(GameScenes is not about) Videogames as art. We candidly take for granted that videogames are a form of art. After all, the debate was settled by Henry Jenkins (2005), who convincingly argued that: «Games represent a new lively art, one as appropriate for the digital age as those earlier media were for the machine age. They open up new aesthetic experiences and transform the computer screen into a realm of experimentation and innovation that is broadly accessible. And games have been embraced by a public that has otherwise been unimpressed by much of what passes for digital art.» 2 Similarly, James Paul Gee (2006) argues that games’ distinct artistic status require us to develop unique interpretative frameworks: «Videogames are a new art form. That is one reason why now is the right time for game studies […]. The importance of this claim is this: As a new art form, one largely immune to traditional tools developed for the analysis of literature and film, videogames will challenge us to develop new analytical tools and will become a new type of “equipment for living”, to use Kenneth Burke’s (1973) phrase for the role of literature.» 4

(GameScenes is not about) Art as a game. Somehow, naively, we take for granted that art is a game. Howard S. Becker’s (1982) description of the inner and outer workings of art in Art Worlds reads like the instruction manual of a complex MMOG. According to Becker, an art world is «the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that the art world is noted for». 5 Artworks, Becker suggests, are shaped by the whole system that produces them, not just by the people we regard as artists. Like World of Warcraft, art worlds are intricate webs of social, cultural, technical, and economic interactions between different subjects. Among others, there are creators, technicians, players and spectators. An art world, like a game world, is a collective activity. The rules of this particular game are called “conventions” and they cover all the decisions that must be made with respect to works produced. 6

(GameScenes is not about) game art. There is a difference between a game artist and a Game Artist. The former is a professional role which operates in the game industry. A game artist creates graphics for one or more types of games. He is responsible for all of the aspects of game development that call for visual art. There is a high demand for game artists. Conversely, there is an extremely low demand for Game Artists. Likewise, there are many books that focus on game art. This is not one of them.

(GameScenes is not about) Art Games. Art Games are videogames specifically created for artistic (i.e., not commercial) purposes. According to Tiffany Holmes (2003), an art game is an interactive work, usually humorous, by a visual artist that does one or more of the fol-
loving challenges cultural stereotypes, offers meaningful social or historical critique, or tells a story in a novel manner.8 She further elaborates: “To be more specific, Art Games contain at least two of the following: a defined way to win or experience success in a mental challenge, passage through a series of levels (that may or may not be hierarchical), or a single player mode. Examples include Montgri and Richard-Oliver’s BlackLash (1998), Thompson & Craighead’s Triggerhappy (1998), Natalie Bookchin’s The Intruder (1999), Prize Budget for Boys Pac Mondrian (2002), Gazzola Frassaci’s September (2001), Carta&Vallone’s ZAVERL (2001), and many more.9 Although Art Games may be considered an expression of Game Art, we decided – for a variety of reasons – not to include them in GameScenes (with a few notable exceptions, such as Eddo Stern’s unclassifiable Cis/Fishy/Arm). The second key question is: Can contemporary software sold as commercial games be considered Art Games as well? Personally, I would say yes. There are several examples of games – ICO by Fumito Ueda, Electraskyplayed by Toshihiko Iwai, Rez by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, Okami by Clover Studio and many more – that blur the boundaries between what is commonly regarded as “game” and “art”. The relationship between commercial games and game art is not without problems. As Janine Fron, Ellen Sandor & (art) wrote: “While the arts community continues to explore games as art, and artistic statements may emerge from game players, it is important to acknowledge that there are fundamental differences between both. The arts world seeks to find new voices, explore new ways of making art, and also includes a large number of people dedicated to education, criticism and preservation of what has been made to date. Innovation through social discourse and examining public issues are a major driving force in the art community. The game industry is mostly composed of programmers, designers, artists, and animators, and exists to attract an audience (for the sake of commercialized entertainment). Games are big business, with products produced as ultimately unlimited editions, in which the initial monetary value of the best selling game is higher than the value of the most successful, edited, conceptual, or otherwise limited edition. One can say today that the size of the audience is significantly larger for one game than for the edition of one artwork. Yet the diversity of people working in the art world and studying art as a profession is larger than those in the game industry. There are a number of dedicated educators working to implement (formal education programs for games, which may invigorate the community as a whole with fresh ideas, interest in other art forms, respect for history, and awareness of social responsibility).”10

(GameScenes is about) Game Art. Game Art is any art in which digital games play a significant role in the creation, production, and/or display of the artwork.11 The resulting artwork can exist as a game, a painting, photograph, sound, animation, video, performance or gallery installation. In Game Art, games can be used both as tools and/or themes. For instance, to create Unreal Art (2005), Alison Mealey used game tools (e.g. Unreal game engines). Other examples include the Unreal Tournament (30 minutes of play of actors’ recorded activity within the game) to create digital drawings that can be subsequently printed and hung on a wall. By looking at the “unreal” painting, a viewer – even a player of Unreal Tournament – would probably (all to no) realize that the digital is the real. At test, in contrast, to create his SolidLand series (2004), Mauro Celini used games as a source of inspiration and as a subject. Here, a digital game screenshot is reinterpreted and transformed aesthetically by traditional means (painting, brushes, canvases). The finished artwork can be played on a computer, and can be used game tools to create ultimately analog artworks. This shows, once again, the great potential of Game Art. The resulting works are never as “digital” as the digital, but they are becoming increasingly intertextual, and those that are often employ interactivity for non-competitive means.12 They employ game media attributes, such as game engines, maps, code, hardware, interfaces etc, for a very broad range of artistic expressions – abstract, formal and narrative, as well as cultural and artistic. Art mods are not necessarily having anything to do with the competitive theme of games.13 Examples of computer game modification include Machinima (screen-based narratives made using pre-existing, often modded, computer games), chonima,14 generative art mods,15 performance-based games,16 and site-specific installations17 and site-relative.
mod. GameScenes includes several examples of computer game modification. Some forms of Game Art as artistic computer game modification have an algorithmic nature, a term used to define visual art explicitly generated by an algorithm. Since algorithmic art is a subset of generative art, and it is practically always executed by a computer, it follows that some forms of Game Art are also examples of Generative Art, a term used to define art or design that has been generated, composed, or constructed in a semi-random manner through the use of computer software algorithms, or similar mathematical or mechanical or randomized autonomous processes. Since algorithmic art is a subset of Generative Art, some forms of Game Art can be considered a sub-category of computer art. Computer art is any art in which computers played a role in production or display of the artwork. Russian Dolls. Game Art has yet to gain the acceptance, attention, and consideration reserved for “serious” art forms such as painting and photography, perhaps due to the flawed impression of many that the source material, i.e. games are an inferior form of human expression or by the equally erroneous assumption that the computer is the only originator/author of the artwork, and that the resulting work or game – could be (potentially) infinitely repeatable. Moreover, Game Art is often interactive, participatory, and dynamic, and some believe that “true art” is passive, exclusionary, and static/fixed. For better or worse, most Game Art tends to be parasitic, to borrow a term from Anne-Marie Schleiner, as it appropriates and repurposes existing technology for its own goals, it also elevates that appropriation to the status of a radical gesture. As Millos Manetzs writes: “An artist who works with videogames, doesn’t create or change anything him- self. He/she just extracts the hidden notion by looking carefully the parade of symbols the game is offering already. [...] A videogame artist is not the one who creates a videogame, but rather the one who “paints” it. As well as a painter is not the guy who eats a piece of bread, but the one who “paints” it, a videogame artist doesn’t even play a videogame but he just extracts stuff from it. It’s easy and beautiful. The coolest thing to do.”

(Random disruptive quote) "Modern computer games might offer a different and freer approach to responsive media. But my experiences in computer games are virtually nonexistent. And I have no children to show me how to use them.”

(Games are a popular art. Game Art is not very popular. Although some Game Artists can be considered the Art world equivalents of rock stars (e.g. Millos Manetzs), most practitioners in the field remain (deliberately) removed from mainstream culture. Their works are considered cryptic, esoteric, or plainly bizarre by the hobby polls. Game Art is far removed from the mass-produced games that can be found in shops. For this reason, Game Art is not particularly loved or understood by gamers. Even paladins of videogames such as Henry Jenkins do not seem to be particularly impressed. In the preface to Nick Kel- man’s Video Game Art, he writes: “A few of those art critics have been prepared to defend videogames as art when they are created by artists already recognized for their accomplishments in other arts. [...] so we are seeing a range of artists worldwide stage political conflicts or erotic fantasies through pretty simplistic game interfaces. As these works take their place in the Whitney Biennial, the curators are not so much conceding that videogames are art as they are proclaiming that “everyday mass culture” can be used to make art in the hands of real artists.” Of course, the highbrow artists are starting to tap game-like interfaces works that speak to the impact this medium has on our visual culture. But if games are going to be thought of as art, it be because of what Shigeru Miyamoto (Super Mario Brothers) does besides game design with chess, the Surrealist’s ‘Exquisite Corpse’ the extradited bound games that were the Situationists’ psycho-geographic maps of Paris; the algorithmic play of Ospipe […] Today when an artist like Chris Finley creates suites of paintings with titles referencing LEVEL THREE and WARP ZONE you could say that he’s tak- ing the classic – and now classically sus- pected – high road, trying to rivalize or rivalize the importance of pop cult tropes. [...] It is true that Game Art often defines itself against commercial games. Its ambivalent nature lies in the fact that it both celebrates and condemns its source material. [...] Meanwhile. [...] Art was trying to make a game which was different to the game that art itself was playing. In other words, there was a time indeed when art was always trying to toy with reality … today this no longer is the case. All the arts forms are now playing the game at the level of the simulation of reality.”

Notes
3 See S. S. Postol (2005), who eloquently explains in the now-classic ‘Trigger happy why game development itself is an art, an art that process has been extremely complex. Moreover, the technical limitations of the print medium forced us to trim down considerably our original ambitions. Some of the criteria that we adopted are highly subjective, thus questionable. We wanted diversity but also consistency. We wanted to include milestones but also new entries in the short but intense history of Game Art. We gave a preference to technically accomplished works that were also aesthetically striking. Above all, GameScenes will not provide answers about Game Art. Rather, it will raise more questions. As I said, this is not a manifesto. This is a disclaimer.

San Francisco, July 2006
For example, L. Hartas (2003), in her book "Art: A Case Study of Two Examples of the Artistic Realisation on Art Games, see, for instance, the work of Julian Opie as it encompasses traditional, analog games and toys. For example, Victor Todorović (ed.) 2005, "Video Games: A New Art Form", London & New York: Routledge, has also been presented an equally convincing argument that comic-inspired by game aesthetics, one might make in晋m the belief that comic-artists whose production tangentially relates to games, game artists explicitly incorporate games in their artworks. An example might come at hand by this: Although it can be forcibly argued that many Julian Opie’s paintings and installations appear to be inspired by game aesthetics, one might make an equally convincing argument that comic-book conventions are at work as well. Thus, Julian Opie does not qualify as a game artist. Miltos Manetas, on the other hand, explicitly acknowledges the relevance of digital games in his works.

The term was coined by Victor Todorović (http://t-o-d-a-r-o-v-i-c.org/) who created various modifications for Unreal Tournament 2003 and 2004 that allows users to import their own engines into the game in order to compose their own virtual environments. For more information can be found at: http://ateral.net/.

For example, in a few of these definitions I relied on Wikipedia, which is both a licence and a curse, since they seem to change on a daily basis. Such as sorts that disrupt in-game norms to expose underlying functions of game play. They both compare similarities and differences between real and virtual spaces, and the viewer further into a reality of fantasy.


This is why perhaps personally did not agree on the editorial decision made by John Hall (and on Lippolt’s juxtaposing Art Games and commercial games in the otherwise superb Art of Edge of Art (2008).


1. From S. Fron & S. Aron (2004) discuss the rise of Game Art in the last few years, noting that in recent years, games have caught the eye of the art community at large, opening a new channel for the future of games in art, as presented by artists using new media and museums. They quote, among the other, “Game Show” presented at the Digital Arts Conference (DAC), 2002; "Art Worlds" presented at the Digital Arts Conference (DAC), 2002; and "The Play: The Interactive and Transgressive Practices in Contemporary Art" presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2001, "ArtGame: Exploring the Relationship Between Videogames and Art" presented by SF MoMA in 2001. In the last few years, the number of art exhibitions focusing on Game Art has literally skyrocketed. It is probably a good thing.

At the recent “Pong Mythos” 2006) an exhibit in Berlin there were more than thirty artworks on display (installations, video, games, performances etc.), dedicated to a single game, Pong (1972). For more information, see http://pong-mythos.net/index.php?la=en&work=Game, Artist:Laurent on 25.01. Curated by Andreas Lange, “Pong Mythos” has also been presented in Stockholm, Leipzig, and Bern (2007).

References


Fuchs, Mathias (2005) "From an artist’s perspec- tive", Artificial.it available online: www.artificial. it/articles/fomisantrist.htm.


In January 2004, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) in San Francisco opened an exhibition called “Bang the Machine: Computer Gaming Art and Artifacts.” It sought to show that the influence of the computer gaming industry on artistic invention had become significant and unavoidable, nothing short of “pervasive.”

Artists had established reputations for working on the edge of gaming culture, such as Ellen Sandor’s (art) collective, Tobias Bernstrup, Palle Torssen, Cory Arcangel, JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), Eddo Stern, Mauro Ceolin and Brody Condon. Visitors to “Bang the Machine” immediately confronted the pervasive influence of game culture in an upfront and personal way.

Entering the main gallery space devoted to the exhibition, they faced a temporary wall constructed for the exhibition. It displayed a 4x5 array of framed prints. These drawings reworked familiar images from historical, news and fictional (cinematic) events in the isometric perspective associated with computer games such as The Sims or Command & Conquer. They represented historical moments originally experienced via screens (television news, security camera videos, movie theaters) or prints, implanted over years of repeated exposure in the internal screens of our memories, and now freshly redrawn as screenshots, as if captured from the display of a computer game. These (Screenshots) served as an eerily postmodern revision of the Renaissance notion of the Memory Palace, a random walk through recent history paced by the association of memory and images. Yet, this was no fixed sequence of narrative or ideas. Instead, Screenshots pointed to idiosyncratic constructions of personal identity through the accidents of exposure to and memory of these images.

The creator of Screenshots was the Arizona-based artist, Jonathan (“Jon”) Haddock, born in Sacramento, California, in 1960, two years before the birth of Spacewar! Too old to be a child of the