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From Appropriation to Approximation
Tracing the relationship between video and computer games and contemporary
fine art practice

Introduction

Recent years have seen a significant surge of museum and gallery exhibitions focusing on
works in the context of computer and videogames.   At the same time the discussion
about the ontological status of computer games in relation to art, specifically whether
they can be understood as an artform or not, is heating up.

Contemporary artists are increasingly influenced by computer and videogames, while
game designers are turning towards the world of fine arts for inspiration.
It is the intention of this paper to examine the relationship between contemporary fine art
practice and computer games. In order to understand how and why contemporary artist
practice is moving towards games it is necessary to take a step back and take a look at the
mutual attraction between the fields of games and art

Modern Siblings

Johan Huizinga, the famous Dutch game scholar, posited play and games at the roots of
all cultures and clarified that they permeate various sectors of society such as art,
philosophy, law and politics. The notion of games as a core element of culture is also
perceived by McLuhan. He states that: *"Games are popular art, collective, social
reactions to the main drive or action of any culture"*[1]. He hints at the historic importance
of games as a form of collective art at the heart of ancient non-literate societies, for the
constant modelling of the universe through dramatization and enactment. Similarly,
Callois describes tribal rites as forms of play with mimetic functions that are often related
to full bodily involvement.

According to McLuhan, the shift towards literacy brought about a change of focus from a
mimetic relation to the outer world to the inner world of the human psyche.
Tribal and participatory forms of art, which were homologous with games, evolved into
literary substitutes and private dramatizations of the human psyche.
Games in this context have to be described as a social art demanding bodily involvement
and mutual participation.
Adorno and Horkheimer identified the myth of the Odyssey, and the personal struggle of
the individual with this shift from the ancient world to an early phase of enlightenment.
The cultural forms of art and games seem to depart onto separate tangents at this point.
Text and the emergence of the individual narrative gradually create forms of art directed
towards individuals, and thus move it away from the participatory game.

What then is the relation between art and games ?

On the first glance we can identify a number of similarities, both are generating spatiotemporal zones, which are perceived as different from everyday life. Furthermore, art as well as games, are said to be on the one hand governed by rules and on the other hand related to notions of freedom.
The latter has led Sutton-Smith to critique the romantic conflation of art and play. He reflects upon the romantic ideal of childhood as a realm of freedom and creativity that can be traced back to Schiller and writes: *"Essentially what this "romantic' relationship between children's play and art did was to obscure whatever the true relationship between play and art actually is and to contribute instead the notion that what is most important about them is the freedom, originality and autonomy they connote."[2].*

Sutton Smith is convinced that the direct identification of play with art is clouding the options of explaining the true nature of play. However, the interest in so called primitive art and children's art as sources of innocent creativity has had a strong influence on modern art and therefore has to be treated as one important strain of proximity between the two forms.

Whereas child's play has been idealised as seemingly free from constraints, games are usually based on rules. The consensual acceptance of these rules by all players is necessary to enter the spatiotemporal microcosm of a game. Furthermore, the rules are precisely the means to create the difference that defines the threshold between everyday life and game. This adherence to the rules can be likened to a contract, which if broken by one of the participants holds the power to destroy the game.

Objects of art emerge from being perceived as different from profane objects and it can be argued that this process is similarly based on rules.
As Boris Groys has shown in his famous examination of the concept of the new in art, we are only able to identify works of so called "high" art based on processes that generate a difference between the profane world and the realm of art. For him the locus of differentiation throughout the history of modernity is the museum.
In relation to the avant-gardes of the last century he states that: *"[t]he less an artwork differs visually from a profane object, the more necessary it becomes to draw a clear distinction between the art context and the profane, everyday, non-museum context of its occurrence"[3]*
What is important here for our argument is that every profane object that is transported into the museum, can at some point in time be valorised and transformed into a work of art. Consequently if games are pass this threshold, they become works of art.
A number of artists are indeed using "traditional" strategies of the appropriation of elements from the popular culture phenomenon of computer games and transform these objects into pieces of art by placing them in the art context.
Groys relates to Marcel Duchamp as one of the most important artists, who have directly addressed the process of transformation from non-art to art. The concept of the ready made challenged the differentiation process itself and has thus also transformed the rules

of art itself. Groys asserts that in recent years the artistic focus has gradually moved away from the transformational power of the object in the museum space to the creation and examination of the context surrounding the artwork.

He writes: *"In the modernist tradition, the art context was regarded as stable-it was the idealized context of the universal museum. Innovation consisted in putting a new form, a new thing, in this stable context. In our time, the context is seen as changing and unstable. So the strategy of contemporary art consists in creating a specific context which can make a certain form or thing look other, new and interesting – even if this form was already collected before."*[4]

In other words, in his view, contemporary artistic practice is particularly concerned with examining, creating and transforming the rules governing the emergence of art itself.

The game of chess is the central metaphor in Marcel Duchamp's work.

For him:*"[c]hess is undoubtedly one of the most private forms of artistic activity, since the artist's constructions, however beautiful, occur on the invisible plane of thought and could not be said to please a wide audience"*.[5]

The simple rules of chess are able to generate a universe of "plastic" constructions.

Part of the pleasure that can be derived from this process is its solipsistic nature. It creates a private aesthetic spatiotemporal realm. Here we have the perspective that playing a game might be part of an artistic practice in it's own right with the player as the audience.

It might be farfetched to relate the playing of a computer game to Duchamp's notion of the creation of temporal aesthetic constructions on the "plane of thought", but the core element of individual aesthetic pleasure could be said to be similar.

This is not to claim that every player of a videogame is an artist of some sort.

However, the practice of playing a computer game most definitely can be regarded as an aesthetic and sometimes creative process, constricted by time that generally does not leave an artefact behind.

Game elements turn up in various shapes in Duchamp's work. There are the recurrent language games, the use of aleatorics or chance as an important part of artistic production,

the constant play with gender identities, as well as the ever-present practice of chess.

From the Surrealist cadavers exquis over William Burrough's cut-up-method and John Cage's composition strategies to Karl Sim's artificial life installations the use of aleatoric elements has played an important role in artistic practice.

Fluxus art strongly employed various game structures such as participation, chance and the examination and dramatization of rule based behaviour.

The playful approach to the representation of gender identities can be seen as another highly influential aspect of the game in modern art. Callois refers to this element of games that can be found in children's play as well as forms of drama, as Mimicry. There are numerous examples for Mimicry in art; some of the most famous include Duchamp's female alter ego Rrose Selavy as well as the work of Cindy Sherman.

Since computer games have only become important as a medium with the arcade games of the early 80ies the focus here will be on artists who have been influenced by and have

used computer games for their artistic practice. Most of these artists seem to come from the fields of Net-and Media art.

Between Appropriation and Approximation

In the last ten years we have witnessed a significant cultural re-evaluation of video and computer games. Whereas these games were generally treated as children's toys during the 80s, they have permeated the whole of society by the year 2000.

Academic research and contemporary artistic practice are accompanying a general establishment of the cultural importance of those games. Currently they are entering the museums from two directions. On the one hand they more and more perceived to be cultural products worthy of exhibition in their own right and on the other hand they have become an integral part of contemporary fine art practice.

The exhibition Game On[6] was an interesting example for the shift of perception that has been taking place in the last decade. In the exhibition catalogue, Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire promote the notion of computer games as the "*art of contested spaces*". They write: *"[w]e should consider […] viewing games as spatial art with its roots in architecture, landscape painting, sculpture, gardening or amusement-park design."*[7](Jenkins H. Squire K., p.65, 2002).
This approach is especially worth noting if one considers the impact of installation art during the 90s that was led by an examination of spatial configuration and audience participation in space.
Whether one adheres to the notion of computer games as an art form or denies their potential to generate high art, it remains obvious that they have a number of characteristics, which are not entirely shared by fine art.

First of all they are a mass medium attempting to deliver compelling entertainment for a fixed prize on a PC or console. Furthermore they demand a high level of participation and engagement. To put it bluntly: As games they have to be played. In terms of production a lot of similarities with the medium of film can be observed. Computer games and films are usually produced by teams consisting of professionals with highly specialised roles. The emergence of hybrid entertainment products incorporating film, game, toys and even fashion manifestations has led to a strong connection between formerly separated entertainment sectors.

However, given that most computer games are not attempting to be perceived as works of art it might be more interesting to move on from the discussion of the computer game as a form of art to its relation with contemporary fine art practice. This relationship between the poles of fine art and computer games can be described as a permanent oscillation between appropriation and approximation. In other words, both forms are borrowing elements from each other to employ them in their respective systems and both exist in

varying degrees of proximity. Two major questions can be said to emerge from this context. Firstly, how is this process organised and secondly what are the reasons for it.

From the perspective of art, the first question is synonymous with the examination of artistic practices and strategies at work. The particular artistic practices span from the appropriation of game iconography, via the modification and subversion of existing games to the production of unique and original games. Yet, between these three broader modes that can be identified, there also exist vast grey areas.
However, why artists are interested in games at all is a lot harder to explain in categorical terms and one can find a vast number of differing motivations and interests.
It might well be that it can only be dealt with appropriately in the context of particular artworks.

Generally the computer game is increasingly treated as a new medium with unique and original technologies, functions and codes. Very much like film, the whole dispositif at work in games has become an object of examination and reference. Artistic examination is directed towards all aspects of games, such as the user's environment, the game-space, the game-play and its rules, the game's audiovisual representation as well as narrative structures.

Artistic Strategies In The Context of Computer Games
Three different modes of relation between contemporary fine art and games have been mentioned: **appropriation**, **modification** and **production** of original games.

Appropriation of elements from the audiovisual apparatus of computer games and their transportation into the art context is probably the most widely used artistic strategy in this context. Here, artists do not necessarily need in depth knowledge of a game's technology or rules.

The second strategy demands a certain knowledge of the rules and system of a particular game, but even more importantly an understanding of the wider context, such as the game's fans and communities emerging from it. The artist is changing a functional or aesthetic element in an existing game. This often critical or ironic intervention is referred to as **modification** (mod) or patch.

Quite often, modding a game, providing a new skin for an avatar or creating a whole level
generates better knowledge of its technology and functions. This leads directly to the third strategy that ought to be mentioned here, the **production** of unique and original games. A large number of these games, that have recently been termed artist games, are playable online.

Appropriation of Game Iconography

The classic pop-art practice of the appropriation of aesthetic objects and codes from everyday life, in order to employ them in the creation of works of art has been a major force in modern art. Here, artists act as critical instances, highlighting and researching popular cultural phenomena. There are lots of similarities between the 60s pop artists, highlighting issues such as branding of fabricated objects and the implications of aesthetics in the world of consumable objects and the concentration of contemporary artists on the iconography of computer games.

The focus remains on the iconography of gaming as a popular activity that has completely penetrated all western societies as one of the most important manifestations of commercial entertainment. Artists are treating the aesthetic peculiarities, from the early reduced vector graphics and sprites, which already seem to have a relation to minimal art, to the highly iconic game characters such as "Super Mario" and "Lara Croft" as an integral part of the contemporary media landscape. Furthermore, fashion and nostalgia are strongly influencing the choice of imagery. The "strong" iconic image of "Pac Man" has been appropriated by countless visual artists, because it stands for a particular segment of 80s youth culture.

There is a difference between artist s, who are interested in the idiosyncrasy of the imagery and iconography, such as the pixel based characters that can be found in all videogames of the early 80s, and those who are more interested in the rules of the games. It is an entirely different operation to consider the rules of the game, how it was played and which spaces are generated by playing it. This is why there is a need to separate the mere appropriation of imagery from strategies that generate a much greater proximity with games, such as the creation of mods.

Furthermore, other than with mods or artist games, artworks emerging from a strategy of appropriation are generally produced with traditional means, such as painting, drawing, photography, film or video.

A good example for the visual appropriation of game culture is the painter and media artist Miltos Manetas. His approximation to computer games has led to two separate strains of work: On the one hand he has painted series of images depicting people playing console games in various environments, the game controllers and technical devices, cables and television sets[8].

On the other hand he has recorded gaming sessions, short videos[9] of games he played, without further changing or altering them. These games include Tomb Raider, Super Mario Bros, Soul Calibur, Abe's Odyssey, Boxing and Snowboarding games as well as Metal Gear Solid. All of these short videos show elements of the game being played and have titles that enhance the ironic distance to the depicted action. For example, in one video we see Mario sleeping beneath a tree and the title is accordingly "Super Mario Sleeping"(1998), another one shows the character Sophitia from the fighting game Soul Calibur in the winning stance, when she automatically utters the words: "I am sorry"(1998) which is also the title of the piece.

In order to understand the ironic surplus these videos generate, people have to have played the games themselves. The ironic humour is triggered by evoking specific situations in games, and are thus to a certain extent addressing the gaming community as an audience. This process leads to a somewhat problematic situation: At present only a

small proportion of the art audience is familiar with computer games. This does not mean that an audience that has never played the game will be completely unable to relate to these works.

However, an important layer of meaning, that often refers to user actions, before or after the extracted scenes, is lost in those cases.

In a similar fashion, a work of art that uses footage derived from a film will be read differently if the audience is not familiar with the particular film.

It could also be interesting to consider the impact these pieces have on the game community. After all appropriation in art is a process that is based on devolving the choice of important situations or cultural element s to the artist. The player of a game on the other hand is used to making decisions or choices on his/her own.

To put it in other words, these pieces need an audience that has played the games they are referring to, but their form of presentation prohibits the most important feature at the heart of these games – the active choice of what to experience at any given time. This situation arises from artworks, which are built on the reference to games, but at the same time do not employ game mechanisms.

Aesthetic appropriation can also be found in the work of Norbert Bayer, who uses the pseudonym "Mr. Ministeck". "Ministeck" is the name of a popular puzzle game from the late 70ies and early 80ies in Germany. It consists of sets of small coloured plastic bricks, which can be used to create mosaic-like images.

Bayer uses these plastic bricks to represent iconic pixel and sprite-based imagery derived from video and computer games [10].

Under the series title "Analogue Eats Digital" his motifs include Pac Man and its Ghosts, Mario and Donkey Kong. These images are for once playing with the pixel based representation system on screens with very limited resolutions, addressing them as a stylistic system rather than being dictated by technical limitation, in addition they are infused with a certain nostalgia, remembering the decade of arcade computer games.

Some of the imagery taken from early computer games has generally penetrated the visual worlds of design, advertisement and visual arts, as a fashionable renaissance of reduced pixel styles. To some extent this process might be related to the emergence of mobile phone devices, which also had limited displays similar to the early 80ies games. Since technological constraints of contemporary mobile devices are improving fast, it remains to be seen how important the reduced pixel approach will remain as a style.

The relation between mosaic and pixel-based representation from early videogames is also

important in the ceramic mosaics used for the representations of aliens in the "Invader" project[11]. Invader positions the aliens from the famous game "space invaders" as mosaics all over numerous cities, thereby adopting the practice of graffiti and sticker artists.

Although Invader's ongoing practice introduces another important element, the public space and the city as an arena for his work, he is directly appropriating the highly iconic images of alien invaders from the 80ies arcade game Space Invaders.

Since strategies involving appropriation have been at the heart of modern art practice for a long time, a lot more artists could be named in this context.

Yet, here it has to suffice to remember that we are mainly dealing with artists who are employing the iconic elements from games because of their significance in a wider cultural sphere. This approach includes all artistic work that uses audiovisual elements from computer games without interfering with or relating to the game technology itself.

Intervention in the form of Mods and Hacks

So-called mods and patches are modifications of the game software that can be applied after the full game has been obtained by the player. Frequently these patches are used to fix bugs or adjust the gameplay. In online games they are often used to close security holes that allow cheating or to introduce new objects or features into the game.

The practice of the quick fix, the patch that can alter a program is strongly connected with the distribution system of the Internet. Contemporary PC games are subject to alterations and the patches can be obtained online. Although most patches are delivered as bug fixes by the game programmers and designers, they have increasingly become a means of creative involvement of the gamers themselves. The various skins for avatars in the well known first person shooter "Doom" - some of them relating to other pop culture icons like Mickey Mouse or the Smurfs - are falling into this category. So are the creations of maps or models for existing games. One of the earliest visible art exhibitions that highlighted the practice of modding and patching in the context of computer games was the online exhibition "Cracking The Maze ", curated by Anne-Marie Schleiner in1999[12].

In her curatorial statement [13]Anne Marie Schleiner delivers an overview of the historical evolution of mods and patches, emphasizes the importance of the Internet as distribution medium and hints at the subversive potential of mods. These mods for example were the first attempts to include representations of female bodies into the realm of player avatars in first person shooter games like doom and Marathon. Schleiner points out that these hacks

introduced female avatars into games before they were officially included in games like Resident Evil, Final Fantasy VII and Tomb Raider. From this perspective unofficial fan mods have transformed the representational strategies of the game industry. This could be an interesting incentive for artists who are interested in transforming the often stereotypical representations and narratives in computer games.

Schleiner writes:

"On a technical level, of course, the artist(s) avoids having to put in the extensive time required for programming an interactive game engine. But the parasitic game patch is also a means to infiltrate gaming culture and to contribute to the formation of new configurations of game characters, game space and gameplay"[14]

It is important to note that "Cracking the Maze" included patches from artists as well as gamers and hackers who did not produce their interventions with an art context in mind. This fact shows that on the one hand the image of the hacker has become interesting for contemporary media artists, and on the other hand the artistic context has been widened to include a number of previously excluded activities such as programming software.

All of these facts are similarly important in the context of net art.
Patches and Mods are leading to a number of different interventions:
Some affect the architecture, lights and sounds in a level (so called maps), others affect the player representation (skins), some might use the well known game-play of classic games like Pong, Break or Space Invaders and exchange the visuals, some transform the whole aesthetic machine of a game while others only change certain rules of a game.

The most complete transformation possible is the patching of the way graphics are represented by the game engine. The artist group "Jodi", that has come to fame with its net art projects was also one of earliest game-modding protagonists. Their deconstructions of the first person shooter Quake entitled "ctrl-space"(1997) and the follow up "SOD"(1998)[15], which are based on completely changing the visual representation of the game by introducing different textures, reducing the colours to black and white and changing the interface and weapon representation is a complete conversion of a well known game. The ctrl-space patch changed the game so much that it became unplayable, because the information conveying space and location which is necessary to navigate through the game environment was completely abandoned. The Jodi patches can be described as abstract kinetic screen sculptures, that often reference abandoned computer technology and to a certain extent minimal art. Essentially the objective in these patches is to turn the entire game into a purely aesthetic experience that removes the original gameplay and goals completely.

Another patch, which is directed towards the deconstruction of the entire game graphics, has been presented by Tom Betts aka Nullpointer in his QQQ[16] project (2002). An interesting additional element is that players online are constantly influencing the aesthetic representation of the game patch, which turns the piece into an online performance.

Modifications of games like "Quake" and "Unreal" became increasingly popular in the gaming community and accordingly they were used in the art context. The exhibition "Syn:Real"[17], organised by t0 netbase at Museumsquartier Vienna in 1998, invited 12 artists to contribute mods for the Unreal game Engine and presented them to the public as part of a LAN-Party, a type of event that is deeply rooted in gaming culture.

One year later the Berlin based gallery Shift eV. organised a similar show entitled "Reload"[18]based on the Quake game engine. In the case of Reload, the game environment was mirrored by an intricate architecture in the exhibition space.

In both exhibitions the game engine itself became the exhibition space for the artwork thus taking on the traditional role of a museum and the artists provided the spaces, sounds and character hacks for their respective showrooms/levels. This is particularly interesting in relation to Boris Groys observation, that contemporary art is increasingly dealing with the context enabling the transformation of the profane into a work of art.
Here the most profane objects, the games themselves, are transformed into art spaces.

The artists Matthias Fuchs and Sylvia Eckerman, who submitted a level for Syn:Real,

have created a virtual museum entitled "Expositur"[19](2002). Fuchs writes about the piece:
"Even though the virtual museum "Expositur" tells about objects and processes, even though there is a semantic framework and an underlying logic structure our knowledge space leaves ample room for alternative readings, it encourages the users to define their private paths away from the main roads."[20]
Chris Cornish has presented his "repeater "series[21] which meticulously recreates art spaces such as the Tate Modern Gallery. Tobias Bernstrup and Palle Torsson have modeled a number of European art museums including artworks as the arena for the first person shootout in a piece entitled "Museum Shootout"[22].
These artworks seem to mark a significant shift in the relation between games and art. If, as Groys asserts, the avant-gardes of the early 20th century were targeting the museum as storage halls for dead art, creating works that were meant to embrace life only to end up inside museums, it could be added that the media artists of the 21st 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 audiovisual spaces they are usually relying on the game-play 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 game-play 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 80s, such as Breakout, Space Invader and Tempest. A game that has to be positioned in the grey area between modification and original game is Natalie Bookchin's "Intruder"[24](1999). 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 The 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.
Another game that uses gameplay elements from shooters is "Blacklash"[26]. It was developed by the artist group mongrel and has found critical appeal.
This game plays with the racial stereotypes present in all media systems towards young black males. It is set in a stereotypical American inner city and the player has to fight hordes of racist policemen and KKK spiders. Mongrel, a multi-ethnic group of artists has produced a number of projects, which encourage public participation and "Blacklash" represents an attempt to reach a part of society that is significantly underrepresented in contemporary commercial games. "Blacklash" is one of the earliest attempts at delivering a critical political statement in this new form.

In 2003 the game scholar and developer Gonzalo Frasca has started the company "Newsgaming"[27]. It focuses on the production of simulations and games engaging with and critically commenting important national and international events.
Mongrel as well as "Newsgaming" attempt to move computer games beyond mere entertainment into the realm of political activism. The enormous penetration of computer games throughout the whole of western societies seems to have turned them into viable channels for such undertakings. In these cases the artist takes the role of testing the boundaries of the new medium and its potential for the dissemination of critical perspectives or information.

However, apart from this research into different optional content, other artist projects are concerned with the development of entirely new and original technological methods.
An interesting example for this approach, which combines technological research with original game ideas in the art context, are Blast Theory.
Their most recent work "Uncle Roy"[28] was presented at the ICA in London in June 2003.
"Uncle Roy" is a *"mixed reality"* game that involved people participating as street players in the city of London as well as online players at their homes. Street players and online players had to collaborate and discover Uncle Roy's location in the city in order to send a streetplayer there.
The most innovative element in the game is the collaboration across media boundaries, between players at home and on the street. At the same time the use of GPS-enabled hand held computers creates awareness for the constant invasion of privacy that such technologies bring with them. Without being part of the game industry, Blast Theory are creating technologically challenging and critical games .
Unlike the modification of existing games, the development of entirely new ones demands
a very high level of technological knowledge. This could be one of the reasons for the

prevalence of group structures in the field of artist games.

Conclusions

The question whether computer games can be considered art or not can easily be answered by pointing towards Boris Groys. Everything can be art and it is much more interesting to discuss the unique characteristics and the creative potential of computer games than to keep the galleries free from entertainment.

Furthermore art and games can be treated as siblings throughout the history of modern art.
Both cultural forms share a number of elements that have led numerous artists to employ game structures in their work.
Fine art practitioners have appropriated elements from video and computer games ever since they existed, but this process mainly tapped into them as a pop cultural phenomenon. More often than not this did not lead to a critical analysis of the potential of these games.

The exiting shift we have seen in recent years is related to the growing numbers of artists, who are choosing computer games as a medium for artistic expression and critical comment.
Artists who use computer games as a means of expression usually have a foot in the gaming community as well as in the art world. They are developing ways to criticise the odd human machine relation that has come to dominate work and life in the western world by exploring new interfaces. The stereotypical semiotic landscapes of commercial games is systematically infiltrated and transformed. Fixed identities are literally played with and transformed into fluid states. At the same time computer games are treated as models for experimentation with novel ways of audience participation and narration.

Increasingly the online distribution models, which were originally developed for games are used to distribute artworks.
Finally, the defining characteristics of computer games, their potential to generate unique experiential spaces, is gradually being understood by artists and they are starting to experiment with it.

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