticapitalist and antifascist themes and his affinity with communist causes. His best known works originated in involvement with the KPD, as a contributor to various communist publications counter to the rise of National Socialism. Two examples from a photomontage series dating from 1932, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Big Gifts* (fig. 2.4), and *Adolf, the Superman, Swallows Gold and Spouts Tin* (fig. 2.5), portray Hitler as a puppet of capital and a demagogue receiving contributions from industrialists while appealing to the masses through workingman rhetoric. A 1934 photomontage entitled *The Thousand Year Empire* (fig. 2.6), puns on the ideologies of domination coalescing within the third reich. The image shows a precarious house of cards stacked according to rank. At the top is the king with the face of Fritz Thysen, the owner of the largest steel and coal company in Germany supplying armament to Hitler between the two World Wars. Hitler appears as the lowly drummer boy (“Der Trommler”) at the bottom of the pyramid. The implication of this house of cards is that its collapse will follow on the removal of its shaky foundation. In this connection, *The Voice of Freedom in the German Night on Radio Wave 29.8* (1937), a poster designed for a communist radio sta-
tion broadcasting from Czechoslovakia into Fascist Germany shows the liberatory impact of technology in the hands of the “people,” a familiar narrative of classic marxism.

In contrast with Heartfield’s the photomontages of Hausmann and Höch, which date from the Weimar period, are visually overloaded with references to the rise of consumer culture. But as Hausmann and Höch sought to similarly exploit the materials of mass marketing, their works engage with them in different ways, as opportunities to reflect on the cultural context and identity of Berlin Dada. Hausmann’s works include Dada and himself in the form of advertisements, as in Dada siegt! (“Dada victorious”) from 1920, and his self-portrait ABCD (1923–24) (fig. 2.7). These montages combine the typographical forms of sound poetry (Hausmann was a sound poet) and visuals to formally convey noise and movement in a mix of detachment and irony, as well as pay homage to Russian Constructivism (he collaborated with El Lissitsky on one occasion). Höch also engages self-portraiture in conveying the emergence of media personalities, as in Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany (1919–20) (fig. 2.8), which includes Dada members taken from the group’s publications alongside fashion models, revolutionaries, and public figures from the

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52. Hausmann was also a sculptor, an inventor, and later photographer; he is known for his sculpture entitled Mechanical Head (1919), which commented on the celebration of reason underpinning the portrait in Western tradition; he is however, less well known for his invention of the optophone (1920–1936), a “syneesthetic” machine designed to transform sound signals into visuals and vice versa. See for instance, Jacques Donguy, “Machine Head: Raoul Hausmann and the Optophone,” Leonardo 34, no. 3 (2001): 217–220.
Figure 2.4: John Heartfield, The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Big Gifts, 1932
Figure 2.5: John Heartfield, Adolf the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk, 1932
Figure 2.6: John Heartfield, The Thousand Year Empire, 1934
arts, politics, and sciences like the Prussian artist Käthe Kollwitz, Lenin, German cabinet ministers, and Albert Einstein. The gendered references of this work, the kitchen knife and a map of European countries granting voting rights to women, abound in Höch’s photomontages, with the modern woman a recurring figure. Contrary to Heulsenbeck’s “new man,” whom he characterized to carry “pandemonium within himself,” Höch’s portrait of the new woman in Beautiful Girl (1920) (fig. 2.9) conveys misgivings about consumerist objectification, salient in the pin-up pose of the woman, her faceless light bulb head, and her encasing, perched against the backdrop of BMW insignias, tires, gears, cogs, and a wrench. Höch was to later comment on the challenges facing the new woman, which included the attitudes of male Dadaists:

The Dadaists were not inclined to abandon the (conventional) male/masculine morality toward woman... Enlightened by Freud, in protest against the older generation... they all desired the “New Woman”... But they firmly rejected the notion that they, too, had to adopt new attitudes.  

Alongside print and visual works, Dada’s public performances played into mass media in Germany to spread agitation. It was Baader who remarked seventy years

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53. Richard Huelsenbeck, “Der Neue Mensch,” Neue Jugend 1 (May 1917): 2–3. The black boxer inserted trough the tire on her right side may reference the Europeans’ fascination with the celebrity culture of the roaring twenties in the United States (the boxer as idol was impersonated by Arthur Cravan, 1887–, a Swiss poet and provocateur adored by the Dadaists and Surrealists).  
Figure 2.7: Raoul Haussmann, ABCD, 1923–24
Figure 2.8: Hannah Höch, Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany, 1919–20
Figure 2.9: Hannah Höch, Beautiful Girl, 1920
before Baudrillard on media war: “World War I was a newspaper war. In reality it never existed.” Dadaist media theatrics mocked the militaristic, hierarchical, and submissive attitudes of Germany’s leaders to invigorate resistance. This strategy was at least for a time effective at circumventing attempts by authorities to erase dissenting voices from the public sphere. These interventions were also pivotal for the development of performative interventions spanning to the present. The campaign of public disinformation undertaken between 1918 and 1919 by Baader and Hausmann took root in the foundation of a number of mock institutions. Among these was a political party, the Unabhängigen Sozialdemokratische Partie (Independent Social-Democratic Party), which was dedicated to ending the war and the Protestant-inspired Christus G.m.b.H, a Christian sect which conferred dispensations to army deserters in a mockery of the religious fervor of the period. The public announcement (a spoof) of the creation of the Dada republic of Nikolausse, a rich neighborhood in Berlin, ironically framed as a push toward a democratic system to be achieved “without violence, bloodshed, or weapons, armed with nothing but a typewriter,” met with a disproportionate reaction by the authorities (the mayor deployed two thousand troops in defense of the villa owners), suggesting the efficacy of the media campaign set about by Baader. Baader also sent a series of missives, which were printed by a number of mainstream Berlin newspapers, which included the “Eight World Sentences,” a Nietzsche-inspired

55. Huelsenbeck and Green, The Dada Almanac, 95.
“anti-thesis” parodying the North American President Woodrow Wilson’s “fourteen points” to world peace (1918).57 In another press announcement, Baader postulated his candidacy as a representative of Berlin, district 1, to the German parliament (Reichstag) under the title of “ober dada,” likely a pun on the Nietzsche’s übermensch, and a sarcastic jab at the racial superiority rhetoric extolled in support of the war.58

As the ober dada, Baader staged an event in the Berlin cathedral themed Christus ist Euch Wurst (“We don’t give a damn about Christ”), which took place on the first Sunday of the November revolution (November 17, 1918) and was aimed at

57. 1. People are angels and live in heaven. 2. They, and all bodies which surround them, are world accumulations of the greatest order. 3. Their chemical and physical changes are miraculous events, more mysterious and bigger than any end of a world or any creation of a world in the area of the so-called stars. 4. Any intellectual and spiritual expression or perception is more wonderful than the most unheard of event, which the stories of ’Arabian Nights’ describe. 5. All activities and actions of humans and all bodies take place for the entertainment of heaven, as a game of the highest order that can be viewed and experienced in as many different ways as there are individual consciousness facing an event. 6. An individual consciousness is not only the human being, but all the orders are shapes of the world out of which the consists and within which he lives as an angel. 7. Death is a fairy tale for children, and the belief in God was a rule for man’s consciousness during a time when we didn’t know that earth, as everything else, is part of heaven. 8. World consciousness does not need a God. Baader’s “eight points,” quoted in Sudhalter, “Johannes Baader and the Demise of Wilhelmine Culture: Architecture, Dada, and Social Critique, 1975–1920,” 226. Baader’s style recalls Nietzsche’s mimicking of the Bible format to produce an anti-Christian critique in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1909).
church leaders supporting the state's push for war. He interrupted Pastor Dryander shouting “What is Christ to you?” promptly answering his question with “you don’t care a hoot.” This action provoked a public scandal, and Baader was arrested for blasphemy (he was shortly released on grounds of his certified insanity conferred to him by the German army doctors). As ober dada, he also urged his inauguration as “President of the Earth,” on the same day as the newly established Weimar parliament was scheduled to meet. On July 16, 1919, he cast a cryptic leaflet entitled The Green Corpse into the Weimar National Assembly on the day that it introduced an article in the constitution guaranteeing “Every German the right to give free expression to his opinions in word and print or any other form.”

Praised by some and scorned by others, Baader’s actions caused a stir among the Dadaists themselves. Huelsenbeck, who had left Berlin to practice medicine, was particularly opposed to Baader’s role play, which he saw as an attempt at self-aggrandizement. In addition to internal discord among the group, the limits of scandal also became evident during the Dada European tour devised by Huelsenbeck, Hausmann, and Baader in 1920, which was called to a halt because of audiences’ hostility. According to Huelsenbeck’s account, the provocative antics

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59. Huelsenbeck and Green, The Dada Almanac, 39.
60. Ibid.
61. See a letter addressed to Baader by Huelsenbeck entitled “A Personal Dada Matter,” with Baader’s reply reprinted in the Dada Almanac. Ibid., 37–43.
by the Dadaists drew the ire of Czech audiences incensed because the group was composed of Germans, while the German public saw them as socialists, and the socialists deemed them “reactionary voluptuaries.”63 Baader in turn cites the poor organization of Huelsenbeck as the main reason for his decision to leave the group and return to Berlin.64 Yet, Baader’s actions were mild-mannered in comparison with Jung’s radical political turn exemplified by his involvement in a spectacular act of piracy in 1920, which was covered internationally by newspapers.65 Jung and a shipyard worker, Jan Appel, seized and detoured the German ship Senator Schröder to Murmansk in the Soviet Union, where they presented it as a gift to the Soviet revolutionaries on Mayday in an act that extends Dada’s artistic subversion to the political sphere.66 He was received by Lenin as a member of the Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands (KAPD), and urged to argue for the unison of German communist factions on his return home. He was arrested in Germany on charges of piracy and released in 1921.67 He eventually left Europe for the United States in disillusionment with the failed revolutions in Germany and Russia.

64. Huelsenbeck and Green, The Dada Almanac, 42.
67. Ibid.
In Berlin, the Dada Fair in July 1920, the only art exhibition by the group, presaged the imminent dissolution of its activities. The show was organized as an environment composed of typographies; nonsensical poster poems; and assemblages such as Baader’s Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama, a sculptural collage of recycled materials accompanied by prints of odd visionary architectural spaces; photomontages by Haussmann, Heartfield, and Höch (who was included against the wishes of Grosz and Heartfield); and Rudolph Schlichter’s dummy entitled Prussian Archangel, a life-size model of a German officer with a pig’s face bearing the legend “Hung by the Revolution.” At the entrance to the show a placard proclaimed: “Art Is Dead. Viva la Machine Kunst of Tatlin.” A parody of institutionalized art culture (recalling the Salon des Refusés) as well as a self-mockery, the show was accompanied by a catalogue and an essay by Hausmann denouncing the exhibition as a cheap diversion from the seriousness of the political crisis facing the country, and as yet another unoriginal and “snobbish” attempt at copying “waning” Russian art (Constructivism). The critics and the Reich’s lawyers reacted unfavorably, and the gallery owner as well as four artists were reprimanded for defaming the Reichswehr. Grosz and Wieland Hertzfelde were moderately fined. The works in the show were either confiscated or discarded after the exhibition, in line with the Dadaist conception of art as a living expression that once played out was of no value.  

68. Höch was included after Haussmann threatened to boycott the show. Irene Gammel, Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 332
Club Dada self-dissolved as interest in its continuation waned among members. Höch, Hausmann, Hans and Sophie Arp, and Tzara (by then living in Paris), along with Hans Richter, who together with Viking Eggeling had been working on abstract films, drifted toward Constructivism in response to the productivist direction taken by Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus at Weimar. Jung, Grosz and Heartfield embarked on a commitment to Communism, while denouncing its dogmatization in the Soviet Union. Heartfield escaped the SS fleeing to Czechoslovakia and subsequently emigrated to Britain where for a time he was interned as an enemy alien. He settled in East Germany, East Berlin were he came under suspicion by the Stasi (East German Secret Police) because of his lengthy stay in Britain (after six years, he was admitted to the East German Academie Der Künste [Academy of the Arts], due to the intervention of Bertold Brecht and Stefan Heym). Grosz and Jung emigrated along with Richter to New York, which along with Los Angeles, (where Bertold Brecht, Frankfurt school figures, and others) took refuge, became meccas for dissident intellectuals and artists akin to what Zurich once had been. Under National-Socialist rule Dada and Constructivism became equally suspect and classified as “degenerate art.” Members of the initial group remaining in Germany were forced into hiding, as in the case of Hanna Höch, or into anonymity like Baader, who distanced himself from his former Dada activities and concentrated on practicing architecture.

The two dominant sensibilities of Dada—the aesthetic experiments of Zurich’s Dada and Berlin Dada’s political actions—were carried throughout in avant-gardes emerging independently elsewhere. Even though Dadaist energies took on different expressions within various groupings of artists and intellectuals, they all identified with an initial Dadaist axiom: “Art is not an end in itself, we have lost too many of our illusions for that. Art is for us an occasion for social criticism, and for real understanding of the age we live in.”

2.3 Surrealism

Surrealism emerged with the rise of Paris as an art node in the 1920s, around a group of artists steeped in Dada’s legacy of playful subversion, and against the backdrop of war trauma. The initial group of Parisian Dadaists, soon to become Surrealists, included André Breton (1896–1966), Louis Aragon (1897–1982), Benjamin Péret (1899–1959), Paul Éluard (1895–1952), and Philippe Soupault (1897–1990). The Surrealists likened their efforts to the investigation and the transformation of the psychological dimensions of reality to the role of the analyst.\footnote{71. Tristan Tzara et al., “Dadaist Manifest (Berlin 1920),” in Richter, _Dada 1916–1966: Documente der internationalen Dada-Bewegung_, 22.}

\footnote{72. The group’s interest in Freudian psychoanalysis not only reflected the popularity of Freud’s work in post-war France but was also indicative of the influence of the emphasis on individual expression found in the writings of anarcho-individualist thinkers such as Pierre Janet (L’ Automatisme psychologique, 1910), whose work known to the Surrealists, broke with the prevailing assumption that the individual’s unconscious and “rational external persona” were split and the the
Unlike the analyst, the artist did not use psychoanalysis to cure; rather “psychological pathologies” were approached on their own terms as knowledge in line with the surrealists’ refusal to make “reason” the criterion for expression and indeed the definition of what it means to be human. Accordingly, art was also removed from aesthetic concerns and devoted to inquiries into the liberatory possibilities of fluid models of subjectivity—a project that Walter Benjamin was to later characterize as a bid “To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution—in other words, poetic politics.” Breton foregrounded the connection between poetry, play and politics in Surrealism, citing Johan Huizinga’s discussion of play as an *action libre*, a spontaneous action, which affirms “the supralogic nature of our situation within the universe” and is akin to poetic expression as both share “beauty, the sacred, magic force.” In sum, the game of “poetic politics,” as implied by Breton concerns the belief in the subversive power of the “play of imagination.” The Surrealists’ pursuits of the liberation of the imagination developed in a range of activities, including games. According to Breton, the central role of games in Surrealism spoke to the group’s broader pursuit of knowledge about “the ties that unite us... consciousness of our desires, and what they have in common.”

unconscious was not real. For Janet, the unconscious was precisely what informed the individual’s uniqueness. Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada*, 156–157.


75. ibid., 9. Translation mine.

76. ibid., 7–9. Translation mine.
this light, he writes, play negates the separation inherent to linear thought and relations:

The imperious need that we experience to do away with the old antinomies of the type action and dream, past and future, reason and madness, up and down, etc., suggests that we not spare those between the serious and the non-serious (the game), which regulate the domains of work and leisure, of sense and folly, etc.\textsuperscript{77}

Surrealists’ experiments in automatism, a technique based on unconscious free-association, was re-adapted from Freudian analysis and used to facilitate the manifestation of collective and individual desire by means of language and images, of which the game \textit{cadavre exquis} is the best known (Breton cites in addition other games such as “school notation (from -20 to +20), analogy (if this was...), definitions (what is...), conditionals (if... when...)”\textsuperscript{78} These games speak to Breton’s definition of Surrealism as a “pure psychic automatism,” indicative of the investment of the movement in the transformative power of the freed imagination, absent of “any control exercised by reason.”\textsuperscript{79} In the 1930s, Dali formulated “paranoic criti-

\textsuperscript{77} Breton, \textit{L’un Dans L’autre}, 8. Translation mine. Johan Huizinga’s ludic definition of the human/socius in Homo Ludens (1938) was praised by Breton in this work.

\textsuperscript{78} The \textit{cadavre exquis} game consists of a piece of paper passed around to several people for each person to writes or draws something, folds the paper so as hide the contribution and passes it on; at the end of the game the paper is unfolded to reveal the collective result. ibid. Translation mine.

cism,” a technique based on the simulation of paranoid states used in the study of objects. Dalí described the paranoiac-critical method as a “spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectivity of the associations and interpretations of delirious phenomena.”

Breton explicitly cites a number of Surrealist games belonging to the development of “paranoic criticism” in his discussion, such as “interventions into the irrational (in the knowledge of an object, the embellishment of a city, the extension of a film...which through their focus on pleasure” fold into “processes and techniques” developed within the plastic arts like “frottage, frumage, collage, decalcomania, drawing with candles, etc.,” thus accessible to all. These techniques speak of the Surrealists’ deep mistrust of thought and expression based on the belief that reality exists in-itself (as intimated in realism, rationalism, and objectivism). Surrealism called the “real” into question, showing that reality is not fixed or external to perception, but rather a manifestation of desire. From this angle, Dali twisted Marx’s thesis


81. Lucy R. Lippard, ed., “The Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism,” in Surrealists On Art (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 210. Dali’s ideas poked fun of dialectical materialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as drew on the double image of the rorschach test and Marx Ernst’s double images. Dali, “The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment,” 90. This method was further developed into a poetic and ironic classification system involving the prescription of possible experiments to be undertaken and designations of objects deriving from these experiments.

82. Breton, L’un Dans L’autre, 8. Translation mine.
on false consciousness to argue that consensus reality is a paranoid delusion of the worst kind, given its stultifying effects. Thus, for the Surrealists, any effort toward discrediting the world of reality was a revolutionary act set to provoke “a crisis of consciousness” and energize transformation. The surrealists’ predilection for games reflects the movement’s playful vision of being and relating, as well as the belief that therein laid the crux of social change. Surrealist games indicate the movement’s quest for new ways of perceiving, its intense interest in psychic forces and phenomena, as well as its determination to carry on Dada’s engagement with freedom in social, moral, and intellectual spheres. These concerns, translated in practices that attempted to fuse the individual and the social spheres, are intertwined with the conceptualization of surrealist games as objects, as physical manifestations of imaginative processes, and as means of playful resistance that speak of Surrealism’s political dimension, in which the transformation of perception was intimately linked with the desire for a transformed world.

2.4  A Poetic Revolt

The antifascist campaign of Claude Cahun (1894–1954) and Marcel Moore (1892–1972) undertaken between 1940 and 1945, is a compelling application of the surrealist game in resistance. The couple had been active in Parisian Surrealist circles as performers, poets, and photographers until the late ’30s, when they

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moved to Jersey, an island in the Channel Islands where they had been spending summers since childhood. Concepts and techniques associated with Surrealist games, as discussed above, formed the basis of the relentless counterpropaganda by the two artists (whose real names were Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe) against the Nazis who invaded Jersey on July 1, 1940, a month after the invasion of France. The activities of Schwob and Malherbe (who reverted to their given names upon their arrival in Jersey in 1938) during the four years of occupation were designed to suggest a widespread, international, and insider-based opposition against Nazism, meant to demoralize the occupying forces, in a manner similar to Berlin Dada. They were ultimately arrested in July 1944 and sentenced to death, but the sentence was appealed and commuted shortly before France was liberated in 1945, presumably because the Nazi commander was advised not to proceed with the execution of the two women for fear of widespread revolt among the island population.

The campaign included the distribution of transcripts of radio broadcasts (radio was forbidden under the occupation) translated by Malherbe, who was fluent in English and German (the translations included BBC news broadcasts, and Breton’s radio broadcasts for Voice of America).85 Schwob would subsequently convert the material “to rhyme, conversation, and other literary forms.”86

notes were typed or handwritten with colored inks on papers and cigarette papers, when available. Each note was accompanied with a request to further distribute and was signed “der Soldat ohne Namen” or “der Soldat ohne Namen und seine Kameraden” (“the soldier without a name” and “the soldier without a name and his comrades”), to suggest the work of an “insider.” Dressed up in disguises, the duo set out on regular trips around the island to spread the notes and other materials, targeting places where German soldiers were highly concentrated, such as the café terraces of the island’s capital, St. Helier, where they would deposit these items in soldiers’ coat pockets, on tables and chairs, and folded inside cigarette packets and magazines and books. They also spread satirical commentaries via altered comic books, a popular literature form among the soldiers. An example is cited by Schwob in a letter to a friend in which she describes how she had cut-out the text balloon above a character facing a German soldier about to leave for Russia so that it produced a window framing text on the opposite page, which read, “Bonne aventure” (“Have a great time”). Their literary output also included two issues of a magazine “for the use of the Wehrmacht” with pacifist, antimilitarist and anti-Nazi articles in various languages (German, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Greek, Czeck...) and photomontages, which they addressed to the Nazi command stationed in Jersey and left “abandoned” in the streets, beaches (inside Champagne bottles!), and churches. In addition, the slot machines of the island’s amusement park frequented by German soldiers were singled out for the dispersion of gambling pieces marked with the slogan, Nieder mit Krieg (“Down

87. Downie, Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, 278.
88. Leperlier, Claude Cahun, 275.
with war”). “Ohne Ende”, an abbreviation of a Nazi slogan “Schrecken ohne Ende oder Ende mit Schrecken” (“Terror without end or end with terror”) taken by Schwob from a Nazi publication, appeared repeatedly on walls throughout the island. Taking advantage of the location of their house, adjacent to the parish church of Brelade and its cemetery, which served as the burial grounds for German soldiers in Jersey, the couple undertook nightly guerrilla excursions undetected. Amid the graves they inserted handmade crosses painted black with red letters reading, “Für Sie ist die Krieg zu Ende” (“For you the war has ended”). Above the church altar, they hung a banner paying homage to Berlin Dada; written in red and black letters the proclamation, “Jesus ist gross—aber Hitler ist grosser. Denn Jesus ist für die Menschen gestorben—Aber die Menschen sterben für Hitler” (“Jesus is great but Hitler is greater, for Jesus died for humankind whereas humans died for Hitler”), a slightly modified slogan by Baader included in the catalogue for the Dada Fair, which read, “Allah is great, but the oberdada is greater still.”

From the house they also dispensed food and supplies to Eastern European war prisoners at the nearby work camp, used as forced labor for the building of the island’s defense lines and railway network.

In an interview after release, Schwob said that the couple’s actions reflected their positions “against nationalisms, separatisms; that is, against war...the most

89. Leperlier, Claude Cahun.
90. Ibid., 272–273.
drastic regression from revolution." This position echoes the couple’s intellectual activism, notably their participation in the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Revolutionnaires (AEAR), an organization founded in 1932 by artists and intellectuals involved with the French Communist Party. AEAR was subsequently repudiated amid disputes with party leaders, and an independent group, Contre Attaque, Union de Lutte dès intellectuelles revolutionnaires (1935–1936) was founded. Schwob and Malherbe were among the founding members, along with Georges Bataille, André Breton, and others. Contre Attaque opposed Fascism and colonialism (specifically France’s colonial wars in Morocco), and was highly critical of the Communist Party’s support of the status quo (party leaders favored reforms but stopped short of supporting Moroccan demands for independence). The playfulness of Schwob’s and Malherbe’s activism is also concomitant with the performative focus of their artistic collaboration. Their projects include literary works such as Disavowals (1930), a book of poetry and photomontages published under their gender neutral pseudonyms Cahun and Moore, which focuses on themes of love, lesbian sexuality, and the modern world’s social and economic conditions. Cahun and Moore’s photomontages, are noted for directly challenging the viewer’s perception of female identity, sexuality and beauty, as well as the understanding of the medium of photography as a documentation of reality through performative strategies that parallel the couple’s employment of simulation and role play for activist ends (fig. 2.10). As a point in fact, Schwob and

92. Downie, Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, 83.
Malherbe played with gender norms to deceive the occupiers, whose interrogators found it hard to conceive, even in light of the evidence (they found at the couple’s residence a typewriter and a radio), that the two women were acting alone. Similarly, their excursions were unsuspected by the island population accustomed to the women’s eccentric public displays (they were notorious for sunbathing naked on their lawn, dressing in outlandish outfits, and promenading their cats on a leash). In turn, Schwob and Malherbe premised their interventions on the conviction that many of the German soldiers stationed in the island would act upon their oppression given encouragement.

Taken together, the similarities between the playful note underlying the antifascist interventions of Schwob and Malherbe and Surrealist games are obvious. The composition of their anti-Fascist notes, magazines, and comic books is based on language and visual games developed by the Surrealists in conjunction with experiments in automatism, including “translation poems,” “found poems,” “Surrealist collage,” photomontage and “inimage” (the reversal of photomontage), and “text montage.” Surrealist experiments involving objects with the aim of “reinventing the world,” including “found objects,” “interpreted objects,” as well as “objects to function symbolically,” figure in the dispersion of altered champagne bottles, gambling tokens, cigarette boxes, etc., by the two artists. Their alterations of the walls, church and cemetery are closely related to Surrealist techniques aimed at provoking transparency and demoralization, which include the “inscription of words on articles,” and the “examination of certain actions,” re-
Figure 2.10: Claude Cahun, Self-Portrait, May 1945
respectively dealing with the alteration of objects and environments. In the spirit

94. See descriptions of these games in Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding, A Book of Surrealist Games (London: Shambhala, 1995), which is an abbreviated selection from the French; and Emmanuel Garrigues, ed., Archives du Surrealisme, Les Jeux Surréalistes Mars 1921–Septembre 1962 (Paris: Gallimard, 1995). Dali defines “inscription of words on articles” as inscriptions that “take the shape of the articles” and are meant to be read by everyone in order to avoid abstraction; the “examination of certain actions” involves the production of “deep currents of demoralization and cause serious conflicts in interpretation and practice,” as for instance in “having a colossal loaf...baked and left early one morning a public square.” See Dali, “The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment,” 92–93. Alastair Brotchie’s book on surrealist games includes the following games relevant to Schwob’s and Moore’s activist actions: Translation poems: “For any number of players (this game can also be played by post. ... A poem is sent by the first player to the next, who translates it into another language, sending this version on to the next player, and so on. At the conclusion, each poem is regarded as an original work in its own right, created collectively by the processes of inadvertent transformation”) (32); Found poems: same as “To make a Dadaist Poem” by Tristan Tzara and “To make a Surrealist story: Take a newspaper, magazine or book: cut and paste at will” (36–39); visual techniques: Surrealist collage: “Max Ernst invented this method of pasting together fragments of given or found pictures. By using images that already had a similar ‘look’ (principally engravings illustrating novels, magazines, and technical or commercial publications) he was able to create ‘illusionist’ new pictures–bizarre, fantastic, dream-like, ironic or grotesque.” (60) photomontage: “A variation of collage using photographs” (64); inimage: “In this reversal of the two collage techniques...sections are cut away from an already existing image in order to create a new one” (64); and text montage: “printed texts from different sources and combined for different purposes” (65); Experiments with objects: found objects: “objects which simply have a particular presence, or which seem destined to be found, and whose function must be discovered by the finder” (110); interpreted objects: “objects given a new meaning by juxtaposition with other objects, or by negation of their function” (107) e.g., gambling coins with antiwar slogans; objects to function symbolically: “Objects ... which symbolize the state of mind

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of Surrealist poetic revolt, Schwob and Malherbe upheld desire in the face of the “real,” the *Realpolitik* of National Socialism. Their actions prefigure subsequent forms of feminist activism emerging in force during the 1960s and 1970s, joining art, gender identity and autonomous politics.

### 2.5 Surrealist Games

The recuperation of “poetic politics” (i.e., the waning of the movement’s significance as a political force) took impetus in the aesthetization of Surrealism. The link between Surrealism and art marketing, largely forged by Surrealist artists, transpired on the group’s desire to contest the prevailing separation between the artistic and the social spheres against the backdrop of an art market which became increasingly tied to a broader emergence of mainstream cultural industries post World War II, most visibly in the United States. Dali’s Hollywood and commerce ties earned him Breton’s disdainful nickname/anagram, “avid dollars”; Dali worked for Coco Channel, Walt Disney, and Alfred Hitchcock, to name a few, as well as appeared on television shows like the popular 1950s game show “What’s My Line?” (CBS) as a celebrity panelist (the game consisted of blindfolded contestants in evening attire who were questioned by the panelist until one of them

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* ... of both the maker and the spectator* (110); and the irrational embellishment of a city: “For any number of players. The players are asked whether they would conserve, displace, modify, transform, or suppress certain aspects of a city” (120); and “examination of certain actions,” as noted previously.
would correctly guess the identity of the panelist). Dali was hardly exceptional as for instance another Surrealist, Luis Buñuel, who professed sympathy for Stalinist politics (as did Paul Éluard), also worked extensively for Hollywood studios, yet Breton was particularly hostile to Dali, presumably because of the latter’s turn to Fascism. For his part, Breton was involved with commercial activities through his own Gradiva gallery in Paris, selling the work of surrealist artists. This ambivalence became a persistent source of tensions within the movement, as Breton sought to act as the arbiter and leader of Surrealism, an attitude that earned him the scornful epitaph of the “pope” of Surrealism. In exile in the United States (he fled Vichy France to New York in 1941 and travelled extensively in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean, including Martinique), Breton confronted the merging of Surrealism with art commerce in Surrealist fashion as attested by for instance his participation in an exhibition dedicated to Surrealist games and organized by Marcel Duchamp, who arguably came to represent the

95. The winning contestant received a nominal fee.
avant-garde leader *par excellence* in New York. Breton was included by Duchamp in “The Imagery of Chess” a show and event at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1944, themed on the game of chess and assembling the work of artists who now figure in the modern art canon. Besides Breton, Man Ray, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Isamu Noguchi, Robert Motherwell, Alexander Calder, Arshile Gorky, John Cage, David Hare, Matta, Dorothea Tanning, Yves Tanguy, Isamu Noguchi, and others contributed chess sets, and chess related drawings, paintings, sculptures, and photographic works.99 The chess set by Breton and the Greek poet and critic Nicolas

99. Larry List, “The Imagery of Chess Revisited,” in The Imagery of Chess Revisited, ed. Larry List (New York: George Braziller, 2005), 181–186. Duchamp, whose work is associated with Dada and Surrealism, more than anyone succeeded in introducing the notion of play into the serious realm of art through his influence as an artist, curator and advisor to art institutions and wealthy art collectors in the United States. Duchamp advised Walter Pach, one of the coordinators of the 1913 Armory Show; Museum of Modern Art directors Alfred Barr and James Johnson Sweeney; as well as Peggy Guggenheim, among other art collectors. Duchamp’s life long obsession with chess, both as an artistic medium and as a game, lend his persona a mystique of an avant-garde leader. In the 1915, Duchamp left Paris for New York and in 1918, New York for Buenos Aires, Argentina to escape wartime conscription. ibid., 24. In Argentina, he played mail chess with among others, Max Ernst and Julien Levy, fashioning rubber stamp sets for this purpose, a practice that in retrospective can be seen as a forerunner of mail art in the 1960s. ibid., 24–25. Duchamp also played as a ranked player in France in the ’20s, while producing chess pieces and other chess paraphernalia, later appearing in various photographic and documentary works by known contemporaneous avant-garde artists portraying Duchamp in the guise of the grand master at the chessboard. Chess featured throughout Duchamp’s artistic career from his early painting *Portrait of Chess Players* (1911), *Chessmen* (1918), *Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled* (1932) and *Pocket Chess Set* (1943–1944), to *Reunion* (1968) in a performance/match staged with the American composer John

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Calas, entitled *Wine Glass Chess Set and Board* (fig. 2.11), included in the exhibit Cage and Teeny Duchamp on an electronically prepared board. *Reunion* was performed at Ryerson Theatre of Ryerson Polytechnic, Toronto, on March 5, 1968; the event was organized by John Cage and included the musicians David Tudor, Gordon Mumma, and David Behrman and a wired-up chessboard designed by the engineer Lowell Cross. The work was documented by Japanese artist and Fluxist Shigeko Kubota; see Ya-Ling Chen, “Somewhere Between Dream and Reality, Shigeko Kubota's Reunion with Duchamp and Cage,” *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* 2, no. 4 (2002), http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/music/chen/chen.htm#N_2_. Another chess aficionado was the Argentine Surrealist architect and artist Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari, a.k.a. Xul Solar (1887–1963). He invented the *panajadrez* or *panjuego* (panchess or universal chess) in the ’30s. This game served as a conduit of creative and spiritual energies. Pan-chess was ever evolving, as the writer Jorge Luis Borges, a friend of Solar’s and a pan-chess player, recalls in his memoirs of Solar. See Jorge Luis Borges and María Kodama, *Atlas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1984), 77–81. Hence, contrary to Duchamp, Solar rejected the codification of rules of the original game of chess, as well as its competitive ends: “This game [ajedrez creollo] has the advantage that no one loses and that all win in the end.” See Mario Horacio Gradowczyk, *Alexandro Xul Solar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Alba, 1994), 193, my translation. After he allegedly abandoned art practice, Duchamp devoted his time to chess and to art consulting. He left a legacy in chess with a book co-written with Paris-based chess master and historian Vitaly Halberstadt, entitled *L’Opposition et Cases Conjugées sont Reconciliées* (*Opposition and Sister Squares Are Reconciled*) (1932), which is devoted to very rare endgame situations traditionally played out through strategies of “opposition” or “sister squares” (a forced move). Marcel Duchamp and Vitaly Halberstadt, *Opposition et Cases Conjuguées sont Reconciliées/ Opposition und Schwesterfelder sind durch Versöhnung/Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled* (Paris and Brussels: L’Editions l’Échiquier, 1932). The authors propose that these strategies can be combined to achieve victory or force a draw. List, “The Imagery of Chess Revisited,” 30. The esoteric subject matter of the book (the probability of encountering these situations is only in one of 10,000 games even for chess masters) suggests that the work was conceived less in practical terms and rather
bears misgivings about the project. The work consists of a reflective chessboard with ordinary drinking glasses serving as chess pieces, the white filled with white wine, and the black filled with red wine. Above the piece a hung placard stated the rules: the player who captured a piece was to “drink the symbolic blood of the victim,” and a proclamation on chess entitled “Profanation,” which read: “The game should be changed, not the pieces.” This reference suggests that the work, destroyed after the exhibition, pays posthumous homage to Benjamin (four years after his death while fleeing Nazi Germany) in its paraphrasing of the latter’s praise of Surrealism, which he characterized as a profane illumination (a reference to the Greek word for imagination “phantasia,” meaning light; the mental images not only being illusions but also a form of illumination).  


100. List, “The Imagery of Chess Revisited,” 72–76.

101. Ibid., 74–75.

102. The notion of profane illumination falls in line with the “energies of intoxication” salient in the poetic legacy of the Symbolists and Romantics (i.e., their emphasis on the body and the everyday world as sites to investigate the conditions for “revolution”). Benjamin thereby repudiated the detachment of religious moralism and contemplation as the basis for a politicized artistic praxis. Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” 209–216.
and 2.13), a game created at the villa Air Bel in the La Pomme quarter of Marseille, where the soon-to-be exiled Surrealists fleeing Nazi occupied France spent nine months waiting for the dispensation of refugee visas to the United States.¹⁰³

¹⁰³. Danièle Giraudy and Musée Cantini, *Le jeu de Marseille: autour d’André Breton et des Surréalistes à Marseille en 1940-1941* (Marseille: Alors Hors Du Temps, 2003). The exhibition paid homage to Varian Fry, an American journalist and head of the Rescue Committee for Intellectuals, a North American aid organization under the ERC (Emergency Response Committee). This organization was supported by Eleanor Roosevelt and wealthy American women such as Peggy Guggenheim. Fry is credited with saving 2,000 war refugees, among them many intellectuals and artists, such as Tristan Tzara, Remedios Varo, and Lévi Strauss. Translations from French are mine. André Breton notes that regular visitors to the villa included: Marcel Duchamp, Robert Delaunay, René Char, René Daumal, Sylvain Itkine, Benjamin Père, Tristan Tzara, and Arthur Adamov. See André Breton, “Le Jeux de Marseille,” ed. David Hare, *VVV* 4 (1944): 89–90.
The twenty-two cards of the Jeu de Marseille, based on an old game of the same name used for play, gambling and divination, were designed by the Jewish Romanian painter Victor Brauner (1903–1966), the Spanish artist Oscar Dominguez (1906–1957), the German Dadaist Max Ernst (1911–1976), the Romanian sculptor and painter Jacques Hérod (1919–1987), the Afro-Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam (1902–1982), and the French members of the group, André Breton, Jacqueline Lamba (1910–1993), Andrè Masson (1896–1987), and Frédéric Delanglade (1907–1977), who designed the game’s box.

Each artist contributed two cards introducing a new symbology that transformed the original game’s military ranks (the lesser cards from 2 to 9 were omitted in the Surrealist version of the game) and monarchist hierarchy into a simulation of the group’s allegiances to the politics of desire. Newly arrived in

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104. The mirrored division of a traditional playing card is retained in reference to the Surrealists’ fascination with reversed and double-images relating to the occult and the imaginary, along with “associations ... the omnipotence of dream ... the disinterested play of thought.” Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism (1924),” 26 The cheap and non-uniform materials used for the cards (some of the cards were drawn on the cover pages taken from books) reflect the circumstances of war and scarcity, and suggest emphasis on the relationship between art and life. The game is divided into a red and a black suit, respectively representing love (a red flame), and dream (a black star); and revolution (a wheel), and knowledge (a keyhole). (A reference to Stendhal’s novel The Black and the Red (1830), in which black stands for the color of the Army and red for the Church; the novel is a satire of the French social order under the Bourbon Restoration; black and red are also the colors associated with anarcho-communism). The monarchical order is replaced with the categories of genius (Hegel, Baudelaire, Lautreamont, and de Sade); the siren (Helene Smith, The Portuguese Nun, Alice, and Lamiel), and the magus (Paracelsus, Novalis, Freud, and Pancho Villa). The joker
Figure 2.12: Jeu de Marseille, 1940–1941

(a) Dream (black suit)  (b) Love (red suit)
(a) Wheel (red suit)  (b) Keyhole (black suit)

Figure 2.13: Jeu de Marseille, 1940–1941
New York Breton wrote that the game was intended as a rebuttal of the consensus among historians relating modifications of card decks to military history, which he sees erroneously presupposing that the meaning of objects is fixed. Breton is Pere Ubu, a figure from Alfred Jarry's play of the same name (first produced in 1896 as a puppet show), a reference to subversive sensibility qualified by Breton as, “black humor.” André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997). Breton's anthology of black humor includes a list of literary and fictional figures, playwrights, philosophers, etc., considered to be precursors of surrealism (a kind of Surrealist pantheon). Breton's term black humor refers to “intelligent humor” (“fine and elevating,” xviii) in contrast to “satiric and moralizing” humor (xvi); the term is also connected to Breton's friend, reluctant soldier and dandy poet Jacques Vaché’s conception of “umor,” which stands for cultivated indifference. See Michel Sanquillet, *Dada in Paris*, trans. Sharmila Ganguly (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 57–58. Many of the figures represented by the cards, including Alfred Jarry, D.A.F. de Sade, Baudelaire, and Ducasse (Comte de Lautreamont) are introduced in the anthology, which also includes Vaché and Jarry. The latter was a contemporary and friend of the Polish playwright, poet, pornographer, and later war supporter, Guillaume Apollinaire (1888–1918), who is credited with inventing the term Surrealism (used in the program notes for Cocteau’s ballet Parade performed in France in May, 1917).

105. Breton, “Le Jeux de Marseille,” 89. The drawings for the *Jeu de Marseille* were shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the first Surrealist exhibition in the United States, First Papers of Surrealism, in 1942, and were published for the first time in the Revue VVV, edited by Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, David Hare, and Breton in New York, in 1943. The exhibition was arranged by Duchamp as an environment composed of works by Surrealists barely visible through the strings that formed a webleke space conceived as a playground where a number of invited children played ball and skipped rope. Clearly the arrangement was meant to draw focus on the overall effect rather than on each of the individual works included. The complete designs for the card set were finally published in 1983 by Andre Dimanche, the editor of Cahiers du Sud, and are now available as an art collector’s item, rather than as originally intended as a game that could
also highlighted the collective character of the project. Commenting on this aspect of Surrealism, Alastair Brotchie offers an insight, which also serves to illuminate Breton’s and Calas’ gesture:

To some extent the Surrealist project can be seen as a search for, and intervention in, the new myths underlying contemporary history, the unconscious current beneath everyday events ... part of Breton’s rejection of the position of the ‘artist’ was his belief that personal creativity produced only a personal mythology, the task and importance of collective activities being the creation of collective myths.¹⁰⁶

Yet, the ambiguous position of surrealist games, at once implicated in anti-fascist resistance, as in the case of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, as art commodities, as in “The Imagery of Chess,” and as a collective affirmation of “poetic revolution,” as in the Jeu de Marseille, also hints to the tensions at play in the movement. The fissures revolved around disputes concerning the group’s intellectual leadership and political alliances.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶. Brotchie and Gooding, A Book of Surrealist Games, 161.
¹⁰⁷. Conflicts grew around the the involvement of Surrealists with the French Communist Party under the leadership of Breton who became a member of the French Communist party in 1927 (he was expelled in 1933 by the party line). On the other hand, Antonin Artaud’s strong objections to this turn led to his expulsion from the movement (he was at the time the only Surrealist opposed to the group’s alliance with the Communist party). The Surrealists disengaged from the Communist
With the rise of Stalin in the Soviet Union subsequent the elimination of political opponents of whom Leon Trotsky was the most visible, some of the Surrealists, including Breton and Benjamin Péret, were to identify the Surrealist “poetic revolution” with anarchist thought. This turn signified a return of the movement to its roots. In the 1920s Péret, Dessaignes and Soupault were connected with Action (1919–22), an artistic and literary review publishing a wide range of essays, criticism and work under the umbrella of anarcho-individualism. During the 1910s Breton was involved in anti-war protests in which anarchists figured predominantly and he was familiar with anarchist theory through publications like L’Anarchie, L’Action d’art, and Le Libertaire. Péret was the sole Surrealist member party in 1935 as the latter embarked on a Stalinist line. See Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, Surrealism, Politics and Culture (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003) and Raoul Vaneigem, A Cavalier History of Surrealism, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (AK Press, 1999), 20–32.

108. Trotsky was opposed to the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, while holding to the. Breton and Péret were Trotsky’s supporters on account of his anti-fascism. Trotsky was assassinated in Mexico by a Stalinist agent. In Mexico, Trotsky befriended Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and André Breton. In 1938 Breton and Trotsky wrote Pour un Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant (For an Independent Revolution in Art), a manifesto that signaled Surrealism’s definite break with Soviet orthodoxy by condemning Stalin’s institutionalized art, social realism. See Andre Breton and Leon Trotsky, For an Independent Revolution in Art (1938), http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcsurrealism1.htm.

109. Papanikolas, Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada, 105–106. Breton’s familiarity with anarchist currents was not exceptional among artists at the time nor was this knowledge and identification restricted to artists’ collectives; in addition to art critics, well-know artists like Duchamp, Picasso and Coucteau, the latter a contributor to Action, were versed in anarchist theory. See Patricia Leighten, Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism 1897-1914 (New Jersey: Princeton
to be directly involved with anarchist groupings (the Durruti column) engaged in
armed struggle during the Spanish civil war (1936–1939) against the fascists lead-
ing up to the dictatorship led by General Francisco Franco and supported by Nazi
Germany and fascist Italy and Portugal. The exodus to the Americas in face of
fascism and Stalinism in Europe brought focus to the movement’s anarchist sensi-
ability. In exile in New York, Breton discovered the work of François Marie Charles
Fourier (1772–1837), a French philosopher and writer, whose brand of anarchism
was influential for artistic and social movements both in Europe and the Ameri-
cas, in the late nineteenth century and again during the 1960s. Upon return to
University Press, 1989). Papanikolas suggests that the turn to anarcho-individualism post World
War I is a by-product of the decision to support the war effort by anarchist leaders like Peter
Kropotkin and Jean Grave, who believed that military strategy would lead to revolution, with the
Marxist-Leninist of the Bolshevik turn of the 1917 Russian revolution. Papanikolas, Anarchism and
the Advent of Paris Dada, 12.
110. Vaneigem, A Cavalier History of Surrealism, 28; Association des amis de Benjamin Péret, 1999,
http://www.benjamin-peret.org/.
111. Wilson, Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays, 5–36. Breton wrote Ode to Charles
Fourier in 1947, in route to Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico in pursuit of his interest in Native
American culture. (Earlier, Antonin Artaud had already made the link between Surrealism and
anarchy through theater; he shared the Surrealists’ interest in native American cultures, living in
Mexico among the Tarahumaran people in 1936-37). Breton was also to include Fourier among the
list of Surrealism’s precursors in the second edition of Anthology of Black Humor (1950). Fourier’s
repudiation of the mechanist model of mercantile thought/culture, and argument for pleasure as
the organizing principle of human activities, be they economic, political and sexual, were par-
ticularly appealing notions to Breton. In his writings on Freud (after Wilhelm Reich), Herbert
Marcuse echoed this turn by arguing that Surrealism was defined for its quest to expand the “plea-
sure principle.” Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (Boston,
Paris in the late 1940s, the Surrealist group around Breton and Péret began a brief collaboration with the anarchist journal Le Libertaire between 1951 and 1953 (the journal was founded in New York by the French poet and exile Joseph Déjacque and appeared in various countries and periods, up to the present). The article entitled “Poet, that is to say Revolutionary,” written by Péret for the journal in 1951, clarified the position of Surrealism, stating that the poet refuses to submit to political verdicts: “...His quality of poet makes him a revolutionary who must struggle on every terrain: that of poetry by his own means and on the terrain of social action, without ever confusing the two fields of action.”

MA: Beacon Press, 1974), 144–145. Wilhelm Reich was the Austrian-American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst and Freud’s estranged student. Reich’s work echoes Fourier’s arguments for the liberation of pleasure, as the premise for effecting harmonious transformation of social relations in their economic, political, and sexual scope. In the United States, Reich focused on investigating the conditions of life giving energy or orgone, leading to a chain of events involving the destruction of his writings and his arrest and eventual death in an American jail in 1957. The Berlin Dadaist Franz Jung, then also living in the United States as an exile, was among the intellectuals and academics publicly speaking out in defense of Reich at the time of the trial. Reich’s enthusiasts included James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, JD Salinger, Saul Bellow, and Sean Connery. Albert Einstein, whom Reich invited to corroborate his findings was less sanguine. See Christopher Turner, Adventures in the Orgasmatron: How the Sexual Revolution Came to America (New York: Farrar / Straus / Giroux, 2011). I include these links to point out the vast influence and heterogeneity of elements linked to the legacy and transformation of Surrealism.

112. Le Libertaire was conceived as a publication based on Saint-Simonianism, an anarchist current contemporaneous with Fourierism, but focused on worker organization. It appeared also in France, Algeria and Belgium).
113. Cited in Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron, “Breton, Arendt: Positions Politiques, ou bien Re-
for the journal, entitled “The Lighthouse” (1952), was even more explicit. The essay opens with the line “It was in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism first recognized itself, when it was still only a free association among individuals rejecting the social and moral constraints of their day, spontaneously and in their entirety.”¹¹⁴ According to Breton, it was the prevailing “idea of efficiency” that derailed the “organic fusion” between Surrealism and anarchism, meaning the group’s belief that social revolution (i.e., Russian revolution in 1917 and the advent of the Trotskyist Third International around 1925) would spread and result in “a libertarian world.”¹¹⁵ He also made clear that the link between Surrealism and anarchism resided in a shared contempt for “the so-called ‘reason’” and affirmation of “socialism, not conceived as the simple resolution of an economic or political problem, but as the expression of the exploited masses in their desire to create a society without classes, without a State, where all human values and desires can be realized.”¹¹⁶ Surrealism’s turn to anarchism in the 1950s came at a time in which both movement’s were waning as social and political forces.

While the decline of anarchist currents was largely tied to their equalization in public perception with violent acts, ironically, in regards to Surrealism, it was the movement’s artistic influence that spelled the decline of its political significance. Already in 1935, lecturing in Prague before a group of Czech Surrealists, Breton

¹¹² Breton, “To the Light House,” 160.
¹¹³ Ibid., 160–161.
¹¹⁴ Ibid.
put forth his apprehension about the recuperation of Surrealism:

Perhaps the greatest danger threatening Surrealism today is the fact that because of its spread throughout the world, which was very sudden and rapid, the word found favor much faster than the idea and all sorts of more or less questionable creations tend to pin the Surrealist label on themselves: thus works tending to be “abstractivist,” in Holland, in Switzerland, and according to very recent reports in England, manage to enjoy ambiguous neighborly relations with Surrealist works; thus the unmentionable Monsieur Cocteau has been able to have a hand in Surrealist exhibitions in America and in Surrealist publication in Japan.\textsuperscript{117}

Later attempts by Breton and others to counter the aesthetization of “the idea” met with public indifference.\textsuperscript{118} The Surrealist project was taken up and transformed in various ways by a number of key intellectual figures that were to be

\textsuperscript{117} Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism (1924),” 257.

\textsuperscript{118} Alyce Mahon notes in this respect the 1965 exhibition entitled, “Absolute Deviation,” which was organized in Paris by Breton and a number of Surrealists as an attempt to denounce the blandness of retrospective exhibitions of Surrealism by curators unconnected with the movement. Alyce Mahon, \textit{Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968} (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 177. The cultural cache of the 1965 exhibition stood in stark contrast with the media scandal provoked by the first Surrealist Exhibition in 1938, in which the gallery was transformed into a precarious cavernous labyrinth enveloped in soot. ibid., 190–195. Yet, both surrealist exhibitions were meant as wry denouncements of the sinister cultural purging of totalitarian politics and the alienated desires of techno-culture—the first in response to the Nazi’s ‘Degenerate Art’ exhibition
grouped under the canon of post-structuralist and post-modern thought. Among them is Jacques Lacan, a surrealist and later psychoanalyst known for redefining the notion of desire first in relation to Freudian notions of “lack,” and later in terms of defining the relationship between the self and the “different” or the alien. Also, Dali’s ironic reference to schizophrenia (p. 50) appears in modified form in the context of post-modernist theory, notably in Jean Baudillard’s and Fredric Jameson’s writings. Baudrillard invokes schizophrenia to construe the collective subjectivity in an information society. Jameson speaks to Baudrillard’s notion of the simulacrum in his critique of the cultural forms of the postmodern/late capitalist, whose fluidity he likens to a “Surrealism without the unconscious.”

On a more positive note Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (the later, a former disciple of Lacan) incorporate the Surrealist legacy in speaking of becoming, a fluid notion of being/embodiment central to “schizoanalysis.” Others include Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Henri Lefebvre, Jacques Derrida, and various intellectuals and activists associated with the left, including the French socialist

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group Socialisme ou Barbarie (Socialism or Barbarism), whose members included Jean-François Lyotard, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Guy Debord.\textsuperscript{121} On the streets of Paris, Surrealism was acknowledged by the 1968 slogan scribbled on the walls: “All power to the imagination.”\textsuperscript{122} In the United States, Surrealism echoed in the literary works of the 1950s Beat generation, 1960s counterculture movements’ concerns with the liberation of the unconscious and sexuality, and the cultural focus of anti-authoritarian of social and intellectual currents. The scope of Surrealism reached through the networks of artists and intellectuals in exile and in transit, exhibitions, and publications spanning to Latin American, the Caribbean, Japan, and Africa, where it found fertile ground in ongoing anti-colonial struggles. The idea also found sympathy among younger artists emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s, who sought to revive the political dimension of Surrealism by synchronizing the movement’s concerns with the liberation of desire with their respective historical conditions. Among these, the Situationists in Europe and the Fluxus network centered in New York, but operating globally, proved influential

\textsuperscript{121} See for instance “Libertè est un mot vietnamien,” (April 1947), a tract calling for the end to the French “imperialist war” in Indochina drafted by Breton, Yves Bonnefoy, and Pierre Mabille and signed by twenty-five people, including Benjamin Peret and Yves Tanguy; the declaration of opposition against the Algerian war entitled “Déclaration sur le droit à l’insoumission dans la guerre d’Algérië” published in Front unique, no. 2, Milan, in 1960, drafted by Breton and Maurice Blanchot among others and signed by 121 intellectuals and artists including Guy Debord and Michelle Bernstein, all of the Surrealists of French nationality, as well as Beauvoir, Sartre, Marguerite Duras, and Michel Leiris. See reprints in Mahon, Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968, 114 and 146.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 205–215.
for carrying forward Dada’s and Surrealism’s projects in their own time and beyond, as in the last two decades both movements were brought into the limelight of cross-cultural mobilization.

2.6 Situationism

While the recognition of the “devaluation” of the political dimension of Dada and Surrealism was at the core impulse of Situationism, this group was also careful to note its break with the political adherences of these movements thereby fore-shadowing the decentralized and intellectual orientations of the countercultural currents emerging in the 1960s. Guy Debord wrote apropos this issue:

The two currents that marked the end of modern art were dadaism and surrealism. Though they were only partially conscious of it, they paralleled the proletarian revolutionary movement’s last great offensive; and the halting of that movement, which left them trapped within the very artistic sphere that they had declared dead and buried, was the fundamental cause of their own immobilization. Historically, dadaism and surrealism are at once bound up with one another and at odds with one another. This antagonism...attested to the internal deficiency in each’s critique–namely, in both cases, a fatal one-sidedness. For dadaism sought to abolish art without realizing it, and surrealism sought to to realize art without abolishing it. The critical position since worked
out by the situationists demonstrates that the abolition and the realization of art are inseparable aspects of a single transcendence of art.\textsuperscript{123}

This position was likewise articulated by fellow Situationist Raoul Vaneigem’s call for “the suppression and realization of art” in favor of a revolution of everyday life—in essence the realization of the art of living through “playful affirmation.”\textsuperscript{124}

The founding event of Situationism (SI) at Cosio d’Arrosscia in northern Italy in 1957, brought together two groupings related via shared affinities: the Lettrist International (LI, Paris 1952–1957), a neo-Dada movement, represented by Guy Debord (1931–1994) and Gil Wolman (1929–1995), and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB, 1954–1557), a neo-Surrealist group which consisted among others of the Danish artist Asger Jorn (1914–1973) and the Italian painter Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio (1904–1964).\textsuperscript{125} Thus, Situationism

\textsuperscript{123} Debord, \textit{The Society of the Spectacle}, 136.
\textsuperscript{125} Debord and Wolman were previously part of the Lettrists (LI, 1946– ), a neo-Dada group led by Jewish Romanian poet and filmmaker Isidore Isou. Following disputes with Isou, the dissident offshoot of Lettrism, the Lettrist International (LI, Paris 1952–1957) was founded by Debord, Wolman, Jean-Louis Brau, and Serge Berna; see Guy Debord, Gil Wolman, Jean-Louis Brau, and Serge Berna, “Finis les Pieds Plats” published in \textit{Internationale Lettriste} 1, (December 1952) and reprinted in Guy Debord et al., “Finis les Pieds Plats,” in \textit{Documents relatifs à la fondation de l’Internationale situationniste, 1948–1957}, ed. Gerard Berreby (Paris: Allia, 1985), 147. Hadj Mohamed Dahou, Cheik Ben Dhine, and Ait Diafer were among others members of the Lettrist International group.
developed out of the merging of Surrealist desire with Dada’s irreverence within the construction of situations, a concept defined by the Situationists as “a moment in life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events.”

in Algeria and Tunisia, but little is known about the group. The “Manifesto of the Algerian Group of the Lettrist International,” first published in Internationale Lettriste 3, August 1953, and other tracts such as “The Most Unshakable of Colonies,” unattributed, published in Potlatch 12, September 28, 1954, however, suggests that agitation against French colonialism was high on the group’s agenda. Asger Jorn was at one point a pupil of French architect and painter Fernand Léger and the Swiss architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, a.k.a. Le Corbusier, and a cofounder of the CoBrA group (Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam, 1948–1951). Whereas the LI favored Dadaist provocation, the IMIB privileged the Surrealists’ interest in the unconscious, which they sought to apply in inquiries into environments. IMIB artists were highly critical of the Bauhaus’ project development into functionalism under the leadership of Max Bill (who had invited Jorn to join the Ulm based Bauhaus), a development that Jorn attributed to the employment of a pedagogical model based on imitation and utilitarianism; see Asger Jorn, “Notes on the Formation of an Imaginist Bauhaus,” in Situationist International Anthology, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), 23–24. The Bauhaus was officially closed on orders of the Nazis in 1933 in part because of student and faculty association with Communism; In a letter announcing the formation of the IMIB, Jorn writes: “...a Swiss architect, Max Bill, has undertaken to restructure the Bauhaus where Klee and Kandinsky taught. He wishes to make an academy without painting, without research into the imagination, fantasy, signs, symbols—all he wants is technical instruction.” Jorn quoted in Steward Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War (London: Aporia Press & Unpopular Books, 1988), 24.

126. Libero Andreotti and Internationale Situationniste, Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996), 68. Another definition would read in reprise of Sartre’s notion of the situation: “Up till now philosophers and
Key to the creation of situations is détournement, a term referring to forms of intervention designed to infiltrate and mobilize the tools and ideologies used to uphold the dominant order for ends diametrically opposed to this purpose. Debord and Wolman defined détournement as “the integration of present or past artistic production into a superior construction of a milieu,” adding that, “in this sense there can be no Situationist painting or music, but only a Situationist use of these means” (the reclaiming of Dada and Surrealist projects is a case in point).
The aim of détournement, as Raoul Vaneigem indicates, is “the reversal of perspective...a kind of anti-conditioning...a new game and its tactics,” applied within the space and time of “everyday life”128 In sum, Situationists saw subversion as a two-fold project—as a creative means toward “the victory of a system of human relationships grounded in three indivisible principles: participation, communication and self-realisation”; and as an oppositional force against the totalitarian structures underlying “cultural conditioning, specialization of every kind, and imposed world-views.”129

2.7 The Great Game to Come

The initial focus of development of Situationist détournement as a distinct ludic aesthetic (or ethic) centered on researching and developing “unitary urbanism,” defined as “the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.”130 As a critique of the scientific utilitarianism of modern urbanist schemes, the techniques and practices associated with unitary urbanism responded to the application of architecture and urban planning for purposes of control. Situationist critiques were in particular directed toward the grand urban design schemes by post World War II architects, such as Le Corbusier, and their implication in buttressing techno-

129. Ibid.
ocratic control over social space and relations. By extension the development of new forms of urban design assumed environments which would be principally aimed at satisfying ludic impulses like the dèrive, an activity central to Situationist psychogeographic research in urban spaces. Psychogeography concerned “The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals,” in short the manifestation of the environment’s sensorial effects on humans.\(^\text{131}\) As initially conceptualized by the Russian French poet and theorist Ivan Chtcheglov, the dèrive is akin to “the flow of words” to which the psychoanalyst listens “until the moment when he challenges or modifies a word, an expression, or a definition.”\(^\text{132}\) Debord in turn defines the dèrive as “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances that involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects.”\(^\text{133}\) The dèrive functions to reinstate pleasure in relation to space, a position ensuing from a refusal of proprietary relations (i.e., capital’s drive toward “enclosure”).\(^\text{134}\)

As concepts and practices unitary urbanism, psychogeography, and the dèrive echo Bakhtin’s articulation of the Medieval carnival as freed time and space—“the

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utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance”—opposed to what
he called the “spectacle” of artistic forms that maintain the divisions of social hi-
erarchies (e.g., theater based on the separation between spectators and partici-
pants).135 The Situationists draw extensively on these ideas for their critique of
the “spectacle” of commodity culture. In an anonymous tract entitled “The Use of
Free Time,” (1960) they chastise “leftist sociologists” (i.e., Marxists) for situating
the “problem of free time” within “passive consumption.”136 Rather than a critique
of consumption—the understanding of leisure as “empty time,” for the SI the ques-
tion of “free time” calls forth the possibility of a time and space of “free creation
and consumption”—a direct paraphrasing of Bakhtin that also frames this position
as a refusal of “classic forms of culture” (i.e., formalized cultural and social in-
teraction such as “tragic theater, or bourgeois politeness”), “degraded spectacular
representations”—“televised sports, virtually all films and novels, advertising, the
automobile as status symbol,” and “the spectacle of refusal” of sanitized forms of
“avant-gardism.”137 In practice, the construction of situations meant the creation
of “experimental revolutionary art” or culture, which Vaneigem associated with
the “unitary” energies of free play.138 In this vein, psychogeographic research is

135. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 7–9. Bakhtin was also referencing the imagery central to
carnivalesque arts: the human body and its functions, making love, eating, drinking, defecating
and urinating, which is absent in “decent” literature and art. Ibid., 19.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.; Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life, 188. The influence of these views extended to
sociological currents emerging in parallel with the SI’s concept of “unitary urbanism,” converging
in a common privileging of everyday life as the central site of analysis concerning the dialectical
largely an extension of Surrealist games, which were extensively taken up within the Lettrist International (LI). LI members, among them Debord, devised a concept for a game based on impressions of locations in Paris gathered during urban dérives, envisioned as “a pinball machine arranged in such a way that the play of the lights and the more or less predictable trajectories of the balls would represent the “thermal sensations and desires of people passing by the gates of the Cluny Museum around an hour after sunset in November.”139 Other LI game concepts included the Surrealist-inspired “Proposals for Rationally Improving the City of Paris,” a tract that urges the abolition of museums and placement of art in bars, keeping the Metro open all night, the opening of the roofs of Paris to pedestrians in conjunction with the placement of escalators for access, the installation of streetlamps with on and off switches, and the replacing of streets named after saints with new names.140 Debord’s interest in games tracing to “Game of War” or “Kriegsspiel,” which was realized with his second wife Alice Becker-Ho in the relationship between the production of space and the reproduction of social relations. The work of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) in this area was well known among Situationists (Debord and Raoul Vaneigem, along with the theorist Jean Baudrillard, attended Lefebvre’s sociology course during the academic year 1957–58). Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War, 31 Lefebvre argued that the transformation of “everyday life” within the city into an urban experience (and the complete urbanization of society) was influenced by and in turn influenced the dynamics of social relations. Control over the production of space was therefore linked to social control and inversely the transformation of social relations necessitated new ways of conceptualizing and organizing space.

1960s, was first devised in 1955 when he was involved with the LI (the game was patented in 1965). The object of the game is the exploration of possible movements within the constraints of the game board and the enemy’s moves, based on an interpretation of von Clausewitz’s treatise on military strategy On War (1832, compiled and edited post-humously by von Clausewitz’s widow, Marie von Clausewitz, néé, Countess von Brühl). Debord attempted to commercially release the game in partnership with Gerard Lebovici, one of his publishers and patrons. The company was named Sociétè des Jeux Strategiques et Historiques. However this project came to a halt when Lebovici was found shot and Debord withdrew his works, including his films, in protest against insinuations that he was involved in the murder. The game became known thirty years later as a digital adaptation by Alexander Galloway.

Among the initial projects undertaken by Situationists as preliminary research on unitary urbanism are psychogeographic reports realized in Paris, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, and Venice. Abdelhafid Kathib’s report on the popular Des Halles market in Paris, then threatened with demolition, was delayed by two arrests for breaking the police curfew imposed on Algerian residents at dark. He recom-

mended demolition on grounds of the commercialization of the market. Dutch Situationist groups realized similar investigations in Amsterdam during dérives conducted in 1959, using walkie-talkies to survey the possibilities of transforming the central neighborhood around the stock exchange building in Amsterdam into a ludic space. At the same time, they also planned an ultimately unrealized project involving the construction of a labyrinth connecting the Stedelijk Museum with the city via an aperture in the museum’s wall. By breaking through the museum wall to allow the passage of urban drifters, this project was literally set to open up the institutionalized barriers between art and life. British SI member Ralph Rumney developed a psychogeographic guide to the city of Venice based on photos and short typewriter texts, but was expelled for failing to deliver it on time to be included in the first issue of the SI’s journal, Internationale Situation-Writings on the City, 72. After WWII Western Europe underwent major urban reconstruction that reconfigured the physical map of European cities along with the social, spiritual, and economic flows coalescing the urban fabric. Paris is a case in point. The city had not been redesigned since Baron Haussmann was called upon to alter the spatial configuration of the city during the Second Empire reforms by Napoleon III (between 1852 and 1870). The present reconstruction was a follow-up on the rationalist premises of Haussmann’s design, but this time the city was refashioned to accommodate the lifestyle of suburbanites. This was to the detriment of social life of the cities’ poorer classes as working class neighborhoods were systematically destroyed to make space for highways and shopping malls. The most notable victim of gentrification was the Les Halles marketplace in the center of Paris, where Parisians from all classes and backgrounds comingled among the food stalls and popular entertainment. Guy Debord paid homage to it in his film “The Society of the Spectacle” (1973).

niste. Lastly, Debord and Jorn collaborated on a number of psychogeographic projects in Paris and Copenhagen. The Naked City (screenprint, 1957) is one of the few images of Situationist gift-art representing nineteen Parisian neighborhoods as bits taken from official maps and connected through arrows. The arrows suggest flows and connections between the neighborhoods standing for the complex web of social, political, and historical forces shaping these spaces. The title of the piece refers to Naked City (Jules Dassin, 1948), a semidocumentary employing the language of film noir to convey a portrait of New York and its people at a moment of fragmentation prompted by large scale urban renewal. The work evokes the so called ‘americanization’ of Paris, which was in effect modeled after modernist urbanist schemas tested in French Algeria to reinforce social and racial divisions. In Fin de Copenhagen, 1957 (fig. 2.14), Debord and Jorn imbricate consumer culture and colonist ideologies through references to racial categories (black and white) printed on a bottle of spirits; their negation: “there’s no whiteness”; and a proclamation of support for the then ongoing anti-colonial insurrections: “Long live free Algeria.” Memoires of 1959 includes reassembled maps of Paris, London, and Copenhagen and images and writings cut out of magazines stolen from newsstands, against backgrounds of colored ink blotsches and drips suggesting a tribute to the legacy of poetic politics, of which the dérive, détournement, and unitary urbanism are extensions.

146. For a comprehensive description of the visual elements see Sadler, The Situationist City, 88–89.
148. In this sense Debord’s Howls for Sade (1952), a Lettrist-styled film that shocked audiences
Figure 2.14: Asger Jorn and Guy Debord, Fin de Copenhage, 1957
The creation of unitary urbanism began with the environments constructed by Pinot-Gallizio and his son, Giors Melanotte in 1959 under the term pittura industrialle or industrial painting, which they developed with collaborators, among them the Dutch SI member Jaqueline de Jong, at the plein-air laboratory in Alba, Italy. The project was set to reclaim the tools and applications of industrial production for artistic experiments, involving in this case the creation of rolls of canvas up to 145 meters in length by hand and with painting machines and spray guns with special resins devised by Pinot Gallizio, who was trained as a chemist.149 Gallizio’s paintings are aesthetically similar to abstract expressionist works, as surfaces combining painterly substances concocted from pigments mixed with cigarette-ash, mud, and gunpowder, with particles of dust and materials from the outdoor environment, but divergent in their intent as a critique of the values underlying the two main currents in art at the time: the validation


of abstraction in high art, and the functionalism of industrial arts. In reference to this, British art historian Frances Stracey notes that industrial painting differs from “other productivist artwork precedents ... such as the Bauhaus or Russian Constructivism, whose geometric forms tended to resemble the machines they so admired.”

Gallizio’s “machine aesthetics based on accident and randomness... deliberately aimed to rupture notions of the systematic, the orderly, or the symmetrical.” Gallizio also mocked the democratizing rhetoric of productivism by declaring his plans to sell the rolls of paintings by the meter in streets, markets, and department stores, and claims that their applications were universal, ranging from fashion to the creation of whole environments. According to him the ultimate goal of the project was the development of a “unitary applicable art” intended to engulf all cities and ultimately transform the planet into “a luna-park without borders, arousing new emotions and passions.”

A more modest demonstration of applied industrial painting took place at the prestigious Renè Drouin Gallery in Paris in 1959, where Pinot Gallizio constructed the “Anti-Material Cave,” an environment that vaguely recalls the cave created for the 1938 Surrealist exhibition in Paris. The “Anti-Material Cave,” was presented as a blueprint of a

151. Ibid.
153. Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War, 33–35. The first show of industrial painting was realized at the Notizie Gallery, in Turin in 1958, however. See for a discussion of the 1938 Surrealist exhibition Mahon, Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968, 23–63. Like the 1938 Surrealist exhibition, the ‘Anti-Material Cave’ consisted of a cavernous envi-
unitary environment with large canvas rolls covering the walls and windows of the gallery where female models dressed in cuts of the canvas wandered. The installation also included a “terminofono,” a motion-detection device (developed by Italian composers Walter Olmo and Cocito de Torino), that emitted notes of

154. Frances Stracey suggests that Pinot-Gallizio intended the models to be seen as a celebration of the emergence of a new subjectivity that was associated with the feminine emerging from the “uterine cavern.” (The invitation card for the show referred to them as “provisional reality” resulting from the “anti-matter of the ceiling and the matter of the ground”). See Frances Stracey, “The Caves of Gallizio and Hirschhorn: Excavation of the Present,” *October* 116 (2006): 92–93. I am reluctant to interpret the models in such a positive light given the overall masculinist tone of the Situationist circles in which few women were active participants (Bernstein was married to Debord, and Dutch artist Jaqueline de Jong, the editor of *Situationist Times* (1962–1967), was Jorn’s partner for 10 years). Bernstein has yet to comment on the issue, but Jong has recently talked about the masculinist posture of SI men. In an interview during the 1989 ICA exhibition, Ralph Rumney commented on the gendered labor division among the group as follows: “[Bernstein] typed all the Potlatches, all the IS journals and so on. One of the curious things about the IS was that it was extraordinarily antifeminist in its practice. Women were there to type, cook supper, and so on. I rather disapproved of this. Michele had, and has, an extraordinarily powerful and perceptive mind which is shown by the fact that she is among the most important literary critics in France today. A lot of the theory, particularly the political theory, I think originated with Michele rather than Debord, he just took it over and put his name to it.” Ralph Rumney quoted in Ralph Rumney, “About the Historification of the Situationist International: Ralph Rumney in Conversation with Steward Home, Paris 7 April 1989,” January 31, 2011, http://www.stewarhomesociety.org/interviews/rumney.htm (accessed June 1989).
variable pitches in response to the movements of gallery visitors.¹⁵⁵ The whole related a labyrinthine playground propitious to the sensibility of the ludic human. Yet just as their predecessors, the conventional adherence to gender categories among SI male artists stood in direct contradiction with the “unitary” rhetoric behind their practice—in an interview, Jong characterized Gallizio and his son as Italian “machos,” commenting on the fact that she collaborated with them on realizing Pittura Industrialle, yet was neither acknowledged nor remunerated for the work. She sees this as symptomatic of the widespread masculinist attitude of the 1960s, and Gallizio’s overall “bourgeois” attitude which ultimately lead to his expulsion from the SI.¹⁵⁶

Gallizio’s friend, the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuis (1920-2005) was also a regular visitor at the Alba estate, where he began developing his famous urban design entitled New Babylon (1949–1970) (fig. 2.15) partly in reference to the nomadic lifestyle of the groups of Roma who regularly camped in the premises.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷. Art Historian Alyce Mahon points out that the title New Babylon refers to “Grigory Kozinstev and Leonid Trauberg’s 1929 silent film of the same name, which was a socialist view of the Franco-Prussian War and celebration of the Paris Commune of 1871.” She also cites Charles Fourier’s vision of the Phalanx and the work of Chilean painter Roberto Matta as influential to Constant’s vision for New Babylon. See Mahon, Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968, 196 and Wilson, Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays, 20. McKenzie Wark remarks on the structure
Nieuwenhuis employed nomadism as a model for his sketches, paintings, and three-dimensional structures to convey a vision of unitary urbanism set as “the terrain of a game in which one participates.”

of New Babylon: “Considered vertically, New Babylon materializes Marx’s diagram of base and superstructure. Its sectors are literally superstructures, made possible by an infrastructure below ground where mechanical reproduction has abolished scarcity and freed all of time from necessity.”


158. Unattributed, “Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s,” http://www.notbored.org/uu.html. The figure of the Roma was widely celebrated in 1960s counter-culture in Europe. For instance, many images of the Roma and hippies imitating them (especially young white women) were taken by the Dutch photographer Ed van der Elsken, who is of course best known for his photographic record of the bohemian scene in the left bank of Paris where the Lettrists and subsequent Situationists moved. He photographed and included many of them in his photo-novel *Love on the Left Bank* (1954).
The New Babylon project consists of a global network of environments involving a wide variety of media (sound, smoke, color, etc.) which were designed to be re-organized by dwellers at their pleasure. People could permanently drift within these spaces if they so chose, as imagined by Chtcheglov in 1953. In time Constant was to frame his project within an utopian vision of an universal technonomadic society:

New Babylon ends nowhere (since the earth is round); it knows no frontiers (since there are no more national economies) or collectivities (since humanity is fluctuating). Every place is accessible to one and all. The whole earth becomes home to its owners. Life is an endless journey across a world which is changing so rapidly that it seems forever other...A renewed, reinvented audiovisual media is an indispensable aid. In a fluctuating community, without a fixed base, contacts can only be maintained by intensive telecommunications. Each sector will be provided with the latest equipment, accessible to everyone, whose use, we should note, is never strictly functional. In New Babylon air conditioning does not only serve to re-create, as in utilitarian society, an ‘ideal’ climate, but to vary ambiance to the greatest possible degree. As for telecommunications, it does not only, or principally, serve interests of a practical kind. It is at the service of ludic activity, it is a form of play. 

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Constant proposed that the automated spaces of *New Babylon* would be serviced by “by teams of specialized creators who, hence, will be professional situationists.” He also suggested that the funds needed for maintenance would be provided by tourism. These suggestions met with resistance from the Parisians, and Constant resigned from the SI in 1960. In addition, the conflict took root in divergent views on the impact of informatization. Constant praised automation for bringing about “new conditions in the field of economy,” which he saw as contributing to the erasure of human labor and ultimately the increase of leisure. Constant dedicated *New Babylon* to the Homo Ludens, who he celebrated as a product of the wealth generated through technological development:

> It is becoming clear that in the era of automation all the work that, until now, was done by human labour can be taken over by inanimate machines. For a while people still believed that man was essential to operate the machinery, but even that appears to be a misconception.

> Automation stands for the operation of machines by other machines.

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In his collected writings published in 1969 Constant cites in this respect Norbert Wiener’s view of the human worker as “a wasteful producer” in comparison with the efficiency of cybernetic machines applied to industrial production.\footnote{162 Constant, \textit{Opstand van de Homo Ludens: een Bundel Voordrachten en Artikelen}. (Bussum: Paul Brand, 1969), 131. My translation.} Though Wiener never intended for machines to replace humans (rather he saw cybernetics as the integration of humans and machines), Constant argues that “the replacement of humans by machines, also in regulatory or control functions, cybernetics, does not entail the degradation of the human, but rather its liberation.”\footnote{163 Ibid., 62.} Thus under complete cybernetic automation, humans would be freed to at last pursue their play impulse as “life artists.”\footnote{164 Ibid., 63. Peter Lamborn Wilson suggests rather that Constant’s vision echoed Charles Fourier’s future utopias made up of an network of global communities (the phalanges) harmoniously connected through pleasure and the cultivation of the individual’s creativity. See Wilson, \textit{Escape from the Nineteenth Century and Other Essays}, 13.} Constant’s ideas reflected the technoutopian visions of counterculture currents attempting to establish communities parallel to the ‘establishment’ with the help of cybernetic concepts and computer technologies. This movement included a host of iconic figures whose influence is exemplified by that of the engineer, architect, environmentalist, and countercultural icon Buckminster Fuller, whose network of ‘disciples’ spanned the circles
of experimental arts (he taught at Black Mountain College and collaborated with artists connected to the Fluxus network), and hippie drop-out culture, personified by the likes of ‘cyberdelia’ entrepreneur Steward Brand, known for establishing the WELL (Whole Earth ’Lectronic Link) in 1985, a prototypic online community modeled on the The Whole Earth Catalog (1968–1972), a counterculture magazine selling tools and literature to drop-out communities whose geodesic domes testified adherence to Fuller’s visions of a sustainable future. By contrast, members of the SI saw Cybernetic automation and Cybernetics as yet another means for social control, at least in their application to further technocratic organization. The “cybernetic state” was Vaneigem’s term for the contemporaneous paradigm of control following on “feudal power” and “bourgeois power.”165 In a recent interview Vaneigem addressed Constant’s project as follows: “New Babylon’s flaw is that it privileges technology over the formation of an individual and collective way of life—the necessary basis of any architectural concept.”166 Vaneigem’s misgivings were shared by Debord. In a letter to Constant, he objects to his friend’s privileging of an intellectual “class” as the bearers of a new order.167 The task would more appropriately be to appropriate technology (once sufficiently developed) for antiauthoritarian ends, as Vaneigem intimates: “By laying the basis for a perfect power structure, the cyberneticians will only stimulate the perfection of

its refusal. Their programming of new techniques will be shattered by the same
techniques turned to its own use by another kind of organization, a revolutionary
organization.”168 The break with Constant signaled the SI’s ‘schism’ roughly cor-
responding to a Lettrist International/IMIG-COBRA divide in 1961, which meant
the expulsion of artistic currents of the movement (among them the SPUR group
in Germany and the Nashists in Denmark), leaving the Parisian Lettrists to pursue
agitation as the SI’s principal focus until its dissolution in 1972.

2.8 The Return of the Scandal

Not until 1966, the year of Breton’s death, did the Parisian Situationists came
to public attention through media reports about student activism involving the
Tunisian Situationist member Mustapha Khayati. Khayati’s tract De la Misère en
milieu Étudiant (On the Poverty of Student Life) (1996), written in collaboration
with student protesters at the University of Strasbourg and urging students to
refuse political isolation by linking their struggles with “working class militants,”
stressed collectivism and participation, concerns that correspond with the central
role of play in Situationist politics. In a brief essay entitled “Contribution to a
Situationist Definition of Play” (1957), the SI associated the marginal position of
play and its link with competition to the broader “idealization” and development

of “the forces of production.” At the crux of the group’s engagement with play was the “negation” of these conditions. Opposed to the competitive element and the separation of play and everyday life, the SI affirmed a “collective concept of play: the common creation of selected ludic ambiances,” or the creation of “conditions favorable to direct living.” In light of this, the involvement of the group with student protests and their urging of collaboration with workers, indicates its investment in a politics pitting play (“direct participation”) against the forces of rationalization and their hold on artistic, intellectual and manual activities.

The Situationists’ rebuttal of media reports following on the Strasbourg protests, which highlighted the diversion of funds from a student union for the printing of the 10,000 copies distributed among students during the official ceremony marking the beginning of the academic year, foregrounded once again the group’s perception of Cybernetics as an agent of rationalist control, in this case in relation to the spheres of intellectual and artistic expression. Stating that the focus ought to be on the broader grievances against authoritarianism, not least in academia, the text cited the background leading up to these event in a series of protests targeting Abraham Moles, an engineer of electrical engineering and acoustics, and

a doctor of physics and philosophy, then an assistant professor in social psy-
chology at the University of Strasbourg, which preceded the scandal.\footnote{172} Moles was
the focus of protest at the occasion of a conference held in conjunction with an
exhibition of kinetic sculptures by Hungarian artist Nicolas Schöffer in 1965, at
the University of Strasbourg, and six months prior to that event, during a lecture
at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris (Moles was one of the first to discuss
and promote the connection between aesthetics and information theory).\footnote{173} The
involvement of the SI in the student protests was in fact preceded by an exchange
between Moles and the group in 1963, when he sent an open letter to the SI in re-
gard to the concept of “situation.”\footnote{174} In it Moles (citing his friendship with Henri
Lefebvre) offers a series of suggestions on the development of the “situation.” The
crux of the letter argues for the combination of “novel situations” with “novel as-
semblages” as a way to counteract what Moles calls “the society of control.” To
this end, he suggests body modifications meant to create “variations” that would
function to counteract the constraints of “tradition” and “morality.” These “vari-
ations” would include adaptations of the human body to foreign environments
(“gravityless environments,” “underwater living,” “walking on the ceiling”); gen-
der deviations (the creation of an infinite number of sexes); and sensorial muta-
tions leading to the development of new art forms, which he deems “the dream of

\footnote{173} ibid., 265–266; On Moles see Abraham A. Moles, \textit{Information Theory and Esthetic Perception},
\footnote{174} See Guy Debord, “Correspondance avec un Cyberneticien,” in \textit{Internationale Situationniste} 9
'Total Art.'” (Moles’s proposal is essentially an ‘aesthetic’ re-adaptation of the cyborg, a term coined by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960 to describe induced biological adaptations of humans to extraterrestrial environments, which they advanced in relation to space travel). Moles’ letter accompanied by Debord’s riposte describing Mole’s propositions as “pornographic reveries” and citing his harassment of a student involved with the SI, was distributed during the student protest at the 1965 conference. On the whole, the affair speaks of the SI’s contempt for the “methodological myopia” of specialization personified by Moles but broadly symptomatic of its “Kantian ethic” of “democratization” through “rationalization,” which they itself saw as a reflection of the “dominant reality of overdeveloped capitalism”: the alienation of “commodities” and “spectacles.”

Khatabi’s “On the Poverty of Student Life” included a foreboding of what was to unfold in May 1968: “Proletarian revolutions will be festivals or nothing. Play is the ultimate principle of this festival, and the only rules it can recognize are to live without dead time and to enjoy without restraints.” Similarly, Vaneigem posited play as the antidote to “hierarchical society” by intimating the premises

for the realization of a *socio ludus*:

It is impossible to foresee the details of such a society—a society in which play will be completely unrestricted—but we may expect to find the following: rejection of all leaders and all hierarchies; rejection of self-sacrifice; rejection of roles; freedom of genuine self-realisation; transparent social relationships.¹⁷⁹

The Situationists' support of student activism speaks of the group's self-imposed task to act as catalysts of resistance with détournement as its main means: in their words “the work of the situationists is precisely the preparation of ludic possibilities to come.”¹⁸⁰ In its totality, the group's practice and theory was dedicated to the development of this technique in various media and contexts. In addition to the works cited throughout, détournement is also central to Michele Bernstein's novel *All the King's Horses* (1960), a parody of a *roman à clef* and a meditation on free love; comic books and photo-romances by anonymous Situationists; Situationist cinema (Debord and Wolman); and the occasional art show, of which the 1963 exhibition entitled “Destruktion-RSG-6” (June 22–July 7) merits special mention as an exemplary instance of the SI’s affirmation of the link between cultural and social transformation in the tradition of Dada and Surrealism, and in

this case obliquely referencing Sartre’s concept of the situation in theater marked by existentialist angst. ¹⁸¹

The show was held at Galerie Exi in Odense housed in the cellar of the first commune in Denmark, Huset (the House), and celebrated a covert action by British activists, “Spies for Peace,” who made public the secret location of six of the British government’s nuclear shelters, the “Regional Shelters of Government-6.”¹⁸² The exhibition was divided in three sections: the first room was designed as a bomb shelter, with cans, water, and plank beds with dummies in body bags on them. The room was unlit and filled with a penetrating smell, while men in protective

suits offered visitors “the last pill.”

The second section, entitled “Revolt,” was arranged as a shooting range where visitors provided with rifle guns could shoot at pictures of political, military and religious leaders, including President Kennedy, Khrushchev, De Gaulle, the Danish foreign minister Per Haekkerup and the pope (fig. 2.16 and 2.17). Debord’s “Directives” (fig. 2.18), canvases with slogans like “Réalisations de la philosophie” (Realization of Philosophy) and “Abolition du travail Aliéné” (Abolition of Alienated Labour) painted on them hung alongside the targets.

The third section, “Exhibition,” showed Michele Bernstein’s three-dimensional tableaux (fig. 2.19), entitled “Victoires du prolétariat” (Victories of the Proletariat), which consisted of plaster casts with toy soldiers and plastic tanks representing “reconstructions” of past revolts, and J. V. Martin’s “Thermonuclear Cartographs,” maps made of soft cream cheese (fig. 2.20) representing the meltdown of the world after a nuclear attack.

183. Rasmussen, “To Act In Culture While Being Against All Culture: The Situationists And The ‘Destruction Of RSG-6’,” 95.
184. Ibid., 75.
Figure 2.17: De Gaulle target, “Destruction of RSG-6,” 1963
Figure 2.18: Guy Debord, Directive

Figure 2.19: Michele Bernstein, Victoire de la Commune de Paris (Victory of the Commune in Paris) (detail)
Figure 2.20: J. V. Martin, “Thermonuclear Cartographs” (detail)
Upon entering, visitors met with the underside of consumer culture, literally represented via the nuclear shelter. Following on the encounter with this secluded, militarized architecture came the opportunity to symbolically destroy hierarchies, as indicated by the targets portraying political, military and religious authorities and Debord’s ‘Directives,’ one of which paraphrased the marxist adagio: “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it” (the other one painted on a Pittura Industrialle canvas by Gallizio conveyed misgivings about art as commodity). Besides presenting visitors with the possibilities at hand–victorious revolt or nuclear holocaust—the exhibition was intended as a critique of contemporaneous art. Bernstein’s revisionist détournement of boys’ toys (miniature plastic soldiers and tanks) commented on the detached use of consumer products in Pop art movements like the Nouveaux Rèalistes, celebrating realism via “poetic recycling of urban, industrial and advertising reality,” while J. V. Martin’s “Thermonuclear Cartographs,” sarcastically addressed the Nouvelle Figuration group’s call to reintroduce figurative painting with social and political themes.\(^{185}\) In the catalogue essay, Debord remarks in reference to Michele Bernstein’s tableaux that “each new attempt to transform the world is forced to start out with the appearance of a new unrealism”; and Bernstein humorously cites J. V. Martin series of paintings as “nouvel irrealisme.” Debord’s comment on his detourned “Directives” sums up the overall effect as a “simultaneous ridicule

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and reversal of that pompous academicism currently in fashion which is trying to base itself on the painting of incommunicable “pure signs.”\textsuperscript{186} At the same time, the controversial closure of the exhibit by the gallery owner demonstrated the difficulties of sustaining a position of radical critique from within ‘art’ (the gallerist, presumably a principled pacifist, cited his disapproval of “the shooting tent,” only allowing audiences to visit the “Exhibition,” leaving the Situationists no choice but to retract the event). As Martin explained, “Destruction of RSG-6” was not an art show, but “an attack on the society that allowed its ruling powers to expose humankind to deadly dangers through the threat of nuclear war and nuclear tests.”\textsuperscript{187} Situationist ‘art’ was nothing if not a call to action.

The combination of the repressive atmosphere following on the 1968 events and the SI’s uncompromising position (resulting in an ever faster series of resignations and purges), precipitated the group’s official dissolution in 1972. The previous year, Debord acknowledged that the SI was successful in its agitational aims but failed to address the “deficiencies” of its own organizational structure.\textsuperscript{188} In the last document addressing the dissolution of the movement (drafted with the Italian Situationist Gianfranco Sanguinetti), Debord concluded that the problem of organization was no longer the purview of a single group (i.e., the po-

\textsuperscript{187} Quoted in Rasmussen, “To Act In Culture While Being Against All Culture: The Situationists And The ‘Destruction Of RSG-6’,” 198.
litical/cultural avant-garde), but at the heart of “the vast and formless protest movement currently at work.”\(^{189}\) He concluded: “Henceforth, situationists are everywhere, and their task is everywhere.”\(^ {190}\) The reference was to groupings expressing hostility to the status-quo through cultural subversion concurrent with a stress on play. Some of these groups including the Angry Brigades in Britain, Kommune 1 in Germany, and the “Metropolitan Indians,” a group of anonymous political pranksters emerging in Italy in 1977, were familiar with Situationist ideas.\(^ {191}\) Philosopher and founder of the now defunct Cybernetic Culture Research


190. ibid., 67. The jest of this document testifies to Debord’s penchant for mystique; as Ken Knabb remarked: “the SI was exemplary not only for what it said, but above all for all that it did not say.”Ken Knabb, “The Society of Situationism,” 1976, http://www.ccdc.vt.edu/bps/PS/situationism.htm.

191. Kommune 1 included the brother of author and media critic Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ulrich Enzensberger. The group lived in Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s house for a time. Forming as an offshoot of the politically-motivated student movement in Germany in the 1960s, the commune became prominent for its media pranks and anti-familialist stances. The German Green Party and the Computer Chaos Club, the latter a well-known hacker group, emerged from the circles of Kommune 1. See Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I. Berlin 1967-1969* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2004); see also Michael Shane Boyle, “Aura of the Archive: Confronting the Incendiary Fliers of Kommune 1,” *Performing Arts Resources*, no. 28 (2011): 297–303. The “Metropolitan Indians” were associated with the Marxist Autonomists in Italy, including Antonio Negri and a number of other Marxist intellectual figures involved with pirate radios like radio Alice with which Félix Guattari was intimately acquainted. François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York: Colombia University Press, 2010), 286–287. A direct
Unit (CCRU), Sadie Plant discussed the connections between the SI and the above cited groupings in a Guattarian vein, in relation to the ‘molecular’ arrangements of these movements as “configurations of desires rather than solidarities between people or social groups.” Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age, 124. But given the SI’s own admission of organizational failure, it is in my view more relevant to stress the role of play in Situationism as the group’s more enduring legacy. The anti-rationalist ethos of these groups, their stress on pleasure and fun as forces of individual and social transformation stand testimony to their affinity with the Situationists’ intent on placing play at the center of life, a political position taken in response the discrepancy of conditions post World War II, caught between the optimism of an economic boom and a relentless atmosphere of nuclear doom. The New Left (professionals with Marxist leanings) emerging in Europe and the United States was the heir of Situationist theory, as were a number of less known anarchist theorists (including Hakim Bey). The visibility of these currents diminished against the 70s and 80s backlash spearheaded by neoliberalist intellectuals and conservative governments.

Link between Situationism and Italian Autonomism can be traced through Sanguinetti, whose tract entitled True Report on the Last Chance to Save Capitalism was published in Italy in 1975 under the pseudonym Censor, and first circulated among Italian government and intellectual figures. The document revealed the complicity of the Italian Communist Party in the state repression of workers’ movements in Italy, as well as alleged that the Italian secret services were responsible for the Piazza Fontana bombing of 1969, which led to the imprisonment of several anarchists (of which one was killed under police investigation). The revelation that the document was the work of a Situationist rather than an ‘insider,’ caused a political scandal. Sadie Plant, The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age (London: Routledge, 1992), 127–128.
such as those of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the U.S., with
the global economic crisis of 1968–1973 setting the tone. In an ironic twist, the
‘rediscovery’ of the SI as a precursor of later forms of cultural intervention during
the ’90s was mainly due to the conjunction of institutions and academics engaged
in historicizing the movement and artists and activist groups responding to the
rise of neoliberalism and the advent of digital networks. The latter groups were
additionally anticipated by artistic exploits of concepts and structures related to
communication and information by Fluxus, a group working in parallel with the
SI.

2.9 Fluxus

Instead of the centralist organization of the SI, it was Fluxus’ loose conceptualiza-
tion and structure as a conglomeration of geographically-dispersed artists was to
become the favored form of later groups emerging in conjunction with the main-
streaming of the internet. The group itself coalesced around the nomenclature
“fluxus,” a Latin word meaning to “flow.”

192. George Maciunas et al., Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931-1978: Based
Upon Personal Reminiscences (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 40–41 and Clive Philpot, “Fluxus:
Maganizes, Manifestos, Multum in Parvo,” in Fluxus: Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman
Collection, ed. Clive Philpot and Jon Hendricks (New York: The Museum of Modern Art New York,
1988), 10. The term fluxus has multivalent origins. It appears to be first proposed by George Maci-
unas in 1961 as the title for a magazine dedicated to Lithuanian culture, but ultimately adopted to
1960s with footings in the avantgardist currents tracing to Dada and in counterculture culture. The group formed on the initiative of the Lithuanian artist George Maciunas (1931–1978), around John Cage’s and Richard Maxfield’s classes at The New School, and through the series of feasts held at Yoko Ono’s loft on Chambers Street in New York, for the purpose of promoting exchange between like-minded artists in Europe, North America, and Asia, as well as to bring their work to a broad audience in parallel of the existing art venues where abstract expressionism and pop-art were the rule.\footnote{Ken Friedman, “The Early Days of Mail Art,” in Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology, ed. Chuck Welch (Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 5–6.} Fluxus’ focus on networking and exploits of communication systems emerged in response to the abstraction of the high art world, and against the backdrop of utopian visions premised on self-organizing communitarian networks articulated by Marshall McLuhan’s term, the “global village.”

Fluxus’ initial three years (1961–64) centered on neo-Dada music and poetry performances held in New York and Europe, introduced Fluxus to a wide public (performances were televised and streamed live in Germany). Initial members included Cage’s and Maxfield’s students, the Americans George Brecht (1925–2008), Dick Higgins (1938), Allan Kaprow (1927–2006), La Monte Young (1935), and the Japanese composer and Yoko Ono’s first husband Toshi Ichijanagi (1933), as well as Ben Patterson (1934) and Maciunas, among others. Their European counter-designate the nascent movement on advice of one of the original members of Berlin Dada, Raoul Hausmann. Fluxus’ structure is described by Kristine Stiles as a “voluntary association of people.” Quoted in Hannah Higgins, The Fluxus Reader, ed. Ken Friedman (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1998), 32.
parts included the Korean composer Nam June Paik (1932–2006), the German-
Swiss sculptor Dieter Rot (1930–1998), the American poet Emmett Williams (1925–
2007), and the French artist Robert Filliou (1926-1987).¹⁹⁴ Fluxus collaborators
included Daniel Spoerri, Christo, Ray Johnson, and a host of other artists. The
group itself was highly fluid in practice and membership, with exception of the
constant presence of Maciunas, and the distinctive character of Fluxus art, which
while vastly heterogenous was uniform in its self-conscious position in and be-
tween systems of classification in reflection of the artists interest in the aesthetic
and political implications of their work. The activist basis of Fluxus is contested
by critics, among them Higgins’ and Knowles’ daughter and art historian Hannah
Higgins, who implied the a-political nature of Fluxus by noting that the group was
above all defined by its “gaming spirit.”¹⁹⁵ By contrast, artists associated with
Fluxus tend to situate the movement as an anti-institutional response to existing
cultural and political structures emerging alongside 1960s political movements
for enfranchisement and equal rights.¹⁹⁶ However, Fluxus’ “gaming spirit” and
collectivist ethos need not be indicative of a depoliticized stance. Assessments
to the contrary speak in my estimation of a particular concept about what con-

¹⁹⁴. Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War, 50–51.
¹⁹⁵. Higgins, The Fluxus Reader, 31; She also states that Fluxus was a self-agrandizing myth put
forth by Maciunas. Steward Home interprets Fluxus at the end of the sixties (what he calls the
“post-heroic period” of the group) as a move toward depolitization under the influence of the
“hippie scene.” See Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War,
58–59.
¹⁹⁶. Jon Hendricks, Gilbert, and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Fluxus Codex (New York:
stitutes the political (i.e., a hierarchical, separate organization), a view that was consistently refuted in Fluxus' engagement with play as a conceptual and formal fold for the expression of anti-authoritarian politics.

2.9.1 Intermedia

In a 1965 essay entitled “intermedia,” Dick Higgins discussed the ideas underlying the intermedial arts to which Fluxus was devoted, as a conceptual and practice-based nexus of genres, forms, and media.\(^\text{197}\) According to him, intermedia arts respond to the rise of “a classless society” and “populism” in the “East” and the “West.”\(^\text{198}\) To this point, he contrasts the fluidity of these transformations with the hierarchy of art-historical categories, bound to the commodity market. Thus intermedia stood for the rejection of the art commodity to which a purist approach to the medium and the categorization of art into genres was inherent.\(^\text{199}\)

Maciunas picked the thread of Higgins’ ideas when defining Fluxus art in terms of gratuitous gestures or as cheap mass products; a combination of art and entertainment: “Fluxus art-amusement.” Its main characteristics are playfulness and interactivity. “Therefore,” he writes, “... [the work] must be simple, amusing,

\(^{197}\) Dick Higgins, *The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 18–23. Higgins notes that the term intermedia as he defines it was first proposed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1912.

\(^{198}\) Ibid., 18.

\(^{199}\) Ibid., 18–19.
unpretentious, concerned with insignificances, require no skill or countless rehearsals, [and] have no commodity or institutional value.” In this vein, Maciunas characterizes Fluxus in terms of “the monostructural and nontheatrical qualities of the simple natural event, a game or gag ... the fusion of Spike Jones, Vaudeville, gag, children’s games and Duchamp.”

The Fluxists enthusiasm for mainstream culture as a model of artistic practice was at the same time accompanied by proposals concerning the (mis)appropriation of mainstream distribution systems. In this respect, intermedia did not refer to a particular formal approach to artistic processes, but rather to the potential of these forms for stimulating creative, egalitarian, and global communication.

2.9.2 The Eternal Network

The concept of Fête Permanente, in literal translation the “Eternal Festival,” but translated in English as the “Eternal Network,” applied the ideas underlying intermedia on communication networks. The term originated with American artist George Brecht and the French artist Robert Filliou, who used it in 1968 on a poster

200. By contrast, Maciunas characterizes art commodity as “complex, pretentious, profound, serious, intellectual, inspired, skillful, significant, theatrical,” in order to “appear rare, limited in quantity, and therefore obtainable and accessible only to the social elite and institutions.”


201. Ibid.
mailed to friends announcing the closing of ‘La Cerille Qui Sourit,’ a Fluxus shop managed by the duo in the south of France. The “Eternal Network” is today mostly cited in connection to mail art and correspondence networks in which the ‘goal’ is gifting, but Filliou had also sabotage in mind when he called on artists to appropriate public spaces: “bars, churches ... parks”; communication and media channels, including the postal and transportation systems, “radio, television, newspapers”; and even electoral processes, to foment “(subversive) nuisance” on a global basis. In addition, the “Eternal Network” offered a solution to prag-


203. Filliou, “La Cedille Qui Sourit,” 204. Maciunas’ appropriation of the subsidized postal system intended for keeping up the morale of U.S. military personnel to promote Fluxus (through Flux mailings) is a forerunner of Filliou’s “Eternal Network.” Maciunas undertakings during his tenure as a graphic designer working for the U.S. Air Force in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1961, prompted his dismissal. Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War, 51. Back in New York City in 1963, he penned a set of suggestions to broaden the scope of Fluxus via “propaganda through sabotage and disruption,” including the disruption of the New York transportation system by means of strategically situated break-downs on the city road system; the spread of misinformation; the sabotage of communication networks, involving the overloading of the postal system with thousands of unstamped mail in the form of packaged bricks and other materials addressed to newspapers, galleries, artists, and museums, bearing as return address similar addressees; as well as disruptions of cultural events at museums and art events using stink and sneeze bombs, fake announcements, and telephone calls to direct emergency and delivery services
matic concerns with projecting Fluxus' ideas externally, as access to communication systems became increasingly cheap and widespread in response to the needs of military and government institutions and transnational business in the 1960s.

According to Fluxus member Henry Flynt, Maciunas envisioned Fluxus as a wry parody modeled along the lines of “international corporatization” and “alluding to utopian communalism.” This concurs with Maciunas' provocative encasing of Fluxus in relation to Russian Constructivism on various occasions, and attempts at steering the development of the movement into a collectivist enterprise, which incorporated Fluxus workers, a collective newspaper, a Flux Housing Cooperative, and a Flux mail-order catalogue offering Fluxus products available for purchase. A network of fluxshops and warehouses located in New York, The Netherlands, France, and Japan also carried such items, among them Fluxus games.

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205. Maciunas wrote that “Fluxus goals are social (not aesthetic). They (ideologically) can be related to those of the 1929 L.E.F. Group in the Soviet Union and are set up like this: step by step elimination of the Fine Arts (music, drama, poetry, painting, sculpture etc etc). This motivates the desire to direct wasted material and human capabilities towards constructive goals such as the Applied Arts: industrial design, journalism, architecture, engineering, graphic and hypographic arts, printing etc, which are all areas that are closely related to the fine arts and offer the artist better career opportunities.” Maciunas quoted in Home, The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War, 56. George Maciunas' Fluxus manifesto distributed at Fluxus Festival in Wiesbaden, Germany in 1962, as part of Ben Patterson's Paper Piece stated: “Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, intellectual, professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of
2.10 Fluxus Games

On the standing of “jokes, games, puzzles and gags” in Fluxus, member Ken Friedman noted the various dimensions of play significant for the movement: “Play comprehends far more than humor. There is the play of ideas, the playfulness of free experimentation, the playfulness of free association and the play of paradigm shifting that are as common to scientific experiment as to pranks.” Thus Fluxus games give expression to these concerns in concept and form.

For instance, the Fluxkit Flux Paper Games: Rolls and Folds (1969–1976) plays on the performative dimension of intermedia, showing that its coming into being is contingent on (playful) enactment. The box contains a series of plastic boxes...
with pieces of paper folded or rolled in some way. The first box in the series, *Flux Paper Games: Rolls and Folds 1* involves contributions by four artists: two games by Paul Sharits, respectively *Sound Fold*, a piece of crumpled paper that produces sound when unfolded, and Unrolling Screen Piece, a film fragment with instructions that reads: “Pull down roll fold into pad wipe until clean drop into toilet flush away paper”; three games by Gregg Sharits, including Bag Trick, a corn filled bag in a paper roll; *Roll Fold*, a paper rolled and folded once; and Roll Trick, a folded paper with matchsticks sicken out with the instructions: “Ignite here”; David Thompson’s *Un Roll*, involving a piece of wall paper and a paper with a printed letter-game showing the word “roll”; and Bob Grimes’s *Pull Fold*, a perforated paper with an inserted loop with a printed instruction: “Pull.”

Fluxist concerns with open-endedness also materialized in games that contrary to the aforementioned games are not amenable to physical play. An example is Maciunas’ *Flux Snow Game* (1966), which consists of a transparent plastic box containing styrofoam bits with a label showing a diagram of snowflakes. Maciunas’ game involves a visual pun on the fluidity of Fluxus in reference to the structure of snowflakes as a forever-changing complex system, likely also a reference to systems theory (a scientific concept concerned with the organization and communication of both biological and social entities). George Brecht, a chemist

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210. Ibid., 108.
211. See María Fernández, “'Life-like': Historicizing Process and Responsiveness in Digital Art,” in

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by profession, likewise produced games that explore the links between structure, signs and actions, and included recycled instructions in the form of experimental music scores. Brecht’s puzzle games like the Puzzle series (fig. 2.21) combined found materials with scores typed on cards in the form of instructions. These

212. Brecht was also a student of composer John Cage from 1958 to 1959, along with Alan Kaprow, Jackson Maclow, Higgins, Claes Oldenberg, and other key figures of American modernism. Cage’s teachings emphasized chance and games (most notoriously the I-Ching) as key aspects of musical composition. Brecht’s musical scores consist of written instructions much like those included in his puzzles. See Julia Robinson, “Scoring the Event,” in George Brecht Events, Eine Heterospektive/A Heterospective, ed. Alfred M. Fischer (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2005), 28–33.
instructions, which followed on the free association principles of Fluxus music, added to the sense of ‘puzzlement’ rather than clarification. A card included in the Bead Puzzles reads, for instance: “Bead Puzzle, arrange the beads so that they are the same. Arrange the beads so that they are different.”\textsuperscript{214} The Swim Puzzles (1965 and 1983) contain shells and printed text urging the player to “Arrange the shell in such a way that the word CUAL never appears.”\textsuperscript{215} The Inclined Plane Puzzles series (1965), contains a stainless steel ball and instructions: “Inclined Plane Puzzle / Place ball on inclined surface / Observe the ball rolling uphill.”\textsuperscript{216} As humorous puns on the word puzzle these games draw attention to the deductive process of puzzle solving to suggest that the expected approach to play—i.e., to solve the puzzle, is not applicable. Brecht’s games point to the arbitrary nature of rules, signs, and structures, and their power to effect behavior and the material world. This relation is constantly evoked in other games by the artist, which are similarly unplayable. An example is Closed on Mondays, a Flux Game (1969), which consists of a black plastic box containing adhesive materials sealing it permanently; the label designed by Maciunas shows five children playing in front of a set of double doors bearing the title of the game spelled out in graffiti.\textsuperscript{217} Similarly, Direction by George Brecht/a Flux Game (1965), exists as a simple white box with a label affixed on top and on the bottom showing the image of a hand with the


\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 58–59.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid., 59.
index finger ending in the title of the game and pointing upwards.\textsuperscript{218} Altogether these games engage notions of communication emerging within the Cold war scientific context filtered through the Surrealist vein underpinning Fluxus’ belief in the transformative power of the freed imagination. In a similar way, the \textit{obvious deck} (1967) by Robert Filliou, was a deck containing 54 cards with the same face on both sides of the playing cards used in the Leeds game (1976) (fig. 2.22), a group activity played with blindfold participants that suggests connections with Surrealist automatism and the interest in altered perception shared with hippie culture.\textsuperscript{219}

By way of contrast, the \textit{White Chess Set} (1966), an antiwar statement by hippie icon, life long pacifist and Fluxus associate Yoko Ono, testifies to a less laudatory view of play as well as to the activist edge of Fluxus.\textsuperscript{220} The game consists of an all white chess set that is part of a larger installation comprised of two white chairs and table with an inscription that reads: “Chess Set For Playing As Long As You Can Remember Where All Your Pieces Are.”\textsuperscript{221} The installation alludes to chess as a simulacrum of the Cold-war era military conflict, of which Vietnam became an emblem (Ono herself experienced the fire bombing of Tokyo by the U.S. Airforce in 1945 first hand at the age of twelve). By painting both sides white, Ono literally

\textsuperscript{218} Conzen, Stuttgart, and Karl-Ernst-Osthaus-Museum, \textit{Art Games: Die Schachtern Der Fluxuskünstler}.
\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
Figure 2.22: Robert Filliou, Leeds game, 1976
erases the “black and white” logic of competitive play, in its stead offering a chess riddle in the form of the white color, symbol of the peace movement.

The games of Japanese Fluxus member Takako Saito are likewise rooted in the activist ferment of post-WW II in Japan and the United States.\textsuperscript{222} Like in the United States at the time, Japanese universities were important nodes of dissent involving a wide-range of groups, some of marked political leanings like the anarchist-communist league Zengakuren, of whom the Situationists were fond, and cultural currents such as Sōzō Biiku undō, the ‘Creative Art Education’ movement, in which Saito participated as a psychology student at the University of Tokyo.\textsuperscript{223} This movement emerged out of theories developed after WWII by Japanese pedagogue and art collector, Teijirō Kubo, and as a critique of the colonial ideologies underlying the transformation of Japanese art education in imitation of western models, to which it responded by using art and play to stimulate students’ creativity and free will.\textsuperscript{224} (Beyond the Japanese context, the Creative Art Education movement connects with similar popular education movements elsewhere, such as those associated with the Brazilian activist-pedagogue Paulo Freire and his friend,

\textsuperscript{222} Yoshimoto, \textit{Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York}, 115–137.
\textsuperscript{223} Post-WWII Japanese culture involved a regressive turn to authoritarian politics, the rise of the nation’s economic and technological power, and the discontentment of a generation of artist-activists who experienced the hardships of World War II and were coming of age in the volatile sociopolitical sphere of the 1960s, peaking in Japan on the occasion of the renewal of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1963. ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 118.
activist-dramaturg Augusto Boal). Saito’s friendship with members of the group living in between Japan and the United States, such as the Japanese artist Ayo, led to her association with New York Fluxus, where she continued to develop her concerns with play and fluid forms of pedagogy through games.

From 1964 on Saito began developing a series of wooden chess sets crafted in high quality materials, an unusual trait in Fluxus works though the interest in crafts would become a salient interest among feminist artists in the 1970s. Saito’s chess series includes sets that like Ono’s are conceived as disruptions of chess as a highly formalized simulation of militarist logic, transformed into vehicles to set the sensorial body at play. The series includes Sound Chess (1965 and later), which “contains six different sound-making objects in identical wooden boxes,” so that the pieces are only identifiable by the sound cues; the pieces of Weight Chess (1965 and later) are similarly only recognizable by their difference in weight; Spice Chess, in which a series of test tubes containing different spices are used, and values are determined by the smell, as well as color and texture; Smell Chess (1965 and later), in which “thirty-two glass containers with liquids of various odors have to be sniffed and identified”; and Wine Chess (late 1970s and later), involving wine tasting (perhaps an oblique homage to Surrealism), and Liquor Chess (fig 2.23).²²⁵

As noted by art historian Midori Yoshimoto, Saito’s chess sets do not adhere to the binary logic of chess play as “winning was no longer as important as one’s physical

interaction with the game pieces.” Rather, “by involving the senses that were normally unrelated to the traditional game, Saito transformed the ultimate conceptual game into a play of sensuous interactions.” Saito’s holistic approach to sensual experience is also reflected in the ascendance of Eastern philosophies like Zen and Buddhism among Western artists, including John Cage, as well as among hippie communities. The attention paid to the body is of course central to feminist and post-colonial struggles unfolding at the time, and Saito’s pedagogical games can be as well understood in this sense. Saito also developed games involving simple forms like paper cubes and other modified game props for Fluxus events or Flux-fests held at various venues, including colleges. Saito’s game *Kicking Boxes Billiard*, which consists of “floor billiards with paper boxes” was played at the ‘Flux Olympiad’ at Stony Brook, New York, on August 18, 1969, in conjunction with other ‘disrupted’ games like “Ping Pong ... played with “prepared” rackets (“convex, corrugated rackets, rackets with water containers, rackets with a hole in the center, inflated or soft rackets”); table games (tennis and badminton) played on the floor with balloons, and other bizarre props. Another such Fluxfest held at Douglass College in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in February 1970, included “soccer played on stilts, a javelin event that substituted a balloon for a javelin, and table tennis played with paddles with holes in the center or corrugated metal cans glued onto the paddle.” Given the pedagogical basis of Saito’s work, it

227. Ibid.
229. Tara McDowel, “Fluxus Games,” in *Game Show* (Cambridge, MA: MASS MoCA Publications,
was apropos that these events took place within educational institutions, where Fluxus events coincided with a period of intense student agitation against war and demands for educational and broader social change. Against this context, these games reflect Saito’s perception of a rationalist basis for dominance and partiality toward the cultivation of sensuality and pleasure as a political position.\textsuperscript{230} This playfulness, characteristic of Fluxus’ objects and performances, speaks of the nature of the group’s social engagement, which far from being a-political indicates an alternative formulation of the political, understood to broadly include any creative act and expression antithetical to the prevailing authoritarian thought, values and structures.

As ‘products,’ Fluxus games, along with the fluxshops and warehouse ventures were hardly successful at attracting a mainstream audience. Like Saito’s, many of the games were mainly shown at Flux events held at institutions. From 1966 on Fluxus activities were mostly devoted to the realization of artist-run spaces, as in the case of the Flux-House project, which Maciunas envisioned as living, working, and exhibition environments under the management of Fluxus.\textsuperscript{231} Though

\textsuperscript{230} In this respect, it is telling that Steward Home’s assessment of the political “degeneration” of Fluxus hinges on what he describes as “The sensual and indulgent nature of the feasts,” involving various Fluxus events in New York, Fluxus feasts, “the fluxshow, fluxsports,” which he sees as “in diametrical opposition to the severity of early fluxus manifestations,” which he associates with the “heroic period” traced to the explicit politics of the Fluxus manifesto (by Maciunas), previously discussed. See Home, \textit{The Assault on Culture: Utopian currents from Lettrisme to Class War}, 58–59.

\textsuperscript{231} In one case, Fluxus took on the form of a non-profit organization presided by Maciunas and Robert Watts, for the purchase of warehouse buildings in an area in New York known today as
Figure 2.23: Takako Saito’s Liquor Chess, 1975
initially successful, the realization of Flux-Housing projects was prevented by a combination of mafia attacks and legal action by New York City officials.\^232

Fluxus’s artistic practice as a collective, process-oriented free exchange, and mobilization of mass communication systems as vehicles for the production and

SoHo, at the time transforming as a locus of housing speculation. Maciunas et al., *Mr. Fluxus: A Collective Portrait of George Maciunas 1931-1978: Based Upon Personal Reminiscences*, 169–214. The project involved the creation of a Flux Amusement Center managed by The Greene Street Precinct, Inc., a Fluxus company meant to operate “a unique entertainment and game environment” that combined a shopping mall and arcade format, as well as coordinated “the development, distribution, and sale of a new product line utilizing the talents of new and well known artists and designers.” George Maciunas and Robert Watts, “Proposal for the Greene Street Precinct, Inc. (ca. December 1967) in Hendricks, Gilbert, and Collection, *Fluxus Codex*, 44. Fluxus members, Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell were also active in thinking about Fluxarchitecture. Vostell’s introduction to *Fantastic Architecture* (1966) delineates its aims as follows: “A new life ... Our projects—our environments are meant to free men—only the realization of utopias will make man happy and release him from his frustrations! Use your imagination! Join in ... share the power! Share property!” Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, and Claes Oldenburg, *Fantastic Architecture* (London: Something Else Press, 1969), no page number. Among others the book includes contributions by Buckminster Fuller, Raoul Haussman, and John Cage.

\^232 The confrontation between the City and Maciunas was transformed by the latter into a Flux-event, entitled “Flux combat with New York State Attorney General (& Police)” (1966). Archival documentation of the project includes Maciunas’ humorous petition letters to city officials; photos of Maciunas in various disguises as a gorilla ingesting the letters sent by the Attorney General’s office; disguise materials used to elude the police; postcards mailed by friends in Europe and Asia to the office in order to make it appear as if Maciunas was abroad; and plans and photographic documentation of the “flux-fortress,” involving the transformation of Maciunas’ living space into an elaborate labyrinth devised to frustrate the city marshals.
distribution of art, echoed the democratizing impulses of 1960s counter-culture. As the ideas underlying intermedial arts and the “Eternal Network” followed on avantgardist strategies, Fluxus was significant for giving broader currency to these currents at a key moment in the emergence of new forms of media and economies that we now relate to globalization. The scope of Fluxus’ influence during its time may be understood in relation to early mentions of the movement by the art critic Thomas Albright, published in a two part series under the title, “correspondence art,” in the *Rolling Stone*, in 1972. In these articles Albright cited Fluxus’ public prominence through “sometime member and” celebrity figure Yoko Ono, as a major impulse for the flourishing of the correspondence art scene in the 1970s. Many of the formal features of “correspondence art” activities mentioned by Albright, including the multimedia approach of correspondence artists (mailings involved printed matter, disposable objects, xeroxed leaflets, cassettes, videos, many of them pirated), recall Higgins’ intermedial arts, as well as Filliou’s notion of the “Eternal Network,” globally composed of “information art,” “companies,” “banks,” and “schools,” mailing to each other and ‘spamming’ a range of public figures, celebrities, and institutions. Albright also cited the similarities between the “correspondence network” and Steward Brand’s *The Whole Earth Catalogue* (the precursor of the ‘virtual communities’ of the Well at the inception of the internet), even though as he says, the latter was framed within “a survivalist model” and

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234. Ibid., 28.
commercially-driven.\textsuperscript{235}

\section*{2.11 Avant-garde Play}

The avant-gardes’ turn to play represents a response to a rationalist system whose basis on dualism as expressed through hierarchy, separation and competition contradicted this system’s alleged orientation towards humanity’s progress. The impetus of this response related to the recognition that the artistic sphere was integral to the affirmation and reproduction of the prevailing conditions within the political, economic, psychological, sexual and intellectual spheres. As such, the overturning of the bourgeois art tradition and the affirmation of pleasure, collectivity and collaboration was understood as key to individual and social transformation and play and games, activities associated with ways of being and relating marginalized or repressed within the rationalist tradition became central for the development of an alternative formulation of the political in the avant-gardes. Zurich Dadaists turned to mockeries of the culture of imperialism staged in nonsensical performances that engaged spontaneity with the aim of perturbing the passivity of audiences. Berlin Dadaists concentrated on media disturbances literally developed from scraps of mass culture and set in circulation as counter-propaganda. The theatrical bent of Berlin Dada was manifest in subver-

\textsuperscript{235} Albright, “New School: Correspondence Art,” 32. Incidentally, Albright’s articles appeared in the \textit{Rolling Stone} eight months prior to Steward Brand’s article on “Spacewar” in the December issue in which he called for “computers to the people.” I will come back to this in the next chapter.
sive impersonations of authorities and institutions, and in misinformation campaigns strategically aimed at provoking authoritarian reactions so as to expose them. Surrealism sought to examine desire on its own terms, in order to set it free. Following in Dada’s steps, Surrealists embraced ludic concepts like spontaneity, chance, and improvisation, as well as fluid perceptual states in the belief that the transformation of perception and social change are mutually implicated. The combination of the Surrealists’ focus on desire and Dada’s expert propaganda formed the two strands of Situationist investigations into the relevance of perceptual management in capitalist societies toward the development of interventions into these conditions articulated in situations that took détournement as its principal technique to counteract the linearizing effects of dominant culture. Fluxus developed in parallel as a global network of artists and associates forming a collaborative open-ended structure which functioned as an autonomous forum operating within institutional and mainstream communication systems. Conceptualized as a counter-cultural response, Fluxus flourished as an early instance of a far-reaching network based community in which the utopian ideals of communalism of the artistic avantgardes and 1960s counterculture merged.

At the same time the avant-gardist project was not without contradictions. The drive to exclusion and centralized organization within some of these movements not only ran contrary to the avant-gardes’ celebration of fluidity (Homo Ludens), but also mirrored the dualism of the conditions to which they were responding, those of the rational human. These tendencies had parallels with political organizations representing industrial labor (i.e., upholding the human as producer) with
which these movements allied themselves at times. Common to both was the desire for cultural and social change, but in the end these projects proved irreconcilable as party lines became more rigid and avant-garde currents drifted by contrast toward decentralized association. Most of all, the avant-gardes had a profound impact on intellectual and social movements associated with the broader transnational counterculture community emerging in the 1960s, whose emphasis, rather than centralized political structures, was on the role of intellectual, cultural and social community as a force of transformation. The avant-gardes’ legacy took on a renewed political significance for the formation of new forms of activism emerging with the mainstreaming of computers and computer networks in the 1990s. Tactical media practitioners and other digital activists seized on the fluid methodologies developed within the avant-gardes in response to the emergence of decentralized forms of power fully expressing in the cultural and economic conditions of globalization. The videogame industry, developed in the ludic hubris of avantgardism, is exemplary of these transformations in its emblematic status as a global information-driven and hybrid culture and economy.

236. Counterculture political movements included anti-war, civil rights, free-speech, feminist, gay liberation, and environmentalist groups. These groups were embedded in the broader cultural ethos of anti-authoritarianism and experimentation widespread among hippie communities and other subcultures, including alternative media, grass-roots, artistic, and pedagogical currents, besides psychedelics and religion-infused communities.
CHAPTER 3

MACHINA EX LUDENS

This chapter examines the role of the collective in videogames as a function of the rationalization of *Homo ludens* within the development of decentralized computing in the 1960s and fully expressed in the 1990s with the advent of the internet. This analysis also includes discussions of videogames to lend insights into these transformation and into the later uses of videogames for intervention by artists. The visions of the playful collective borne out in the legacy of the avant-gardes transformed at the nexus of countercultural utopianism and institutional and entrepreneurial cultures aligning in the desire for the computer as a system suited for dynamic, decentralized communication. Within this project, play and games were rationalized through communalist ideals of a humanistic, rational society linking free interchange of information and access to computers and computer networks with individual and social empowerment, as collaborative work methods and conceptual models of research concerning the development of network, screen simulation-based computing, and lastly as hybrid environments interfacing the transnational economies of the videogame industry.

3.1 Spacewar

Originally designed by three engineering students, Steve Russel, Martin Graetz, and Wayne Witaenem at the the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Laboratory housed
in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Spacewar (1962) (fig. 3.1) developed from a hack, the colloquial term for a clever programming feat. In- 
spired on the popular genre of science-fiction, the initial game involved the PDP-1 (Programmed Data Processor-1) computer, two humans, and two sets of joysticks used to control two space-ships in motion on a visual display. The ships were controllable for pitch, thrust, yaw and the firing of torpedoes against a starfield backdrop and a “hyper space” option used to make ships disappear and reappear randomly on screen. Eventually, the game spread to various research sites, where like experimenters took to its open-ended form, in the process introducing new modifications, including invisibility, “Score keeping, Space mines, Partial damage,” sound, as well as more extensive re-configurations such as a two console game introducing a first-person perspective meant to simulate the pilot’s window, and yet another MIT version designed to raise the stakes of the game by way of rigging the machine to dispense an electronic shock to the player relative to the

exploding ship.2

Spacewear's fluid form reflected the architecture of its platform, the PDP-1, an oddity compared to the then dominant computing paradigm aimed at incremental improvement of the processing capabilities of gargantuan mainframes used by the military to calculate ballistic trajectories and for accounting tasks by business and state institutions.3 Often compared to gigantic calculators, batch-processing com-


3. The PDP-1 had display-input interfaces and its proto-time-sharing structure provided for real-time feedback to users' input. Presumably DEC's donation of the computer to MIT students was intentionally devised to attract stockholders and customers as the business world underwent its first wave of computerization, but to then little effect. M. Mitchell Waldrop, The Dream Machine: J. C. R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 188. Ken Olsen, then DEC representative, characterized the PDP-1 as “unique” because of “it was simple, fast, and interactive.” See ibid. Of course this was relative to the large data-processing machines. For instance, Steve Russel, Spacewear's co-programmer, describes the PDP-1 as a bulky machine “the size of three refrigerators.” Steve Russel quoted in Herz, Joystick Nation:
Figure 3.1: Spacewar, 1961.
puters processed data in an assembly-line manner under the supervision of teams of technicians controlling access to the computer room.⁴ Among researchers, lingering resentment against this highly regimented model contributed to the desire for responsive computing—as one of the PDP-1 engineers put it, the quest was for a computer to be “Interactive. Exciting. Fun.”⁵ Spacewar provides a window into the playful modes of research emerging within the pursuit of interactive computing at MIT during the early 1960s. Sherry Turkle speaks of this methodology as “bricolage,” a term used by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss “to contrast the analytic methodology of Western science with an associative science of the concrete practice in many non-Western societies.”⁶ Turkle writes: “In the context of programming, the bricoleur’s work is marked by a desire to play with lines of computer code, to move them around almost as though they were material things—notes on a score, elements of a collage, words on a page.”⁷ Bricolage is today, as Turkle points out, a celebrated sensibility that marks a shift from rigid, fixed notions of knowing and being, which she attributes to the encouragement of “informalism” in the culture of simulation.⁸ At the time, in the context of the MIT AI lab, Spacewar was not particularly exceptional, but one of many “curious” by-products of an “utopian situation” as one of the MIT hackers characterized this

How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds, 6.

⁴. These clerks were charged with feeding the IBM punch cards delivered to them and returning the resulting printouts.
⁷. Ibid., 52.
⁸. Ibid.
particular moment in the development of networked computing (others included the creation of new forms of debugging, text-editing, music and various other game programs).  

By contrast, the political support for research into interactive computing took place on the dystopian backdrop of the Cold War “arms race” pushed to the edge with the launch of Sputnik 1 by the Soviet Union in 1957. In response, the United States government began massive funding of academic and industry research into long-term projects aimed at the development of complex network systems such as ballistic missile defense, satellite-surveillance radars and nuclear test simulations (e.g., the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment or SAGE). Additionally, the transformation of computing into a non-linear, screen simulation system was accompanied by a profound conceptual shift concerning the nature of the relationship between the human and the computer. “Man-Computer Symbiosis,” the title of a 1960 essay by the American engineer and psychologist Joseph Carl Robnett Licklider captures the pivot of this change as a break with the traditional separation between the human and the machine. The essay, addressed to en-

9. Levy, Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution, 150–151. This situation was to change in the 1970s with the Mansfield Amendments (1969 and 1973) passed in Congress, limiting military funding of research unless specifically proving to benefit short-term defense applications.
10. Sputnik 1 was the first artificial satellite, whose cultural impact effectively destabilized public perception about the U.S.’s ideological and technological superiority established with the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.
12. J. C. R. Licklider, “Man-Computer Symbiosis,” in The New Media Reader, ed. Noah Wardrip-
engineers, argued against the mechanist perspectives underpinning the notion of “mechanically extended man” in favor of bringing human and computer into a mutually beneficial relation premised on collaboration—he calls these machines statistical-inference, decision-theory or game-theory machines. Contrary to the then reigning Behaviorist School led by the psychologist B. F. Skinner, in which the human was seen as a product of genetic and environmental factors (i.e., devoid of intent), as well as against AI’s dream of creating intelligent machines as Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 74–82. As it happened, in April 1961, the same year that the PDP-1 arrived at MIT’s AI lab and work began on Spacewar, Licklider and others, among them McCarthy, spoke at the MIT centennial celebration in praise of the creative possibilities of computers applied to aid humans in exploring complex relations. Waldrop, *The Dream Machine: J. C. R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal*, 182.

13. Licklider illustrated what he meant by symbiosis by opening the essay with a metaphor on the symbiotic relationship between a fig tree and the insect Blastophaga grossorun. Licklider, “Man-Computer Symbiosis,” 74. (His interest in digital computers as modeling tools took root in military research on acoustics during WWII, for which data-processing computers were ill-suited.)

The term “mechanically extended man” referred to the industrial model of automation discussed by Licklider as being driven by the goal of replacing humans, and in cases in which that proved infeasible, the placement of humans at the service of machines. See ibid., 75. The term “humanly-extended machines” takes on a gendered angle when paired with Wendy Chun’s discussion of the gendered history of the term computer, the designation for young women employed by the military to produce “ballistic tables for new weapons, tables designed to control servicemen’s battlefield actions... (not surprisingly, these tables and gun-governors were often ignored or ditched by servicemen).” Computers in this sense were also employed in computation tasks by business. Chun speaks of the application of batch-processing machines to these tasks in terms of a shift from commanding women to commanding machines. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 29.
replacements of humans, the rational thinker stands at the center of Licklender’s vision: “Men will set the goals, formulate the hypotheses, determine the criteria, and perform the evaluations. Computing machines will do the routinizable work that must be done to prepare the way for insights and decisions in technical and scientific thinking.”14 In this vein, “Human-Computer Symbiosis” also framed the management of scientific knowledge in terms of collaborative, interdisciplinary interchanges between engineers and researchers regardless of geographical location.15 This new type of work-group community was envisioned by Licklinder as an “intergalactic computer network,” to which end the precursor of today’s internet, the ARPA, was established in 1969.16

15. As the journalist M. Mitchell Waldrop points out, this idea shows affinity with the Memex, an information retrieval system modeled on the associative processes of thought proposed by the engineer Vannevar Bush in his 1945 article “As We May Think,” at the time presumably unknown to Licklinder. The Memex influenced the development of hypertext systems leading to today’s World Wide Web. The sociologist Fred Turner suggests that Licklinder was steeped in Cybernetics, a scientific theory developed by the mathematician and Licklinder’s colleague Norbert Wiener in the 1940s. In his book The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society (1950), Wiener defines Cybernetics (from the Greek kybernētēs, steersman, governor, pilot, or rudder) as a “new theory of messages,” concerning “means of controlling machinery and society, the development of computing machines and other automata, certain reflections upon psychology and the nervous system, and a tentative new theory of scientific method.” Norbert Wiener, The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 15. Wiener’s theory is based on a comparison of feedback processes as automatic systems, which renders these systems functionally analogous. See Turner, From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism, 108–109.
16. During his talk at the MIT centennial celebrations McCarthy suggested that this system could
3.1.1 The Intergalactic Spacewar Olympics

The idea of an interconnected computer network resonated additionally with elements antagonistic to the hierarchical, centralized forms of organization that surrounded Licklider—the academic-industry-military complex—but who shared the idea of the computer as a tool of rational organization. As documented by the sociologist Fred Turner, the counter-cultural vision of the computer as a tool of consciousness expansion (via the exchange of information) functioned to interweave two seemingly “antithetical” communities: “establishment” engineers be organized as a public utility, “just as the telephone system.” See Waldrop, The Dream Machine: J. C. R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal, 28–29; Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” in The New Media Reader, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 35–47; Waldrop, The Dream Machine: J. C. R. Licklider and the Revolution That Made Computing Personal, 192–193. While the director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA, now DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), Licklider directed funding toward long-term computer-research in universities, helping to shape today’s nexus between industry, the military, and academia. In his 1963 memo entitled “Intergalactic Computer Network,” Licklider encouraged principal investigators at ARPA-funded academic sites to link their time-sharing computers for the benefit of collective research. The ARPAnet was developed from four nodes connecting computers located in various research sites at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), the University of Utah, and the Stanford Research Institute. UCLA’s Network Measurement Center was lead by Leonard Kleinrock; UCSB’s Interactive Mathematics Centre was headed by Glen Culler and Burton Fried; Ivan Sutherland was the head-researcher at the University of Utah’s Computer Science Department; and Douglas Engelbart lead the Stanford Research Institute’s Augmentation Research Center.
and the “New Communalists.” Already sharing proximity in location, at Menlo Park and San Francisco, these communities would eventually also coalesce around ideals of countercultural communitarianism, fueling in turn their quest for “COM-PUTER POWER TO THE PEOPLE!” The intersecting beliefs and philosophies underlying this project were distilled by the journalist Steven Levy in a number of tenets called the “hacker ethic,” whose origins he retroactively traced to the 1960s MIT hackers:

1) Access to computers—and anything which might teach you something about the way the world works—should be unlimited and total. Always yield to the Hands-On Imperative! 2) All information should be free. 3) Mistrust authority—promote decentralization. 4) Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not criteria such as degrees, age, race, sex, or position. 5) You can create art and beauty on a computer. 6) Computers can change your life for the better.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{18}\) This slogan is associated with Theodor Nelson’s “computer lib”—“COMPUTER POWER TO THE PEOPLE! DOWN WITH CYBERCRUD!”—one of the first instances mentioning what Steven Levy was to call the “hacker ethic.” Ted Nelson, *Computer Lib: You can and must understand computers now/Dream Machines: New Freedoms Through Computer Screens—A Minority Report* (Self-Published, 1974), 8. According to Nelson cybercrub referred to the lies told about computers by the powerful (i.e., IBM). He is well-known for his work on Project Xanadu, the first hypertext system which he initiated in 1960.

Partly through Levy’s account of the hacker genealogy, Spacewar gained its lasting aura as a symbol of the gratuitous playfulness of “true hackers.” For the new counter-computing groups forming in California, whom Levy called “hardware hackers,” the game spoke of the promises of decentralization for social change.

In this spirit, journalist-entrepreneur Steward Brand, with the famous New York photographer Annie Liebowitz, reported on the meeting of Spacewar enthusiasts at Stanford, the “Intergalactic Spacewar olympics,” for the magazine *Rolling Stone* in 1972. Part reportage, part manifesto, the article, entitled “Spacewar,

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21. Ibid., 151.

A so-called network-entrepreneur, Brand’s many guises include that of U.S. army soldier; Stanford graduate (Biology, 1960); hippie Bohemian familiar with the work and ideas of American avantgarde figures connected with the Fluxus network, including John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and Alan Kaprow; member of the Merry Pranksters, a California 1964 cult group led by LSD guru and beat/hippie poet Ken Kesey; and the co-editor of the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, a sales catalogue published from 1968 to 1971 offering tools and literature to the ‘drop-out’ hippie communes dotting the North-American rural landscape with Fuller-esque geodesic domes, also used to house military radar systems, exhibitions and civic buildings. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, 41–68 and Freiberger and Swaine, *Fire In The Valley: The Making of the Personal Computer*, 100–101. Brand was also a co-founder of the New Games Foundation, which organized group games for adults, aimed at teaching group spirit; see Andrew Fluegelman and New Games Foundation, *The New Games Book* (Garden City, N.Y.: Dolphin Books, 1976); and Andrew Fluegelman and New Games Foundation, *More new games!–and Playful Ideas from the New Games Foundation* (New York: Dolphin Books/Doubleday,
Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums,” advanced the transformative potential of computers as tools of “the people” from the vantage point of the various elements contributing to the development of the micro-computer, namely: “The youthful fervor and firm dis-Establishmentarianism of the freaks who design computer science; an astonishingly enlightened research program from the very top of the Defense Department; an unexpected market-Banking movement by the manufacturers of small calculating machines, and an irrepressible midnight phenomenon known as Spacewar.”23 As described by Brand, himself centrally influential for the creation of this network, these groups were at work to realize the possibility of a rational collective based on the sharing of knowledge, decentralization, egalitarianism, creativity that would be facilitated by personal computers. In a turn away from antagonistic politics, this project articulated in their stead what essentially amounted to the intellectual activities and work models developing within Cold War research labs on computing as a model for culture at large. Central to this idea was the desire for self-organization thought possible given access to a computer and a playful sensibility. Brand concluded the article on this note, by encouraging readers to engage computers and providing Spacewar’s source code as an incentive.24

1981). He founded several organizations including The WELL, the Global Business Network, and the Long Now Foundation, which are similar in their function as platforms for advocacy of the transformative power of science and technology. The Stanford AI lab was founded by McCarthy, who brought one of Spacewar’s MIT designers, Russel, to the lab in 1962.
24. Source code is the written instructions specifying the actions to be performed by the computer.
As learning resources, computer games were available at low cost through the network of community sites funded by counter-computing groups for the purpose of providing information and public access to computers in the Bay area. Such groups were described by the journalists Paul Freiberger and Michael Swaine as “technological revolutionaries...actively working to overthrow the computer hegemony of IBM and the other computer companies, and to breach the ‘computer priesthood’ of programmers, engineers, and computer operators who controlled access to the machines.”25 The network included the People’s Computer Company (PCC), Whole Earth Truck Store, the Portola Institute, the Free University store and print shop, the Briarpatch food co-op, among others concentrated in Menlo Park.26 The Homebrew Computer Club, which included the future Apple founders Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak as members, grew out of these organizations as a series of hacker gatherings, which eventually developed away from the political line of counter-computing into a hobbyist group freely sharing information and materials on computing (the free sharing of software was famously denounced by Microsoft founder Bill Gates as theft and parasitism in a public statement targeting the Homebrew Computer Club).27 One of the more militant groups, project One in San Francisco ran a community center housed in a space among “200 artists, craftsmen, technicians and ex-professionals” from Xerox and Berkeley Computer


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Corporation (BCC), “and their families.” Interviewed by Brand, the project’s co-founder, programmer and activist Pam Hart, described how the group was working to adapt a computer, the XDS-940, to the needs of researchers investigating “corporations, foundations” and state’s statistical data on the city. Additionally, the machine was also to serve as accounting support for the city’s system of free clinics and as a gaming platform meant to teach programming to anyone interested. Another such initiative, the People’s Computer Company (PCC) published one of the first computer game books designed to teach children how to

28. Project One organized during the protests against the Cambodian invasion at Berkeley around the design of “a retrieval program for coordinating all the actions on campus,” and went on to form “Community Memory,” a computerized community network lasting until the 1980s. Brand, “Spacewar, Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums” and Markoff, What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry, 199.

29. The computer was a hand-me-down from the Stanford research group lead by Douglas Engelbart dedicated to the development of interactive interfaces (i.e., Engelbart is particularly known for patenting the computer mouse in 1963 and for the 1968 presentation at SRI colloquially known as the “the mother of all demos”). The “demo,” in which Brand served as a videographer, consisted of a live demonstration featuring the introduction of the computer mouse, video conferencing, teleconferencing, hypertext, word processing, hypermedia, dynamic file linking, bootstrapping, and a collaborative real-time editor. Engelbart’s political leanings were allegedly Maoist at the time. Chun, Programmed Visions: Software and Memory, 81 and Markoff, What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry, 206; Brand, “Spacewar, Fanatic Life and Symbolic Death Among the Computer Bums.” Incidentally, Project One received a loan from the Whole Earth Catalogue’s left-over funds, handed out at the publication’s ‘Demise Party’ in San Francisco.
program in 1975 (fig. 3.2).\textsuperscript{30} The book was part of a fundraising effort to create more community computer centers and consisted of a list of text-based games designed to teach children BASIC (Beginner’s All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code).\textsuperscript{31} These games, whose main function was to serve as ‘fun’ tools meant to convert players into programmers speak to a vision that Turkle characterizes as a “modernist interpretation of understanding” in which the computer came to embody and symbolize “that it was possible to understand by discovering the hidden mechanisms that made things work...It...promised understanding of the self and


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Figure 3.2: Robert Albrecht and the PCC, *What to Do After You Hit Return or P.C.C.’s First Book of Computer Games*, 1975

the social world.”

3.1.2 World Game

The notion that a total knowledge of the mechanisms governing environments is key for individual and social development was vividly and extensively articulated in World Game (1964), an ambitious project by Richard Buckminster Fuller, a former navy lieutenant, engineer, inventor-entrepreneur and iconic figure among the drop-out rural communities living in Fuller-esque domes who formed Brand’s Whole Earth Catalogue’s target consumers. World Game was defined by Fuller as “an organization of computer capability to deal prognosticatingly with world problems.” However, this game was never fully implemented, at least not in the form that Fuller proposed, which he described as consisting of a giant simulation of earth (the size of a football field) that could be controlled electronically (through a computer) by remote controls via individuals or teams playing collaboratively. Players, mostly University students, utilized comprehensive data including statistics about the earth’s resources, trends and historical knowledge of “generalized principles operative in the physical universe” which were gathered by the team at the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville campus, the headquarters housing

34. ibid., 10. Fuller proposed the game as part of the exhibition housed in a geodesic dome built for the Montreal World Fair 1967 (the dome was built and still remains on display today, though the outer layers covering the structure are now missing due to a fire). The exhibition part of the project was rejected by the United States Information Agency commissioning the project, however. ibid., 17.
Fuller’s newly minted design science devotion. A playful expression of design science, the game had as its goal advancing the “means of making five billion humans a total economic and physical success at the earliest possible moment without anyone being advantaged at the expense of another.” In practice, the idea was to use the game to simulate world trends and propose alternative scenarios toward the increase of wealth for the entire world population without human exploitation and environmental impact. Fuller described the project as “World Peace Gaming Science,” the inverse of “World War Gaming Science” as outlined in game theory by the Princeton mathematician John Von Neumann in 1928.

35. Fuller, The World Game: Integrative Resource Utilization Planning Tool, 2. Fuller’s application of World Game as a pedagogical tool was part of his larger vision to transform education from what he saw as constituting a narrow, specialist focus, no longer resonant with the conditions of a complex industrialized world. His aim was to change the emphasis of the educational system toward a cybernetic, system theory approach, which in practice translated into a focus on generalized, integrative learning meant to produce knowledge which ultimately could bring about the possibility for change. A similar pedagogical schema was also advocated by the British engineer and artist, Roy Ascott at the Ealing and Ipswich Art Schools in Britain during the same time period. Ascott began as a student under Bauhaus influenced mentorship, later developing his interest in transforming art and design education based on cybernetic principles set in practice through various techniques, including games. See Degree Zero 101 (September 2006), http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/degree_zero/; and Is Journey a Game or a piece of Interactive art? (04/15/2012), http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/gamesblog/2012/mar/15/journey-game-or-interactive-art.


The mathematics of game theory as Fuller explained were premised on “a drop dead” or “zero-sum” scenarios which was widely used by world powers during the cold war.\textsuperscript{38} According to Fuller, who was familiar with game theory via his military career, the assumption behind these scenarios was based on Thomas Malthus’ ideas (formulated before Darwinian views on the survival of the fittest) which state that the planet does not contain enough resources to sustain an increasing human population. As a result, political and military leadership is set on a winner-loser situation.\textsuperscript{39} World Game represented a rejection of the competitive drive at the root of game theory and of the antagonism of those striving for “political reform,” as well as repudiated specialization as a strategy toward human evolution.\textsuperscript{40} Because Fuller assumed that conflict (war) was fundamentally rooted in economic factors, his solution was to foster the conditions for abundance, a task to be accomplished through rational planning, i.e., design science, the basis of World Game.\textsuperscript{41} This strategy not only echoed the inter-disciplinarity and collaboration characteristic of Cold War labs (which was also extolled by counter-culture currents as a model for a rationalist society), but also took the point of view of the “modernist understanding” mentioned by Turkle, which in practice signified by what the artist Jordan Crandall deemed “armed vision,” a totalizing, transparent representation associated with the “militarized language...of positioning, tracking,

\textsuperscript{38} Fuller, \textit{The World Game: Integrative Resource Utilization Planning Tool}, 2.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{41} Fuller repeatedly compared the game with Russia’s five-stepped, twenty-five year plan and China’s goal to become rapidly industrialized, in order to make the point that the task he was proposing to accomplish was much more comprehensive and complex. See ibid., 2.
identifying, predicting, targeting, and intercepting/containing” (in effect, Fuller
spoke of re-directing information gathered through the unfolding technological
developments connected to military aims, including spy-satellites and the nascent
internet network). Akin to Licklider, Fuller saw in the development of the com-
puter (i.e., its specialized capabilities including calculation, design and automatic
manufacture) the impetus for the augmentation of the human’s innate “general-
ist” capacities to rationally apprehend and intervene into the whole system. In
World Game, Fuller imagined the players as “artists” or “architects” conceptually
guided not by political action, but by the scientific perspectives of cybernetics
and systems theory which they could test with the help of the computer used
to simulate processes of feedback and “automated” principles of self-regulation
governing the total environment of “spaceship earth” (he was to call this, Syner-
getics, or the study of the patterns inherent in nature’s systems). The players’
god’s view was most visibly represented in the dymaxion map, the centerpiece of
the game, which Fuller developed. The map showed a non-hierarchical view of
the planet as a flat surface consisting of a contiguous island surrounded by one
ocean and could be rearranged in various ways as to highlight various aspects of
the world (fig. 3.3).

ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=115.
44. See R. Buckminster Fuller, Synergetics: Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking (1979), http://
45. This map does not have a right-side up and represents land masses according to proportion
as well as indicates regions by way of coloring that corresponds to the prevalent colors of human
skins in these regions. Fuller maintained that the Mercator map (1569), which is the most preva-
Figure 3.3: World Game players
While the overall gist of World Game evoked rationalism, Fuller’s discourse around the project was at the same time firmly encased in the millenarianism of the Cold War. A case in point, a discussion of the game was included in the volume *Utopia or Oblivion: the Prospects for Humanity* (1969), in which he outlined the two choices facing humanity.46 The polarized mood surrounding Fuller’s mes-

lently used, was culturally biased, a product of linear thought (he never tired to denounce the idea of infinity, which this map represents, as the result of an antiquated perception of the earth as a flat surface). At the same time, the countercultural appeal of the dymaxion map resided in its representation of a world without the hierarchies implied in political borders and the prospect of decentralized stewardship (Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalogue* whose distinct cover featured a photo of the planet earth in space taken by NASA, featured a dedication to Fuller’s faith in system theory; Brand wrote in the introduction to the first section of the catalogue that the publication was devoted to the “Understanding of Whole Systems,” and that “The insights of R. Buckminster Fuller initiated this catalog”). For Fuller’s description of the dymaxion map see Fuller, *The World Game: Integrative Resource Utilization Planning Tool*, 75–81 and for a short examination of Fuller’s iconic status among counterculture see Fred Turner, “R. Buckminster Fuller: A Technocrat for the Counterculture,” in *New Views on R. Buckminster Fuller*, ed. Hsiao-Yun Chu and Roberto G. Trujillo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 146–159. In his discussion of “spaceship earth,” Fuller argued that cybernetics and systems theory held the key to the solution of world problems.

See R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), 87. Fuller’s view of the world as one island as well as his perspective on computers were closely related to McLuhan’s concept of the “global village” and ideas about technologies as extensions of humans: in the same book Fuller stated that computers were extensions of the human brain, a view that he repeated in his discussion of The World Game. ibid., 112 and Fuller, *The World Game: Integrative Resource Utilization Planning Tool*, 176.

sage was captured by Gene Youngblood, an alternative media and video critic then advocating for the implementation of the World Game in a series of articles for the *Los Angeles Free Press*, the largest countercultural publication at the time. Youngblood writes: “There are a lot of young people like me who were pretty uptight and didn’t know what to do with their lives, who have now committed themselves to World Game... It’s really the only possible alternative for positive revolutionary action.”47 “The young lives of mid-century America find themselves perched on the fulcrum of a cosmic balancing act with utopia on the one hand and oblivion the other.”48 “The last either/or in history.”49 This sense of being caught between utopian hope and dystopian reality reflected the broader response to the development of computer technologies among the counterculture. This response oscillated between utopian embrace and paranoid rejection, as in effect, the majoritarian view of computers was of the latter inclination. The computer was widely perceived as a tool of the industrial-academic-military research system, as for instance Turner points out in relation to Free Speech demonstrations at Berkeley with students marching with computer cards around their necks on which punched patterns of holes read: “FSM” (an acronym standing for Free Speech Movement and Do not fold, spindle or mutilate) and “Strike.”50 Against

50. Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, 1–2. The warning “Do not fold, spindle or mutilate” was printed on IBM punch cards used for public purposes such as student registration since the 1930s (the statistician
this backdrop the computer yielded to the forces of technocracy and the extant economic and political powers for whom such development represented a means toward the pursuit of profits. Within this scenario the engineers associated with the nascent videogame industry began focusing on the development of games as consumer products, not as means to bring “Power to the people.”

3.2 In the Beginning

The inception of the industry is associated with Atari, a videogame company founded by Nolan Bushnell in the Bay area in 1972, amongst what Levy calls Herman Hollerith used punch card to tabulate the 1890 census in the United States and was the founder of one of the companies that later merged to form IBM). By the 1960s the cards became symbolic of the alienation and hostility felt against centralized systems: the state, the corporate world and the university. See Steven Lubar, “”Do Not Fold, Spindle or Mutilate”: A Cultural History of the Punch Card,” Journal of American Culture 15, no. 4 (1992): 43–55. The speech delivered by Berkeley student Mario Savio at the FSM sit-in in December, 1964 captured the mood among students for whom the machine metaphorically stood for the entirety of a dehumanizing system: “There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can’t take part; you can’t even passively take part, and you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you’ve got to make it stop. And you’ve got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you’re free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!” See Free Speech Movement Archives, “Mario Savio’s speech before the FSM sit-in,” http://www.fsm-a.org/stacks/mario/mario_speech.html.
the “game hackers,” a younger generation with business acumen.\(^\text{51}\) An engineer, Bushnell began his career as an entrepreneur with a failed attempt at commercially adapting Spacewar, and subsequently successfully launching Pong (Atari, 1972) (fig. 3.4) as an arcade game.\(^\text{52}\) While neither innovative nor original (Pong was a slightly modified version of another game that appeared earlier on the Magnavox’s Odyssey system (Magnavox), the first home/family gaming platform that plugged into a TV set to play electronic Ping-Pong [fig. 3.5]), Pong arcades and Magnavox-like consoles such as the Atari 2600 (1977) contributed to the public’s familiarization with interactive computer technologies.\(^\text{53}\) But Atari’s success was in part also


\(^{52}\) Nolan Bushnell encountered Spacewar as an engineering student in Utah and again at Stanford. His adaptation of the game was called Computer Space (Nutting Associates, 1971), the first mass-produced gaming arcade. The first commercial version of Spacewar was a coin-op game, Galaxy Game, designed by Bill Pitts and Hugh Tuck and installed at Stanford’s Tresidder Union coffeehouse, which was patronized by a mix of counter-culture, anti-war activists, Stanford students and high-schoolers. See Patrick May, “At Google, 1970s Coin-Operated Video Game Provides Inspiration,” San Jose Mercury News (8-18-2010), http://www.theledger.com/article/20100818/NEWS/8185012?tc=ar and Markoff, What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry, 217. These games were commercial failures, albeit instructive ones in that they showed that consumers had to be taught to interact with interactive technologies (in this sense, Spacewar was hardly adept to mass-consumption). Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon–The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World, 32–35.

\(^{53}\) ibid., 45–48. Atari’s Pong had sound capabilities and a score teller, unlike the tennis game on the Magnavox system. Both games are often cited in genealogies of videogames in conjunction with the 1975 Magnavox court suit concerning copyright infringement filed on behalf of Ralph
a source of decline, as its videogames and machines met enthusiastic reception among traditional consumers and the new breed of hacker-entrepreneurs alike. The latter were by in large composed of developers selling unauthorized game cartridges for Atari’s home entertainment system, the Atari 2600 (1977). Small-scale hardware hacking of Atari’s consoles was more rare, but it also existed.\(^{54}\)

Baer, a German émigré and a Sanders Associates’ head engineer holding the patent for the system, which dated from 1968. The case was settled on a compromise, with Atari’s purchase of the Odyssey’s license for US$700,000, and the condition that Magnavox was to obtain the rights to Atari products developed over the next year. Atari’s competitors would have to pay royalties to Magnavox. See Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon–The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World*, 47. The company continued filing similar court suits against other electronic entertainment companies like Bally-Midway, Mattel, Activision, Coleco, Sega, and Nintendo. Baer estimates that videogame licensees were to pay “close to a hundred million dollars for Magnavox, Sanders and ... the lawyers.” Baer, *Videogames: In the Beginning*, 16. Atari pursued a similar route after purchasing the patent of *Pong* in 1974. Low cost PCs and computer software were introduced by Apple, Radio Shack, Commodore, and Atari in the early 1980s. See Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, 303.

\(^{54}\) For instance, Atari attempted to sue a small shop ran by two MIT students, Doug Macrae and Kevin Curran, who sold board kits designed to be inserted in Atari’s arcades to play modified versions of existing games, but ultimately opted instead for employing them as game developers. The boards were first produced to modify Atari’s arcade game *Missile Command* (1980); Macrae and Curran went on to develop a modified and unauthorized version of the arcade game *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980), *Ms. Pac-Man* (1981) for Bally-Midway. See Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon–The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World*, 167–173. Among the unauthorized game developers, Mystique was one of the most notorious for releasing pornographic games for the Atari 2600. One of these games, entitled *Custer’s Revenge* (1982), caused protests from women’s and Native American groups because it
The proliferation of low-grade and ‘pirated’ products eventually resulted in the loss of consumer interest in Atari’s products.  

The “golden age of videogames,” as often referred to by fans, names the re-emergence of the videogame industry under the rigid corporate structures of Japanese media-entertainment transnationals operating with the benefit of hindsight post “videogame crash” in the United States. Arcade culture became synonymous with games like Space Invaders (1978, Taito) and Pac-Man (1980, Bally’s Midway, Namco), while the company Nintendo dominated the game console market with the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES, 1985) and the Gameboy, a handheld game device (1989). Nintendo became additionally emblematic of the broader

55. This event is known in videogame folklore as the “North American videogame crash” of 1983, and associated with Atari’s demise, which various authors attribute to a mix of poor quality products produced by the company as well as others, management and labor conflicts, as well as market oversaturation due in large part to rampant piracy. See Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009), 66–79; Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon–The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World, 226–227; and Dyer-Witheford and Peuter, Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games, 10–11.

56. Nintendo was founded as a playing card manufacturer in 1889, entering the market of electronic games as a distributor in 1974, when it secured a license to the Magnavox Odyssey
Figure 3.4: Pong (arcade), 1972

Figure 3.5: Magnavox Odyssey, 1972

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focus on anti-piracy measures surpassing Atari’s, including the lock down of consoles and game software in addition to engaging an in-house legal team specializing in copyright infringement. The introduction of low-cost network PCs and the internet in the 1990s would enable the conditions to decentralize and ultimately for the alignment of proprietary and sharing cultures, bringing videogames to their current hybrid forms.

3.2.1 Hybrid Games

As an universal machine and a network communication tool, the PC opened access to knowledge on hacking and programming and a platform for distribution of materials to a wide-community associated with the rise of game modification or modding culture. While connected to the rapid development of telecommunication, videogame console in Japan. Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games: From Pong to Pokemon–The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the World, 346–366. 57. This period is also associated with the beginnings of a fierce market-share competition between console manufacturers akin to a technological race driven by the pursuit of ever increasing graphical and processing capabilities, from which Sony would emerge as a frontrunner with the PlayStation (1994). 58. Modding, an abbreviation of modification, became a popular term with PC games denoting an addition introduced by a nonprofessional made by reverse-engineering the game’s map files, the packages containing levels, graphics and other game data. These programs were first distributed through manuals, often sold at a low-price in computer stores, as well as through Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs) and later through the internet. As previously noted, the development of the internet in the United States was publicly financed via military funding of computer re-
nication technologies and the internet, at the same time, as Levy suggests, the rise of the caché of hacker culture is associated with the resurgence of the decentralist visions of counter-computing culture of the 1960s in the high-tech culture of Silicon Valley as exemplified by cyberpunk, a cultural movement emerging in the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{59} The libertarian strand of hackerism expounded in cyberpunk search in the context of the Cold War arms race. By the late 1980s, citizens in the United States and Europe gained limited access to the network, with commercial Information Service Providers (ISPs) emerging in the 1990s. The usability of the internet improved with the introduction of the World Wide Web, created by Tim Berners-Lee and his colleagues at the Centre Européenne pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN) in 1990. The Web took advantage of hyperlinks embedded in documents and the new Universal Resource Locator (URL), which made it easier to connect, locate and publish information, as well as incorporate multimedia formats. Mosaic, a Web browser which allowed users to associate hyperlinks with images and post color images within their Web pages was developed by a team led by Marc Andreesen at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) and released in 1993, helping to further drive the growth of the Web and making the commercialization of the internet desirable. Andreesen went on to found Netscape, a commercial browser manufacturer, whose product, the Netscape browser, helped drive the rise of e-commerce. Finally, deregulatory measures opened the internet to commercial traffic by 1995. 


\textsuperscript{59} Cyberpunk is linked to the noir cyber science-fiction novels of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, among others. Steven Levy, \textit{Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution} (Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2010), 379. The prefix cyber derives from Cybernetics, while the punk suffix refers
publications such as *Mondo 2000* and *Wired* paved the way for the cultural and economic valorization of the hacker ethic (i.e., free speech, free information, self-organization and decentralization) as a crucial and innovative force for the development of the new information economy and more broadly society at large. In the wake of the demise of the Soviet Communist empire in 1991, the connection of computers and the internet with the decentralist values and attitude underpinning the hacker ethic resonated deeply with the playfulness of the fluid self, libertarian politics, and neo-liberalist economics. The underlying imaginary of the heady mix of net-utopianism was captured by the figure of the hacker modeled on the “cowboy” of North American pioneer culture, the “console cowboy” central to the prose of cyberpunk author William Gibson.60

Befittingly, as an early developer of networked first-person shooter (FPS) PC games, the Texas-based company id Software (1991) was at the forefront of a format that became highly influential for the growth and development of modding culture on the internet. id was founded by four members of the computer

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60. In *Neuromancer* (1984), Gibson’s novel written before the mainstreaming of the internet, he alludes to the link between cyberspace and videogames when he writes that “The matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games.” The book represents cyberspace as a cerebral, hallucinatory experience. Gibson’s console cowboy is epitomized by the protagonist of *Neuromancer*, Henry Dorsett Case, a talented hacker, hustler and drug addict neurally ‘damaged’ by the criminal organization whom he betrayed (he was caught stealing) and attempting a dangerous hacking scheme on behalf of an mysterious figure in order to obtain a cure. William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), 69.
company Softdisk: programmers John Carmack and John Romero, game designer Tom Hall, and artist Adrian Carmack (no relation to John Carmack). id’s members personified the “console cowboy” image through their penchant for fast cars, signature long hair (John Romero), and gore-cyberpunk themed videogames.61 The company emerged subsequent a failed attempt at securing the rights to develop PC games for Nintendo and a foray into PC gaming with the Commander Keen series (1990), which incorporated the cartoon-style and side-scrolling action of Nintendo games and was distributed by Apogee, a DOS shareware game publisher.62 Within a market dominated by entirely proprietary games and consoles, id’s shareware distribution model which lend users a free sample of a game and its editor, quickly gained the company a community of modders engaged in reverse engineering game files, and freely-sharing and showcasing programs (level-editors) used to create entirely new games.63 id took a number of measures in response, including hiring the more talented modders, developing customizable games allowing for the modification of sound and characters, as well as develop-

62. Previous to id’s founding, the future id Software founders, John Romero, Tom Hall, and John Carmack approached Nintendo with a PC hack of Nintendo’s Super Mario Bros. 3., but the company declined to enter the PC market. The trio named the company after Sigmund Freud’s id, the locus of inchoate instincts and monstrous drives. See Heather Chaplin and Aaron Ruby, Smartbomb: the Quest for Art, Entertainment, and Big Bucks in the Videogame Revolution (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005), 100; and Kushner, Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture, 55–57.
63. Shareware distribution of software was already well-established in the late 1980s.
ing legal frameworks restricting access to game engines (the core source code of the game) in an attempt at protecting its intellectual property. To this end, shortly after the release of *Doom* (1993), id's highly popular networked FPS on the internet, the company developed a Data Utility License (DUL) designed to regulate the creation of editing utilities for the game. The DUL required that authors of *Doom* editors sign and abide by the company's terms of use, which included restrictions protecting the game engine from reverse engineering, enabling the editor to only work with the commercial version of *Doom* (not with the freely available shareware version), and obliging authors to submit a copy of their editor to id and to conspicuously display id's logo in acknowledgment of the company's trademark ownership.\footnote{Andrew Mactavish, “Licensed to Play: Digital Games, Player Modifications, and Authorized Production,” 2008, http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companionDLS/. id's PC games include *Castle Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), *Doom* (1993), and the *Quake* series (1996), the latter two with networked multiplayer gaming capabilities supporting real-time interaction between multiple players. id's *Doom* and *Quake* became known for the Deathmatch feature played via computers connected to a LAN and on the internet, involving individual players or teams to face each other in a medievalesque tournament. A notorious live match is the id sponsored 1997 “Red Annihilation Deathmatch Tournament,” in which players competed for the grand prize: Carmack's “cherry-red Ferrari 328.” Kushner, *Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture*, 248–252.} In sum, the license served to effectively protect id’s intellectual property, while potentially increasing its knowledge base (since all editors were to be submitted to id), and fostering game sales (given that utilities only worked with the commercial version of *Doom*).\footnote{Mactavish, “Licensed to Play: Digital Games, Player Modifications, and Authorized Production-}
proprietary claims to the game engine (not the creation of mods) proved fortuitous, bringing id both revenue and hacker credibility as the company repeatedly benefited from the licensing of game engines to other commercial developers, while encouraging fans to creatively contribute by freely releasing the source code of the older versions of game engines.

Additionally, id’s experiences with Doom were instructive to then-emerging game developers such as Valve Software, creators of Half-Life (1998), and Epic Games, creators of Unreal Tournament (1999), both FPS games. In contrast to id, these companies sought to actively manage modding communities and their creative practices rather than solely relying on copyright law and licensing agreements. In interest of signaling “hacker ethic,” Valve brought Counter-Strike (fig. 3.6), a popular 1999 fan-mod for Half-Life, a game using a licensed modified version of id’s Quake engine.66 Authored by two engineering students, Minh Lee and

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66. Mactavish, “Licensed to Play: Digital Games, Player Modifications, and Authorized Production.”
Jess Cliffe, *Counter-Strike* was developed over the internet and pays ‘homage’ to id’s *Quake* (1996), transposing the latter’s “counterstrike” rounds of death matching with terrorist and counter-terrorists teams pitted in a series of rounds ending by completion of the mission’s objectives or by elimination of the opposing team. *Counter-Strike’s* continued popularity online effectively added to the longevity of *Half-Life* (the latter’s sequel was released in 2004, a long time for a sequel driven industry). Valve’s purchase of a fan mod is exceptional, however. Typical of most videogame companies is Epic’s strategic legitimization and support of mod culture through the distribution of utilities to assist with user content creation and the development of legal frameworks known as End User License Agreements (EULAs), which are designed to protect intellectual property, maximize profit and minimize litigation by exonerating the company from responsibility for player-produced content.  

67 For instance, the EULA for Epic’s *Unreal Tournament* (UT2004) explicitly states that mods must only work with retail and registered versions of the game and cannot be sold without the company’s permission, but on the other hand, the company provides materials and guidelines that encourage the use of content from past *Unreal* games for UT2004 mods in an attempt at managing its branding and consolidating the value of its intellectual property. But support of modding practices by videogame companies is not limited to FPSs; well-known game developers employing similar strategies include Maxis, the creator of the Sims series (2002–2007), known for attracting a female fan base, and Blizzard,

67. Mactavish, “Licensed to Play: Digital Games, Player Modifications, and Authorized Production.”
the developer of the *World of Warcraft* series (2004–2011), to date the most subscribed massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) with 10.3 million players globally (the game is often discussed in relation to “gold-farming,” a term designating unsanctioned for-profit exchanges among players). These games employ modding as the end of play itself as is the case of ‘social gaming,’ a rising trend with free customizable games like *FarmVille* and *Mafia Wars* (Zynga), and others, played over Facebook or on mobile devices, like iPhones. As Turkle noted these forms of play speak to the possibilities of the flexible and pluralistic self through play with both one’s virtual selves in computer communication, as well as with endless others; in her words, they are “dramatic examples of how computer-mediated communication can serve as a place for the construction and reconstruction of identity,” and one may add, of reality and collective relations.

Currently, the possibility for consumers to playfully engage and self-adapt products is acclaimed as the latest trend in marketing. This strategy is associated with terms like “prosumer,” (combining the terms professional and consumer, or producer and consumer), and “crowd-sourcing,” (a combination of the words crowd and outsourcing), both associated with the so-called knowledge-driven industries. In practice this trend ushered in the rise of customization and ‘social

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70. Crowd-sourcing was coined by Jeff Howe in a June 2006 Wired magazine article “The Rise of Crowdsourcing,” in which he discussed it as a way to reverse the outsourcing of production to
media’ combining mobile technologies and the so-called Web 2.0, a term designating online platforms such as Second Life, social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, etc., which are similar to videogames in their integration and management of the informational flows associated with the pleasure and leisure activities of the network collective with rational goals (i.e., the market). The role of the collective as consumers-producers of culture is likewise centrally implicated in newly-coined concepts such as “hybrid economies,” “creative economies,” and “collective intelligence,” terms that as a whole stress the positive impact of digital technologies to organize collective creativity fueling decentralized capitalist forms of production and consumption.71 Here it is worth
countries like China. See Jeff Howe, “The Rise of Crowdsourcing,” Wired 14, no. 6 (June 2006),
http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html. The term “prosumer,” was
advanced by the futurologist Alvin Toffler in his 1980 book, The Third Wave, in which he noted that
the transition from a industrialized society to a information economy meant that mass standard-
ized products would become obsolete, thus advising businesses to initiate the mass-production of
customization as a way to maintain profit. See Alvin Toffler, The Third Wave (New York: Bantam
71. One of the most vocal proponents in the United States, the Harvard lawyer Lawrence Lessig
discusses the creative role of ‘remix’ technologies in relation to the “hybrid economy” of capital,
his term for “a practice of exchange” that combines sharing and commercial economies. Lawrence
Lessig, Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy (New York: Penguin, 2009),
116. Lessig’s examples of these economies include gaming-like platforms such as Second Life,
information sharing sites like Dogster, Craigslist, Flickr, YouTube, Google, Politech, Slashdot,
Last.fm, Usenet (Microsoft products), Yahoo!Answers, Wikipedia, Lostpedia (one of the fan sites
dedicated to Lost, a television series), and online role-playing games (RPGs), such as World of
Warcraft. ibid., 177–224. See also John Howkins, The Creative Economy: How People Make Money
noting George Gilder, techno-utopian and advocate of the neoconservative economic politics (he was President Reagan’s favorite author), as a precursor of creative capitalism advocates. In his book, *Wealth and Poverty* (1981) Gilder puts forward a critique of the centralist mentality of Socialist economies and an argument for decentralized capitalism, whose moral center is according to him, the “giving impulse...no less central to all creative and productive activity.”


72. George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 7. Of note is Gilder’s framework as he mobilizes the idea of ritual tribal exchange, the economy of potlatch developed by Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss to sustain his argument for the generosity of capitalism, which he sees similarly as the waging of risk without the certainty of return.
lies underlying these visions, namely that the rationalization of creativity, skills, and knowledge will lead to societal transformation echo the utopian rationalist dreams distilled in the hacker ethic of Cold War planners and counter-cultural movements following on the legacy of the avant-gardes, but ultimately tracing to eighteenth-century romantic formulations regarding the relationship between the political and the social in which the coupling between reason and decentralized governance was first made. The decentralist drive of knowledge-based economies is not without opportunities, however, as its hybrid model of production and consumption supported by computer networks functions also to enable the conditions for acts of playful dissent, undesirable from the point of view of companies.

3.3 Random War

That the strategies employed by the videogame industry to control collective production, be it through the management of creation and distribution of materials or through legal recourse, are to date by in and large supportive of players’ participation is in part due to awareness that players’ contributions as knowledge and content producers are hallmarks of thriving information economies, but also because of the fact that complete control over these activities is impossible. While supporting and managing modding practices gives companies substantial command over the community’s creation and distribution of content (for instance, developers may claim royalty-free rights on user-generated content) ultimately there is
little that companies can do to reach and control unauthorized flows of knowledge and exchange. Speaking at the first Hackers’ Conference in 1984 Brand already articulated one of the most obvious aspects of this paradox; as he put it: “Information Wants To Be Free. Information also wants to be expensive...That tension will not go away. It leads to endless wrenching debate about price, copyright, ‘intellectual property,’ the moral rightness of casual distribution, because each round of new devices makes the tension worse, not better.”73 And so, no matter how centralized the game environment, as Blizzard and other companies found out, or secure the console, as Sony has recently experienced with the PlayStation 3, hackers will find the means to create and distribute unauthorized materials.74

The flexibility and reach of videogames are factors that make the medium similarly attractive to artists using videogames as activist tools in the last decade and a half. In comparison with hacker communities, artists engaged relatively late with computers, though the current hybridization of art and technology was already immanent in the 1960s within collaborations between artists and engineers and in some cases with artist-engineers with access to research computers.75 Then


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Ford. The program determined the distribution and position of soldiers on the battlefield, their military ranks, and who was to die or to be wounded. The outputs of computer-generated instructions included “1. Total number of dead on each side; 2. Total number of wounded on each side; 3. The number of dead and wounded in each of forty sectors of the battlefield; 4. Identification of the dead and wounded in alphabetical order; 5. The survivors in alphabetical order.” At the height of mass protests against the Vietnam war, Random War’s striking juxtaposition of abstraction and reality commented on the detached rationalism of computers at the service of the “establishment” of which IBM stood as symbol, herein echoing counter-computing sentiment contributing in part to the impetus for the development of the micro-computer, the “dream machine,” as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Borne out in the collaborative research culture of academic and industry labs as dictated by the exigencies of Cold War, and steeped in the counterculture’s utopian dreams of decentralization, the networked personal computer, inadvertently provided an interface between art, activist, and corporate cultures. Supported by computer networks, today’s videogames function as hybrid environments—as an ideal commodity form of decentralized power that is “instantaneous, experiential, fluid, flexible, heterogenous, customized, portable, and permeated by a fashion with form and style”—and as an ideal activist medium for those who see in these

77. Reagan was a former Hollywood actor, and the then Republican governor of California; Ford was then a Republican member of the House of Representatives.
79. Ibid.
Figure 3.7: Charles Csuri, *Random War*, detail, 1967
forms the impetus and possibilities for engaging and transforming present conditions.\textsuperscript{80}

CHAPTER 4
NOMADIC RESISTANCE

This chapter examines interventions in digital games associated with tactical media (TM), a form of playful electronic activism emerging in response to the utopian promises of decentralization that accompanied the mainstreaming of digital networks in the 1990s. A discussion of the artistic, activist and theoretical tendencies articulating TM as a contestational concept and media practice provides points of reference for analysis of TM activism in digital games. These interventions are conceived as détournements of commercial games in particular and of electronic networks in general. In line with the politicized role of the ludic in practices associated with avant-gardism and counter-culture, TM engages digital play in attempts at catalyzing the need and desire for individual and collective transformation. At the same time, in direct contradiction with the utopian impetus of these currents, TM games are primarily aimed at raising questions about the ways in which the instrumentalization and categorization of human singularity intertwine with digital game environments and with the economic, political and cultural conditions of the collective sphere.

4.1 A New Avant-garde of Embodiment

TM emerged within institutions and initiatives funding and otherwise promoting open forms of media distribution and electronic media arts in Western Europe in
the context of increasing cultural mobility and access to digital technologies and networks, post-1989. The term Tactical Media originated at the Next Five Minutes (N5M) festival in Amsterdam, an event convening alternative and DYI media communities “exploring connections between art, electronic media and politics.”

In a recent discussion, Felix Stalder characterized these events “as tactical because they were not geared towards setting up long-term structures, but towards quick interventions that could be realized with high ingenuity and low budgets...partly as an attempt to sidestep the exhausting debates about identity and representation that had been raging for more than a decade.”


2. Felix Stalder, “30 Years of Tactical Media,” in Public Netbase: Non Stop Future: New Practices in Art and Media, ed. Branka Curcic et al. (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Revolver-Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, 2008), 192. Alternatively, art venues and media initiatives in Europe like Prix ARS Electronica (Austria), Documenta (Kassel, Germany), the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) (Karlsruhe, Germany) and Public Netbase (Austria), among others, offered international artists and activists opportunities to develop work in new media. Various theorists relate the term tactical to Michel de Certeau’s notion of tactics, or unconscious ways that weaker elements engage to counter the strategies of the powerful. Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For instance, David Garcia and Geert Lovink define TM in relation to the “tactical ethics and aesthetics” of popular (mis)appropriations of tools and “styles” of capitalism. Garcia and Lovink, “The ABC of Tactical Media,” 107–110. Similarly,
the internet coincided with the ascent of neo-conservative power symbolized by the neo-liberal economic politics ushered in by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the 1980s, but also reflected in the cultural sphere then dominated by the so-called “culture wars” led by Republican politicians and religious fundamentalists against the increased visibility of feminist, gay and artists of color responding to multiculturalism and the AIDS crisis. On this bleak backdrop, the anti-authorianism of the 1960s counter-computing hippies trickled down to the net utopianism of cyberpunk discourses accompanying the mainstreaming of com-


3. See for instance Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine, eds., Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America (New York: New York University Press, 1999). The aftermath of the “culture wars” saw a Republican majority Congress voting to end grants by the NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) to individual artists and cutting its budget by 40 percent. The NEA was founded in 1965 under the Johnson Administration. After 1996, much of the funding for the public arts went to popular school and community projects in music, folk arts and museum-preservation programs. The term “culture war” references in this case Antonio Gramsci’s stress on cultural hegemony as a fundamental condition of social class domination.
puters and computer networks. The visions underlying these discourses as Erik Davis highlighted, reverberated powerfully with long-standing and thus largely ‘hidden’ mystical traditions and historical currents upholding “techgnosis,” his term for the intense fascination with transcendence and technologies of communication in Western culture, manifesting in full force yet again at the dawn of the millennium.⁴ A telling example is the dream of immortality through consciousness downloading into computers as articulated by cyberpunk writer William Gibson in a then often quoted line from his book Neuromancer: “the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat.”⁵ Mark Dery foregrounded the link between the discourse of posthumanism of the “laissez-faire libertarian” utopians and the rise of the “secular myth” of the internet as a space of fluid identities and infinite possibilities, including “re-embodiment in the ‘shiny new body of the style, color, and material of your choice.’”⁶ The so-called ‘cyborg,’ an hybrid of animal, machine and human, thus seen positively to be beyond identity politics, became emblematic of the overall jest of net utopianism, according to which in the disembodied, cerebral environments of the internet all humans are equal and free. The widespread engagement with this identity in digital culture forms, including videogames, by the mid-nineties concretely demonstrated the appeal and diffusion of these discourses which echoed the broader cultural

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⁵ Gibson, Neuromancer, 6.
valorization of the hybrid, decentered identity associated with postmodernism.7

The charged political and philosophical orientations of net utopianism vis-à-vis the body, and in particular the alignment of the notion of fluid, hybrid identities with the new exigencies of capital was a central concern to a number of cultural activists associated with TM speaking to the relevance of the internet as a site of political intervention.8 Among these groups, the cyberfeminist collective subRosa connected the disembodiment of digital environments with the sphere of “pan-capitalist social relations” in line with standing historical feminist and post-colonial critiques of the body-mind dualism which permeates Western thought.9 The group called for “new activist concepts and projects of ‘becoming autonomous’” in the interest of developing a political position that embodies autonomy as an antidote to the authoritarian underpinnings of the dominant culture.10 Earlier, in the later 1990s, the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), a group of TM


artists with roots in guerrilla performance, issued a call to artist-activists to form an avant-garde willing to develop “electronic disturbance.” The group cited the inadequacy of focused concerns about free access to information as grounds on which to enact this project while noting that “developing systems of communication may provide another utopian opportunity... If cynical power has withdrawn from the spectacle into the electronic net, then that is also where pockets of resistance must emerge.”11 Drawing on the concepts of rhizomes and nomadism of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, CAE suggested that small groups or “cells” would be best suited to intervene into the condition of “nomadic capital,” thriving

on the mobility, dispersion and elusiveness afforded by network technologies.\textsuperscript{12} Cells would be formed by those working with new technologies, including activists, artists, theorists, hackers and lawyers, who were as such well positioned to intervene. Drawing on the “historical tendency” of recombination found in

various forms in revolutionary, avant-garde and hacker movements, these cells would work to adapt, refine, theorize and intensify electronic disobedience. In keeping with its impulse as a critique and intervention into the hybrid identity celebrated in nomadic capital, the new avant-garde of electronic resistance was also skeptical of the transcendent identity of historical avant-gardism. In a literal pun on the term avant-garde, meaning forerunners (originally referring to the front ranks of a military formation), CAE wrote:

The avant-garde today cannot be the mythic entity it once was. No longer can we believe that artists, revolutionaries, and visionaries are able to step outside of culture to catch a glimpse of the necessities of history as well as the future. Nor would it be realistic to think that a party of individuals of enlightened social consciousness (beyond ideology) has arrived to lead the people into a glorious tomorrow. However, a less appealing (in the utopian sense) form of the avant-garde does exist.14

Thus the new avant-garde is pragmatically defined since it draws on those “trained and ready” to engage “disruption in cyberspace” based on shared desire for change. TM’s cellular configuration fits Hakim Bey’s understanding of the immediatist organization “devoted to the overcoming of separation” in contrast to planning

model engaged by revolutionary institutions.\textsuperscript{15} As opposed to the transcendence (externality) of “enlightened consciousness,” TM relates to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s “plane of immanence,” a concept that relates the idea that everything is a mode of one substance and thus on the same level of existence. In this sense, TM cannot be understood as an attempt at reinstating identity as a grounds of a political project, but rather as an assault at the deep-seated privilege of identity over difference.\textsuperscript{16} In a similar vein, “ontological anarchy,” Bey’s term for an autonomous politics whose unfolding is immanent on being/doing/becoming (its expression) is a fitting characterization of TM practices.\textsuperscript{17} Rather than a blueprint, TM is thus more accurately articulated, in Bey’s words as “a game for free spirits.”\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{16} Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 41. Deleuze and Guattari consider identity as the possibility of thought, though it is difference that is the generative principle of real thought (in terms of a political project, difference can be understood as the difference of power relations.)

\textsuperscript{17} Hakim Bey, \textit{Immediatism} (San Francisco: AK Press, 2001).

\textsuperscript{18} Bey and (M.O.R.C.), “Ontological Anarchy in a Nutshell (Radio Sermonettes).”
4.2 Action! New Avant-garde Games

TM interventions in digital games were largely realized in 1990s during a period in which internet environments were rapidly emerging, but still mostly unstable. Net-artist Olia Lialina speaks of a “vernacular web” in noting that the flourishing of the world wide web during this time was the work of amateurs “soon to be washed away by dot.com ambitions, professional authoring tools and guidelines designed by usability experts.”19 This window in time provided an ideal environment for activists intent on exploiting the widening use of computer technologies (due to decreasing costs) given the possibility of circumventing the separation between sender and receiver and reaching users already organized around new forms of entertainment culture. Digital games thus suggested attractive forms to those hoping to catalyze behaviors that embody a political position deemed by Subrosa as “becoming autonomous.”20 To paraphrase the group, the concepts and practices grounding this position relate the refutal of the culture of authority, separation and exclusion of social and economic hierarchies upheld by proprietary knowledge, accumulation of resources and competition, and on welcoming difference, skill exchange, and collaboration as the grounds for the development of “common wealth of knowledge and power.”21 Conceived as détournements of

existing games, as “electronic disturbances” or as “exploits,” which for the most part utilize the decentralized configurations of internet networks, TM interventions in games as a whole challenge the instrumentalization of playful notions of identity and reality in videogame entertainment. I want to stress that the notion of exploits as theorized by Alex Galloway and Eugene Thacker, as involving the discovery of “holes in existent technologies and projecting potential change through those holes” is just one aspect of these interventions. Galloway and Thacker, The Exploit, 81. “Social engineering,” a term associated with celebrity hacker Kevin Mitnick, which refers to exploiting human psychology to gain access to facilities, systems or data is an important facet of hacker practices as well as a factor foregrounded in TM. See for a discussion of “social engineering” Kevin D. Mitnick and William L. Simon, The Art of Deception: Controlling the Human Element of Security (Indianapolis, IN: Wiley, 2002).

One of the earliest TM détournements of videogames, the Simcopter hack (USA, 1996) (fig. 4.1) targeted the company’s brand, Maxis, at the time also developing The Sims. Initially, Jacques Servin, a gay programmer, made the news in 1997 when he was fired by the company, after 50,000 modified SimCopter units, with surreptitiously inserted scantily clad male characters kissing each other, were shipped across the country during the Christmas season of 1996.22 The characters, as the programmer explained, were triggered under certain conditions, on

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his birthday, on his boyfriend’s birthday and on Friday the 13th. In the movie “The Yes Men,” Servin (who is one of the Yes Men, ®’ark’s performative counterparts) claimed the Simcopter hack and recounted how he heard about ®’ark from a friend. Set along the lines of Dada’s appropriation of institutional fronts, ®’ark was an anonymous information brokerage company modeled on the ‘elusive’ guise of electronic capital, and lending the benefits of “corporate protection” to “cultural profit” via a website that served as liaison between ‘investors’ and corporate saboteurs seeking funding for projects grouped under “mutual funds.” According to Servin, he dialed into ®’ark’s BBS, signed up for a project that proposed videogame designers to hack videogames, and was eventually paid $5,000 in the form of a money order as a reward for the risk (the funds were provided by an anonymous donor). But the real reward came as Maxis was publicly embarrassed by the prominent media coverage about the hack on national and international channels. Servin soon got another job that paid double his old job, and in retrospect gained something far more rewarding than monetary rewards—a sense

24. The group came to prominence by claiming involvement in a series of interventions involving spoof websites targeting the brand image of powerful entities, including politicians, corporations, and religious authorities. Likewise it is not at all clear that the Simcopter hack happened as Servin claims.
of empowerment: “I felt more powerful. I brought down a system a little bit. I embarrassed a whole company. I affected a stock.”

In the movie Servin states that the Simcopter hack was motivated by frustration with working conditions at Maxis where he was employed as a game designer for a year without vacation and at the time of the hack working 60-hour weeks, combined with dissatisfaction with the masculine stereotypes in mainstream macho-action-games. and the Yes Men call these dadaesque targetings of corporate branding, “identity correction,” performed with the aim of giving “a more accurate portrayal of powerful public figures and institutions than they themselves do.”

About the time of Simcopter, UK and Jamaica based art collective, Mongrel, released Blacklash (1996) (fig. 4.2) as part of the Natural Selection search engine designed to intercept and direct query terms for sex, race and eugenics to content commenting on racism and sexism on the internet (fig. 4.3). The project


29. Mongrel is defunct, but former members continue to produce work under different groups. Core members included Richard Pierre Davis (Trinidad), Matsuko Yokokoji (Japan), Mervin Jarman (Jamaica) and Graham Hardwood (Britain); other associates of the group include Matthew Fuller, Lisa Haskell, Carole Wrights, and Steve Edgell; the Mongrel network also included groups in India, South Africa, and Surinam communities in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Natural Selection is archived under Mongrel, Natural Selection, http://mongrel.org.uk/naturalselection.
Figure 4.1: @™ark, SimCopter, 1996
played off the explosion of search engines in the 1990s to ‘pass’ as a legitimate search engine. In fact, *Natural Selection* linked racialized terms (e.g., white, paki, nigga, etc.) to the group’s server holding a database of websites contributed by artists and collectives, including CAE, Steward Home, Daniel Waugh, Hakim Bey, and the poet Dimela Yekwai, among others. The database included parodies of white supremacist music, sites offering advice to prospective illegal immigrants to Britain, poetic histories of eugenics, ‘biased’ heritage software meant to locate one’s non-white relatives, fake biotech companies offering their services to those wishing to racially engineer their offspring, and *Blacklash*, a game designed as an inversion of the shoot-the-alien action of Spacewar spinoffs such as Space Invaders (Taito, 1978) and Tempest (Atari, 1981). In *Blacklash*, the aliens are represented as swastika-adorned spiders, policemen and Ku Klux Klan, and the player takes on clichèd black-male roles like Crime Lord or Lover on a sonic background provided by the Wu-Tang-Clan.30 According to the author, Richard Pierre Davis, *Blacklash* was conceived “to encourage the black community through game culture that it is possible to break into different areas apart from music, and create games that have something to say.”31 Mongrel member, Mervin Jarman spoke about the game as “a serious wake’ em up call. Its all about ‘REPRESENT’ who is representing whom.”32

As a whole, *Natural Selection* sought to challenge the ‘neutrality’ of the “algo-

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30. The Wu-Tang-Clan was a then-popular New York based group of nine MCs known for their strategic use of the collective as a way to insinuate themselves into the music business.
32. Ibid.
Figure 4.2: Richard Pierre Davis and Mongrel, Blacklash, 1996

Welcome to Natural Selection: a Search Engine Search Engine

Natural Selection is off-line at present.
Please use our fast links section or go to the star sites from a closer read.

Welcome to Natural Selection – a new kind of search engine. No other search engine has the power to give you what you really want! Why? As you use the web, Natural Selection makes complete site analysis to construct personalised preferences from your local memory. At this, the results of these searches may make Natural Selection seem surprisingly 'psychic.' No data is harmed in the process and all excess information is used solely to enhance your surfing experience.

Fast Links to

Cars * Real-estate * Video Games * Home Remodeling * Sewer
Religion * Concern * Family member * Web Dictionary
Business and Finance * Investing * Anti-Virus * Science *
Photography * Internet

Figure 4.3: Mongrel, Natural Selection Search Engine, 1996

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lich” structure of information technologies which frame the relationship between the organization of data/information and the user’s experience. In her discussion of the project, media theorist Wendy Hui Kyong Chun writes:

Mongrel’s interfaces and software reverse the usual system of software design: it produces interfaces and content that are provocative—even offensive—in order to reveal the limits of choice, to reveal the fallacy of the all-powerful, race free user...Mongrel’s projects also play with the relationship between software and ideology in order to make us question the reduction of race to a database category.33

Mongrel collaborator Matthew Fuller relates the project to “second-order memetics,” a playful reference to memetics, a theory of cultural transmission peaking in the 1990s, which sought to explain human behavior on the basis of naturalism, as a result of preprogrammed memetic (i.e., informational) replication.34 As a

34. Memetics was based on the views of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (The Selfish Gene, 1976), who contended that memes (information units) hosted in the brain and followed replication
‘biased’ software and a pun on the semantic etymology of memetics—from the Greek mimētēs meaning “imitator, pretender,” Natural Selection meets the resurgence of positivist ideologies in techno-environments with a strategy of ridicule akin to the identity correction of Servin and ®ark, in this case designed to subvert racist identification on the internet.

The notion of identity correction is also central to one of the recommendations coming out of the Cyberfeminist International (CI) meetings at Documenta X in Kassel, Germany, in 1997, that reads, “Creating new avatars, databodies, new self (ves) representations which disrupt and recode the gender biases usual in current commercially available ones.”35 This suggestion was put into practice in The Intruder (1999) (fig. 4.4), a viral game by Natalie Bookchin, former member of ®ark and currently a Los Angeles based net artist.36 The title of the game is a double entendre that signals disruptive intent and the work’s framing on a short

patterns driven by competition (i.e., similar to genes, or biological units), thereby determining the evolution of human behavior and culture. This idea is similar to B. F. Skinner’s behaviorism, which maintains that human behavior is the mere product of genetic and environment factors (though change of behaviors could be effected by changing environmental conditions). The main thread in naturalism-based theories (oftentimes associated with the French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck) is the idea that humans are devoid of will or agency and that evolution mainly occurs according to natural laws, which are opposed to supernatural laws and defined over time as the unconscious, market forces, ideologies, structures, languages, discourses or technologies.

story by the late Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, entitled “The Interloper” (1998). The story is a parable of misogyny based on a biblical passage (Matthew 1:26) transposed on cowboy culture in Argentina. The plot revolves around two gaucho brothers, Christian and Eduardo Nilsen, with Juliana, a young peasant woman referred to by the anonymous narrator as a “beast” and a “thing” subject to the brothers’ jealous competition, bigamy, sexual slavery and ultimately murder, leading to the narrative’s resolution in fraternal reconciliation.

Like Natural Selection, The Intruder was set for random discovery by internet users. Bookchin explained:

People who come to the computer for entertainment are mostly coming through games, and I wanted to lure people in who wouldn’t otherwise be interested. For this reason I thought it could work on the net...I inserted keywords, at a time when that still worked, so that people looking for “sex” or something else would end up at “The Intruder.” I don’t know how long people would stay, but it did end up being something

37. The game’s website contains a link to the story in Spanish.

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that did insert itself into all these different contexts: art, literature, hypertext, people who were just interested in playing ... that was my interest, in having something that was not automatically framed as “art,” so that people would end up being surprised ... because I think when you walk into an institution that frames itself as art...you already have the expectation that you are going to be shocked, or surprised, or in some way moved.38

By drawing parallels between colonialism and hyper-masculinism (at the time videogames were mainly male-coded toys), Bookchin points to the common thread permeating these ideologies as forms of domination.39 To this end, the artist positions the player to unwittingly act as an accomplice in the unfolding of Borges’

39. In its memetic distribution Boockin’s work evokes the “Cyberfeminist manifesto” (1991), an internet meme by the Australian cyberfeminist art collective VNS Matrix, (later integrated in a game installation, All New Gen, 1995), but its concept is closer to the work of Subrosa, a cyberfeminist collective identifying itself with a second-wave of cyberfeminism (opposed to the first wave of utopic posthumanist gender subversion associated with Sadie Plant and VNS). Subrosa called for integration of post-colonial and feminist theories in investigations into the conditions of women in digital culture as well as engaged in writings and performances that sought to raise questions about the gendered and raced implications of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) in connection with the intertwined histories of eugenics and colonialism. See Fernández and Wilding, “Situating Cyberfeminisms” and Brett Stalbaum, “Substantial Disturbance: An Interview with Faith Wilding,” Switch Journal 16 (2001), http://switch.sju.edu/nextswitch_engine/front/front.php?artc=18;.
story in the game’s ten levels that combine a soundscape composed of narration by a female voice, atmospheric sounds and sound tracks of early videogames, with typical actions elicited in videogames such as shooting, chasing, and scoring. In this way, the game also highlights the ideology of control as a constant across videogame genres (e.g., sports, shooters, porn, maze games). On occasion, Bookchin used *The Intruder* in workshops designed to teach children game modding. (One of these events took place in Marseilles, France, in a predominantly Arab area.) As a teaching tool, the work functioned as an antidote to ideologies of domination, as the artist invited young attendees to use *The Intruder* as a placeholder for their own purposes, as a conduit for exchange of skills and knowledge in the spirit of Cyberfeminist projects of “becoming autonomous.”

The function of videogames as pedagogical tools is central to *Super Kid Fighter* (SKF, USA, 1998) (fig. 4.5), a project developed by CAE and CarbonDefense-League (CDL) as a hack of a Nintendo GameBoy ROM aimed at boys between the ages of ten and fifteen, the target market of Nintendo products at the time. In- 40. Games referenced included *Pong* (Atari, 1972), *Space Invaders* (Taito, 1978), *Atari Football* (Atari, 1978), *Custer’s Revenge* (Mystique, 1982), *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980). To finish *The Intruder* the player enacts the story’s ending, shooting at Juliana from behind the sight of a gun aiming at her diminutive figure running in the woods.
structions on how to replicate the hack were included in *Child as Audience*, a media kit containing a CD-ROM, a pamphlet on youth oppression and a hardcore music CD by the band Creation is Crucifixion (CiC), CDL’s musical persona (kits were initially sold in concert venues). The game is a RPG in which the player plays as a student siding with ‘deviants’ to escape authority (school, church, family, etc.) and earn money and information leading to the final reward, the entrance to a brothel where two images of a male and a female could be bared (the score determines the degree of exposure). The project, which is exceptional in that it was conceived prior to children gaining widespread access to the internet, aimed to counter-act the “ideological influence of games in childhood” by way of raising the possibility of provoking a company (Nintendo) to speak publicly against the (modified) cartridges sent in by alarmed parents. A potential public acknowledgment of the hack would have a tremendous reverberation in the gaming community because 1) GameBoy (1989) was the top selling videogame device at the time; 2) it encouraged children and politicized programmers to create games for their own subversive purposes; and 3) in retort to Nintendo’s obsession with control over its products, it demonstrated that piracy and reverse-engineering of products is always possible. The pedagogical frame of the game evokes the work of Brazilian activist-pedagogue Paulo Freire, whom the group cites elsewhere as an inspiration for devising their performative practices of “recombinant theater”

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43. Personal communication with CAE member.
46. Ibid., 134.
aimed at educating and imparting basic information on biotechnologies to the public. Freire’s thoughts on pedagogy as a means to critical consciousness are echoed in the game’s attempt at activating awareness about the conditions of corporate forms of videogame entertainment and the audience’s agency to respond to them. In addition, the narrative of the game pays homage to the Austrian-American psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, whose research and activism promoted adolescent sexuality based on the idea that the individual’s psychological condition was rooted in the economic, political, and sexual structures shaping socialization. These influences converge in a game designed to thwart the a-sexual and heterosexual roles inscribed in the rules of Nintendo’s videogames for children by encouraging sexual curiosity and the audience’s propensity for mutual recognition of discovery and capabilities thus setting in motion fluid modes of self and social identity to play a powerful videogame company.

The rapid development of the world wide web in the late nineties transformed the composition of the internet, ushering in a phase of enclosure expressed in the rise of new forms of commerce, so-called e-commerce, and the professionalization

48. Freire devised the notion of critical consciousness in opposition to the “banking concept” of education in which learning is based on imitation and on the hierarchical separation between students and teachers, a structure that he saw embedded in legacies of oppression and colonization. See Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Donaldo Macedo (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), 71–86.
of digital spaces. These developments and the increased global reach of internet networks brought at the same time new opportunities and impulse to electronic resistance as exemplified by a high-profile tactical event entitled Toywar (fig. 4.6).  

The project was launched as a large scale multiplayer game in 1999 in response to a legal dispute between etoy.org, an art website by the Swiss art group etoy, online since 1994, and eToys.com, a relatively new dot.com selling children’s toys online. The toy retailer filed the lawsuit in California following the refusal of a monetary offer for the etoy domain name. The company alleged the artists of “unfair competition, trademark delusion, security fraud, illegal stock market operation, pornographic content, offensive behavior and terrorist activity.” This strategy was successful, leading to a court injunction shutting down the etoy web-  

51. etoy is fashioned as a corporation much in the same way as ark. The group was the winner of the Prix Ars Electronica in 1996.  
site. etoy's solicitation for support on various lists like the Thing, Rhizome.org, nettime, hell.com, etc., resulted in The Twelve Days of Christmas, a game campaign designed by®-ark in collaboration with the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a digital performance group founded and led by Ricardo Dominguez, a former member of CAE.\textsuperscript{53}

Using FloodNet, a software application first launched by EDT in support of Zapatista uprisings in the south of Mexico, large groups of gamers manually reloaded the eToys’ website at selected times repeatedly, causing access to slow down during long periods.\textsuperscript{54} The event developed over time with added features such as

\textsuperscript{53} EDT was founded in 1997 by Ricardo Dominguez with Stefan Wray, Brett Stabaum and Carmin Karasic.

\textsuperscript{54} The Zapatistas refers here to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) supported by dispossessed Mayan communities in Chiapas, an exhausted, exploited area in southern Mexico that is rich in natural resources such as timber, oil, gas, and water. January 1, 1994, marked the beginning of EZLN led uprisings against the NAFTA (North America Free Trade Agreement) deal between the U.S., Canadian, and Mexican governments, the latter led by the unpopular Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI, in power for over seventy years. Mayan demands for land and
the automation of the check-out process on the Etoy website by “etoy soldiers” and the loading of pages, including financial documents, on the eToys server in order to overload its capacity of response.\textsuperscript{55} Alexander R. Galloway, a Rhizome political rights challenged the privatization of communal lands under a new law that permitted the impoverished peasants to sell land, passed in parliament in anticipation of NAFTA, and more broadly the simultaneous neglect and intensification of state violence against local communities. Initially modeled on a “traditional guerrilla” structure, the EZLN quickly transformed into a “communication guerrilla.” The Zapatistas rose to prominence as the first postmodern guerrilla movement on account of both their effective use of electronic networks from deep within the Lacandon jungle to report on corporate and governmental abuses, and their energizing of alterglobalization movements. Essentially a re-adaptation of civil disobedience techniques to electronic environments, EDT’s practices developed as refinements of digital activism associated with alterglobalization groups such as the Anonymous Digital Coalition (ADC) in Italy in response to the Zapatistas’ call for the development of “intercontinental networks of resistance.” Coco Fusco, “Electronic Disturbance,” in Anarchitexts, Voice from the Global Digital Resistance, ed. Joanne Richardson (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 100. The FloodNet was launched with the SWARM performance at the 1998 Ars Electronica festival. This event was extensively covered after it was revealed that the U.S. Department of Defense engaged an aggressive counter attack. According to Domínguez this was “the first offensive use of information war by a government against a civilian server.” ibid., 103. This attack also contravened U.S. constitutional law prohibiting military attacks on American civilians under The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878. In comparison, EDT’s virtual sit-in on the website of the University of California Office of President (UCOP) in conjunction with students protesting tuition fee increases in California on March 4, 2010, was a largely underreported event though Domínguez and his team were placed under criminal investigation (the investigation was later dismissed). Evan R. Goldstein, “Digitally Incorrect,” The Chronicle of Higher Education (2010), http://chronicle.com/article/Digitally-Incorrect/124649/.

\textsuperscript{55} See Info Wars, Film, 2004.
affiliate at the time, described *Toywar* as a “complex, self-contained [system], with [its] own internal email ... [its] hazards, heroes and martyrs.” He adds that, “similar to a simulation or training game, *Toywar* constructs a one-to-one relationship between the affective desires of gamers and the real social contexts in which they live.”56 According to etoy, in its entirety, the event involved internet users as well as “1798 activists, artists, lawyers, celebrities and journalists...filling counter court cases, infiltrating customer service, pr [sic] departments, the press, investor news groups and also on the level of federal trade commission.”57 Play was extended for several months into the Christmas season, which resulted in a drop of eToys’s already inflated stock from $67 at the beginning of the launch of *Toywar* to $15 when the company stopped the virtual eviction and was ordered to pay court restitutions.58 The etoy group commented ironically post-event, declaring *Toywar* to be “the most expensive performance in art history: $4.5 billion dollars.”59 In surpassing the effects of the one-time intervention by a lone worker, as with the Simcopter hack, *Toywar* demonstrated that electronic technologies can be important tools in the organization of collective forms of resistance. The hybrid forms of electronic games facilitated the participation of wide audiences, as a result empowering the articulation and negotiation of issues of self-representation and collective identity. In this way, play and game spaces can be transformed into

57. See, Etoy, *Toywar*.
59. Etoy, *Toywar*. 

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vehicles for self-expression and self-representation by the whole community.

4.2.1 Beyond TM

The emergence of new forms of game environments in the late 1990s like the popular massive multiplayer online games (MMOGs), brought new and significant opportunities for dissent, as these spaces provide ‘ready-made’ platforms, the more attractive for involving hundreds or thousands of players and including relatively user-friendly options for modifications. Additionally, the increasing miniaturization, portability and network integration of digital technologies lent new and innovative means to artists interested in probing the connections between the organization of virtual play environments and real spaces, in particular vis-à-vis the global rise of militarist ideologies.

The games of artist Anne-Marie Schleiner are significant examples of interventions set on the intersections of videogames, militarism and gender and racial categories, and their relation to the construction of online and off-line spaces. Schleiner herself characterizes her work as “Situationist gaming,” in reference to the Situationists’ employment of play as a “freeing and transformational” force acting to suspend the dominant order.60 *Velvet Strike* (France/USA/Spain, 2002-

ongoing) (fig. 4.7) was her first collaborative intervention with Joan Leandre (Spain), and Brody Condon (Mexico-U.S.). The project took advantage of the popularity and the modding capabilities of Counter Strike (Vivendi Universal, Microsoft Game Studios, 2000) to solicit the participation of players in alterations of the appearance of the game’s environments. (As noted in the previous chapter, Counter Strike itself originated as a gamers’ mod of Half-Life and was subsequently commercialized due to its popularity; play revolves around pitting a team of counter-terrorists against a team of terrorists in a narrative reminiscent of the framing of the global war on terror after the 9/11 bombings, the height of the game’s popularity.)

The Velvet Strike mod provides gamers with the ability to post and download spray-paint skins modeled on graffiti, with anti-war messages that can be placed on the walls, ceilings, and floors of the game environment. In his discussion of the project, Mateo Bittanti notes: “By destabilizing the intended, expected uses of the game by means of virtual protest, Schleiner’s approach can be linked to the long tradition of player empowerment.”

To this point, Brody Condon’s mod-sprays (Love 1, 2, 3) (fig. 4.8), which show two male combatants engaged in various homo-erotic poses, evokes a playful homage to Simcopter’s kissing soldiers (Servin and ®ark).

Velvet Strike also speaks of Schleiner’s pioneering role as a curator of various


Figure 4.7: Anne-Marie Schleiner, Joan Leandre, and Brody Condon, Velvet Strike screenshots, 2002-ongoing
online shows around digital games and internet folklore, following from a series of such projects starting in 1998, including “Cracking the Maze,” which consists of game mods by artists and art collectives on gender, race, and politics in and outside of gaming; “Mutation.fem,” a collection of female character game hacks or ‘skins,’ which was exhibited in Helsinki, Finland, at the Kiasma Museum show “Alien Intelligence” curated by Erkki Huhtamo in 2000; “Lucky Kiss,” an online exhibit of interactive erotica designed and freely distributed by networks of fans dedicated to develop and share these works; and “Snow Blossom House,” which consists of a collection of ‘hentai’ games based on adult manga developed by artists and fan communities.63 Velvet Strike appropriates the Counter Strike game to serve as a space for exhibiting the sprays freely contributed by artists and the public. In the vein of free culture activism, the project includes sprays contributed by Australian producer Rebecca Cannon, (fig. 4.9), a fellow artist and co-curator with Julian Oliver of the online game archive Selectparks.net, one of the first initiatives to preserve electronic games by artists.64

In addition to sprays, the Velvet Strike website contains instructions for specific tactics that gamers can deploy to undermine the ‘trigger-happy’ approach of Counter Strike. These directives are reminiscent of Surrealist games and Fluxist scores as well as digital disobedience techniques (e.g., trespassing and virtual

64. Ibid.

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Figure 4.8: Brody Condon, Sprays for Velvet Strike
(a) Dangerous Enemy

(b) No

(c) Kitty

Figure 4.9: Rebecca Cannon, Velvet Strike sprays
sit-ins) developed by Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) and Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT). Suggestions for in-game interventions are authored by the artists and gamers and posted on the project’s website. Two examples are the “Recipe for Salvation” by Graphical User Intervention (GUI), that reads as follows: “1. Enter a Counter-Strike Server with a hostage scenario as a member of the Terrorist Team; 2. Rescue the Hostages you are supposed to be guarding;” and “Recipe for Heart Stand-in” by A.M.S, which contains instructions for a peaceful in-game protest:

1. Ask the members of your Counter-Strike team, (must be at least 14), Counter-Terrorist or Terrorist, to stand in a large, low, flat open area in the game that can be viewed from above. 2. Arrange everyone to stand in the shape of a heart. Do not move or return fire. 3. On all player chat send out the message repeatedly: ”Love and Peace.” 4. Retain position stoically.65

As an intervention Velvet-Strike responds also to the spread of racist and militaristic games and mods on the internet in the aftermath of 9/11, as Schleiner notes in her statement of intention on the project’s website entitled “Velvet-Strike: War Times and Reality Games (War Times from a Gamer Perspective).” In it she is openly critical about the regressive implication of ‘reality’ in mainstream games. She writes:

Beginning with Half-life and continuing with shooter games whose al-

leged appeal is “realism,” a kind of regression took place. In terms of
game play, games like Half-life are universally seen as advancements.
Yet in Half-life you are only given one white guy everyman American
gek guy to identify with. And all of the NPC researchers and scien-
tists in the game are male. Half-life remaps the original computer game
target market back onto itself, excluding all others and reifying gamer
culture as a male domain. (Not that I didn’t play Half-life but I would
have enjoyed it more if I could have played a female character).

In a public performance, entitled O.U.T. (Operation Urban Terrain) (fig. 4.10),
Schleiner engaged the gendered and raced ideologies of “Reality Games” by liter-
ally juxtaposing the environments of America’s Army (AA) (U.S. Army and Ubisoft,
2002–ongoing), a public-funded recruiting game on the militarized urban environ-
ments of New York City during the protests at the National Republican Conven-
tion (NRC) in 2004. The performance involved Schleiner and Elke Marhoefer

66. Anne-Marie Schleiner, “Velvet-Strike: War Times and Reality Games (War Times from a
Gamer Perspective),” http://www.open sorcery.net/velvet-strike/about.html (accessed
2002). NPC stands for non-playing character or any character not controlled by a player.
67. A freely available online simulation series sponsored by the U.S. government, America’s Army
(AA) was designed to attract target recruits, young male gamers. The project developed out a
concept study proposed in 1999 by the current head of the team, Colonel Casey Wardynski, in
response to the decline in the number of army recruits, as military service is not compulsory in
the United States. The proposal urged the use of “computer game technology to provide the pub-
lic with a virtual soldier experience that [is] engaging, informative and entertaining.” Quoted in
(Germany) as the main protagonists, in collaboration with artists Luis Hernandez (Mexico), Pierre Rahola (France), and Chris Birke (U.S.), in addition to a number of others playing in the environments of AA. Dressed in Lara Croft’s gear and armed with a laptop and a projector, the duo set on a screening dérive through Manhattan, Harlem, and Brooklyn, where they projected live feeds of AA sent via a wireless connection by players onto various locations.68 The project sought

army.mil/soldiersmagazine/pdfs/sep08full.pdf. To this end, a Web portal was created, linking to recruiting materials, and a series of games were created based on scenarios of routine military training and recent U.S. military interventions abroad. The AA’s franchise currently extends to “America’s Army Real Heroes,” a line of action figures modeled after real-life military personnel who have been awarded recognitions for military service; T-shirts; mugs; keychains; and other paraphernalia. For instance, AA’s version for the PlayStation game console (U.S. Army, Ubisoft, Secret Level, 2005) asks the player to “partake” in Major Jason Amerine’s experiences in Afghanistan in the year 2001. Because the aim is to convey a positive image of military engagement, America’s Army omits the unglorious facets of military engagement.

to challenge the “convergence of military and civilian space” through temporary occupations of public spaces in New York City. Schleiner explains:

I matched virtual locations within the America’s Army game servers with physical New York City sites, projecting a live performance of a virtual sit-in inside a tunnel with yellow taxis onto a building in midtown Manhattan, where there were many yellow taxis, and pairing a red brick warehouse in the game with a brick building in Harlem. For the last location I merged a live soldier dancing performance in the popular America’s Army map ”Bridge” with projection onto the Manhattan Bridge in Brooklyn.69

O.U.T. echoed the protesters’ slogan responding to the propagandist undertones of the U.S. presidential election of 2004, as typified by the Republican Party’s symbolic choice to hold its national convention in Madison Square Garden, in

Manhattan. The projections of AA’s militarist imagery on sites in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Harlem, respectively the city’s financial, commercial, and cultural heart of New York City and the site of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and two poor and predominantly African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods, further highlighted the divisive effects of spectacularized politics to which O.U.T. responded by amplifying and synchronizing dissent in real and virtual spaces.70

As for Velvet Strike, the project is still ongoing, but functions presently mainly as an exemplary intervention ‘inserted’ into the celebratory media reports about online gaming, as news about it spread. Its preeminent exhibition at the 2004 Whitney Biennial and elsewhere also contributed to the project’s prestige.71 Thus, of the projects discussed thus far, Velvet Strike has perhaps contributed the most to the visibility of interventionist approaches to digital gaming among videogame designers and artists alike.72 Schleiner’s re-articulations of existing digital games set in the role of activist platforms evoke what artist Mary Flanagan calls “subversive play”—actions that appropriate “the cognitive space of public space” with “social and political goals” seeking to “open up dialogue by transgressing the boundaries

70. See: http://www.opensorcery.net/OUT/.
72. For instance, Ian Bogost references Rebecca Cannon’s spray-skin posted on the project’s website entitled, “kitty,” which he suggests might have been the inspiration for subsequent mods such as the “Hello Kitty flashlight” mod,” which appears on the Doom 3 online game (idSoftware, 2004). See: Ian Bogost, “Doom 3 gets cute,” http://www.bogost.com/watercoolergames/archives/doom_3_gets_cut.shtml.
between art and everyday life.”

Reversing the premise of O.U.T., Domestic Tension (2007) (fig. 4.11), a gaming intervention of Iraqi born artist Wafaa Bilal, inserts the real into the virtual to similarly speak to the function of mainstream videogames as tools of militarist propaganda. Bilal’s project is conceived as a telematic performance involving the artist and internet audiences via an interactive game-like interface. For the event, the artist installed his living quarters at Chicago’s Flatfile Gallery, where he resided for thirty-one days under the voyeuristic gaze of audiences who could peep in via a live webcam, chat, or shoot at him via a rifle-sized paintball gun affixed to the camera. (The gun is modeled on an actual website of a Texas-based ranch that allows online guests to hunt over the internet.) Over the course of the game, the gallery room was covered in yellow paint and bits of paint ball shells (yellow refers to the color used in paraphernalia sold in the U.S. to show support for the troops). The space was essentially transformed into an environment simulating the conditions of an actual war zone, including the suffocating smell (of the fish-based paint used in the pallets), the sonic disturbance caused by random gun shots,

73. Flanagan, Critical Play, 11. Flanagan’s understanding of play echoes Rita Raley’s ideas about Tactical Media. See Raley’s discussion of another game collaboration between Hernandez and Schleiner discussed in this context: Rita Riley, Tactical Media (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 58–64.

74. The original title proposed by the artist was “Shoot an Iraqi.” The gallery owner, however, refused to allow the piece to be performed under this title for fear of attacks. See Claudia Pederson, “Trauma and Agitation: Video Games in a Time of War,” Afterimage 38, no. 2 (2010): 9–13.

and the artist’s performative mimicry of everyday life as a civilian living in a war zone.\textsuperscript{76}

The project attracted participants in over 130 countries, and Bilal’s site received 80,000,000 hits, while 60,000 paintballs were shot.\textsuperscript{77} Responses ranged from abusive behaviors like derogatory remarks and attempts at hacking the server

\textsuperscript{76} Community donations dictated Bilal’s food intake for the duration of the performance. Ironically this resulted in a significant weight gain, given that most of the donations consisted of junk food. See Bilal and Lydersen, \textit{Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun}, xvii.

\textsuperscript{77} http://wafaabilal.com/closingmedia.html.
to increase the frequency of shots, to encouragement, in the form of praise for the project and counter-actions by hackers taking turns to divert the gun away from Bilal.\textsuperscript{78} The artist kept his identity and motivations ambiguous throughout the performance as a strategy designed to attract public involvement. In subsequent interviews Bilal discussed the game-performance as an experiment addressing political, personal, and artistic concerns, in response to the Iraqi war coverage in U.S. media:

I was watching the news - in fact, ABC news, when they had an interview with an American soldier sitting in a base in Colorado, and she was firing missiles into Iraq after being given information by American soldiers on the ground in Iraq, and when asked if she had any regard for human life, she said “No, these people are bad, and I’m getting very good intelligence from people on the ground.”\textsuperscript{79}

Bilal set out to connect the cognitive dissonance of participants with the me-
diated experience of the Iraq war via U.S. media, which as he states, “consistently excludes images of casualties.” “I want it to be far removed,” says Bilal, “I want it to be video game-like. That’s how we see this war, as a video game. We don’t see the mutilated bodies or the toll on the ground.”80 The absence of sound, as online participants cannot hear the shots in the gallery, focuses the images as ideologically resonant constructs. The images are revealed as conduits of detachment, constructed in this case to position participants in the affective state of the soldier bombing targets in Iraq from a computer terminal in the United States.

Bilal’s work posits participation as an antidote for alienation. Domestic Tension is intended as a participatory anti-war statement, which he states is conceived “to engage audiences that are otherwise unlikely to actively participate in political or cultural discussions because they feel that these issues do not concern their everyday life.”81 The work’s political statement foregrounds the notion that historical conditions are contingent on human action. In interviews and a book about the project, Bilal explicitly states that the project should not be seen as an attempt at martyrdom, but as “an artist trying to make a point,” and relates the work to his experiences as an artist and conscientious objector under Saddam’s rule, as a political refugee in Saudi Arabia, and presently as an Arab American citizen.82

81. Ibid.
82. Bilal and Lydersen, Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun, xviii. He lived in Saudi Arabia’s refugee camps while waiting for political refugee status, moved to the United States

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Bilal’s confinement in a gallery and subjectification as a living target in an artwork brings to mind the legacy of agitational performance (e.g., Chris Burden’s 1971 performance, *Shoot*, at the height of protests against the Vietnam war). On a personal level, Bilal responds to trauma (his brother was accidentally killed during an American missile strike in Kufa in 2004, and he himself suffers from post-traumatic disorder) by challenging de-humanizing representations of war. Underpinning these views is the exponential turn to automated warfare in military interventions and political discourse, in which “drone attacks” and terms like ‘collateral damage’ routinely function as sanitizing euphemisms for a rational regime of deadly force with civilians as central targets. One of the earliest projects to deal specifically with drones, Bilal’s intervention hinges on re-purposing the tools, spaces, and codes of the dominant culture to create a space for collective dialogue around these issues. Whereas the project’s activation of the gallery as a site of protest speaks to a high-art public, its extension onto the internet and framing in the tropes of entertainment enables also a semiotic common ground with audiences conversant in mass-media representational modes. As Bilal states, “my work is not didactic or vitriolic, but aims to provoke awareness and dialogue about the toll war takes on all involved.” Bilal’s celebration as an Iraqi born digital artist on account of Domestic Tension (he was nominated Chicagoan of the year by the *Chicago Tribune* in 2007) further undermines mass media’s spectacular

in 1992, and obtained a MFA degree in 2003 from the Art Institute of Chicago, where he first began teaching art.

84. Personal interview with the artist, June 6, 2009.
portrayals of ‘the other,’ as either helpless or irrational, as reified representations (i.e., as hyper-real signs with no reference to ‘real people’).  

While Bilal challenges the use of videogames as tools of militarist propaganda, the Nevada based conceptual artist Joseph DeLappe notes their alleged success as 

85. For post-colonial histories on current digital practices see for instance Special Issue: Pacific Rim New Media Summit Companion 4, no. 32 (2006); Media Arts: Practice, Institutions and Histories 23, no. 3 (2009); Anna Everett, Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace (New York: SUNY Press, 2009); and Ravi Sundaram, Pirate Modernity: New Delhi’s Media Urbanism (New York: Routledge, 2010). Here I also wish to mention the political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss, whose investigation of the Haitian revolution to modern conceptions of democracy considers this event as the foundation of Hegel’s philosophy and Marxist thought. See Susan Buck-Morss, Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).
training and recruiting tools as an opportunity for change. His concept for a role-
playing game, entitled America’s Diplomat (AD) (fig. 4.12) (2008), is a tongue-in-
cheek commentary on America’s Army and an argument for the creation a similar
simulation to train future U.S. diplomats.

News about AD was publicized in 2.1 million paper copies of a fake free edition
of The New York Times, dated July 4, 2009, which was distributed in major cities
in the U.S., on November 12, 2008, along with a website version, eight days after
the 2008 presidential elections. The article discussed America’s Army (AA) as
one of the “top 20 internet-based games ... initially developed at the cost of $10

86. DeLappe is well known for Dead-in-Iraq in 2006, a project for which he gained wide artistic
recognition. The work employs the tactics of electronic civil disobedience (ECD), such as virtual
trespassing and sit-ins, to create an in-game performance, which he sees as “a new type of street
theater,” consisting of textual insertions into the messaging function of America’s Army (AA). Jon
Winet, “In Conversation Fall 2003: An Interview with Joseph DeLappe,” in Videogames and Art,
ed. Andy Clarke and Grethe Mitchel (Chicago: Intellect, 2007), 98. Entering the environments
of America’s Army under the code name, ‘dead-in-iraq,’ the artist types the name, age, service
branch, and date of death of North American military personnel killed in Iraq until he is ‘killed’
or eliminated by other players (he mimics the U.S. military’s policy of not accounting for the Iraqi
casualties). Upon elimination, DeLappe repeats the process in the next round of the game in a
mimic of its monotonous shooting drills. The artist intends to continue these interventions until
the end of the war, as a memorial to the war’s military toll, which as of “5/3/08” numbered
gaming/dead_in_iraq/dead_in_iraq%20jpegs.html.
million dollars ... [with] an annual support of $1.5 million dollars”; its success as a recruiting tool: “40% of army recruits played the game before enlisting”; and its viral marketing in the form of products promoting the game, including “console and cell-phone games, T-shirts, and the Real Heroes program, a section of the America’s Army website [highlighting] actual soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan ... recreated ... as action figures.” The newspaper announced a future transformed by social policies like national health care, free education, a stop to wars abroad, corporate funding for research into climate change, etc., and included links to progressive organizations. The project involved a one year collaboration between the Yes Men and a network of artists, among them, DeLappe and Steve Lambert, The New York Times employees, a large number of activist groups, and volunteers following a series of instructions distributed through the website set up by the Yes Men, BecauseWeWantIt.org.89 The spoof challenged The New York Times’s support for neoliberalist and pro-war pundits, among them its regular columnist Tom Friedman, who penned his resignation as an “expert” in the fake edition. The event symbolically ‘corrected’ the paper’s position by appropriating its format to advance the possibility of progressive social change, in a pun on Barack Obama’s campaign chant in 2008, “Yes We Can,” itself an appropriation of “Si, se puede,” an iconic slogan of the United Farm Workers led by César Chávez and associated with race and class struggles in the 1960s. The project brings to mind another situationist view of play; in Debord’s words, as “another struggle and representa-

89. Activist groups involved among others include the Anti-Advertising Agency, CODEPINK, United for Peace and Justice, Not An Alternative, May First/People Link, Improv Everywhere, Evil Twin, and Cultures of Resistance.
tion: the struggle for a life in step with desire, and the concrete representation of such a life.”

4.3 Representation

Tactical media interventions in digital games are part of a broader set of practices aimed at demystifying the decentralized ontology of technoscientific discourses emerging with the mainstreaming of the internet. These interventions, like those of the avantgardes, are both oppositional and at the same time embedded in the structures they oppose, in this case seizing the opportunity of hybrid forms of entertainment games to effectively challenge the ideologies framing these spaces; hence, their articulation as expressions of resistance is immanent and mutable. In this sense, this form of playful activism diverges from the utopian telos attached to the validation of play and games by the avantgardes, while at the same time employing concepts and techniques developed within these practices. Tactical interventions in gaming are best understood in response to the brand of post-human utopianism surrounding the internet, at its height during the introduction of these technologies into public space. As a whole, these discourses construed digital environments as tools of transformation and progress linked to the promise of a de-centralized, fluid identity or a disembodied consciousness associated with dualism (i.e., the transcendence of the body), a view given new currency with the entifica-

90. Debord, “Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play.”

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tion of the decentralized economies of globalization. Détournements function to mobilize and activate social capacities and desire to challenge and subvert these discourses and conditions, in practice seeking to enable the collective’s articulation of the terms of expression and representation, however temporarily. Emerging in parallel with tactical media interventions, persuasive uses of videogames bring digital play into the realm of reasoned communication, hereby conceiving decentralization as a progressive force and a desirable long term, permanent form of organization associated with the tradition of the public sphere.
CHAPTER 5

PERSUASIVE GAMES

This chapter examines persuasive games in response to the destabilizing impact of decentralization on the public sphere. At the same time, artists associated with this project conceive of decentralization as an opportunity to stimulate critical-rational reflection via the appropriation and re-conceptualization of the medium as rhetorical simulations of current social and political events. As a result theoretical and artistic models focus on the question of how simulations may be structured or configured to prompt reasoned reflection as an outcome of play, herein conceived as a mode of argumentation whose goal is to both disrupt overly rigid notions of being and relating and attend to themes promoting lasting sociopolitical change.¹ In their permanent and rational orientations, persuasive projects differ

¹ The notions of persuasive games and persuasive technologies, the latter broadly defined as technology designed to change attitudes or behaviors of the users through persuasion and social influence, but not through coercion, are closely related in concept. B. J. Fogg, Persuasive Technology: Using Computers to Change What We Think and Do (San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2003), 16; see for a pertinent critique of the re-emergence of persuasive technologies as a design concept and practice, which includes a discussion of persuasive games Sustainably Unpersuaded: How Persuasion Narrows our Vision of Sustainability (CHI '12: Proceedings of the 2012 ACM Annual Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, ACM, May 2012), 947–956. However, not all persuasive technologies are designed with the intent to produce reasoned-critical reflection, nor are persuasive games reducible in practice to an exclusive focus on changing behavior. As this chapter discusses, persuasive games include a wide range of approaches, which are moreover conceived as experimental and in development rather than presented from as an unified, dogmatic
from both the temporary forms of tactical media interventions and the emphasis on linking play and pleasure in the avant-gardes, while similarly affirming the power of play and games to effect social transformation. This analysis investigates conceptual and artistic models of persuasive games with a view of inquiring into the broader legacy of modernist ideals of collective life connecting this project with counter-computing movements.

5.1 Procedural Rhetoric

Following on the notion of play as rhetoric as advanced by the Australian theorist Brian Sutton-Smith, game designer and theorist Ian Bogost foregrounds persuasive games in terms of the rhetorical impact of videogames, suggesting that the unique aspect of the medium is “procedural rhetoric,” a form of communication “particularly devoted to representing, communicating, or persuading the player toward a particular biased point of view.” This characteristic, according to Bogost, separates videogames from other media in which words and images are employed, instead representing relationships and processes through rules and reward models: “arguments are made not through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic mod-

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els.” According to this concept, the programmer’s task is to create models or simulations that represent the dynamics of complex organizational systems, be they political, commercial or pedagogical, which on the whole are filtered through the point of view or bias of their author. Bogost calls the rift between the real and the represented system (“the gap between the rule-based representation of a source system and a user's subjectivity”), “simulation fever,” a term punning on Derrida’s notion of “archive fever,” in this case referencing to “the omissions and inclusions of a...system” or its simulated representation. Meaning (i.e., reasoned reflection) arises out of the encounter with the biases embedded in the simulation and always “enters the material world via the players’ faculty of reason.” He speaks to this point by suggesting that the rhetorical power of videogames ought to be aimed at changing players, rather than the underlying environment, as, according to him simulations are “primarily intended to craft new technological constraints that impose conceptual or behavioral change in users.” Bogost advocates for a rhetorical philosophy aimed at convincing rather than coercing players, which for him translates in practice into digital games that employ persuasion to “disrupt and change fundamental attitudes and beliefs about the world, leading to potentially

4. He writes that “objective simulation is a myth because games cannot help but carry the baggage of ideology.” ibid., 135.
6. Ibid., 99.
significant long-term social change."  

8. Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, ix. Persuasive games represents Bogost’s response to two approaches emerging in the digital gaming literature of the last decade, narratology and ludology. Narratology focuses on the question of how language and narrative structures affect players’ perspectives. Ludologist models give primacy to manipulations of formal elements specific to digital games, involving the underlying combination of forms and rules structuring the meaning of the game or system, as a way to make players aware that they are engaged in a simulation. Bogost dismisses both models, as in his view, at their most extremes, narratology only considers digital games as “producers of narratives” and ludology would “divest games of any engagement...with human experience.” Bogost, *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*, 70. For Bogost, videogames are foremost structures representing a particular author’s point of view. As such, videogames are “configurative systems built out of expressive units,” and units represent “meaning,” laws or rules. ibid., 68. In other words, videogames roughly represent or externalize the views of their designers, consciously or not. The decoding of “meaning” is what he calls, “unit operations,” advanced by Bogost as a form of videogame criticism whose goal is revealing the main message underlying the elements of a particular system, in this case the videogame. Bogost employs “unit” to mean an element that makes up a system or is autonomous as a system itself. It can be any object, human or non-human, yet can also “encompass the material manifestations of complex, abstract, or conceptual structures such as jealousy, racial tension, and political advocacy.” ibid., 5. An operation is “the means by which something executes some purposeful action.” ibid. Together the “unit operation” is the measure of meaning. Decoding is presumably performed by players, who are similarly conceived as designers, as possessing partial views or mental models of existing structures, which however may be distinct. Meaning or reasoned response arises from the players’ synthesis formulated out of the encounter between her’s and the designer’s always partial visions. As a heuristic device, according to Bogost, “unit operation” is universally applicable to any form of media, regardless of form and content. He also stresses that “unit operations” although interrelated with “system operations,” is ultimately distinct from the latter’s focus on structure, rather focusing on the specific elements at once belonging and independent of the structure. ibid.,
In addition to Bogost, a range of artists and game scholars developed concepts that similarly reference the potential of play to effect individual and social transformation, including Mary Flanagan’s “critical play,” Espen Aarseth’s “transgressive play,” Brian Sutton-Smith’s “subversive play,” Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman’s “transformative play,” and others.9 These notions are taken to mean play that goes against the ideals already inscribed in mainstream games, representing the dominant set of cultural norms and values for which the videogame industry stands.10 Persuasive games are conceived with the aim of displacing

4. Bogost writes that his notion of “unit operations” as a form of criticism applied to persuasive games is premised on the French philosopher Alain Badiou’s terms of political ontology. At the same time, this concept is closely related to some Structuralist/semiotic approaches in linguistics and the mathematical model of communication by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver at the basis of Information Science.


the association of gaming with the ideologies of dominant power—much like the avant-gardes’ aligning of play with a decentered, fluid identity—nevertheless filtered through the legacy of the computer counterculture.\textsuperscript{11}

Artists associated with persuasive games share the counter-cultural vision of computer technologies’ enhancement of “people’s power” to respond to and organize outside of rigid, centralized power structures. Implicit in Bogost’s vision of persuasive games are the utopian notions of the “public sphere” and “communicative action” developed by the German Marxist sociologist Jürgen Habermas—harking back, as the scholar Seyla Benhabib notes, to “the modern social-contract tradition beginning with John Locke and including Rousseau, Kant”—a legacy that sought to reconcile rationalist and romantic models of collective organization based on “reasoned judgment and participation” of “autonomous citizens.”\textsuperscript{12} As Habermas theorized it, the public sphere is a political formation

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{11} For instance, Mary Flanagan’s notion of “avant-garde game design,” refers to the engagement of play as a tool of critique and “subversion” in artistic practices and resonates with the overall idea of persuasive play as a “medium of expression” or a “social technology” carrying the potential for instigating social change. Flanagan, \textit{Critical Play}, 4–7.

\textsuperscript{12} Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” in \textit{Habermas and the Public Sphere}, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 90. Benhabib notes also that this tradition extends to notions of “civic virtue” connected to the emergence of the Republic in ancient Greece and Rome. Baidou’s work traces to Plato’s concern with “truth” as associated with “universalism” and a propensity for mathematics as an universal language perhaps due to his intellectual adherence to scientific marxism (associated with Louis Althusser). Badiou is known for maoist sympathies and fierce public controversies, including his attacks on Gilles Deleuze (whose classes he disrupted along with others) and Jean-François Lyotard
\end{footnotesize}
flourishing under the largely pre-industrial, free-market capitalism with support of eighteenth-century liberal democracy providing resources to the emergent bourgeois class engaged in establishing a network of publishing houses, newspapers, etc., which in principle was to function in the interest of decentralizing political power. The public sphere is defined by uncoerced communication of equal participants with equal access and equal rights to intervene or propose subjects.\textsuperscript{13} From this Habermas developed the concept of communicative action, a type of argumentative communication based on reason, which is defined as disembodied language or speech (i.e., related in this case to Aristotelian logic) aimed at persuasion or “understanding.”\textsuperscript{14} Because communicative action is central to the constitution of the public sphere, the concept is understood to function as a set of criteria making possible the evaluation and identification of a rational socius


13. Habermas characterizes the public sphere as egalitarian, a “domain of common concern” or access to discourse emerging out of the transference of spheres of knowledge whose representation was previously dominated by the Church and the courts (e.g., art and culture) to commodity relations in which meaning, interpretation and authority is subject to rational-critical communication (i.e., discussion) by private persons; and inclusiveness, meaning the democratization of access to information (i.e., “everyone had to be able to participate”) furthered by the market under which the private individual, like the educator or group “conscious of being part of a larger public,” emerges as a “new form of bourgeois representation,” namely public opinion. Jürgen Habermas, \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society}, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 36–37.

(or human relations), which includes cooperation, mutual deliberation and the “power of the better argument,” as well is understood to be mutable and geared toward consensus.¹⁵ As Habermas put it:

communicative reason does not simply encounter ready-made subjects and systems; rather it takes part in structuring what is to be preserved. The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is ingrained in the conditions for the communicative sociation of individuals; it is built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species.¹⁶

The utopian legacy of rationalism outlined in the Habermasian concepts of the public sphere and communicative action (in essence a re-adaptation of the model of information exchange and communication pioneered by the bourgeois class, the merchants) is echoed in discourses upholding the emancipatory effects of digital technologies, including the so-called hacker ethic, discussed in Chapter 3 as associating rationalism, egalitarianism and democratization with computational technologies, a set of beliefs likewise implicit in ideas about the internet as a “virtual community,” an agora, a “hive mind,” and a conduit of “collective intelligence” (prior to the internet, the “global village” expressed these ideas).¹⁷

¹⁵. According to Habermas this type of communication is distinct from communication concerned with instrumental ends, normative value and subjective self-expression, in that it is universally applicable and thus involves the ability to reflect on language itself. See Habermas, Theory of Communicative Action, 397–398.
¹⁶. Ibid., 398.
¹⁷. The idea of the “virtual community” is attributed to counter-culture icon Howard Rheingold,
The concept of persuasive rhetoric central to persuasive games as conceived by Bogost is similarly related to communicative action in that it articulates the medium within and for the “public sphere” by way of aiming at disrupting the normative identification of mainstream videogames, and literally punning on the definition of videogames as an “action-based medium,” as Alexander Galloway put it. In his most recent book on persuasive games, *NewsGames: Journalism at Play*, Bogost clarifies the impetus of this project in relation to concerns about the demise of the social value of print news, which he attributes to processes connected with technological and economic decentralization. In response, he proposes to engage videogames (i.e., simulation) to “cultivate the desire for journalistic practice,” arguing that journalism ought not be thought as a medium-specific form but as an effect: “a practice in which research combines with a devotion to the public interest, producing materials that help citizens make choices about their private lives and their communities.”


20. Ibid., 180.
5.1.1 Newsgames

In practice the development of persuasive games can be traced to the ideas underlying forum games as outlined by the Uruguay-born videogame designer and former CNN en Español reporter, Gonzalo Frasca in his essay titled “Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance, and Other Trivial Issues.”\footnote{Gonzalo Frasca, “Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance, and Other Trivial Issues,” in \textit{First Person, New Media as Story, Performance, and Game}, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 85–94.} Central to Frasca’s essay are questions such as: “Is it possible to design videogames that deal with social and political issues? Do videogames offer an alternative way of understanding reality? Could videogames be used as a tool for encouraging critical thinking?”\footnote{Ibid., 85.} Frasca answers these questions affirmatively by proposing forum videogames as a feature available inside of a bigger “videogames of the oppressed” online community. Forum games are based on the notion that play ought to function as cues to prompt players’ awareness that they are engaging in simulation (i.e., a biased representation). The assumption is that thus aware, players will question the ideologies “hidden” in videogames.

Initially, Frasca envisioned forum videogames on the type of participatory theater developed by the Brazilian dramaturg-activist Augusto Boal (1931–2009). Boal drew on the work of his friend, the Brazilian Paulo Freire in the field of pedagogy, who in turn adapted the notion of “critical consciousness” from the Martinique-born, Algeria-based psychiatrist-philosopher-activist Frantz Fanon.
(1925–1961). (Fanon stressed the need for education beyond its function as an extension of colonialist ideologies, i.e., dominance and hierarchy.) Boal developed theater, which included a plethora of games and forms, some of which taking as their basis the news, as a forum of “the oppressed,” a notion that intimated the performance’s function as a rehearsal for social action.23 Additionally, “Theater of the Oppressed” dovetails with the notion of the “epic theater” developed by the German playwright Bertold Brecht (1898–1956). Together these traditions translate Marxian theory into theatrical formats that go against the rules, norms, and ideologies of Aristotelian drama (e.g., the separation between actors and spectators, linear progression, catharsis, etc.), instead encouraging the audience’s participation and control over the means of representation.24 The participatory model of Boalian theater that most appeals to Frasca consists of short public engagements in which members of the audience are asked to enact a daily-life situation that concerns them in front of the group. For example, a worker might wish to enact a exploitive relation with the boss. As the issue is enacted, audience members can interrupt and engage the person speaking. This process is repeated several times. The point is not to find solutions to the problem proposed, but to create communal awareness about its existence and to generate discussion (i.e., to bring the

issue out of the private and into the public sphere). Boal’s notion that to partake
in performative exchanges is a potentially transformative activity is re-elaborated
in Frasca’s concept of a simulated forum in which players engage in analogous
actions. In practice, this consists of simulations that allow players to make modi-
fications independent of designers. Forum or “Boalian” videogames resemble the
“open games systems” discussed by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, which like
“open source software,” are “designed to be evolutionary, not static, and to be
expressed in multiple forms,” and involve “Players [operating] as a community of
developers, transforming elements of the game system, playtesting them, sharing
them with other players, and submitting them to further modification.”

Thus, Frasca’s concept of forum games is similar to current customizable games, but en-
cased in a pedagogical function: “publishers would sell software that allow play-
ers to construct characters that would have different behaviors...[to] help players
realize that the concept of behavior—and particularly deviant behavior—is not
a fixed entity but rather a social construction.”

As such, he argues that forum games would promote “the development of a tolerant attitude that accepts mul-
tiplicity as the rule and not the exception.”

Whereas forum games were conceived as a conceptual exercise, Frasca did
develop digital games under the heading Play the News in collaboration with

26. Gonzalo Frasca, “Rethinking Agency and Immersion: Videogames as a Means of
27. Frasca, “Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance, and Other
Trivial Issues,” 93.
other designers, including Bogost (Frasca later renamed the project newsgames.)

These games are based on the re-articulation of Brecht’s stress on transparency, a key concept of his political theater expressed in techniques aimed at disrupting the audience’s role as passive spectators (e.g., actors would directly address the public, and elements of the play such as music, words and production are separated to produce an alienating effect, what he called a verfremdungseffekt). Like Brechtian theater, newsgames draw attention to the simulation’s artifice by means of techniques designed to provoke reflection about a particular issue in different, more complex ways. As the title indicates, newsgames engage players with views on current social and political events. According to Frasca: “For political video games, September 11 was the trigger. If it had happened in the sixties, people would have grabbed their guitar and written a song about it. Now they’re making games.”

*September 12th* (2003) (fig. 5.1) was the first newsgame simulation designed by Frasca and the team at Powerful Robot (PR), his studio in Uruguay. This game is a freely available short simulation designed in a cartoonish style that plays with the mechanics and alleged realism of mainstream first person shooter videogames (FPS) to convey an anti-war message (Bogost suggests that the game comments on

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28. Personal communication with Gonzalo Frasca.
30. PR creates a variety of games, including games for the Cartoon Network. See: *Powerfull Robot*, http://www.powerfullrobot.com. Part of PR’s profits are donated to various progressive causes. Personal communication with Gonzalo Frasca.
the escalating effects of surgical strikes).\textsuperscript{31} The game’s opening sequence shows a
drawing of an Arab woman holding a dead child in her arms, followed by images
of a ‘terrorist,’ recognizable by a white turban and a gun, and a family of ‘civil-
ians,’ the woman fully covered, and the man and child wearing dishdashas. The
accompanying text reads:

This is not a game. You can’t win and you can’t lose. This is a simu-
lation. It has no ending. It has already begun. The rules are deadly
simple. You can shoot. Or not. This is a simple model you can use to
explore some aspects of the war on terror.\textsuperscript{32}

The scenario is set in a crowded market square of a Middle Eastern town, where
terrorists mingle with dogs and civilians. The player controls a side-scrolling
sniper window juxtaposed onto the scene. Despite the suggestion of an accurate
strike, the chance of a ‘clean’ shot is thwarted by the preprogrammed impossibil-
ity to aim accurately (the window scrolls sideways and remains briefly static in a
random manner). The built-in delay between shots frustrates the expectation of
uninterrupted fire (the player is forced to wait and see the results of each strike),
and when a character is hit, the passerby gathering around the casualty transform
into terrorists. Repetitive shooting causes the square to become entirely popu-
lated by terrorists aimlessly walking among the rubble. The message is evident:
vio\textsuperscript{31}lence elicits violence.

\textsuperscript{32} Powerful Robot, \textit{September 12th, 2003}, \url{http://www.powerfulrobot.com}.
This is not a game.
You can’t win and you can’t lose.
This is a simulation.
It has no ending.
It has already begun.
The rules are deadly simple.
You can shoot.
Or not.
This is a simple model you can use to explore some aspects of the war on terror.

Continue

Figure 5.1: Powerful Robot, September 12th, 2003
The second simulation designed by Frasca’s studio two days after the Madrid train bombings on March 11, 2004, is entitled Madrid (2004) (fig. 5.2).33 The work consists of a single vignette showing a group of people, both young and old, holding candles amid darkness. Each character wears a T-shirt that reads: “I love,” and the name of a world city that has been the target of terrorist acts, including New York City, Oklahoma, Paris, Madrid, Tokyo, and Beirut. A little girl character wears a T-shirt with a cryptic text: “I love BS AS.” The goal is to synchronize the candle flames by clicking on one at a time, though the futility of this task soon becomes clear, because by the time the player is through with clicking on all the flames, the candles first clicked on have already died out. In absence of action, a screen appears that reads, “You must keep trying,” urging the player to keep clicking.34 In contrast to the first game, the frustrating repetitiveness of Madrid does not correspond to an evident take-away message beyond its overall suggestion of collective mourning and remembrance. Bogost recently noted that players mistook the difficulty of the game as making an argument for “the futility of remembrance rather than its necessity,” but the simulation may as well be broadly interpreted as a follow-up scenario of September 12th.35

In response to critiques about the simplicity of these games vis-à-vis the complexity of the issues that they propose for discussion, Frasca pointed to the nature

34. Robot, Madrid.
of simulation as “a necessarily limited model of reality.” 36 According to him this issue can be bypassed as political games become more sophisticated. 37 “With news gaming,” says Frasca, “we are trying to explore a genre somewhere between the game and the political cartoon. These games make a point rather than entertain. If the game is too good, the message might become invisible.” 38 Implicit in this statement is the lingering legacy of early counter-computing, namely the idea that “understanding proceeds by reducing complex things to simpler elements...that it is possible to understand by discovering the hidden mechanisms that made things work.” 39 As Turkle points out this idea “(analyze and you shall know”) is a rhetoric that animates “the writings of Karl Marx...Adam Smith, Sigmund Freud [and] Charles Darwin”; in counter-computing it re-appears in the notion that a successful grasp of computer processes would similarly further understanding of the rules

36. McClellan, “The Role of Play.”
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
of the community and ultimately result in self and social transparency.\(^{40}\) The implicit audience of persuasive games is thus constituted as a normative, passive consumer; in Frasca’s case, the allusion is to the player of mainstream FPSs. In contrast, gaming interventions associated with tactical media assume and engage players’ propensity toward “transgressive play,” to use Aarseth’s term, thus operating on what Michael de Certeau called the “hidden” or “operational logic” of consumption (hidden because it is “invisible in the universe of codification and generalized transparency” associated with the rational tradition), meaning the creative (or tactical) production characteristic of users whose status corresponds to the oppressed in society (this production includes any manipulation of forms, including linguistic, religious, etc.).\(^{41}\)


\(^{41}\) Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 35. A mounting body of studies (including ethnographies) arguing for the agency of players backs de Certeau’s thesis that use is a crucial site of re-articulation. See, on cheating Consalvo, *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*; on players’ in-game protests Taylor, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture* and Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2005); on “queer play” Jenny Sundén and Malin Sveningsson, *Gender and Sexuality in Online Game Cultures: Passionate Play* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Henry Jenkins’ work speaks about fan culture as a form of alternative social communities defined through cultural tastes and consumption practices which are sometimes in tension with mass media, see Henry Jenkins, *Textuals Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. A similar strand in Cultural Studies traces to the re-evaluation of work of Marxist thinkers in the 1970s who saw domination over the means of cultural production as an integral element of hegemonic power (from its initial grounding on Antonio Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony and the work of the Frankfurt school
Phone Story (2012) (fig. 5.3) by Molleindustria (the alias of the Italian artist and researcher Paolo Pedercini), suggests however a project formulated on a combination of persuasive and tactical effect.\textsuperscript{42} The game is played on the Android and iPhone platforms and involves the player (i.e., the consumer of these phones) in four scenarios satirizing the exploitative conditions of production, consumption and disposal of these products, in addition effectively rerouting revenue to activist organizations working to transform these conditions.\textsuperscript{43} The “Coltan” and “Suicides” levels highlight labor exploitation, respectively of minors in Congolese coltan mines, and Chinese assemblage workers (the task is saving workers trying to commit suicide by jumping off the Foxconn factory roof). The “Obsolescence” and “Waste” levels focus on marketing strategies fueling the rapid cycles of consumption of mobile phones in the West and the resulting problem of disposing highly toxic electronic waste (in this case in Pakistan). The game, designed to financially support the “non-businesses model” of activists, was available for pur-

\textsuperscript{42} In a personal communication, Frasca advanced the simulations of Molleindustria, conceived as short and humorous comments on current events, as inspiring models for the development of News games. Beginning with McDonald’s Videogame (2006), a simulation that mimics the global chain’s business model in order to advocate for ‘sustainable’ consumption, Pedercini takes on the “dictatorship of entertainment,” as he calls it, in a series of simulations similar to Frasca’s in form and aims, but using play to satirical effect. Molleindustria’s games are available at Molleindustria, Radical Games, http://www.molleindustria.org/. See also Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer, NewsGames: Journalism at Play, 26–31.

\textsuperscript{43} The game involved the collaboration, among others, of the YesLab run by the Yes Men. Chiara Ciociola, “Phone Story behind Apple Allure,” Neural 41 (Winter 2012), http://www.neural.it/art/2012/04/phone_story_behind_apple_allure.phtml.
chase on the Apple App store from which it was removed (although it is still available on Android), a decision that resulted in focusing more media attention on Apple’s business practices, thus potentially impacting the public image of the company. In an interview Pedercini cited his involvement with the “alterglobalization” movement and independent media as influences for his project: “Video games were (and still are) an important element of youth culture... at least back in 2003, there was no trace of alternative voices in this field. Games were simply the worst of the worst: crass, militaristic, sexist, aligned with all of the dominant values. It looked like a good place to start.”

Persuasive games are not homogenous in form, but include simulations that draw on and combine existing formats. For instance, Bogost’s game studio, Persuasive Games, produced a series of short RPGs on current events in 2006 based on the format of news editorials. The series includes Airport Insecurity, a game in which the player takes the role of a Transportation Security Agency (TSA) agent attempting to enforce rapidly changing and increasingly zany security rules; Bacte-


Figure 5.3: Molleindustria, Phone Story, 2012
ria Salad, which gives the player control over agribusiness food production in face of risk of E. coli contamination, a task that soon becomes impossible to sustain leading to upset costumers with diarrhea; and Oil God, a God eye view simulation, which lets the player manipulate civil unrest and natural disaster variables to influence the future of the oil market.\textsuperscript{46} The re-purposing of familiar games is another strategy employed in persuasive games. An example is Mary Flanagan's Layoff! (Tiltfactor Lab, 2009), a simulation that uses the mechanics of Bejeweled (PopCap Games, 2001), a multi-platform match-three puzzle game, to comment on corporate mis-management during the 2008-2009 economic recession. The player plays on the side of management, laying off workers and replacing them with financiers and bankers. Each time a worker is fired, information about the character appears on the screen; in contrast, bankers are immovable and unpersonal.\textsuperscript{47} The format of persuasive games has also been used for the development of similar games. Frasca's Madrid was for instance cited by Bogost as the inspiration for Huys (“Hope”) (Kerem Demirbas, 2009), a game memorializing Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, an outspoken critic of the denial of official accounts vis-à-vis the 1915 genocide of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire (Dink was recently killed by a Turkish nationalist).\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} All games are available at Ian Bogost, Persuasive Games, http://www.persuasivegames.com/games/. See also Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer, NewsGames: Journalism at Play, 175.

\textsuperscript{47} Mary Flanagan, Layoff! 2009, http://www.tiltfactor.org/layoff/.

Overall, persuasive games are underlined with concerns about control over the public sphere, and much in the same way that the early computer counterculture and internet pundits advanced the democratizing effects of digital technologies, artists associated with this project equate transparency of communication with greater public accountability in politics and media. The main point advanced in these games is the notion that information and communication are basic conditions of progress (i.e., tools to counteract economic, racial, and political disparities). The view that communication is central to individual and collective empowerment is similarly advanced in avant-garde games and tactical gaming interventions. But contrary to the latter, communication in persuasive games (as framed by Bogost) is prescribed on rationality, arguably a reflection of the idea that an unified discourse is key to building a movement that is capable of achieving long-term social and cultural change. However, Bogost's conceptualization of the player as a rational agent is contradicted in his latest game, *Cow Clicker* (2010) (fig. 5.4), intended as a commentary on the rise of so-called social network games like *FarmVille* (2009), a simple but popular farm simulation played on Facebook and mobile platforms. Bogost obliquely references the later to describe *Cow Clicker*: “You get a cow. You can click on it. In six hours, you can click it again. Clicking earns you clicks. You can buy custom ‘premium’ cows through micropayments (the Cow Clicker currency is called ‘mooney’), and you can buy your way out of the time delay by spending it. You can publish feed stories about clicking your cow, and you can click friends’ cow clicks in their feed stories. Cow
Clicker is Facebook games distilled to their essence.” In an interview Bogost says that he “didn’t set out to make it [Cow Clicker fun. Players were supposed to recognize that clicking a cow is a ridiculous thing to want to do.” Instead, the game soon spread via Facebook as players used it to profile themselves in mimic of Bogost’s distaste for FarmVille. In response, Bogost launched with Pedercini a sarcastic commentary on games that he sees as forms of “clicktivism,” meaning “the belief that participation in a social network could change the world.” In this version of Cow Clicker players could donate money to Oxfam America, either by clicking on a sponsored “Cow Clicktivism” page or by purchasing a cow. Bogost’s response to players’ willingness to donate was to distill the game to a cow bell that can be won by reaching one million clicks, a task which he estimates will take ten years. The latest feature of the game is in response to Peter Molyneux’s Curiosity (2012), a game experiment designed to glean information on how to develop games based on data shared on social media networks. Bogost’s cube clicking is like Curiosity in that it consists of a black cube that breaks apart overtime as players collectively click on it in pursuit “a special truth” that will be revealed as the cube entirely disappears (in Molyneux’s game players can speed this process by purchasing a “diamond chisel” for $77,400 which will allow the

51. Ibid.
52. Oxfam America is a charity organization providing animals to poor farmers in non-Western countries.
owner to break the cube open; Bogost’s version allows for a similar purchase with “credits”). Bogost added an image of Slovenian philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek which players can click to counter “cube clicking” (The use of Žižek alludes to the game’s farcical intent). As Bogost puts it, “cube clicking” is “a vile practice that exposes the worst aspects of contemporary neoliberal culture, turning play into labor and joy into obligation, whilst lining the pockets of bourgeois virtual ranchers.”

While intended as a comment on “behaviorism,” the project ultimately called into question Bogost’s notion of players as rational agents on which “procedural rhetoric” is based as players failed to heed the point of Cow Clicker: demonstrating a mindful understanding of social media games as exploitive, vacuous play would ultimately entail a refusal to play the game.

5.2 Simulation

In a broad sense, persuasive games reflect both the overall resonance and the more recent re-orientation of Habermas’ narrative of the public sphere, as initially formed through political support of the market, and later appropriated by these forces through control of media, in progressive discourses on media culture. Early critics of the notion of the public sphere attributed the emergence of this domain to “cultural” rather than “technological transformation,” stressing thereby the rationalist personhood as both “the utopian moment of the public sphere and a major source of domination.”\(^5^4\) A central theme of these critiques is that the public sphere is neither neutral nor progressive, but a culturally and politically laden utopian construct that relies for its definition on what it implicitly excludes—embodiment, those thus marked, and their agency.\(^5^5\) Much of this line of thought attempts to engage Habermas’ understanding of communication as a power-free relation via Michel Foucault’s notion of communication (knowledge) as embodying pre-existing power relationships.

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55. The idea of subaltern counterpublic or counterpublics composed of those excluded by the public sphere (women and other marginalized groups) as proposed by Nancy Fraser is one of the best known critiques of the Habermasian public sphere. See Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109–142.
Current critiques of the public sphere mainly target the co-evolution of technological transformation and market forces as a source of social disempowerment. Critics of the belief in the democratizing effects of digital technologies include media theorist Tiziana Terranova, who sees this notion as the “cyberdemocratic mode” of modernist liberal ideals of subjecthood, as expressed in the idea that the liberal subject has the right to education and political participation, a notion contributing to the significance of media channels as spaces through which public accountability can be exercised.\(^5^6\) Echoing Habermas, Terranova cites control of media channels as a key strategy for shaping social and political conditions, which she deems the “biopolitical power” of media, a strategy of control that rests on “information oversaturation” in which the medium functions primarily as a source of “fascination” positioned in direct relation to “the kind of affect that it packs, the movements that it receives, inhabits and/or transmits”; the ultimate result being that “rational debates and communicative action” become “marginal.”\(^5^7\)

Political scientist Jodi Dean advances a similar argument about what she calls “communicative capitalism,” a term that encapsulates her skeptical view about the relationship between computer technologies and democratic politics: “The proliferation, distribution, acceleration, and intensification of communicative access and opportunity produce a deadlocked democracy incapable of serving as a form for progressive political and economic change.”\(^5^8\) The term underscores the


\(^{57}\) Ibid., 142.

\(^{58}\) Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Poli-
role of market forces in the disconnect between “communication” and “action,” or politics circulating via computer networks and the absence of responses to this development by the official political sphere (Dean advocates for union and party politics instead). The gist of these critiques, namely that decentralization and the destabilization of the public sphere are linked phenomena, forms similarly the impetus of persuasive games, which at the same time seek to re-activate politics (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 17. Terranova’s and Dean’s critiques reiterate the situationists’ notion of the “spectacle” discussed in Chapter 2 as referencing the reifying effects of mass communication under the logic of the commodity; according to Debord: “In the course of this development [the spectacle] all community and critical awareness have ceased to be.” See Debord, The Society of the Spectacle, 21. The impact of the spectacle is the suppression of “non-spectacular opinion,” an aim which according to Debord is most effectively accomplished through seduction rather than violence. The notion of seduction was later developed by Jean Baudrillard in order to make the point that meaning (the search for truth, in this case in Freudian analysis) is a methodology alien to the culture of the simulacrum (i.e., the spectacle) in which “all appearances conspire to combat meaning, to uproot meaning, whether intentional or not, and to convert it into a game.” Baudrillard however also conceded to the pleasures of opacity. See Jean Baudrillard, Seduction, trans. Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 153. In addressing the polarizing effects of objectifying or spectacular representations in videogames, scholars have also discussed hyperrealism or simulation as a particularly powerful form of representation because we are habituated to assume that the mimetic act is neutral. See for instance Simon Penny, “Virtual Reality as the End of the Enlightenment Project,” in Culture on the Brink: The Ideologies of Technology, ed. Gretchen Bender and Timothy Druckrey (Seattle: Bay Press, 1998), 231–249. See also James Der Derian, Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2001), 35–46. Penny links realist videogames with the disciplining of the body (in entertainment and the military), while Der Derian establishes a link between mimesis and “realpolitik” in the context of the current informatization of the U.S. military.
cal engagement through decentralization. In practice, this project indicates that the view of the public sphere as a domain chiefly framed on rational premises is limited.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has investigated the emergence of play as a medium of critique by artists working cross-culturally in response to the rise of digital games in the cultural and economic context of globalization. The hybrid forms of media in which videogames are embedded inadvertently lend artists the possibilities to develop and refine strategies in line with the historical legacies of playful critiques and techniques associated with the artistic avant-gardes and the counter-cultural computing movements of the 1960 and 1970s, two of the currents integral to the centrality of play in today’s new media forms of culture and markets of globalization.

The cultivation of play and games in the cross-cultural context of avant-garde culture developed in response to the prevailing rationalism of bourgeois culture. Playfulness was waged in challenge to dualist thought advancing the fixity of reality, its ‘givenness’; on the other hand, it functioned to ground artistic practices toward creating fluid modes of being and relating that celebrated ludic pleasure. In this context, the replacement of the artist as an authoritative individual with the collective, and the decoupling of art from aesthetic and functionalist concerns in favor of its application as critique and the ontological ground of individual and social transformation, represented a challenge to rationalist systems underlying the sociopolitical and cultural spheres. Yet the conceptual basis on critique as a method (from the Ancient Greek term κριτική (kritikē), meaning “the faculty
of judgement”) and the purported goal of overturning tradition show the extent
to which the engagement of play as a form of intervention in avant-gardist cur-
rents draws on and extends the philosophical tradition of rationalism. Likewise,
the playful vision of the human and the social was in practice marred in contra-
dictions. Many artists connected with these movements sought affiliations with
political parties and actively participated in the art market system, while at the
same time taking hostile positions against the authoritarianism of official politics
and the alienation of mercantilism. The non-authoritarian sensibility of avant-
gardist play merged with counter-culture movements emerging as a decentralized
response to the centralized system of power structures. The computer, at the time
exclusively a military, government and business tool whose imposing architec-
ture, tabulation applications and inaccessibility exuded the authoritarianism of
these cultures, became a metaphor for the dehumanizing effects of centralism,
technocracy and bureaucracy among activists.

The emergence of play as a cultural and economic phenomenon within glob-
alization is connected to the rationalization of the historical avant-gardes’ legacy
of play through the counter-cultural computing movement’s involvement in the
project of decentralization taking impetus in the 1960s. Against the zero-sum
game and dualist logic of the Cold-War, the development of simulation-based
computers and computer networks were shaped by the desire for a decentralized,
fluid collective associated with counter-culture communalist ideals of a humanis-
tic, rational society, and the intermixing of scientific, governmental, social, and
entrepreneurial cultures within this project. Playfulness was integral to the de-
velopment of conceptual and methodological frameworks that lead to design of decentralized computers. As broader public access to informational networks and the advent of the personal computer as a consumer product propelled excitement about the possibilities to playfully experience reality, being and relating via computer communication, videogames developed under the decentralized economies of globalization as hybrid, fluid forms intersecting artistic, activist and corporate cultures—a development that inadvertently also created possibilities for dissent.

Interventions in gaming associated with tactical media emerged in the 1990s, as part of a broader practice in response to the utopian rhetoric surrounding the rise of decentralization in the 1990s. These discourses, construed within a body-mind split, advanced the possibility of transcendence through digital technologies. This idea was expressed in various forms which as a whole can be typified as a reification of technology, mobilized as a metaphor standing for the ontological basis of the decentered, fluid social and self. In response, tactical media practitioners use decentralization, in this case by way of détournement, a technique developed in avant-garde practices and used in this case to infiltrate the networks and environments in which digital games are embedded as means to affirm and mobilize social capacities and desire for intervention and change. These interventions are constitutive of playful forms of global activism that articulate dissent as social energies immanent in and on the context at hand, hence, they take ephemeral forms which unlike most of the historical avant-gardes eschew group identity and institutionalized political life by organizing around common concerns. Tactical media interventions in gaming apprehend digital play environments and networks as
nodes of contact, opportunities for the development of discourses on art and dissent, and the circulation of new articulations of identity in relation to different collectivities. These practices call attention, on the one hand, to the exclusionary constitution of dominant play culture, and on the other hand engage the mobility, elusiveness, and reach of its decentralized forms to effect symbolic strategies of expression, representation, and empowerment that are fluid, forming, disappearing and re-constituting in co-existence with others. At the same time, these strategies speak of the practitioners’ awareness of the possibility for co-option of interventionist games in mainstream economies of entertainment operating within these networks.

Artists associated with persuasive games cite the hold of conservative ideologies on videogames, which they see mainly as a rhetorical medium, as the impetus for a project aimed at mobilizing decentralization to provoke critical-rational reflection and discourse in terms similar to the function of print media within the Habermasian public sphere. In this role, persuasive games consist of simulations that draw on and recombine old and new forms of media to represent the artist’s particular views on current sociopolitical issues through dynamic models configured to disrupt the player’s unreflecting responses and advance fluid views about the self and the social world. This project is underscored by concerns about control of the public sphere by a large and concentrated media system. Like elements of counter-cultural movements in the 1960s and 1970s for whom the personal computer represented a force of democratic development, artists advancing games as persuasive tools equate transparency in communication with
greater public accountability in politics and media. In theory as well as in practice, these currents share the belief that communication based on rationality is the chief means to solve the problems and risks associated with the broader project of democracy. While avant-garde and tactical media practices similarly stress participation, transparency and reciprocity in public life, the fluidity and playfulness of these forms connects to considerations about the interrelations between power and rationality. The difficulties of relying on discursive and consensus-dependent, that is, rational forms of engagement against dominant power are illustrated in persuasive games that yield interpretations and behaviors by players which are in tension or even antithetical to the artist’s expectations of and intent to provoke reasoned reflection. These breakdowns in communication suggest that the use of play to enable democratic thought and construct the public sphere as to contribute to emancipatory action, compels rethinking of the normative concept of the player as a chiefly rational agent, arguably an extension of the body/mind dichotomy underscoring utopian discourses surrounding the evolution and rise of digital technologies.

This investigation has focused on the affinities between past and present media practices traced by a shared penchant for recombination, hybridity and decentralization, working within diffuse historical conditions that are contingent to cultural, sociopolitical, technological and economic flows. This approach demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives for the study and critique of current media forms. Historically, the rejection of specialization and a turn to interdisciplinarity was basic to the conceptual foundations as well as the practices
associated with the modernist avant-gardes and the various currents, spanning planners, scientists, counter-culture figures, entrepreneurs, and artists involved in the development of computer technologies, including videogames. Contemporary interventions in digital culture, of which art-based misappropriations of computer are illustrative, emerged on the aftermath of these historical legacies as creative practices on the intersections of technoscience, activism and art. The foundations of these practices on cross-disciplinary exchanges between theorists, activists, artists and programmers developed on the search of new approaches to media activism within the post-Cold War rise of computer networks and globalization. Consciously or unconsciously, current critics who focus on the democratic effects of digital technologies echo the beliefs of counter-cultural movements hoping to rationally advance decentralized power via personal computers in face of oppressive conditions. On the other hand, critics that frame these technologies primarily as tools of power, its means of control, are vocalizing the fears and anxieties prevalent among the majority of counter-cultural currents for whom the batch-processing computer became the emblem of the dehumanizing rationalism of systems of social control. Studies of digital technologies and culture unduly stress these binaries, which in reality are embedded in and intertwined with a broader and more significant turn to interdisciplinary approaches in historical and contemporary forms of media practices.
APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

FPS  First Person Shooter

MOD  Modification (videogames)

MUD  Multi-User Dungeon, Multi-User Dimension, and Multi-User Domain (a multi-player real-time virtual world)

MMORPG  Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game

MMOGs  Massively Multiplayer Online Games

NPC  Non-Playing Character (i.e., not controlled by the player)

RPGS  Role Playing Games

RTS  Real Time Strategy Game

WAD  Game files containing levels, graphics and other game data
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