

JESSICA RENFRO

WE CALLED
IT _____:

FILLING THE GAPS IN
PARTICIPATORY ART DESIGN

HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES

GRAPHY
ORMANCE ART
CES
ODY
ERFORMANCE
OGRAPHY
RT PERFORMANCE ART
EATRE PRACTICES
SCIPLINED BODY
EOGRAPHY
CE ART
PRACTICES
ODY
NCE
PHY
ERFORMANCE ART

WE CALLED IT _____:
FILLING THE GAPS IN
PARTICIPATORY ART DESIGN

JESSICA RENFRO
MA PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

A Thesis presented by Jessica Renfro to Master Performance Practices,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in
Performance Practices, 2021.

HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES

2021

SYNOPSIS

We Called It _____ is an exploratory research that synthesizes discourse on participation from the fields of Performance Studies, Game Studies, and Psychology in order to develop an experimental framework for participatory art design. The mechanisms and methods mentioned in this thesis are tested through practice-led research, which culminated in an experimental performance of We Called It Earth in May 2021.

This research derives from the observation that participatory art often struggles to find consistency between the experience offered to participants and the language used to describe the work. I began to wonder how design choices affect qualities of participation, and asked the question: In what ways can the design of participatory mechanisms (like instructions, mechanics, and environment) improve the consistency of shared experience in participatory art?

Some important findings of this research are that participatory art is a form of social simulation, and artists who engage with it play multiple roles that differ from other artistic disciplines. Key aspects of the framework include ideating from core values and employing a collaborative approach to design through iterative feedback cycles. This framework can be used as a tool for creation or critique of participatory art, and

I hope it will begin to lift the curtain on participatory practices and start a dialogue about the values embedded within them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor Nishant Shah for drawing my attention to the bigger picture, reminding me that academic writing has a dramaturgy of its own, and that research can be act of joy.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my external mentors Sonia Fizek and Souvik Mukherjee, two world-class game scholars who generously and patiently showed me that serious research has hidden itself in the places we have fun.

I would like to thank Pavlos Kountouriotis from the bottom of my heart. So much of my research stems from our conversations and the participatory ecology cultivated at HOPP.

Special thanks to my husband Hadi Asghari for collaborating on We Called It Earth with me...and for sharing life with me. I extend my sincere thanks to João da Silva, who always puts things in perspective, and reminds me that failure is sometimes the far more interesting option.

Thanks to daz disley for his unbelievable technical know-how and probing questions, and to Fenia Kotsopoulou for always referring me back to the artists who came before. And thanks to both of them for their gorgeous and generous photo documentation over the course of this program.

I would also like to thank the HOPP Sisterhood—Emily, Irina, Barbara, Korina, Ella, Luiza, Antrianna, Eryfili, Foivi, and Anushka—for all the times we sang together, ate together, danced together, cried together, and created together. I hope we have many more.

And lastly, thanks to everyone who ever accepted my invitation to participate. You are my co-authors in this work, and it would not exist without you.

DECLARATION

I, Jessica Renfro, hereby certify that I have personally carried out the work depicted in the thesis entitled, 'WE CALLED IT _____: FILLING THE GAPS IN PARTICIPATORY ART DESIGN.

No part of the thesis has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma prior to this date.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Synopsis</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Declaration</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>v</i>
INTRODUCTION	1
A NEW CONTEXT	7
<i>JOURNEY THROUGH AN</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>EMANCIPATED LANDSCAPE</i>	
<i>MAYBE WE'RE LIVING IN A SIMULATION</i>	<i>12</i>
ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF BEING	21
<i>MIND THE GAPS</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>TRY AGAIN, TRY AGAIN, TRY AGAIN</i>	<i>31</i>
WE CALLED IT _____	37
<i>WE CALLED IT EARTH</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>GETTING TO THE CORE OF THINGS</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>GAME DAY</i>	<i>53</i>
FRAMEWORK AND DISCUSSION	61
<i>FRAMING THE WORK</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>CONNECTING TO A LARGER CONTEXT</i>	<i>64</i>
REFERENCES	70
APPENDICES	72

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. <i>Examples of values in participatory art design, selected from Values at play in digital games (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014, p. 6)</i>	24
Figure 2. <i>Examples of MDA in participatory art. Aesthetic goals excerpted from MDA: A formal approach to game design and game research (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubeck, 2004)</i>	26
Figure 3. <i>Levels of Participatory Art Design</i>	28
Figure 4. <i>Mary Flanagan’s Values at play development cycle (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014, p.77)</i>	32
Figure 5. <i>The start screen of We Called It Earth</i>	34
Figure 6. <i>The invitation.</i> Photo: Daz Disley	38
Figure 7. <i>A participant controls one of the limbs during level one.</i> Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou	40
Figure 8. <i>A participant ‘sends energy’ from their phone.</i> Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou	42
Figure 9. <i>A chasm fills up with participants’ text.</i> Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou	44
Figure 10. <i>Participants could send energy from their mobile phones.</i>	52
Figure 11. <i>A participant maneuvers while energy appears on the screen.</i> Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou	53
Figure 12. <i>Participants reacting.</i> Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou	54
Figure 13. <i>A participant dancing during gameplay.</i> Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou	59
Figure 14. <i>Experimental participatory art design framework</i>	61
Figure 15. <i>Instructions for hosting your own Long Table (‘Split Britches’, 2018) 58</i>	67

INTRODUCTION

Life as a freelance performer in the US persuaded me that the game of single authorship is a game without victory. A dubious wealth of advice about branding, personalization, and self-promotion accompanied an ever-narrowing definition of personal success. I worked a little harder, put in more hours, and traveled a little farther to get to gigs, playing a game with unclear rules. Meanwhile, collective problems like social justice and climate change went unnoticed. Problems that could not be solved alone were invisible in this game. So, I decided play a new one.

As an artist, I am motivated by the conviction that collective experiences can act as catalysts for societal change, changing social reality by changing the way we see ourselves and each other. My desire to facilitate this led me to the world of participatory art, and set me on the path that many artists who desire to engage with the public tread. Like those before me, I felt uncertain about where to begin; I did not know how collectivity could be achieved in a performance or what would happen aesthetically if I allowed this collective to determine its own direction.

Claire Bishop, a preeminent Performance Studies scholar, notes that most participatory art is motivated by three

agendas; 1) empowering an active subject who may then determine their own social reality, 2) ceding authorship in an egalitarian way to the participant, and 3) inspiring a collective sense of community and responsibility. Ideally, this promotes “a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning” (2006, p.12) I recognized that the participatory art performances I had attended often espoused these agendas; however, my experiences of participating in them were far less clear cut. I noticed that the quality of participation could vary dramatically depending on the artists’ structural choices—an issue of design not explicitly addressed in the participatory art literature—and that they profoundly impacted the dramaturgy of the piece. The structural ambiguity of ‘participation’ leaves artists guessing how to navigate between control so strict that only the illusion of agency remains for participants and instructions so vague that only confusion, or even anarchy, results. A miscalculation in this area has the potential to render the artist’s initial proposal irrelevant.

While the politics and perils of participation are thoroughly explored in Performance Studies literature, the strategies an artist might employ to engage differentiated qualities of participation are not. My curiosity about this led me to ask the following question:

In what ways can the design of participatory mechanisms (like instructions, mechanics, and environment) improve the consistency of a shared experience in participatory art?

In pursuit of a theoretical basis for my practice-led, exploratory research, I began to formulate a design framework that translates knowledge from other fields into my own artistic practice.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when circumstances required that my practice take a digital turn, I reacquainted myself with online multiplayer games, and was struck by the similarity of the experience to participatory art. I discovered a wealth of Game Studies literature relevant to structuring collective and individual experience, and this was often accompanied by relevant psychological research into the motivation of participants. After experimenting with and applying knowledge from these fields in my artistic practice, I built a framework addressing the design of various participatory mechanisms. My purpose in doing so was not to formulize the creation of participatory art, but rather to offer other artists access to a set of tools that incorporate core values into every aspect of design and help to clarify communication with collaborators and participants.

In framing participatory art as a catalyst for social change, I do not claim that even well-designed performances could meaningfully address global problems. While the genre largely dedicates itself to the tenets of equality and fairness, it often touts its accessibility while ignoring the actual

'conditions of access' limiting who can participate¹ (Shah, 2017). It is difficult, therefore, to extrapolate the impact of such brief performance experiments on society-at-large; however, I believe the art form's capacity for collective exploration is still largely untapped, and offers glimpses into alternative ways of being that might prove an invaluable pedagogical tool. My hope is that this framework will spark a dialogue amongst artists about participatory mechanisms that, through ongoing conversation, will evolve over time.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature in Performance Studies and Game Studies in relation to the major elements included in my participatory art design framework. This includes a brief overview of what participatory art is and how it resembles games, an examination of subjectivity and agency in these contexts, and the potential value of considering participatory art as a kind of simulation.

In Chapter 3, I explore the role of the artist as a designer, procedural author, and facilitator. I then break down the design process into several steps, and develop a taxonomy of participatory art that includes external, mediating, and internal strata. I conclude by reflecting on several beneficial methods of iterative design such as the VAP (Values at play) heuristic, MDA (Mechanics/Dynamics/Aesthetics), and prototyping.

¹ I will explore the importance of the issue of access in more depth in Chapter 5.

In Chapter 4, I apply the framework to a participatory online game I created, *We Called It Earth*, elaborating on specific discussions that arose during the creative process and how they affected the design of the piece. I then reflect on the performance of *We Called It Earth*, how the framework held up in a live context, what might be added to future versions of it, and managing (or accepting) the risks inherent in participatory work.

In Chapter 5, I lay out how the framework comes together to outline a design process. I also examine the limitations of both the framework and participatory art generally, and propose areas where further artistic research might be conducted.

A NEW CONTEXT

Through practice-led research, I developed a design-conscious schema of participatory art as a form of social simulation that places a participant-subject into a new context in order to experience an alternative way of being. I arrived at this by incorporating relevant research about participation in Game Studies and Psychology into the discourse in Performance Studies. My purpose was not to dispute what artistic researchers have previously asserted about participatory art, but rather to approach my practice as a vehicle for participant experience rather than a tool of self-expression. I believe this is important because participatory art is, above all, a social exercise, and placing the social dimension at its core flips the script on the narrative of the artist as a specialist of self-expression. This new focus changes the role of the artist in fundamental ways, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

JOURNEY THROUGH AN EMANCIPATED LANDSCAPE

Bishop's three agendas of empowering an active subject, ceding authorship, and repairing the social bond are largely echoed throughout the literature in regard to the proposed function of participatory art (2006, p.12). They express convictions widely held by artists working in the genre, but do not tell the whole story of what can be achieved through participatory mechanisms. Nevertheless, because they align

with my own artistic practice and values, these agendas are where my framework is rooted. Having established these as criteria for the desired function of participatory art in my practice, however, it is important to define what it is and is not. Bishop distinguishes participatory art from one-on-one interactive art or socially-engaged art by identifying people as its medium. Additionally, In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, she observes a double ontological status as “both an event in the world, and at one remove from it.” (Bishop, 2012, p.284).

Gareth White, whose primary focus is participatory theatre, agrees that artists and participants collaborate “to bind... society together, so that one influences the other, inhabits, and is co-extensive with the other” (2013, p.4). He approaches the phenomenon of a double ontology as well, by noting the power of participatory art to both reshape a participant’s social being while allowing them to perceive themselves in a new way, implying that a participant can both become something new and at the same time critically observe the change from outside.

In *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), Kester approaches the restoration of the social bond as a dialogue that can heal divisions driven by cultural, religious, and nationalistic differences. Where Bishop asserts that participants are the primary medium and White

qualifies that they must provide the action of a piece, Kester asserts the chief goal is conversation, and that the dialogue produced in participatory art has the potential to snowball into a larger conversation within society. He believes this is possible through the creation of a shared identity enabled by a shared system of meaning to which participants can respond. He acknowledges that this runs counter to post-structuralist claims that shared signs and symbols only serve to reinforce an implicit societal hierarchy, but argues that creating in this manner causes “the paradoxical negation of the viewer as a unique individual” (2004, p.89), and makes the assumption that the artist is in some way a superior interpretive being.

The equality of intelligence between artist and participant is also key to Rancière’s conception of emancipated spectatorship. He also places conversation at the center, but unlike Kester, disputes the ability of an artist to communicate their intention in a mutually coherent way:

“Artists... wish to produce a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy for action. But they always assume that what will be perceived, felt, understood, is what they have put into their dramatic art or performance. They always presuppose an identity between cause and effect. This supposed equality between cause and effect is itself based upon an inegalitarian principle: it is based on the privilege that the schoolmaster grants himself—knowledge of the ‘right’ distance and ways to abolish it” (Rancière, 2014, p. 14).

I agree with Rancière that the intention of the artist is not sufficient to produce a coherent experience, but disagree with his conceptual rigidity on this point, believing that well-

designed art, developed in an iterative manner, is capable of provoking a harmonious, if not homogenous, response. Perhaps this is what Ranci re refers to as “the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them” (Ibid., p.15). I assert that there is a profound distance between degrees of interpretive difference and interpretive anarchy, and an artist’s creative and compositional choices largely determine this, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

Ranci re also references the concept of apart-togetherness to describe the dual ontology of participatory work, but additionally moves toward seeing individuals as composed of multiple subjectivities. While the apart aspect will forever remain independent and at a distance, the together aspect also describes the participant, and acts as both the exploration of a shared identity and the realization of it through this exploration.

As mentioned earlier, Bishop’s three agendas do not hold exclusive rights to the genre, and Adam Alston criticizes the trend over the past two decades of creating immersive participatory art as a vehicle for personal experience (2013). He claims that designing this way reinforces hegemonic social norms, and often succeeds only in promoting neoliberal individualism. Immersive theatre has become a darling of advertising companies in recent years, and easily plays

to the narcissistic desires of participants, emphasizing the experience of self above all others. This results in the erosion of participant equality because it rewards only the most entrepreneurial participation, favoring those with the societal privilege to take social risk. Nevertheless, this can produce exhilarating results, and still creates active subjects who claim authorship over the experience. Bishop also comments on this turn towards individual experience:

“In a world where everyone can air their views to everyone we are faced not with mass empowerment but with an endless stream of egos levelled to banality. Far from being oppositional to spectacle, participation has now merged with it” (2012, p.277).

Thus, it appears that there is nothing inherently virtuous about participatory art. It is a form equally capable of creating a shared experience of neoliberal, authoritarian, or anarchic values as it is of creating an experience of community or equality, and this is largely determined by the conscious or unconscious design choices of the artist. In other words, the mechanisms of participatory art are tools that can easily be used in ways that differ from its espoused ideals as stated in Bishop’s three agendas. This distinction highlights the importance of making conscientious, integrative, and iterated design choices when creating participatory pieces.

One of the distinguishing characteristics that separates participatory art from other artistic mediums is its direct engagement with participant subjectivity through the

affordance of an environment wherein participant-subjects can make meaningful choices. An emancipated participant will simultaneously maintain the distance to observe those choices critically. Without understanding the dynamics created within this environment, the artist could inadvertently reinforce the very same oppressive social norms that they wish to confront, or leave participants to interpret solely through their existing social lens.

To sum up, participatory art centers on participant experiences in a designed social context in which they claim agency and share authorship with the artist. In addition, participants present multiple subjectivities through apart-togetherness. In the next section, I will further refine these ideas by discussing the similarity of participatory art to games, and how the Game Studies community tackles the same issues of participant subjectivity, agency, and design.

MAYBE WE'RE LIVING IN A SIMULATION

One of the most striking metaphors used to distinguish video games from other media is that of playing a sport versus watching it on television:

"When I run, I make a series of choices about actions I will take that might affect whether I win. I feel a sense of mastery or failure depending on whether I successfully execute the actions in the way I intended. My emotions ebb and flow as I make these choices and I see what happens as a result. I feel a sense of consequence and responsibility for my choices" (Isbister, 2016, p.3)

The participant in a game has the agency to affect its outcome,

and adherence to the game's rules in turn transforms them into a 'player', whose goal is mastery. In this section, I will examine the social aspect of games, why people play, and how ludic knowledge can be applied to participatory art.

One of the earliest game scholars, Huizinga, describes the act of playing as a "stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity" (1949, p.8), where the rules are agreed to by all involved, and create a social bond based on shared experience:

"The feeling of being 'apart together' in an exceptional situation, of sharing something important, of mutually withdrawing from the rest of the world and rejecting the usual norms, retains its magic beyond the duration of the individual game" (Ibid, p.12).

He coined the term 'magic circle' to describe the collective belief engendered by the conditions of the game, and noted that it disintegrated when the agreed upon rules were broken or suspended.

Celia Pearce explores the social implications of virtual worlds. She defines a virtual world as a social structure, and through ethnography reveals that:

"...players often perceive their avatars as a medium through which one's soul, one's deep inner persona, is expressed, even though the avatar's personality may be quite distinct from that of the person controlling its agency" (2009, p.22).

She further notes that habitual players speak about their online representation in both the first and third person, and that they

readily recognize multiple identities in both themselves and fellow players. Through this network of multiple identities, strong social bonds are formed, and regarded as equally authentic, or more so, than bonds formed offline (Ibid, p.24).

The motivation to play a game, psychologically speaking, goes beyond having fun and enters the arena of self-determination, which consists of three elements: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Rigby and Ryan, 2011, p.10). Competence refers to the need to gain mastery of new situations, autonomy to the need for personal agency, and relatedness to the need for meaningful social connections. Rigby and Ryan conclude that at least one of these elements is present in every game, and that games are ideal vehicles to satisfy these needs because they offer more recognizable patterns than real life. “[V]ideo games give us the ‘just world’ in which we instinctively wish to live. They establish very clear links between actions, consequences, and rewards” (Ibid., p.11).

When applying self-determination theory to participatory art, understanding these needs might help an artist apply internal consistency to their piece in order to fulfill (or frustrate) it. Designing for autonomy, for example, is not simply offering freedom to act, but more specifically about offering the freedom to act in a way that aligns with a participant’s desire. “Even if you have only a single pathway open to you,

you still feel autonomous if it is the one you want to travel down” (Ibid., p.40). And although self-consciousness and social embarrassment are potential risks to the success of participatory art, designing for relatedness in the invitation and the mechanics can smooth the way for a greater sense of social belonging, enabling more risk-taking by participants in other areas of the piece. I will address this in more detail in Chapter 4.

The need for competence introduces another often-referenced psychological concept in game design: the experience of flow. Isbister describes flow as a pleasurable state wherein players perform their best, “time seems to melt away and personal problems disappear” (Isbister, 2016, p.4). Flow creates a sense of immersion because human consciousness is the “selective investment of attention” (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.242), and in flow, all attention is on the task at hand. Game designers attempt to harness this phenomenon through goal and feedback structures that thread the needle between frustration (too difficult) and boredom (too easy). Each of these negative states triggers self-consciousness, which decreases the satisfaction of subjective experience. Because “attention is taken up entirely by the challenges being engaged” (2014, p. 243), participants in flow experience a game or a piece of art as if it were ‘real’ and react to it emotionally.

"Of course we engage with this delusion willingly—it allows us to experience alternate situations and ways of being human, which in turn informs our own experience of being human" (Isbister, 2016, p.8).

Thus, immersion extends beyond the arrangement of a physical or virtual environment to the action of a performance, and can be designed through the use of goals and feedback. An immersive system that allows participant agency is a kind of simulation, and its structure is quite different from other forms of media.

Frasca defines a simulation as a created system modeled on a source system that shares behaviors with it (2013, p.223); for example, a flight simulator would share behaviors with the act of flying an airplane. He argues that all games are a form of simulation, and further elaborates that they require participation, incorporate behavioral rules, and differ with every iteration. This, he points out, strips the narrative authorial power "to make statements through sequences of cause and effect" (Ibid., p.229), as is the practice in film or literature. The creator of a simulation can design one outcome to be more likely than another based on their values or opinions, but communication of those opinions relies on the participant's experience of the system rather than a linear description of events, and this provides key insights into the inherent co-authorship of participatory work.

Aarseth asserts that games are a subgenre of simulation, which

he describes as "a major new hermeneutic discourse mode, coinciding with the rise of computer technology" (2004, p.5). Simulation, he argues, is bottom-up and emergent whereas stories are top-down and predetermined. This empowers a participant to cultivate knowledge, experience, and strategy, which contributes to their sense of self-mastery. He also mentions that because the rules of a simulation are explicit and internal, it is possible to learn one game without having to know the rules of another. Simulations may contain narrative elements within them like characters and stories, but Aarseth asserts that the internal rules that govern player agency must take precedence over the storytelling.

A simulation, however, does more than model a system in which a participant can act; it creates multiple subjectivities. Game philosopher Miguel Sicart describes playing a computer game as an act of subjectivization because rules are a form of power that creates behavior:

"The process of experiencing a game and becoming a player needs to take into account how the nature of the game contributes to the creation of that subjectivity. The game's ontological nature initially defines the ontological position of its subjects, the players" (2011, p.68).

As a result of consenting to the game's rules, a player diverges into at least three distinct subjective forms: player-subject, playing-subject, and played-subject.

The player-subject arrives to the game with cultural and

societal context already intact, but becomes a player by committing to the rules, community, and game experience (Ibid., p.72). They will still consider themselves a player of a particular game even when it is not being played. Like Rancière's emancipated spectator, this player-subject performs an interpretive role, and maintains critical distance during gameplay. De Wildt describes a further split into a playing-subject, a mediating subjectivity between the player and the game world. "The playing-subject is the implicit I that produces the signs of an ergodic text, causing the expression of a game's code" (2014, p.10); in other words, this subject interacts with the code of the game, using an understanding of how to play in order to guide what interaction is expected. The played-subject is the avatar; fictional and controlled within the game by the player-subject, the playing-subject and the code. This subjectivity often represents a character with a cultural background, personality, and beliefs of their own, and actions within the game happen only to them, even though the presence of all three subjectivities is required to play. Sicart further posits that in some multiplayer games, all players together form a 'unity', and can be considered a collective subjectivity, or, a "player of players" (2011, p.86).

Like video games, participatory art also engages with multiple subjectivities, and evokes these through simulating alternative social structures (computer code is not necessary). By synthesizing the discourse on participation in Performance

Studies, Game Studies, and Psychology, I arrived at a description of participatory art as a social simulation that places participant-subjects into a new context in order to experience an alternative way of being. In the next chapter, I will discuss the role of the artist in this form of simulation, and, using the above schema, I will lay out a series of potential considerations when designing the mechanisms of a participatory art piece.

ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF BEING

Much like the multiple subjectivities of a participant, the artist who creates participatory work also performs multiple roles. And while aesthetic elements of an artistic discipline are pivotal in creating an experience, the architecture of a simulation requires a more participant-centered creative approach. In this chapter, I explore the artist of a participatory work as a designer, procedural author, and facilitator, and touch on the importance of an integrated design approach to core values. I then suggest possible iterative methods for feedback during the creative process.

MIND THE GAPS

When I began considering participatory art as a direction for my artistic practice, I had a very specific goal in mind: to bring people together in order to find solutions to climate change. I thought if I could get participants to feel like they were part of something bigger—connected to a global community—they would come up with different ideas and perhaps make different decisions on a local level.

The research I have done into participation over the past two years has helped me distinguish between my desire for specific behavior and core values, and has thus allowed me to approach my practice in a more holistic and consistent way. The example described in the previous paragraph aimed at a desired behavior, and could easily have resulted

in confusion, frustration, or reinforcement of implicit biases. Starting from core values, however, enables comprehensive translation between theory and practice over every level. This is the approach of a designer.

Salen and Zimmerman, authors of *Rules of play: Game design fundamentals*, refer to the process of game design as the creation of rules and structures that result in an experience. This experience should offer meaningful choices to participants, and the consequences of their actions should be both discernable and integrated into a larger context (2004, p.4). In other words, they should be able to perceive that their actions have an effect, and that this effect is relevant to the piece as a whole.

The choices made available to a participant reflect a particular understanding of the world. Flanagan and Nissenbaum assert that this is why a conscientious and iterative approach to values within a piece is necessary. They acknowledge that these values will not be interpreted identically between participants, but assert that constraints on mechanics and narrative elements create a plausible range of interpretation (2014, p.16).

Gareth White's 'horizon of participation' similarly refers to "an evolving, individual understanding of the possibilities offered by an invitation" (2013, p.165). This allows latitude for

individual interpretation while still offering the prospect of informed consent. This does not necessarily imply an explicit breakdown of what is expected from participants, but rather a calibrated tone and delivery that corresponds to the 'horizon of expectation' the artist has for the piece.

When discussing an artist's 'horizon of expectation', the vocabulary of values frequently emerges. Values are culture-specific and generally fall into either ethical or political categories, depending on whether one refers to how people treat themselves and each other, or the arrangement of power in society (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014, p.6) (figure 1).

Designing for core values in a simulation like a game or a participatory art piece can be challenging to do in a comprehensive way. Small cues like a sign at the door, seating arrangement, or a vague instruction can inadvertently cause participants to feel unvalued, manipulated, or confused. The Mechanics/Dynamics/Aesthetics model (MDA) is one way game designers address this.

MDA is an iterative model which recognizes that programmed rule-based actions (mechanics) chain together to create indirect consequences (dynamics) for both the player and the system (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubeck, 2004). The dynamics that unfold for a player in turn provoke an emotional response (aesthetics). Designing from the aesthetics first foregrounds

EXAMPLES OF VALUES IN PARTICIPATORY ART DESIGN

ETHICAL

kindness
honesty
generosity
integrity
respect

safety
creativity
peace
collaboration
responsibility

POLITICAL

equality
security
stability
cooperation
privacy

accountability
democracy
liberation
democracy
equal opportunity

Figure 1. Examples of values in participatory art design, selected from Values at play in digital games (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014, p. 6)

the player's experience, but may fail to account for technical requirements and limitations, while designing from mechanics first may generate undesirable aesthetic experiences for the player.

An aesthetic goal describes the experience the artist would like a participant to have, and can be established through a translation of core values (figure 2). Once the mechanics are aligned with these, the rules manifest the desired simulation. And if, as Sicart proposes, subjects emerge by interpreting rules within their situation (2011, p.63), every structural element of a piece should address the subjectivity anticipated by the designer.

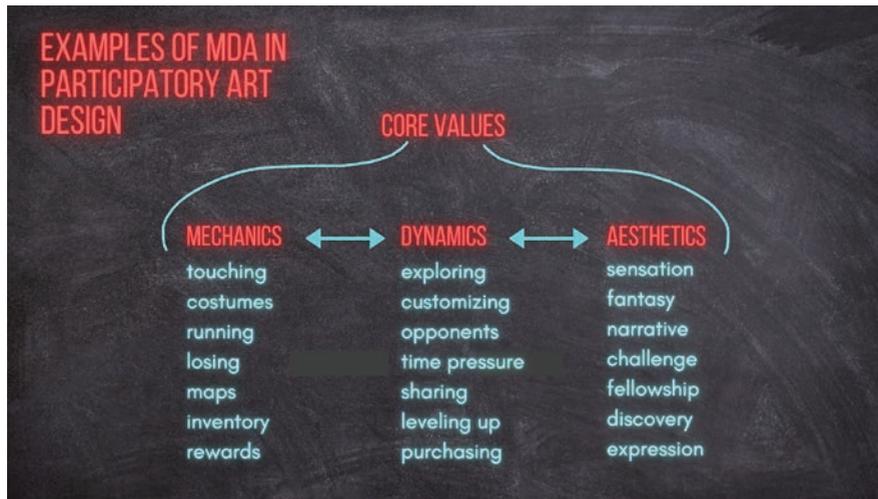


Figure 2. Examples of MDA in participatory art. Aesthetic goals excerpted from MDA: A formal approach to game design and game research (Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubeck, 2004)

Using the taxonomy of player-subject, playing-subject, and played-subject (Sicart, 2011; de Wildt, 2014), I propose corresponding strata of a social simulation; by which, I mean there is an external, mediating, and internal environment to consider in participatory art design. These are not always explicitly separated within a piece, but are nonetheless distinct in their function. The external component is the global and societal context of both artist and participants that drives the real-world urgency, and hence, the values of the piece. Upon accepting the artist's invitation, participants enter a new context where facilitation occurs. If there are mediating objects or technologies necessary for participation, they are encountered and explained in this layer. After learning what is expected during the performance and consenting to the rules, participants experience a third level; the simulation. Here, agency and interaction are determined by the design of the artist, who creates a world that includes components like internal rules, immersive and narrative elements, incentives, goals, and risks. Participants are encouraged to make choices that shape their outcome and experience within this layer (figure 3).

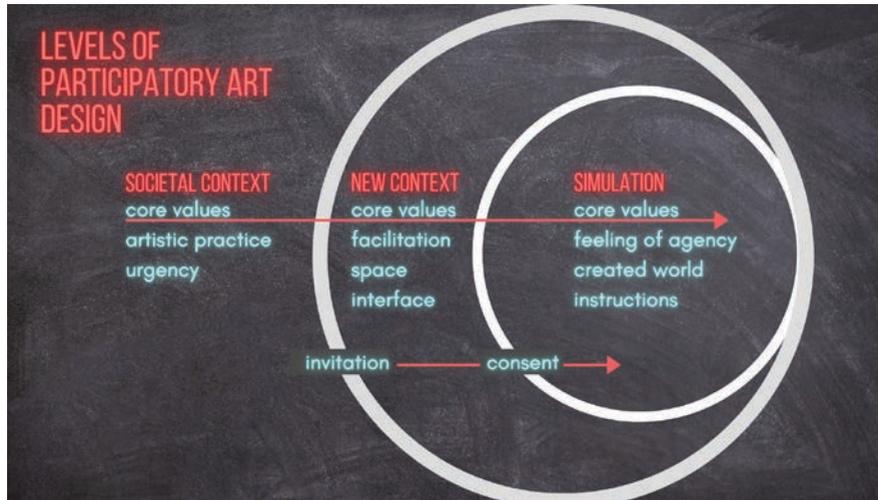


Figure 3. Levels of Participatory Art Design

After consenting to the rules, participants enter a structure in which their actions and decisions create a collective narrative experience. White refers to this structure as a series of ‘gaps’ created by the artist, and notes that participants should be able to “fill the gaps in different ways in each fresh iteration of the work” (2013, p.30) In order to empower this form of co-creation, the artist should consider their role not only as a designer, but as a procedural author.

Janet Murray writes, “The procedural author creates not just a set of scenes but a world of narrative possibilities” (2016, p.143). She argues that participants are not co-authors, but rather ‘interactors’ experiencing the thrill of agency in a narrative environment that has been cleverly cued for them by the designer. Mukherjee asserts that procedural authorship

in video games creates the ‘illusion of agency’ during an “ongoing process of interaction between the game and the player” (2015, p.150). This results in an entanglement from which authorship emerges.

Because participatory art is a form of social simulation, the entanglement created includes intersubjective engagement. This results in participants becoming not just co-authors of a designed experience, but procedural authors for each other. White explains that these procedures “give rise to actually occurring performances” (2013, p.195). In contrast to Murray and Mukherjee, he attributes co-authorship to participants, and regards the results of their agency as the medium of participatory work.

I assert that procedural authorship offers a large range of intersubjective experiences that can be designed by an artist. There can certainly be multiple possibilities from which a participant may choose, as Murray suggests, or a collaboratively produced outcome, like an improvised performance might yield. An artist, as a procedural author, must also decide which technologies, algorithms, or objects to interpolate into the agential choices of participants in order to best express the core values and objectives of the piece. Similar to White, I propose that participatory art is not the procedure itself; instead, I prefer to consider the experience inspired by it as a performance co-authored by artist and

participants, with meaningful contributions also emanating from multiple subjectivities within each individual.

The third role played by an artist of participatory work is that of facilitator, whose presence will affect the piece in several important ways. Firstly, it can be a role of hospitality, inviting participants and connecting them to the simulation. They may also demonstrate how to 'fill the gaps', and assume responsibility for managing social and physical risk. Social embarrassment is always perceived as a risk by participants, but "whether an invitation is accepted and how it is navigated will depend fundamentally on the perception of these risks" (White, 2013, p.78). In this vein, facilitation presents a face of authority to participants that can enforce rules of conduct, ensure consent has been given, and grant authority to the participants' decision-making and creative engagement, validating their contributions to the piece. Because this introduces an imbalance of power, it is important to consider the distance that might be necessary in order to allow participants a feeling of agency.

The persona, tone, and clarity a facilitator may use can make a big difference in reception, and can prime feelings about participation before the piece even begins. But, as with many aspects of participatory art, it is difficult to know whether the choices made during the creative process will succeed in communicating to participants with any accuracy

or consistency. For this reason, it is invaluable to get periodic feedback from people unexposed to the work, and to cyclically iterate based on this feedback.

TRY AGAIN, TRY AGAIN, TRY AGAIN

If meaningful choices have truly been offered to the participant, it will never be possible to fully predict what their experience will be. Iterations of the same production could be considered entirely different pieces because of the variety of ways participants interact (White, 2013, p.30). Therefore, feedback is vital during the creative process in order to expose unexpected dynamics or points of incoherence. There are many iterative methods available, and in this section, I will discuss them in three categories; developing a comprehensive approach with collaborators, experiencing the piece from the perspective of a participant, and involving people unfamiliar to the work through prototyping.

While the MDA model develops coherence between mechanics and aesthetic goals, taking the additional step to clarify core values with collaborators can help prevent small differences in interpretation from snowballing into larger inconsistencies. The VAP (Values at Play) model is an ongoing iterative process of discovery, implementation, and verification (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014, p.75). Discovery involves locating and defining values, in recognition that:

"...values as we conceive them...can be abstract, complex, and often ambiguous. Designers need to unravel ambiguity and develop or embrace a definition of relevant values that is sufficiently concrete to guide design" (Ibid., p.80)

They advocate an approach to locating values that includes identifying key actors, reviewing the piece's functional description, considering societal context, and making explicit technical constraints. This should be integrated with implementation, or, the translation of these values into the specifications of the piece, and verification of whether the piece is accomplishing the desired quality of participation through playtesting and prototyping (figure 4).



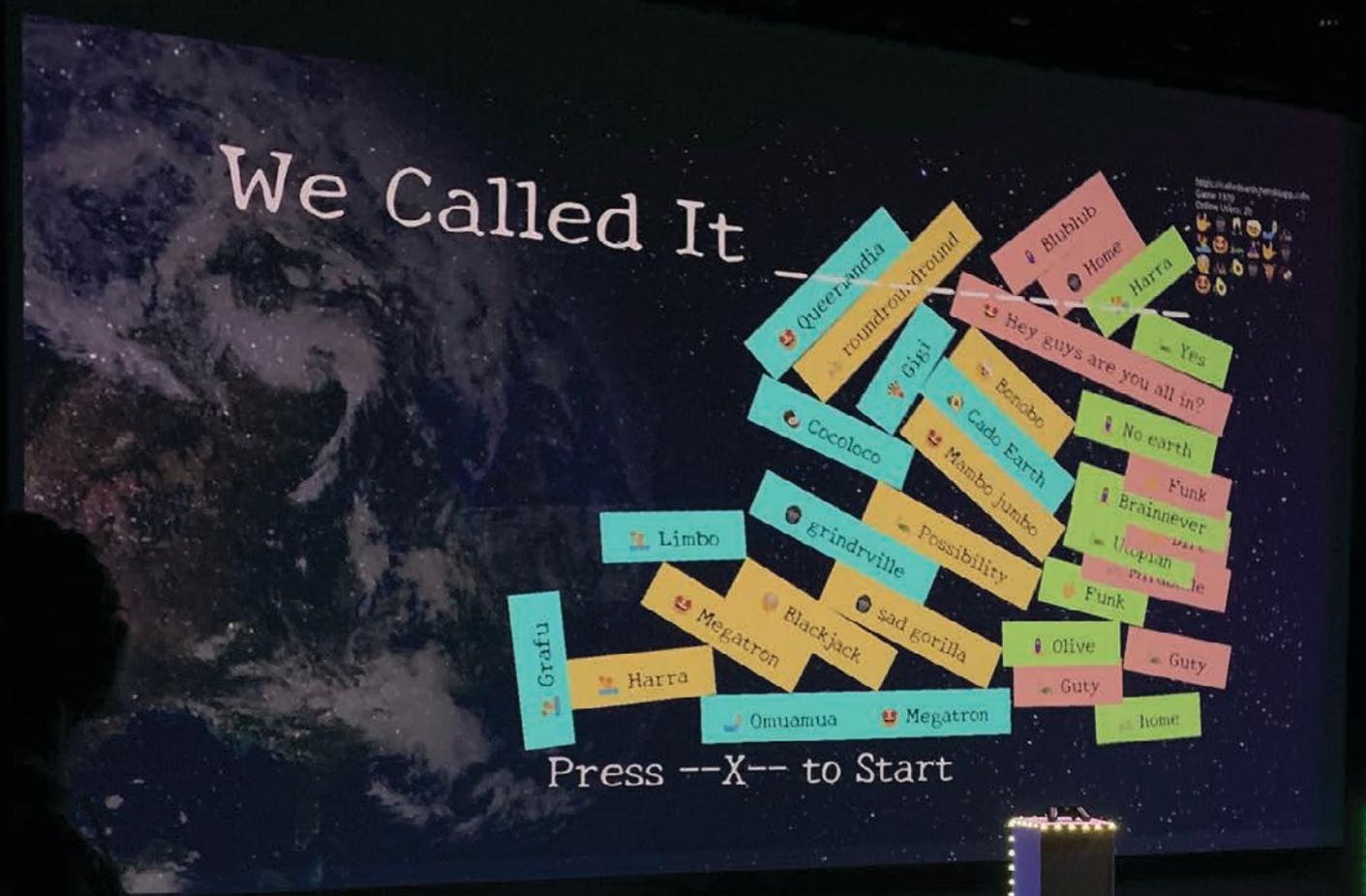
Figure 4. Mary Flanagan's Values at play development cycle (Flanagan and Nissenbaum, 2014, p.77)

Playtesting is the practice of placing an artist, collaborator, or volunteer in the position of the participant in order to explore the available choices of a piece. Many hiccups and

inconsistencies can be revealed during this process, and I believe a participatory art piece can benefit from it at all stages of development. This also facilitates dialogue between artist, collaborators, and participants during prototyping sessions if all have experienced the piece from the same perspective.

Prototyping is a valuable feedback process in all types of performance, and indispensable in participatory art. Salen and Zimmerman advocate producing the first prototype for a game at 20% completion, whether this is on post-it notes, a slideshow, or a cardboard model (2004, p.2:1). This will not only answer important questions about specific aspects of the piece, but helps the designer approach participant experience critically, seeing where it succeeds and fails before too much time is invested in one approach.

Feedback and prototyping are integral parts of the co-authorship of participatory work, but unless specifically desired by the artist, should never subvert the core values of the piece. It is important when showing a prototype or receiving outside feedback to already have a comprehensive understanding of values and aesthetic goals, even if these may change with deliberation over time. In the next chapter, I will apply the previously discussed design principles and methods to *We Called It Earth*, a piece performed in May 2021 at ArtEZ University.



We Called It

- Queer-widia
- roundrou-dronid
- Blubhub
- Home
- Harra
- Gigi
- Hey guys are you all in?
- Yes
- Benobo
- No earth
- Cococolo
- Cado Earth
- Funk
- Mambo jumbo
- Brainnever
- grindrville
- Possibility
- Uopian
- Limbo
- Funk
- Grafu
- Megatron
- Blackjack
- sad gorilla
- Olive
- Guty
- Harra
- Omuamua
- Megatron
- Guty
- home

Press --X-- to Start

Figure 5. The start screen of We Called It Earth

WE CALLED IT _____

In my practice, I identify participatory art as a social simulation that places a participant-subject into a new context in order to experience an alternative way of being. In *We Called It Earth*, I chose to address participant-subjects as a collective subjectivity by placing them into the new context of an immersive, online game. I wanted to simulate what it would be like to collectively occupy the same body and mind in a world shattered by a force simply referred to as 'the Separation'. Learning to navigate this collective experience would constitute an alternative way of being. In this chapter, I will introduce this piece, and elaborate on the process of identifying its core values and the specific ways in which they impacted structural, aesthetic, and coding choices. I will also discuss how, through methods of iterative design, the work evolved over time. Lastly, I will evaluate the 'final' performance, how the proposed design framework fared, and what further questions emerged.

WE CALLED IT EARTH

The invitation.

Outside the theatre, I greeted participants and introduced myself as their 'host' for the evening. I prepared them for an adventure by telling a small story of how the Earth had exploded into a million pieces due to 'the Separation', but

now things were trying to come back together and had formed an entity that wanted to make a new world for itself. I told participants that they were the body and mind of this entity, and that the body could be controlled using the four game controllers they would find inside. I also mentioned that if they had never used a game controller before, they should just mash buttons until they got the hang of it.



Figure 6. The invitation. Photo: daz disley

I made sure everyone had a mobile device and a wifi login (I provided these if participants did not have them), and distributed a QR code, telling them to follow the instructions on the website it took them to. In addition to these instructions, I added three rules for the space:

1. *This is not a theatre—this is a game. Speak up, walk around, have fun!*
2. *Be supportive. Rules can be hard to figure out, especially in the beginning. Offer help if you can and kindness if you can't.*
3. *Keep an eye out for wires on the floor.*

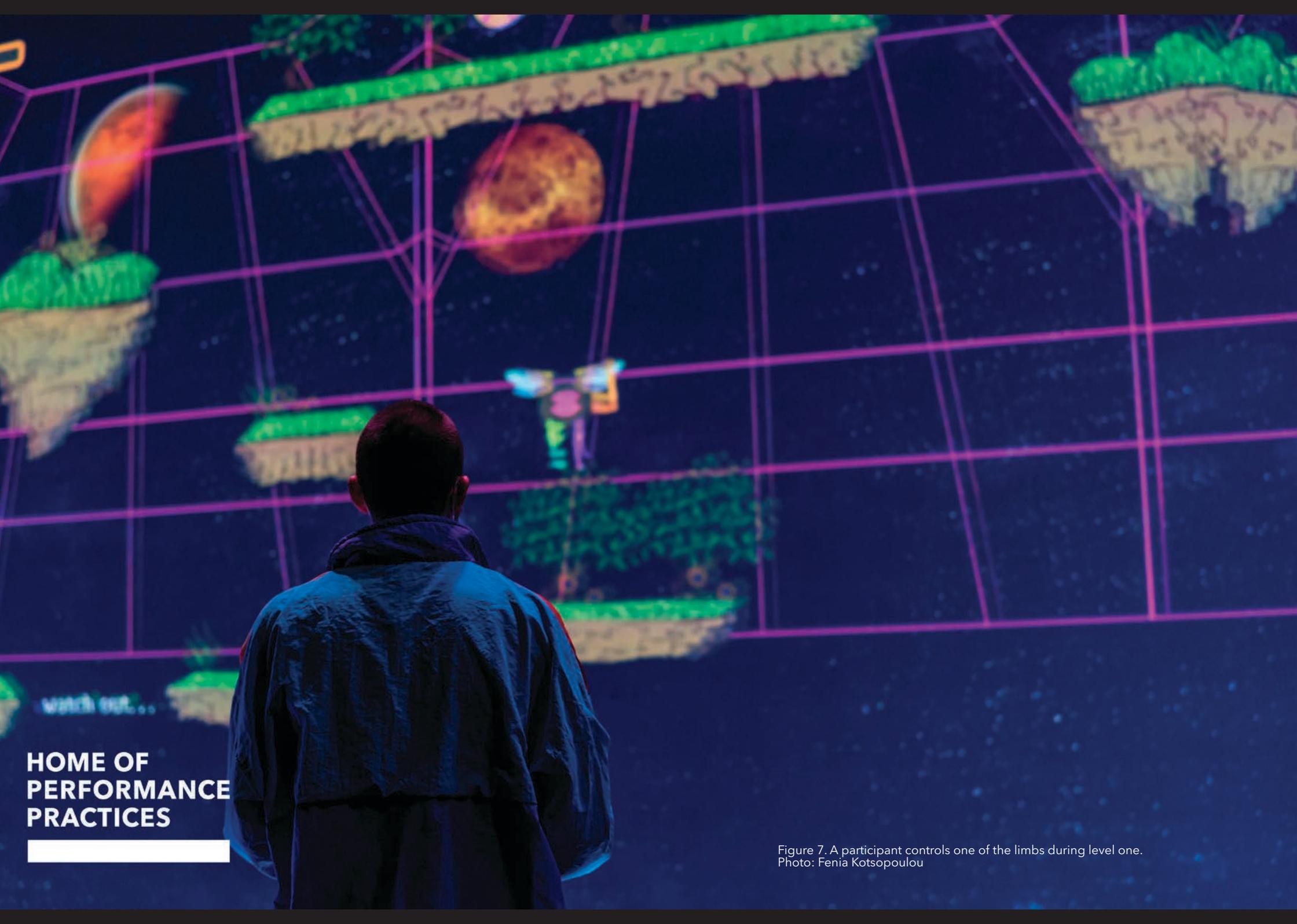
Finally, I told participants they would only have 40 minutes, but that they should not rush. I would move them ahead, if necessary, so they could experience the whole piece. At that point, the doors of the theatre opened.

The new context.

The lighting was dim inside the theatre, accented with bright, indirect colors similar to a video game arcade. Gentle choral music filled the space. Four lit white plinths stood in the center with a game controller on each, and a projected image of a translucent Earth took up the breadth and length of the far wall (see fig. 5). As participants scanned the QR code on their phones, they were instructed to choose an emoji and fill in the blank “We Called It _____.” As they submitted their answers, their text appeared on the screen in colored rectangles. I requested that four participants step up to the plinths to take control of the avatar. Once they had accepted and pressed ‘x’ on all four controllers, level one began.

The simulation.

Upbeat synthesizer music began to play. On the screen appeared a 2D platformer game. An avatar also appeared as a black hole with brightly colored lips, one chicken leg, one cat leg, bee wings and a human arm (figure 7). Each game controller governed one mobility function (right leg, left leg, arm, and jump) and one expressive sound (singing, whistling, yawning, and growling). Participants had to collaborate to



HOME OF PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

Figure 7. A participant controls one of the limbs during level one.
Photo: Feniá Kotsopoulou

maneuver onto the platforms and avoid deadly hazards like exposed rebar and plastic bags.

On their phones, participants were offered a series of emotion-based icons that allowed them to 'send energy'. When tapped, these would appear on screen above the avatar before floating into space.



Figure 8. A participant 'sends energy' from their phone. Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou

At times, the avatar would collect a token that would switch control of each limb to a different game controller. It would also sometimes encounter chasms it could not cross. When this happened, a red button was pushed to activate the storytelling aspect of the game. The camera would shift away

from the avatar and into the chasm, where a story fragment appeared. Online participants needed to fill in the chasm with their responses before the avatar could continue (figure 9).

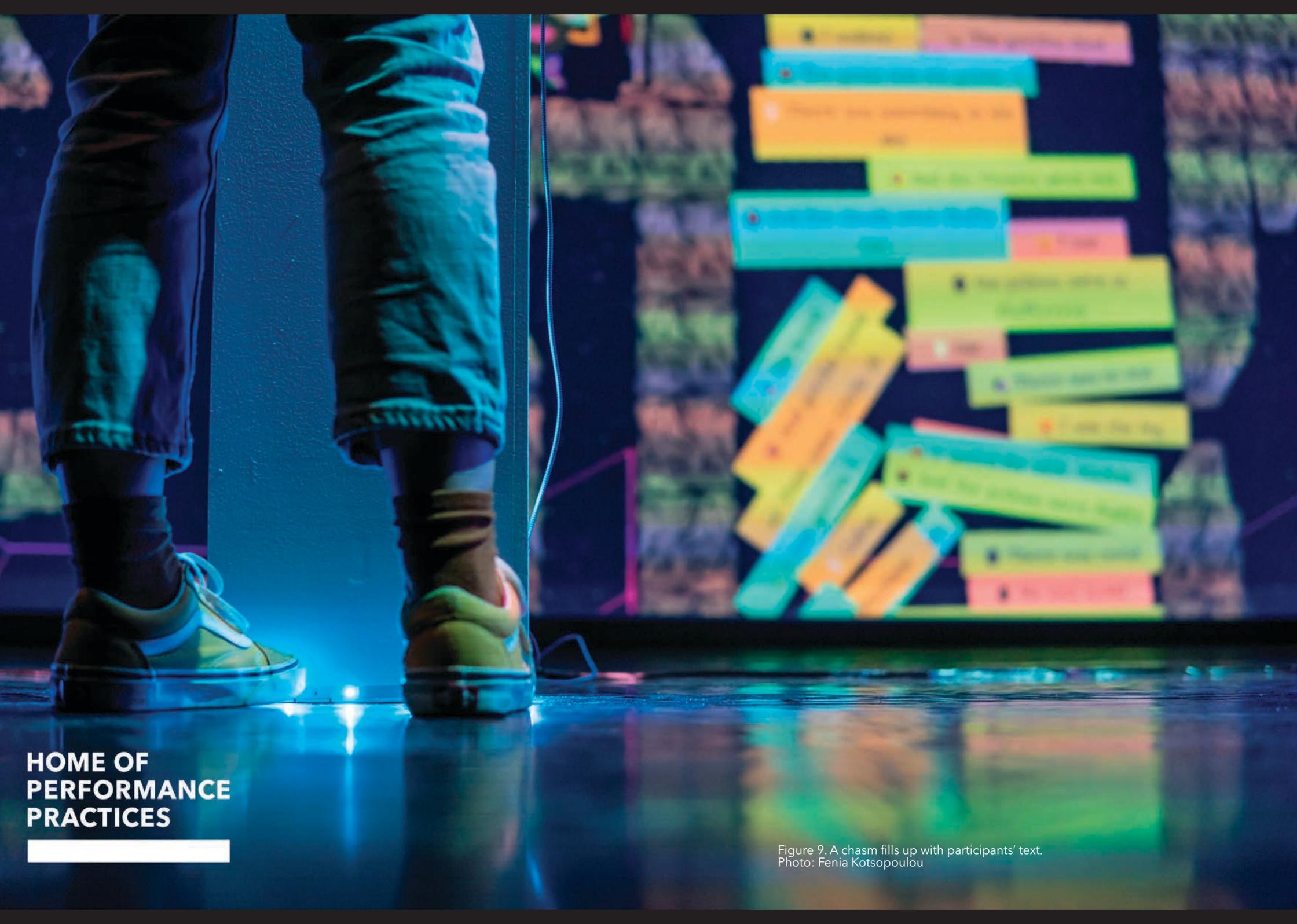
At the end of each level, a glowing Earth token was collected, cueing the words "Let's Dance!" and playing dance music for one minute. To advance to the next level, all four controllers were required to press 'x' and the mobile phone participants had to send 50 energy points within 90 seconds.

GETTING TO THE CORE OF THINGS

Early in the creative process, I identified the core values of this piece as collectivity, access, and disidentification. Below, I will explore these, how they integrated into the piece and with each other, and how through 1,711 playtests, two prototypes, and a performance, they evolved. The examples I have chosen represent only a small sample of the design work that was done, focusing on the game's main mechanics: distributed limb control, sending energy, and collective storytelling. The decisions surrounding these mechanics, however, are indicative of many design conversations I had with my mentors and my collaborator, software developer Hadi Asghari, over the course of several months.

Collectivity.

This was the primary value guiding *We Called It Earth*. My original conception was a Deleuzian/Guattarian rhizomatic



**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**

Figure 9. A chasm fills up with participants' text.
Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou

assemblage lacking hierarchy, beginning, or end (1988, p.9). I liked the idea of decentralization and lines of connectivity that would reterritorialize and spread infinitely. I imagined translating this to a game mechanic wherein each player could choose and attach a limb to a central entity, and then control its movement. I realized quickly, however, that this mechanic did not capture the quality of a rhizome, but rather the chaotic and awkward momentum of a social movement with its power to change society through a sustained and concentrated effort. The politics of this began before the first keystroke. If every participant controlled one limb, what would determine the direction of the avatar's movement? Would majority rule, or would the decision need to be unanimous? Would there be a penalty for lack of consensus?

A social movement had differentiated roles, a unified (if not uniform) goal, and a form of agency that exhibited power in unpredictable bursts from various directions. In order to evoke these qualities, it was important for each participant to experience both intermittent individual agency and collaborative effect. I introduced the idea of using the computer code to randomly rotate control to participants. My collaborator and I also decided that, while there would be no penalty for dissensus, disagreement between the limbs would cause the avatar stay still, and lack of participation would greatly slow progress.

Access.

The implementation of this proposed mechanic quickly ran up against another core value. It was important to us to make the game playable on a mobile phone browser, since that was a fairly ubiquitous device and didn't involve a lot of additional technical knowledge. To implement the mechanic proposed, however, would cause a tremendous lag on a browser-based system; so much so that participants might not experience the movement of the character as related to their own choices. An app could be developed to mitigate this, but that would involve making it available to download on app stores, and this might endanger ease of access for some participants.

Through the same value, we had chosen the game design platform Godot because it was open source and supported by a vibrant programming and design community. However, features that integrated HTML5 were not yet robustly developed, and would need a massive amount of knowledge and programming time to execute. Consequently, the choice was made to have only four limbs, controlled via Playstation controllers in a live space, that would switch functions periodically. The mobile interface would be available to everyone else, and handle the task of storytelling².

² Ironically, throughout the design process, it became increasingly apparent that making the game more 'accessible' involved technology that was not accessible to us. These discussions ultimately led to the realization that offering access to everyone was not possible, which I cover in more depth in the Discussion section.

Disidentification.

Having differentiated roles for participants, I now needed to address a hierarchy emerging within our collective. If the game was a (more or less) standard 2D platformer, the participants operating the game controllers would have much more visibility and agency than those using mobile phones. Also, those with video game literacy would have a sizeable advantage during gameplay. I needed a way to mitigate social risk for beginners and encourage more experienced gamers to prioritize the ethos of the collective over the more traditional goal of victory.

We decided to only allow participants to identify themselves as an emoji. This would offer equal footing on the projected screen, and offer some anonymity for those who might feel a greater risk of social embarrassment. I also opted not to light the faces of any participants during gameplay to keep attention on the screen. My hope in doing this was to cause participants to identify themselves and each other as 'players' or 'members of the same collective' over any other labels during the performance.

Group flow.

During the first prototype, we could not test if the anticipated hierarchy would emerge because, due to technical issues, we were not able to pass off control of the limbs to the participants joining through Zoom. Participants were, however, able to

experiment with entering text, although it was prompted only when the avatar (controlled by me) found the proper token. At that point, their text boxes would fall from the sky to settle nearby. Those submitting text enjoyed the game, but expressed the desire to spend more thoughtful time writing, and to have the opportunity to respond to each other.

Their feedback reminded me of the research I had been doing into collective creativity and group flow, a concept widely explored by psychologist R. Keith Sawyer. He asserts that characteristics of collective emergence include many pauses to leave space for contribution, a deliberate ambiguity that allows for retroactive meaning making, and unpredictability that requires creativity in order to participate (2010).

Taking this into account, a scenario was proposed where the avatar would be dependent on text submissions to fill in holes in the level that couldn't otherwise be traversed. It would freeze upon activating this mechanism, giving mobile phone participants more time for writing. In a further attempt to support this, I composed some mellower music for these sections, hoping that it would calm the exuberant energy that maneuvering the avatar generated, and offer a conducive atmosphere for creative writing. I also hoped that this separation of activities would address the potential inequality between what I was now referring to as the avatar's 'body' (the limbs) and 'mind' (the story).

Revisiting collectivity.

As the second prototype showing approached, I began to focus more on how to deliver instructions and how rules might be enforced if they were violated during the performance. It was a priority for me to avoid a top-down approach, because I wanted to leave space for the collective to affect its own form through the experience of gameplay. I decided to revisit my definition of collectivity in order to better understand how I might maintain a directed sense of community without exerting hierarchical pressure.

Galloway and Thacker explore networks as a system of interrelated, individual nodes. A protocological network is distributed rather than centralized, and is inclusive upon agreement to the terms and conditions. This kind of network operates through relationships, and exerts control through protocols that regulate flow through “multiagent, individuated nodes in a metastable network” (2013, p.30). In other words, it is controlled in a radically horizontal and distributed way without an actor controlling the network itself, thus allowing for more robustness and flexibility when confronting unpredictable contingencies.

During the second prototype I decided to implement this by presenting the rules in written form outside the space so the door could act as a threshold of consent to the terms and conditions of the game. They would communicate two

important points: the theatre was a space of play, and being supportive of other participants was the most important behavior. I used playful language and tried to reassure participants that being confused was okay; they were all beginners, and should feel free to try things out.

Bringing it all together.

Due to pandemic restrictions, the second prototype was the first time experiencing the multiplayer limb control of the avatar with participants. The mechanic itself was an unmitigated success, characterized by cheers of encouragement, loud laughter and confirmation at the end that participants felt like part of a community. Without prompting, participants took turns with the controllers during the game. What had taken me 2.5 minutes to navigate in playtesting, however, now took 25 minutes for participants during the prototype, and this caused people to forget about their mobile phones entirely, opting instead to focus on the action unfolding on the projected screen.

It was pointed out during feedback that the written rules and instructions did not prepare participants for the energy and aesthetics of the game, and they would prefer having a host present to be responsible for the flow of events. I decided that playing this role would also help to increase access, because I could help people with their internet connections, devices, etc..., but that I would need to be careful not to assert myself

as an enforcer of the rules during gameplay.

To address the flagging interest of the mobile phone users, the programmer and I decided that it was necessary to once again increase the interdependence between the 'body' and 'mind', and that an additional mechanic was required to achieve this. An energy bar was added to the top of the main screen, and as the avatar progressed, its level would steadily decrease. Also, if the avatar 'died', 50 points were deducted, and if it fell to zero, the avatar was unable to move until it was replenished. On mobile phones, we added the ability to send emotional energy through five icons, some of which added energy points and some of which drained them (figure 10, 11).

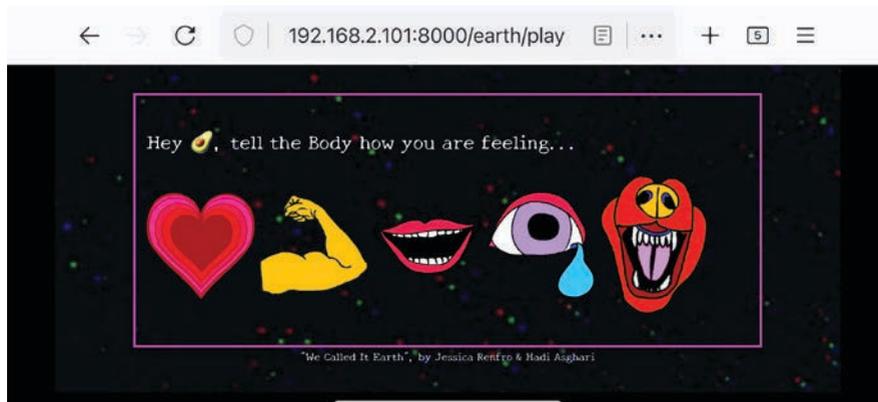


Figure 10. Participants could send energy from their mobile phones.



Figure 11. A participant maneuvers while energy appears on the screen.
Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou

GAME DAY

It is difficult to create a metric for success or failure based on a participant's account of their experience. As emancipated spectators, individual interpretation can vary broadly, and due to the unpredictable nature of simulation, so can events. Based on my own criteria and performance documentation, however, I can piece together whether or not I was able to meet my design objectives.



**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**

Figure 12. Participants reacting.
Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou

The performance did not proceed without interruption. As with all computer programs in such an early stage of development, bugs appeared that had never occurred before and caused pauses during gameplay and a reduction in the number of mobile users due to an issue with the university's firewall. Fortunately, there were contingencies in place to restart the game mid-level, so we were able to continue despite the technical issues.

Interestingly, the protocols of 'be playful' and 'be kind and supportive' were enthusiastically embraced even during the unanticipated gaps. Individuals stepped into the role of cheerleader or joker. A group of participants began singing along dramatically to the game's theme song. Conversation was exuberant and playful, carrying over the energy of the game. Whether this would have been the case in another setting where I didn't already know many of the participants is an interesting point to clarify in future iterations. I would also like to explore if it might be possible to activate these individual behaviors through additional prompts or whether this robustness was simply a byproduct of the kind of network established in the beginning of the piece.

It is easier to ascertain that some participants experienced new subjectivities and ways of being. Some comments during gameplay were:

"I am the pink leg!"

"Oh! I can jump! That's me!"

"I found myself—okay!"

"I'm definitely walking, but I can't do more than that."

"Give us some energy, guys!"

"Send us some love—it's free!"

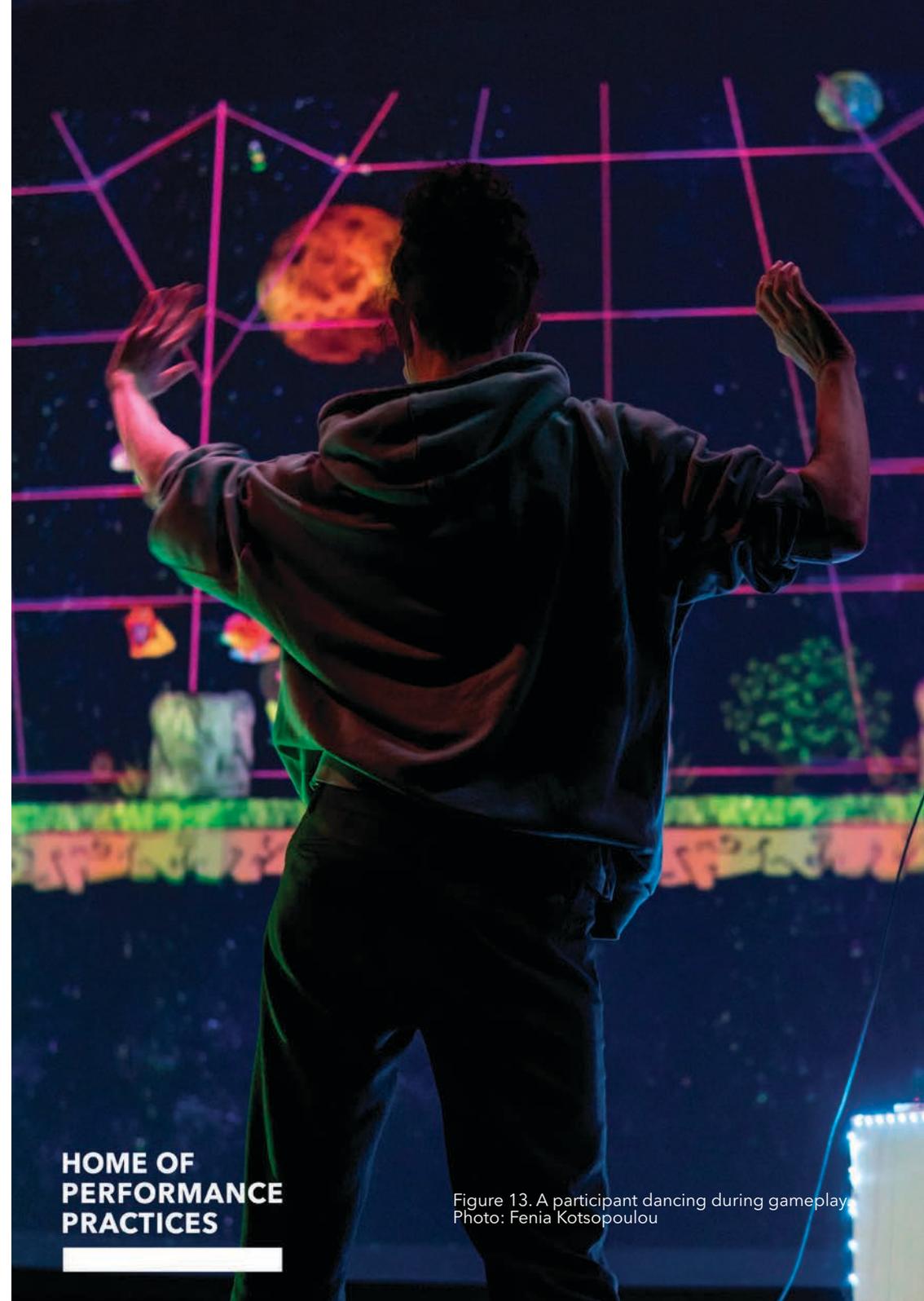
The difficulty of the task seemed to induce a flow state for the participants controlling the body. They referred to themselves frequently as both the character and their individual body part, and kept their attention locked on the screen (figure 12).

Mobile device participation was also more immersive than in previous iterations. The new mechanic of sending energy was astoundingly popular to the point that the energy level of the avatar dipped to a critical level only once in forty minutes after several consecutive 'deaths'. I could not gather from the performance documentation, however, whether this mode of participation induced the subjectivity of being a part of the character. Instead, it seemed to act as an additional mode of communication and support.

The storytelling mechanic encountered difficulty because of the forced reduction of mobile users. Often, responses to the prompts were short, and participants expressed not knowing what else to write before the chasms had been filled. On the other hand, the activity became more social, with those logged on to the server asking for submissions from the others. This additional step was facilitated by me, reinforcing

the importance of having a 'host' to help maneuver through unpredicted hiccups in gameplay.

One aspect of the performance vital to the quality of participation but not covered in my previous design objectives is regulating the level of participant arousal. As an artist, I find it exhilarating to hear cheering and screaming in response to the events unfolding, and the level of enthusiasm in the theatre matched the playfulness I desired in the piece generally (figure 13). I found it an obstacle, however, to transform the quality of participation to a more thoughtful, creative mode during the storytelling parts of the piece. Engagement on a literary level requires a substantially different quality of attention than maneuvering through a video game. This is something I would like to explore in further research, and perhaps include in future design frameworks.



**HOME OF
PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES**

Figure 13. A participant dancing during gameplay.
Photo: Fenia Kotsopoulou

FRAMEWORK AND DISCUSSION

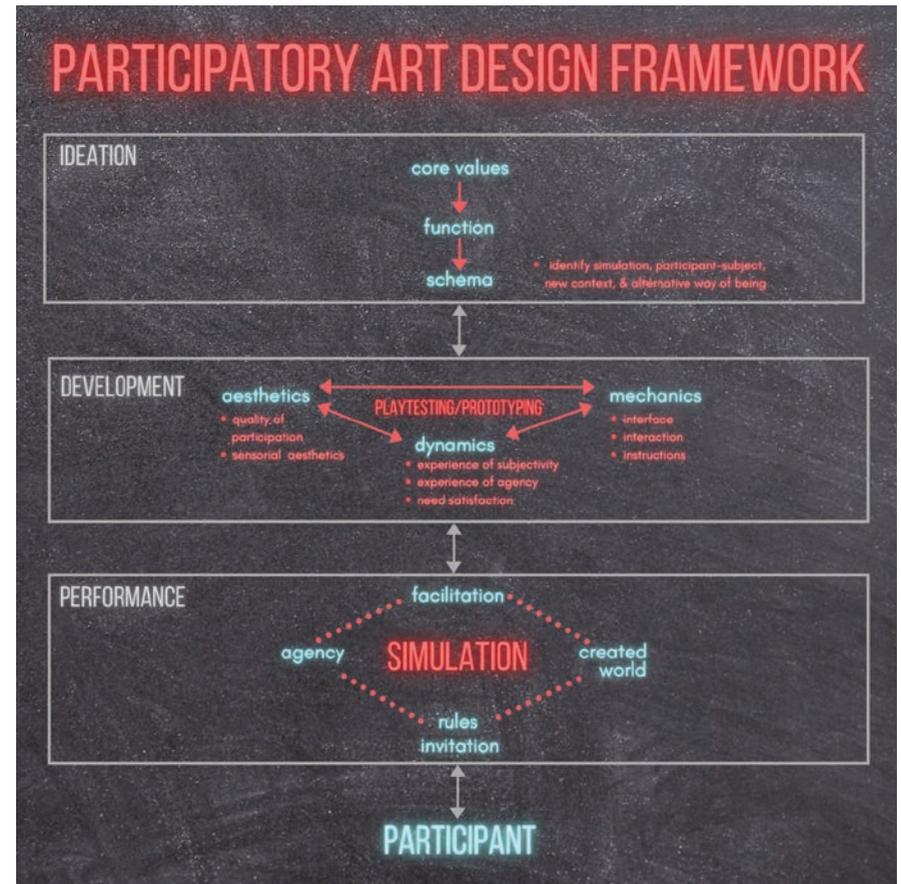


Figure 14. Experimental participatory art design framework

FRAMING THE WORK

In this thesis, I responded to what I perceived to be a gap in the Performance Studies literature in regard to the design of participatory art. I asked:

In what ways can the design of participatory mechanisms (like instructions, mechanics, and environment) improve the consistency of a shared experience in participatory art?

In order to address this, I developed an experimental framework that could be tested through practice-led research. In this framework, the creative process is divided into three overlapping iterative sections (figure 14):

1. **Ideation**, stemming from core values in relation to a societal context,
2. **Development**, wherein the mechanics, dynamics, and aesthetics of the piece are playtested and prototyped, and,
3. **Performance**, wherein participation is invited and facilitated with participants from a larger societal context

Core values are key to the success of this framework. In the first section, the artist determines which values will be the foundation for design, then decides the function they would like to achieve through their artistic practice. I discussed in Chapter 2 how this function often aligns with the egalitarian ideals of empowering an active subject and repairing the social bond, but that these are not inherent to participatory mechanisms, and are dependent on the design process. I also suggest defining the piece's elements through the following schema:

*Participatory art is a **social simulation** that places **participant-subjects** into a **new context** in order to experience an **alternative way of being**.*

I arrived at this definition through interdisciplinary research into Performance Studies, Game Studies, and Psychology. It is premised on the idea that participatory art, like games, is a kind of simulation that evokes multiple subjectivities in participants. Based on this, I laid out internal, mediating, and external strata of a piece to be designed and navigated by the artist.

The second section of the framework includes iterative design models, highlighting the importance of feedback and ongoing conversation throughout the design process. These include the MDA model, playtesting, and prototyping. These periodically revolve back to the first section of the framework, helping it to evolve and sharpen based on experimentation and feedback.

In addition to being a designer, an artist working with participation acts as a procedural author and facilitator. I discussed the authorial entanglement of a simulation and how procedural authorship is shared during a participatory performance in Chapter 3. I also investigated how facilitation can be beneficial in delivering an invitation to participate, managing social risk, and granting authority to the contributions of participants.

In the third section of the framework, an invitation is issued to participants. After consenting to the rules, they interact within the simulation, whose structure determines their experience of agency and subjectivity. This stage is characterized by co-authorship and is therefore unpredictable within the bounds of the simulation. In this framework, the performance resides in the experiences of participants, who can use their newfound shared context as a basis for conversation.

In Chapter 4, I reflected on how this experimental framework was applied in *We Called It Earth*, how it was received in performance, and ways it might be adjusted in the future. I concluded that while the framework was generally successful, it did not account for the importance of regulating participant arousal, which made it difficult to change the quality of attention during the performance.

CONNECTING TO A LARGER CONTEXT

My hope is that this research will spark dialogue within the participatory art community about mechanisms that influence different qualities of participation. As Kester states:

"First, we need a more nuanced account of communicative experience: one capable of differentiating between an abstract, objectifying mode of discourse...and a dialogical exchange based on reciprocal openness" (2004, p.90).

This area of research would not only be a helpful resource for artists exploring the use of participation in their practice;

it would also enable a more nuanced critique of the values driving existing participatory art pieces. This gains urgency in light of the efforts of some governments to reframe 'participation' as "participation in the task of being individually responsible for what, in the past, was the collective concern of the state" (Bishop, 2012, p.14). Using this framework to identify neoliberal values like self-determinism, solutionism, or libertarianism through their consistent presence in elements like mechanics, created world, and rules could forward the conversation about the ethics of certain participatory mechanisms and how they run counter to their stated objectives of 'social inclusion'. Finally, this might allow artists to harness these mechanisms as a way to return power to the collective, changing the focus from individual achievement to collective societal good by simulating a return to egalitarian public values.

Transparency in the process of participatory art creation might also help to draw back the curtain on the pervasive issue of access within the arts. Although many pieces, including my own, express a desire to invite diverse participation, Shah points out:

"Emphasis is largely placed on the moment of access, the point of access, and the actions generated once access has been successfully achieved—on access as a verb, which finds its fruition in the bridging of the last mile, the connectivity to the underserved, and the production of the connected subject. The primacy of access as action makes the infrastructure, which is the condition of access, invisible" (2017, p.117).

It is important when engaging with work about collectivity and the social bond to realize that the ‘participant’ is, to a degree, already selected by the condition of access necessary to engage with the piece. Therefore, it is crucial that the artist recognize that all participatory performances, even digital ones, have exclusion built into them. As a social exercise, it is an ephemeral experience of embodied collectivity that cannot actualize the collective it imagines in a larger societal context.

Nevertheless, participatory art can act as a catalyst for social change by changing how participants see themselves and each other:

“What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done... It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are ‘equipped’ to adapt to it.” (Rancière, 2014, p.72).

We Called It Earth, for example, offers the collective experience of multiple subjects occupying and controlling a single body. This could easily feed into a larger conversation about conflict resolution, teamwork, or social movements. And beyond that, pieces like this also teach how to use participation itself as a tool, asserting it as an additional mode of public discourse. For this reason, I consider it important that both the code and concept of my work remain open-source.

My collaborator and I decided early on to make the code

of We Called It Earth available through a Mozilla Public License 2.0. This allows others to “use, reproduce, make available, modify, display, perform, distribute, and otherwise exploit its Contributions, either on an unmodified basis, with Modifications, or as part of a Larger Work” (Mozilla, 2012, 2.1). The only caveats were that we must be credited in the source code, and that any program generated from it must also remain open-source.

The open-source ecology suits participatory art because its ethos of co-authorship invites generative contributions from people who wish to use it as a tool. One example of this is Lois Weaver’s Long Table, for which extensive documentation and instructions on how to host it are available online (figure 15). Weaver makes explicit in her invitation that she got the original idea from a film. By setting the piece up as both a performance and a practice worth spreading, she avoids claiming proprietorship while still emphasizing the importance of her rules and design.



Figure 15. Instructions for hosting your own Long Table (‘Split Britches’, 2018)

As a final comparison of participatory art to games, I considered my facilitative role in *We Called It Earth* to be similar to the Dungeon Master in a *Dungeons & Dragons* game (2nd Edition, *Player's Handbook*, 1989). This role is crucial, but designed to be passed off to another person through the communication of additional instructions. The new host will rely on the contributions of the designer and procedural author in order to perform the piece.

Participatory performance is usually too short-lived to observe the kind of collective emergence evidenced in multiplayer virtual worlds. Additionally, the subjectivity brought into focus by the artist is likely not based on a customized choice as is common in video games. This makes it less likely that a participant would choose to re-inhabit this played-subject beyond the life of the performance. However, precisely because of its temporary nature, the subjective embodiment in participatory art is an invaluable pedagogical tool.

Through its focus on selective subjective experiences, participatory art helps participants gain new insights about their social reality, and their shared experience can be a touchpoint in subsequent conversations. This kind of dialogue could potentially raise the visibility of the collective problems of our time by engaging individuals who, for a brief time, accept the invitation to step outside of their busy lives and co-author an alternative way of being.

REFERENCES

- Aarseth, E. (2004) 'Genre trouble', *Electronic book review*, 3, pp. 1-7.
- Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. 2nd Edition, Player's Handbook (1989). Lake Geneva, WI, USA: Random House.
- Alston, A. (2013) 'Audience participation and neoliberal value: Risk, agency and responsibility in immersive theatre', *Performance Research*, 18(2), pp. 128-138.
- Bishop, C. (2006) *Participation*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Bishop, C. (2012) *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. Verso Books.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1988) *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Flanagan, M. and Nissenbaum, H. (2014) *Values at play in digital games*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Frasca, G. (2013) 'Simulation versus narrative: Introduction to ludology', in *The video game theory reader*. Routledge, pp. 243-258.
- Galloway, A. R. and Thacker, E. (2013) *The exploit: A theory of networks*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Huizinga, J. (1949) *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. 1st edn. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hunicke, R., LeBlanc, M. and Zubeck, R. (2004) 'MDA: A formal approach to game design and game research', in *Proceedings of the AAAI workshop on challenges in game AI*, p. 1722.
- Isbister, K. (2016) *How games move us: Emotion by design*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Kester, G. (2004) *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art*. University of California Press.
- Mozilla (2012) 'Mozilla public license version 2.0'. Available at: <https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/MPL/2.0/> (Accessed: 18 June 2021).
- Mukherjee, S. (2015) *Video games and storytelling: Reading games and playing books*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murray, J. H. (2016) *Hamlet on the holodeck: The future of narrative in cyberspace*. Updated Edition. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Nakamura, J. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2014) 'The concept of flow', in *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 239-263.
- Pearce, C. (2009) *Communities of play: Emergent cultures in multiplayer games and virtual worlds*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Rancière, J. (2014) *The emancipated spectator*. Verso Books.
- Rigby, S. and Ryan, R. M. (2011) *Glued to games: How video games draw us in and hold us spellbound*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.

- Salen, K. and Zimmerman, E. (2004) *Rules of play: Game design fundamentals*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2010) 'Individual and group creativity', in Kaufman, J. C. and Sternberg, R. J. (eds) *The Cambridge handbook of creativity*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 366-378.
- Shah, N. (2017) '5. In access: Digital video and the user', in *Asian video cultures*. Duke University Press, pp. 114-130.
- Sicart, M. (2011) *The ethics of computer games*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- 'Split Britches' (2018) *Long Table*. Available at: <http://www.split-britches.com/long-table> (Accessed: 19 June 2021).
- White, G. (2013) *Audience participation in theatre: Aesthetics of the invitation*. Springer.
- de Wildt, L. (2014) 'Enstranging play: Distinguishing playful subjecthood from governance', in *Philosophy of computer games conference*.

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Text generated by participants in We Called It Earth

We Called It Earth, May 20, 2021

We called it Earth. But now it is called... Omuamua home Harra Guty Megatron Olive Megatron Guty Grafu Funk Blackjack Mirabelle Limbo Utopian sad gorilla Dirt grindrville Brainnever Possibility Funk Cocoloco No earth Bonobo Blublub Cado Earth Harra Mambo Jumbo Hey guys are you all in? Gigi Yes roundroundround Home Queerlandia Kikirikou CAT Chakra Say something Toilet Smashy Catlon Boopy Jennifer lopez Save me Jujuba Heropi saudade whatever Oil Jump Potato Potato

Once upon a time... the sky was blue I walked The gorillas died The grass was not green :(And the flowers were red There was something in the sky I lost And the clouds were fluffy too the pillows were so fluffyyyyyy And gorilla ruled Oat We loved There was no end Then came COVID 19 There was no end I was gorilla I I was the leg You We felt loved A weird fly with chicken legs was walking And the pillows were fluffy Cofee GORILLA FOR EVER Clouds were marshmallows There was covid Free hot chocolate There was no time Gorilla i was told that i was ugly card B The sea was empty A sky I ate chocolate

Some force held the pieces together... Love Love marina abramovic the force. thank goddess Affection Cake Community Spirituality Chocolate art is the mother of resistance ???? Pindakaas More cake and beer Happy end Belief Cara Questions Us but no political statement Helppp shame Ine Food Fysics BURNETY But I never had enough chocolate cake loveeee Artistic proces Glue Coffee Glue Glue Glue Glue resilienceceeee bitch resilienceceeee bitch Super mario Green for pavlos Aryeh Pancakes Vivas get it ! Draff Jump eeeee

We were still reaching for the sun... When a massive storm came and blew us all away Of life All day long To rise bad feedback for my assesment We will get there soon what a shame on you So basically jessica plannet rhis to be a faster game. But we are failing at it :(To get pink But she never came And putting the Sun in a basket to shi e in the garden When we fell asleep But it ended on all of us When the moon is shaining That big glowing ball Maybe it's a little hot there.....? To escape It was really sad Sorry Jessica if we are not able to win! And then the sun came closer and and closer and ooooh la la Of art But I prefer the moon such a baaad feedback oh no what will you do about it To spread chocolate and chocolate and chocolate grapje ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️ as water was running out and in But then Till we found out we were the black hole We are not that good huh grapjee Is the sun real or is the imagination of Έλα ήλιε μου And then found some stars instead

We were still reaching for the sun... When a massive storm came and blew us all away Of life All day long To rise bad feedback for my assesment We will get there soon what a shame on you So basically jessica plannet rhis to be a faster game. But we are failing at it :(To get pink But she never came And putting the Sun in a basket to shi e in the garden When we fell asleep But it ended on all of us When the moon is shaining That big glowing ball Maybe it's a little hot there.....? To escape It was really sad Sorry Jessica if we are not able to win! And then the sun came closer and and closer and ooooh la la Of art But I prefer the moon such a baaad feedback oh no what will you do about it To spread chocolate and chocolate and chocolate grapje ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️ as water was running out and in But then Till we found out we were the black hole We are not that good huh grapjee Is the sun real or is the imagination of Έλα ήλιε μου And then found some stars instead

Appendix B:

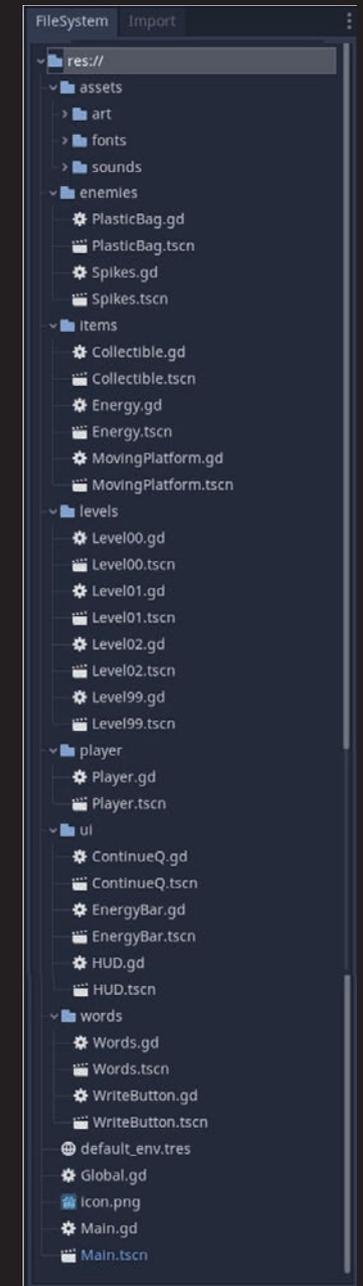
Source code for the limb switching mechanism

```
Godot Engine - We Called It Earth - Main.tscn
2D 3D Script AssetLib
Debug Online Docs Search Help
55
56
57 var devoffset = 0
58
59 func lmb_switch():
60     devoffset += 1
61     print_debug('device-offset: ' + str(devoffset))
62     emit_signal('switched', devoffset*4) # inform eg for HUD
63
64 func get_input():
65     # logic for rotating functions of four controllers
66     if Input.is_action_just_pressed("rotate"):
67         lmb_switch()
68
69     var dev0 = "dev" + str((0 + devoffset) % 4)
70     var dev1 = "dev" + str((1 + devoffset) % 4)
71     var dev2 = "dev" + str((2 + devoffset) % 4)
72     var dev3 = "dev" + str((3 + devoffset) % 4)
73
74     # I. leg movement (dev0 & dev1):
75     var motion_legl = 0
76     var motion_legr = 0
77     if Input.is_action_pressed(dev0 + "_right"):
78         motion_legl = 1
79     if Input.is_action_pressed(dev0 + "_left"):
80         motion_legl = -1
81     if Input.is_action_pressed(dev1 + "_right"):
82         motion_legr = 1
83     if Input.is_action_pressed(dev1 + "_left"):
84         motion_legr = -1
85
86     velocity.x = pow(motion_legl + motion_legr, 3) * speed
87
88     if velocity.x != 0:
89         if abs(motion_legl) > 0:
90             $leg_L.play()
91         else:
92             $leg_L.stop()
93         if abs(motion_legr) > 0:
```

Appendix C:

We Called It Earth Program Structure in Godot. The full code can be found at:

<https://github.com/hadiasghari/calledearth-game>



CHOR

PER

THEATRE PRACT

DEDISCIPLINED BO

DIGITAL PERF

CH

PERFORMANCE A

TH

DEDIS

CH

PERFORMA

THEATRE

DEDISCIPLINED BO

DIGITAL PERFORMANC

CHOREOG



1
2
0
2

PERFORMANCEPRACTICES.NL
FB / INSTA: HOMEOPPERFORMANCEPRACTICES