

Critical Gameplay: Art Games in Instruction

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Overview

How do games affect the way we problem solve, socialize, or even view the world? When we shoot, do we learn to destroy obstacles instead of work around them? Does the binary world of enemies and adversaries teach us to ignore the gray in the everyday? Do games encourage us to ignore consequences and wait for second chances at the same problems? Are we forgetting how to play with each other because playing against each other is more fun?

Critical Gameplay is a collection of “strategically designed” video games. Each game asks what common game mechanics teach us. The games in the collection are designed to help reevaluate our perspective on gameplay experiences. *Critical Gameplay* seeks to offer alternate perspectives on the way we play.

Critical Gameplay does not attempt to answer these questions. Instead, it seeks to open the dialogue with demonstrative experiments in gameplay. It attempts to fill the space of “what if,” with something tangible—a game. What if that avatar had a history before you destroyed it? What if you couldn’t read the game world by stereotyping characters? *Critical Gameplay* is simply about raising questions that encourage critical reflection on gameplay experiences. The following games were exhibited:

Wait: A simple game where the player is encouraged to refrain from acting on the world. As the player moves, the world disappears, but when the player waits, the world becomes more interesting. The majesty is found in the slow, controlled effort. Players are awarded points when the little things in life reveal themselves.

Bang!: A game that allows the player to kill other players, but by killing them, the player must endure a long interruptive experience which reviews the fictive history of the victim.

Match: Seeks to challenge the game design pattern of matching and categorizing. Players are tasked with matching objects with people, then people with people, and finally people with a single representative object. Each time the player successfully matches, the pair is removed from the screen. However, some items simple don't have matches.

Healer: A top down “Saver.” Instead of shooting players, characters must heal victims of historical massacres. The player can reverse death by removing bullets from the victims. The soldiers that committed these massacres are still lurking, so the player must work to keep the victims alive. The player can put themselves between the bullet and the target to protect the victims and distract the soldiers.

Levity: A game in which the collection mechanic hinders the player. Unlike many games which encourage players to collect items, anything the player collects weighs them down. *Levity* is a platformer in which the player’s jump and walk speed are decreased as the player collects items. Players can convert what they have collected to charity, by giving their collected items, but the weight of having collected is never completely removed. The game is designed as an active revolt to collection values, emphasizing anti consumptive use.

Black/White: A game in which stereotype is challenged. Instead of being able to identify a threat by appearance, the player must examine the threat by another means — behavior. To survive the game, the player must react to NPCs based on how they move. Two characters that look exactly the same may act very differently. The game is built within two levels, with two types of characters, animated in two frames with a series of other binary constructs (two actions, two colors, etc).

Simultaneity: An action-puzzler, where the player must navigate multiple robots to various exits on the game screen. Each robot is controlled by the same set of arrow keys, so a movement left moves all robots left. The player must practice mutual benefit to complete each level, as any physical contact with wall damages a robot. If too many robots are destroyed, the level cannot be completed.

Please visit <http://www.criticalgameplay.com/> for more information.