

to end up inside museums, it could be added that the media artists of the twenty-first century are now incorporating the museum as backdrops in their games.

Apart from mods addressing the entire graphic engine or rebuilding and imagining spaces, there exist a number of interventions, which are addressing game characters.

The Chinese artist Feng Mengbo, for example, has introduced an ironic version of the self-portrait into game engine-based art by mapping his face onto a *Quake* bot in the piece *Q4U*.²³ The piece was shown at Documenta 11 in 2002, and the audience could play against the bot, which was programmed to react faster than any human contender.

Although most of the mods and patches are either subverting single elements in existing games or creating new audio-visual spaces, they are usually relying on the gameplay of the original games. Due to the popularity of first-person shooters and the vitality of the mod culture that has developed along with them, the game play in most of these patches is based on the well-known first-person shooting action.

Wherever artists have additionally altered the gameplay as well it is possible to speak about the creation of new and original games. Obviously there is a large grey area between the phenomenon of patching or modding a game and the creation of a new game. Numerous unique games on the market are based on the same game engine. What makes them different is the gameplay in relation to the aesthetic appearance.

Artist Games

The third major artistic strategy in relation to computer games is the creation of unique and innovative games. The term artist game has been coined for these products.

What usually unites these games is their relatively low budget in comparison to the game industry and most are based on the programming languages Java or Actionscript (Flash) ensuring their deployment on websites.

Numerous games are based on classic arcade titles from the 1980s, such as *Breakout*, *Space Invaders* and *Tempest*. A game that has to be positioned in the grey area between modification and original game is Natalie Bookchin's *Intruder* (1999).²⁴ It is based on the experimental adaptation of a short story by Jorge Luis Borges and subverts several game principles from classic arcade games. However, by introducing the narrative element derived from the story about two brothers falling in love with the same woman, she manages to completely transform the original game structures. The goals of the games change towards a different reading of the adapted text. Tiffany Holmes writes about this game: "Gamers can only advance in *Intruder* by perpetrating violent gestures. This novel, first person shooter structure invites gamers to see how popular computer games perpetuate masculine ideologies of spatial conquest, combat fantasies and sexual domination."²⁵ *Intruder* was built with Macromedia's Shockwave and is playable online. The use of the Internet as showcase and distribution system for these kinds of games is a central element.

and the events are interpreted and meaningful within the world of the piece of art. When you read a poem, you make something different of/from/with it than the next person, just as two playings of a game may differ. At every turn in the reading, you will have probably responded differently from the next person reading the same words. The events are reading/interpreting the words or sentences etc. of the work of art.

2. Devices in Bookchin's *The Intruder*

In Natalie Bookchin's Shockwave piece *The Intruder* (dian-network.com/con/intruder), we are presented with a sequence of ten videogames, most of which are adapted from classics such as *Pong*, *Space Invaders*, and *Textual Vagina Blood*. We interact via moving or clicking the mouse; and by making whatever we make of/with/from the story. Meaning is always constructed, never on a plate. The interaction is less focussed on videogame play than it is on advancing the narrative of the story we hear throughout the presentation of the ten games. The story is the Jorge Louis Borges piece *The Intruder* with a few changes. The female in the story is "the intruder". She is as a possession of the two closely bonded miscreant brothers enmeshed in a hopeless triangle of psycho-sexual possession with homoerotic undertones. Finally one of them kills her to end the tension between the two men. Game over. Story over. Bookchin presents an awareness of being an intruder, herself, in the (previously?) male-dominated world of videogame creation and enjoyment. The videogame paradigms are subverted, mocked and implicitly criticized for their shallow competitive and violent nature not unrelated to the nature of the violent males.

Although moving and clicking the mouse is associated with advancing the videogames, the videogames are subordinated to the story; the videogames are used as and within literary devices. The videogames are literary devices in that they are programmed machines functioning less to advance gameplay as triggers for the advancement of the audio of the story. The videogames are also functioning within other comparative/metaphoric literary devices. We compare the worlds of the games with the worlds of the story. Metaphor is operational here. We compare ourselves in the world of the games with ourselves in the world of the story, i.e., we compare the goals of the games with our goals in reading/listening to and understanding the story. We cannot enjoy the games in the way that videogames are usually meant to be enjoyed. Partly because they are not as attentively programmed as well-crafted videogames. But mostly because they are subordinated, in every sense, to the literary dimension. Structurally. Morally. Narratively, etc. The artist mops the floor with the videogame. Art 10. Videogames 0. Women cheer this artwork like few other Net-based works. It is deservedly famous both as statement and for its formal literary innovation. It is not innovative as a computer game. That is not what it aspires to. It aspires to literary/artistic innovation and literary depth. It is a darkly comic, blistering critique of the typical mentality involved in both the design and playing of videogames.

It is a kind of anti-videogame/patriarchy work of media art. But it also explores the relationship between game and art in a different way: both videogame and story are presented as make-believe activities which proceed via the generation of events that change the game/story world and that the player/wreader responds to, generating further events.

Heraclitus poses the game amid the amoral attentions of a child playing dice. Bookchin poses it amid the evil of men.

3. Art Play in Regina Célia Pinto's *Viewing Axolotls*

Regina Célia Pinto's Flash piece *Viewing Axolotls* (arteonline.arq.br/viewing_axolotls), like Bookchin's piece, uses a story. *Viewing Axolotls* uses the Julio Cortazar story "Axolotls" from his collection *The End of the Game*. The Cortazar text is included in its entirety. We might describe Cortazar's story and Regina's use of it as an exploration of transformative immersion. In the Cortazar story, the narrator does and does not become one of the axolotls he views with fascination at the aquarium. He does, insofar as he realizes with immersive, imaginative intensity a possible "mentality" or existential condition of an axolotl, i.e., he becomes fully figuratively an axolotl. But the story is unlike Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, wherein the main character literally becomes a cockroach. In Kafka, the metamorphosis seems the tragi-comic consequence of the character not having fully lived. In Cortazar's story, the figurative metamorphosis is a kind of imaginative achievement. The narrator remains a human being and somehow his humanity is complemented or extended via this realization of axolotlness.

The Cortazar story explores the nature and limits of figurative immersion, which is the existentially strong assumption (necessarily figuratively) of a point of view different from the normal ones. The character experiences figurative immersion and, in parallel, the reader may experience figurative immersion. Regina's adaptation explores immersion in a work of art (Cortazar's) and offers the reader immersion in a virtual work of art (Regina's and/or Cortazar's). How immersive is the experience? Like Bookchin's piece, *Viewing Axolotls* is not as smooth or visually/sonically compelling as a professional videogame. It seems to me that the term immersion is used more literally in connection with videogames than in literature. Yet of course it must remain figurative: we are who we are where we are when we are and there isn't any getting around it. The transformation to realize is not so much becoming an axolotl as becoming Regina (reading Cortazar) becoming an axolotl. The piece is as immersive as you make it. Which, it seems, is part of the nature of immersion. Building a compelling world to immerse in is only part of the task for those who would permit an immersive experience; the other part is allowing/encouraging the imaginative leap that humans can make to figuratively assume perspectives outside of themselves. And that is as well accomplished via the literary as anything else.

Viewing Axolotls also involves a "game". "The objective of the game is to make the avatar and the axolotls exchange glances." The "avatar" is a silhouette of Regina or the speaker of the piece. You cannot literally get them to exchange glances because the silhouette has no eyes. The goal is figurative. The game is even less gamey than Bookchin's efforts. It is playful, however. Again, the notion of the game is used figuratively, as a literary device, in this case perhaps to think of a game as simply play toward the goal of imaginative or literary realization.

4. Game as Device to See Anew: *Pac Mondrian* by Neil Hennessey

When Toronto's Neil Hennessey and friends released *Pac Mondrian* (pbfb.ca/pac-mondrian) in 2004, the *New York Times* wrote about it. And then so did the *Globe and Mail* and *National*

Post, the two national Canadian papers. And many bloggers linked to it and discussed it. What was all the fuss about? *Pac Mondrian* uses a Piet Mondrian painting called *Broadway Boogie Woogie* as the playing surface. As you play *Pac-Man* on it, the surface/painting changes according to the graphical logic of the old *Pac-Man* game. And the audio is boogie-woogie.

One of the main things people comment about is how it lets them experience Mondrian's work anew. Again, the emphasis is on art, not the computer game. Hennessey and friends have also made an arcade version of it that can show in a gallery.

Another of the common observations goes something like this:

Videogames, meet modernist art; modernist art, meet videogames. Now that you two are acquainted, please mash up two of your most iconic symbols. Pac-Man and Piet Mondrian? Okay, sounds good to us. So, anyone for a game of Dali Kong, Warhol the Hedgehog, Man Rayman, or Super Kahlo Brothers?

From engadget.com

The emphasis here is not on either art or the videogame, but on a more or less equal "mash up" of the two. *Pac Mondrian* is not solely for those interested in visual art but also for anyone who likes *Pac-Man*. There is movement here from videogame as solely figurative (Regina) or strictly subordinated to the art (Bookchin).

It is still possible to see the videogame as a device: if we look at it from the point of view of someone interested mostly in visual art and the work of Mondrian, we can see that they will see the videogame as a device that allows us to see Mondrian afresh.

However, we can also see *Pac Mondrian* from the point of view of someone interested not at all in Mondrian, at least initially, but interested in videogames. They will find *Pac Mondrian* an OK implementation of *Pac-Man* and may move from that interest into some engagement with the artistic dimension of the piece.

Comparing the previous work with *Pac Mondrian*, it seems that Natalie's and Regina's works are more complex in their emotional depth and intellectual range. The notion of the game is fully figurative; the notion of play is art play, not game play. *Pac Mondrian* bops lightly upon the surface of pop and modernist art, yet is more deeply realized as a programmed piece and as a juxtaposition of art and videogame. It is a work of strong delight in both art and game and provides people with a sense of the relation of both; it also gives people a sense of the relation of Mondrian's piece to Manhattan, conveys something of the spirit of Mondrian and boogie-woogie in Manhattan.

5. *Arteroids*: Twin Devices

I have worked on *Arteroids* (vispo.com/arteroids) since 2001. It is never really finished. I call it the battle of poetry against itself and the forces of dullness. It is based on the ATARI classic arcade game *Asteroids* ("ATARI", by the way, is "art" and "ai" mixed together). Instead of a space ship, the id entity is a text. Instead of asteroids, you encounter texts.