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Summary and Keywords

Much of the existing research on video games seems to stall over the issue of whether or not violence in games is as innocent as is alleged. Scientists are still divided as to whether or not there is a causal link between the behavior of young people and violence in video gaming. Much less discussion is devoted to how cultural and political engagement finds new channels in video games to confront dominant opinions and perceptions in society. However, a more recent body of scientific work considers how the image spaces of video games facilitate new forms of resistance and how this opens up possibilities of social change in our daily lives. In this research, the culture of video gaming is used as a tool for a deeper understanding of resistance in our society. In this context, application of theories about "contagion without contact" can add some new thoughts to the way the virtual world of video games offers possibilities for a politics of resistance in real life. From a historical point of view, the work of the 19th-century French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, one of the first theorists on contagion, can be used to understand more deeply this on-going process by which everyday life recreates itself in its own image, and vice versa. Rather than measuring the amount of violence present in video games ("content analysis") or identifying causal linkages between media representations of violent imagery and behavior, and subsequent human behavior ("media effect research"), it becomes evident that players of games are not passive recipients, but active interpreters of the reality that arises in and is processed by popular culture.

Keywords: resistance, video games, real virtuality, contagion, imagined communities, commodification, Gabriel Tarde

We are surrounded by the sounds and images of popular culture. Hardly a day goes by that we don't engage in the popular forms linked to the 24-hour rolling "mediascapes" (Appadurai, 1996) in our society. We watch a movie on Netflix or a television show on CBS, play a video game on the Internet, or listen to a pop song on Spotify. The presence of these popular media not only forms a gauge for the significance and value of current political and cultural events; they also display continual movement between various dimensions, such as from the virtual to the real and from the real to the

virtual. In this new culture of "real virtuality," as Manuel Castells called it, "the media are the expression of our culture, and our culture works primarily through the materials provided by the media" (1996, p. 337).[1] As a consequence, stable formations of place, identity, and nation disappear and are replaced by ever-shifting "flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols" (1996, p. 442).

An excellent example to illustrate the impact of real virtuality was the way graffiti artists sneaked subversive graffiti onto the television show *Homeland* as part of a protest against the show's racist portrayal of the Arab world. In the second episode of the fifth season, main character Carrie Mathison can be seen walking past a wall daubed with Arabic script reading: "Homeland is racist." Other slogans painted on the walls of the fictional Syrian refugee camp included "Homeland is a joke, and it didn't make us laugh" and "#blacklivesmatter." In a statement on the Internet, the three artists explained why they hacked the award-winning series.[2] Heba Amin, Caram Kapp, and Don Karl (a.k.a. Stone) claimed that "the show perpetuates dangerous stereotypes by diminishing an entire region into a farce through the gross misrepresentations that feed into a narrative of political propaganda." The producers of *Homeland* did not check the Arabic graffiti on the walls of the Syrian refugee camp. The content of what was written on the walls was of no concern to them. "Arabic script is merely a supplementary visual that completes the horror-fantasy of the Middle East, a poster image dehumanizing an entire region to human-less figures in black burkas and moreover, this season, to refugees," Amin, Kapp, and Karl claimed in their online statement.

The way graffiti was sprayed on the walls in *Homeland* out of concern for the show's representations of Middle Eastern politics and Muslims in general also occurred in the militaristic video game Counterstrike, a first-person shooter game in which players join either the terrorist team, the counterterrorist team, or become spectators. In 2002, digital culture jammer Anne-Marie Schleiner developed the video game tool "Velvet-Strike," a collection of subversive images and captions that can be sprayed like graffiti on the virtual surfaces of Counterstrike. Captions and drawings can be downloaded from a website specially set up for that purpose and could be applied in a manner visible to the other players in the virtual environment of the existing game of Counterstrike (De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006). In an interview, Joan Lendre, one of the members of the Velvet-Strike team, stated that Velvet-Strike offered resistance within the rules or protocols of Counterstrike:

> It started as some sort of interruption in a very particular war-sim network. It made some people inside this environment very mad and upset which means the project actually made sense. For a few months they mailed us, they insulted and told us they would kill us and so on.[3]

New media formats and technologies, such as online video games, raise questions about newfound possibilities to resist dominant opinions and perceptions in society. Classic sociology, operating before poststructuralism and postmodern philosophy, placed the

physical environment of squares, streets, and parks as the center of resistance. "If you want to change the city you have to control the streets" is a well-known slogan of the Reclaim the Streets cultural movement, a loose collection of environmentalists, anarchists, hackers, squatters, and anticapitalists with no formal structure, leaders, or spokespeople, which used street parties as political protest against large-scale project developers and commercial companies. One of their aims was to seize roads in order to prevent cars from being able to access them (McKay, 1998; Ferrell, 2001). Likewise, groups like Critical Mass—an anarchic cycling movement whose participants ride collectively in cities around the world—drift through the city to protest the G8, the war in Afghanistan, the privatization of public space, and so on (Carlsson, 2002; Furness, 2010). With the advent of a virtual reality, however, it becomes apparent that new forms of resistance manifest themselves beyond our "objective" reality and that they operate by continuous series of "loops and spirals" (Ferrell, Hayward, & Young, 2008, p. 129); briefly illustrated here by the examples of *Homeland* and Velvet-Strike.

Video games are a socio-cultural phenomenon of increasing relevance. They constitute a mainstream leisure time activity for broad levels of society and foster the mediated construction of reality (Bogost & Poremba, 2008). A body of recent research shows that resistance is moving from the physical boundaries of streets and squares to virtual image-spaces of video games. Operating under the strong waves of the globalisation process, well-known games such as The Stone Throwers (2000) and Quest for Saddam (2003) deal with specific forms of resistance or are discussed within the context of "resistance" (De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006; Sisler, 2008; Hayward & Schuilenburg, 2014). In light of the central position of video games and game culture within contemporary popular culture (Atkinson & Rodgers, 2015), this raises questions about newfound abilities to resist against cultural, economic, or political power relations. As Gonzalo Frasca points out: "Video games not only represent reality, but also model it through simulations" (2004, p. 21).
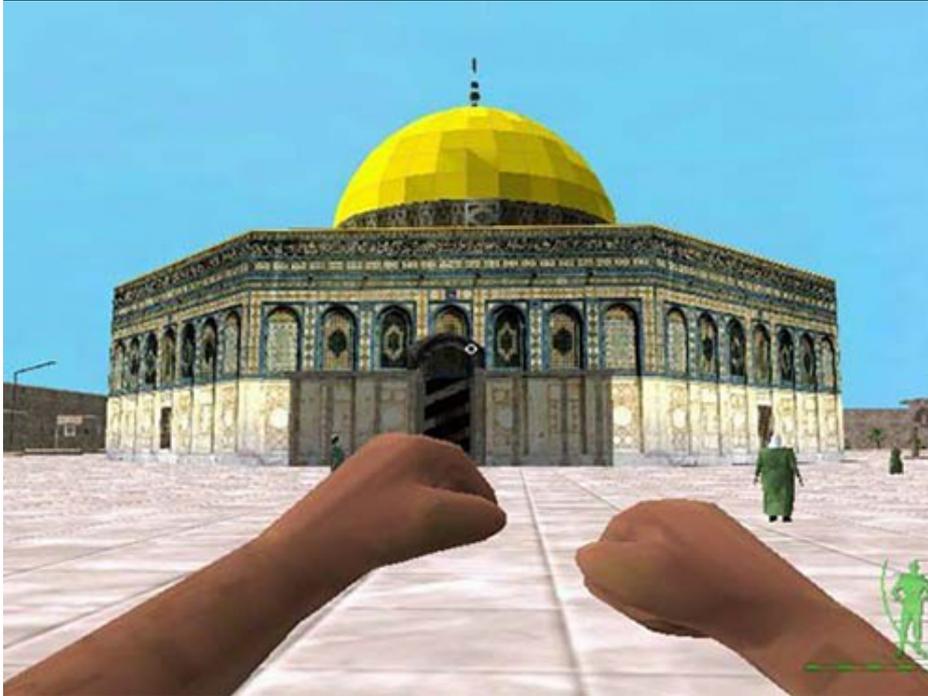
Games of Resistance

Which forms of resistance go on in the realm of game culture? The fact that video games contain more than the expression "it's only a game" might suggest is demonstrated in the way games provide a place for resistance to wider social, economic, and political forces. Admittedly, the term "resistance" is not often connected with video games. Games are commonly perceived as a "children's medium, easily denigrated as a trivial—something that will 'be grown out of'—and demanding no investigation" (Bogost, 2007, p. vii). Moreover, resistance is most commonly studied as an act of physical behavior in public space, such as the political protest of the Indignados in Spain and Greece, or Occupy Wall Street at Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, New York, protest movements driven by people's discontent with the current social and economic inequality in Western societies.

However, drawing on Hollander and Einwohner's (2004) assertion that the key analytical components for conceptualising and identifying meaningful resistance are "intention" and "recognition," there are a range of video games that deal exclusively with "overt resistance," whether as a main goal or alongside other goals in the game. "Overt resistance" is a proclamation of opposition and refusal that is visible and readily recognized by both targets and observers and is intended to be recognized as such (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Meades, 2015). Although the online games focusing on resistance vary in their scope, content, and presentation—there is no specific subgenre among games of "resistance gaming"—three types of games of resistance can be discerned: political games, anti-advergames, and the hijacking of otherwise intended games.

Central to the first type of games is the political situation in a specific country or the political viewpoints of well-known individuals such as the billionaire businessman Donald Trump. This category encompasses a broad range of games, in which the "nation-oriented games" are the more interesting subgenre, specifically games in which nationalist sentiments, or an "us vs. them" politics, applies. These political resistance games can concern global conflicts, like the anti-Israeli game "Under Ash," which was created by a Syrian publishing company in 2001, as a reaction to American-oriented games like "America's Army" (Galloway, 2004; Power, 2007). "Under Ash," a first-person shooter game based on the Palestinian conflict, was aimed at Arab gamers and did not include English subtitles. The game states on its site that it targets "youth who build their worldview on the online environment."[4] Another example of a political game is the Syrian production "Endgame: Syria," a game which sheds light on the less documented viewpoint of the rebels in Syria's ongoing civil war. The game allows players to "explore the side of the Syrian rebels, as they push the Syrian conflict to its endgame."[5] The objective of the game is to bring an end to the conflict in Syria by weakening support for the authoritarian, military-dominated regime of president Assad.

Resistance in Popular Culture

There are also political games in which resistance takes the form of critique on a given status quo. This is illustrated by the game September 12th (2003), which was described by *The New York Times* as "an Op-Ed composed not of words but of actions."[6] Created by a team of Uruguayan game developers led by a former CNN journalist, the main goal of the game was not to convince people that the "war on terror" was wrong, but to trigger discussion among young players. The game asks players to reconsider their private viewpoints and questions the "war on terror" in general. Relevant in this game is that a player cannot win, but he or she also cannot lose. In the game, players shoot missiles at terrorists in a small village. Inevitably, the missiles strike civilians as well. Villagers mourn their friends who were killed by the missiles, and some of them become terrorists themselves. Teachers and museums across the world are now using the game as a tool to discuss the effects of global terrorism.[7] Another example is Vigilance 1.0 (2001), where you play a CCTV operator attempting to spot crimes in an urban area. The game questions the effectiveness of our surveillance culture and the role of CCTV. For example, in the United Kingdom there are up to 5.9 million closed-circuit television cameras, including 750,000 in "sensitive locations" such as schools, hospitals, and care homes. This means that there is one CCTV camera for every 11 people in the country. What makes Vigilance 1.0 a powerful critique of our surveillance culture is the way it confronts a player with questions, such as: "Which infractions are worth acting upon?" and "What are the consequences of spying on every citizen?"[8]

Political resistance can also come in a form of satire or clowning. Each of these can serve to further define "overt resistance," but each in different ways. An example of a satirical game is Airport Security (2006), in which a player inspects the passengers and their luggage and removes the forbidden items before allowing a passenger to go through. The satire is found in an ever-changing list of forbidden items. Prohibited items may include

pants, mouthwash, and hummus.[9] Satire can also be found in the game Neocolonialism (2012), where you "buy your own votes, extract wealth, exploit the working class, backstab, manipulate parliaments and manipulate the International Monetary Fund."[10] An example of "clowning" is the game "Trumpiñata" (2015), which makes it possible to hit the outspoken American president, businessman, and reality TV star Donald Trump with a stick.[11] In the game, a player can create a piñata that looks like Donald Trump and beat it with a stick to make sweets fall out of him. Players collect coins, sweets, and piñata accessories for points.

Games have also been developed to comment on the actions and power relations of major corporations. This is the second type of resistance games, better known as anti-advergames. These games are created to "censure or disparage a company rather than support it" (Bogost, 2008, p. 126). Their main goal is challenge players to rethink their relationship with certain companies or brands by demoting a company or brand for its wrongdoings. In these games, broad consumer issues are targeted, such as in the game Sweatshop (2011), in which you play a sweatshop owner.[12] Anti-advergames also target specific companies, as in The McDonald's Game (2006), in which a player is in control of the fast food chain, encouraged to exhaust the environment, exploit workers, and endanger customers in the pursuit of profit. "You'll discover all the dirty secrets that made us one of the biggest companies of the world," is the slogan of this game.[13] One of the earliest titles in the anti-advergaming genre is Disaffected! (2003), which puts players in the role of demotivated employees of the FedEx Kinko's copy franchise. The player's job is to find out why they are frustrated: Is it incompetence or because of managerial malaise?[14] As Ian Bogost, game author and independent producer of anti-advergames, stated in an interview: "Advertisers, governments and organisations mount huge campaigns to show us what they want us to see, and we want to expose what they're hiding, … how they work and what's wrong with it."[15]

A third way in which resistance through gaming takes place is by hijacking otherwise intended games. Here, resistance is directed against the game itself, when games are copied and modified, infiltrated or used in an alternative way. Hackers, artists, or political groups continue to find expression in this way by using otherwise intended games in their favor. The aforementioned Western game tool Velvet-Strike (2002) is a well-known example in this category of resistance games.

Velvet-Strike delivers a "counter-military graffiti" that can be sprayed inside the game zone of the popular game Counterstrike (1999), a violent game in which terrorists are fought by SWAT teams. By making the images visible for other players in the online environment, Velvet-Strike "makes it possible to comment in a peaceful way on the violence that occurs between terrorists and military units in *Counterstrike*" (De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006, p. 66). The games of Quest for Saddam (2003), Quest for Bush (2006), and The Night of Bush Capturing: A Virtual Jihadi (2008) are other examples of this form of resistance. In a bid to add some conceptual precision about the way resistance takes place in these games, they will be more broadly discussed in the next section.

Case Study I: "Quest for Saddam"

Resistance in Popular Culture

In September 2003, two years after two hijacked planes flew into the Twin Towers, Petrilla Industries issued a video game called Quest for Saddam. The first-person shooter game is the successor of Petrilla's "debut game": Quest for Al-Qa'eda. The game platform is quite simple: you are a highly trained soldier with a lot of ammunition, walking around in a desert compound. On the way you meet Iraqi soldiers who all look like Saddam Hussein. The walls are plastered with images of Saddam Hussein, and there are statues of him. Your mission is to find the real Saddam and kill him. In the meantime, you shoot at all the other "Saddams," pictures, and statues.[16] Developer Jesse Petrilla stated in an interview on news channel MSNBC that the game "is full of one-liners and it just makes fun of everything." He adds that the response on the game is "amazing" and especially for first-time gamers this could be the game of the year 2003.

The humor in "Quest for Saddam" includes the difference between the Republican guard and falafel ("falafel kills more people"). The game is set in Humminumadad, and the Iraqi soldiers shout "Humminumanuma" as they charge at the player. The "Sean Connery like" voiceover comments, upon seeing a map on the wall, "Is that sandpaper or a map of Iraq?" One of Petrilla's favorite parts in the game is when you drop down into Saddam's hideout bunker, via a transportable toilet cabin ("definitely evidence of chemical warfare"). In his hideout all sorts of "funny portraits" line the walls of the bunker, including Petrilla's favorite: a picture of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden naked in a hot tub together. Petrilla had no particular political motive in mind when he created the game. He just wanted to give people the opportunity to shoot Saddam Hussein themselves. [17] However, in 2003 Petrilla founded the United American Committee (UAC), a political action group focused on "promoting awareness of Islamist extremist threats in America."[18]

The "clowning" in "Quest for Saddam," its conflation of the Iraq War with the "war on terror," and its portrayal of Arabic stereotypes inspired the Global Islamic Media Front, an Al-Qa'eda-linked organization, to bring out their own version of the game. In 2006 they created a very simple "skin" on the game, which replaces all references to Saddam Hussein with American president George W. Bush. The most obvious changes include the signs and billboards scattered throughout the game (images of Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden are replaced with images of George W. Bush, other U.S. Officials, Tony Blair, Prime Minister al-Maliki, and others), the statue of Saddam is an empty pedestal and the mosque is now identified as "American Base." The level design is identical to that of Quest for Saddam, except that the "Sean Connery" voiceover is replaced with jihadist music. Petrilla was not amused with the new version of the game. In the newspaper Washington Post he claimed: "They say imitation is the highest form of flattery. But I'm not flattered."

With countless young people playing these games online, the dissemination of the message from both games to a broader public raises the issue of the role of these games in relationship to our physical reality. Wafaa Bilal, an Iraqi born artist and professor of art at NYU Tisch School of Art, recognized the "contagious" impact of the aforementioned games. The stereotypes in Quest for Saddam heightened the attractiveness of a stereotypical response, in this case from Al-Qa'eda. In reaction to both video games, he decided to bring out his own hijacked version of the game, entitled "The Night of Bush Capturing: A Virtual Jihadi." Bilal hacked the Al-Qa'eda version by placing a suicide bomber in the middle of the unfolding plot. After learning of the real-life death of his brother in the war, the suicide bomber is recruited by Al-Qa'eda to join the hunt for George W. Bush. With this "performance piece," Bilal aimed to shed light on the racial nature of Iraqi stereotypes prevalent in Western video games and films in particular and the way these stereotypical images open up the susceptibility to extremist views in general (Al-Ali & Al-Naijar, 2013). In 2008, The Night of Bush Capturing was exhibited at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, when Republican Party members called the Art Department a "terrorist safe haven" and claimed that the artist was a threat to national security. After the FBI started an official investigation, the college shut down the exhibit. For Bilal, the closing of the exhibit contributed to the discussion he wanted to start "why the assassination of a state leader is a 'terrorist game,' while a game depicting the same for another state leader is quite acceptable" (Stahl, 2010, p. 136).

Contagion without Contact

Application of theories about contagion in popular culture can add something new to the thinking of the way resistance takes place in our "liquid society" (Bauman, 2000) and how it transcends into reality. The idea of contagion has been shaped along various lines and is the result of developments that have their origins at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The concept of contagion can be found in medical sciences, for instance in the

study of how invisible viruses are spread through human contact. But it is also possible to take cues from social sciences, such as from the long-forgotten but important work of the nineteenth-century sociologist Gabriel Tarde, whose ideas were overshadowed by his contemporary rival, Émile Durkheim. Gabriel Tarde was born in 1843 in Sarlat and became one of the most influential figures in nineteenth-century French sociology. He was a magistrate in his hometown of Sarlat and head of the office for statistics of the Ministry of Justice. In 1900 he was elected to a chair in modern philosophy at the Collège de France. Besides his activities as a lawyer and criminologist, he devoted effort to studying statistics and psychology (Schuilenburg, 2015B).

Tarde's ideas on contagion have a great deal in common with those developed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983), although Anderson does not refer to them. In this widely acclaimed book, Anderson pointed out that the nation-state is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Imagined because, as Anderson writes, "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication" (1983, p. 49). In a critique of Marxist and liberal theories which had neglected to explain the power of nationalism, Anderson makes clear how a cultural artefact can create a new form of imagined community by showing how the convergence between capitalism and print technology ("print-capitalism") gave a new fixity to language, "which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation" (1983, p. 57). According to Anderson, one of the building blocks of imagined communities is mass media such as books, newspapers, television, and radio. These mass media have helped in the identity formation of communities.

In a paper entitled "The Public and the Crowd" (1969), Tarde supplied one of the first confirmations of the idea that mass media can create a community and that community must involve communication.[19] His hypothesis was that a third instance nestled between the individual and the population. In this paper he discussed "a public" and distinguished this phenomenon from what historian and philosopher Gustave Le Bon ([1895] 2009) called "the era of crowds." Le Bon pointed out in his seminal book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, that "the destinies of nations are elaborated at present in the heart of the masses" ([1895] 2009, p. 15). He used the concept of contagion to develop an analysis in which certain types of groups, which he defined as crowds, constitute a level of phenomena that is wholly separate from individual phenomena because of the unique psychological laws that govern the group dynamics of crowds. In order to explain that the crowd is more than the sum of its individual parts, he showed that in a crowd every sentiment and act is contagious to such a degree that an individual will sacrifice his personal interest for the collective interest. This contagion is an effect of suggestibility and is described by Le Bon as a type of collective hypnotic trance in which emotions and actions, once introduced, have a tendency to spread throughout the crowd.

Resistance in Popular Culture

Nearly a century before Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Tarde puts mass media such as the newspaper at the center of his explanation of the genesis of a public, first with the invention of printing, after which came the railway and the telegraph. Long before the Canadian philosopher Marshal McLuhan (1964) and other media scholars stated that the printing press was more important than any book that had ever been printed, Tarde declared in his article "The Public and the Crowd" that the art of printing brought about a completely new form of human organization that continued to increase with the spread of writing. For Tarde, contagion expressed the transmissions that constitute not only a crowd, but also—and more importantly—a public. He defined a crowd as "a collection of psychic connections essentially produced by physical contact" (1969, p. 278). Tarde emphasized that crowd and public should not be conflated, but distinguished from one another. In sharp contrast with the characteristics of a crowd, he showed that a public is much more of a dynamic and specific concept. It would, for instance, be incorrect to understand the term "public" as a sum of detached individuals in the way the term "crowd" is often used. Public refers to the way in which people with certain common qualities are grouped together. This may concern a group of people with a shared experience or a common interest who, according to Tarde, "do not come in contact, do not meet or hear each other: they are all sitting in their own homes scattered over a vast territory, reading the same newspaper" (1969, p. 278). This involves a mediated experience, which Tarde called "contagion without contact," in which the group of people is not physically present.[20]

To fully understand Tarde's notion of "contagion without contact," it is necessary to discern two branches of interactions—invention and imitation—that form a reality in their self but also influence each other. According to Tarde, imitation is the movement by which something is repeated and diffused. In the foreword to the second edition of *The Laws of Imitation*, he speaks of "the action at a distance of one mind upon another" ([1890] 1962, p. xiv) and of "every inter-psychical photography, so to speak, willed or not willed, passive or active" ([1890] 1962, xiv). Strictly speaking, imitation is an activity in which people consciously or unconsciously repeat an action of which they are not the author, ranging from method of working to a style of clothing or a musical preference. Imitation thus involves a contagious process in which an action is repeated and reproduced. This passivity–activity relation branches into series of interactions, writes Tarde, like links in a chain with "highly variable intervals, sometimes of a few days or months, sometimes of several centuries" (1969, p. 160). At the heart of these series is always an act of invention, which Tarde defined as "a combination of imitations" (1969, p. 153). The distinction between imitation and innovation is thus an analytical one, due to the fact that imitation is not an automatic form, but always involves transformation.

The notion of "contagion without contact" makes it evident that it would be a mistake to focus on the decision-making process of each gamer in isolation. Social processes are driven by interactions—which Tarde defined as imitation and invention. As such, an online game is a social process, in which people do things in relation to and in combination with those around them. This means that the video games discussed here are not passive casings but rather active processes that create their own meaning and public. They

facilitate an enhanced possibility of interaction between different players and provide new ways for representing an imagined community. It is to this very point that I now turn by analyzing the first Palestinian games: The Stone Throwers, Under Ash, and Under Siege. What does resistance look like in those virtual environments and how does this affect our physical reality?

Case Study II: "The Stone Throwers"[21]

Although the design and the interactive possibilities of the video game The Stone Throwers (2000) lag far behind those in Western games, the importance of the game cannot be overestimated. The Stone Throwers was created by the Syrian Mohamed Hamzeh and can be downloaded from a website with the name "Damascus-Online." To commemorate the Palestinians who have died in fights with the Israeli army, the following message appears on the Internet site: "To those who lost their lives for the freedom of the homeland and all those who are fighting for freedom—from Syria with love." The game was developed as a means of political resistance against the suppression of the Palestinians by Israel. However, the violent and armed struggle does not take place in the physical streets and squares of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, or Hebron, but in the virtual world of a video game. Against the background of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the players

take on armed Israeli soldiers. In contrast to Western games such as Counterstrike and America's Army, players do not have an extensive arsenal of weapons. Stones are the only weapons they have at their disposal. When the game is finished, the message appears that playing this game is not restricted to the virtual environment. The players get to hear that they have only killed Israeli soldiers in a virtual environment. Subsequently, a Palestinian funeral is shown, along with the text: "This is the real world. Stop the killing of the innocents of Palestine before the game is really over."

A year after The Stone Throwers, the Syrian publisher Dar Al-Fikr released another game, Under Ash, which deals with the first Intifada. In this game, the player assumes the identity of a Palestinian boy named Ahmad and carries out a violent struggle against the Israelis. In every stage of the game, the player is informed of the historical background to the Palestinian question. In the first part, Ahmad attempts to reach the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. If he reaches it alive, he must evacuate his wounded Palestinian brothers, disarm Israeli soldiers, and repel military troops from the holy site. In another part of the game, Ahmad forces his way into a Jewish colony to raise the Palestinian flag. The last assignment takes place in the south of Lebanon, where he participates in a Lebanese guerrilla attack on an Israeli radar post. According to the makers of the game, Under Ash is "a call for justice and realisation of the truth, the prevention against the wrong and aggression" (Sisler, 2008).

The success of both games in the Arabian world led the Syrian publisher to issue another game entitled Under Siege (2004). It is the first game in which the main role has been allotted to a woman. The player can play a Palestinian woman who volunteers to be a suicide bomber in Israel. Having given her child to family members for safekeeping, she allows a hand grenade to explode in the midst of a division of Israeli soldiers. The images in Under Siege show great resemblance to Western games such as Full Spectrum Warrior, a squad-based game in which the player issues commands to two fire teams, Alpha and Bravo. But whereas in Full Spectrum Warrior the conflict takes place in the capital of the fictitious country of Tazikhstan, "a haven for terrorists and extremists," action in Under Siege takes place between and on the roofs of the buildings in the occupied territories of Palestine. According to Mahmoud Rayya, a member of staff of the Hezbollah office that was responsible for the development of different Arab video games, the main goal of these games is to show the just and moral cause of their fight: "Resistance is not confined to weapons. You also have to catch up with the ever-growing industries like the Internet and computer games."[22]

Constraints on Resistance in Popular Culture

Interest in public space has focused on two social processes that are happening on the street or in the square: "repression and resistance" (Shepard & Smithsimon, 2011, p. 24). Studies of repressive trends in public space concern the "militarisation of public space" (Davis, 1992, 1998; Graham, 2010) by a broad package of new measures and instruments in order to enhance the quality of the urban environment, such as CCTV cameras, iris/vein scanners, facial recognition software, metal detectors and other control and detection devices, preventive frisking, loitering prohibitions, and the application of banning orders by which offenders are denied access or may only enter public space under supervision (Schuilenburg, 2015A). Studies of resistance in public space have looked at forms of political protest, riots, and demonstrations or temporary reclamation of privatised space through playful activities, such as "cultural jamming," in which commercial texts on billboards are altered or sabotaged (Dery, 1993; Carducci, 2006). However, with young people spending countless hours a day, everyday, on the Internet in online gaming, the issue of the role of the video games, as "cultural artefacts," in our relationship to "the merely illusory" reality of virtuality is becoming increasingly relevant. Speaking about resistance therefore means that the virtual space must also be taken into the argument.

The most interesting examples of types of resistance in popular culture are Arab games such as The Stone Throwers, Under Ash, and Under Siege. Whereas American designers commonly focus on Iraq and Afghanistan as the geographical manifestation of the War on Terror, Arab developers utilise Palestine as the place of a broader struggle for Arab dignity and identity (Sisler, 2009). In their opinion, games, particularly those targeted at youths, harmonize better with the experiential world of the young Palestinians than traditional media like television and newspapers. Ian Bogost calls this form of persuasion "procedural rhetoric" (2007, p. ix), the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions, rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures.

Video games are not value-free or neutral media. Designers use them as a persuasive means, as a way of resistance against the way Arabs and Muslims are misrepresented and stereotyped in Western video games and against the political and cultural dominance of Israel and the United States. The fact that resistance now takes place in the virtual environment does not make the struggle less location-oriented. The logic of the continual movement from the real to the virtual world and back rests here on the fact that each virtuality eventually becomes reality and that each reality sinks into a virtual world, as the daily fight with Israeli police and army in the West Bank demonstrates. Moreover, video games such as Under Ash are used as the place of a broader struggle for Arab dignity and identity, giving the players a communal identity. From the perspective of Arab

gamers, video games such as Under Ash aim to provide the players a new self-awareness and a positive self-identity.

The critical question is whether the ascribed forms of resistance in popular culture can really change fundamental attitudes and beliefs about the world, and more specifically lead to significant social and political change. Looking to distinguish political resistance from artistic protest or individual activism, Keith Hayward and Marc Schuilenburg (2014) proposed thinking about resistance as a three-stage process. Drawing upon the work of Gabriel Tarde, they describe the first stage of this process as the *invention* of forms of resistance. This includes rebellious forms of popular culture and entertainment, present in music, films, and video games, with the aim to provoke debate or to create resistance through frictional force. The second stage deals with the process of *imitation* by which something is repeated and diffused. In this context, it is important to point out that in the dissemination, all kinds of new series of interactions are formed. They may cross one another, so that new relations arise, which, in turn, engender other imitative series. At this stage, a type of resistance often falls, to use the words of Tarde, "into the domain of the commonplace, the traditional, and the customary" ([1890] 1912, p. 118). As an example, by July 2004, a year and a half after its initial release, Under Ash had already sold fifty thousand units at eight U.S. dollars each (Souri, 2007). Against this background, the third stage of *transformation* becomes crucial. In this stage, the presuppositions need to be altered that precede a certain political or cultural discourse and, in a sense, guide the thinking and acting in that discourse (in terms of Slavoj Žižek, for example, the establishment of new forms of political subjectivization beyond the neoliberal logics of capitalism). In the context of the Arab games discussed and the struggle against the political and cultural dominance of Israel and the United States, this means the liberation of the Occupied Territories and the foundation of an independent state of Palestine as a precondition of a definitive solution to the conflict. However, many types of resistance will never get beyond the first two stages of invention and imitation, and thus never produce radical social or political change. Resistance is always in danger of falling toward exclusive commodification. It runs the risk that it will be safely transformed into objects we buy, sell, and trade. Even anticapitalist rhetoric, such as Che Guevara T-shirts for example, can be productively bought and sold. The result of this all is a permanent tension between the tendency to commodify resistance in popular culture, reducing the discussed video games for instance only to their commodity aspects, and their aim to fundamentally change social and political outcomes.

Review of the Literature and Further Sources

The growing popularity of video games has lead to a huge body of psychological research into its negative effects: the potential harm related to violence, addiction, and depression (for an overview of the literature, see Anderson et al., 2010). The problem, however, with violent video games and aggressive behavior is that defining and categorizing both is

almost impossible. Only recently have researchers started to consider the benefits of playing video games, focusing on four main domains: cognitive (e.g., attention), motivational (e.g., resilience in the face of failure), emotional (e.g., mood management), and social (e.g., prosocial behavior) benefits (e.g., Tobias, Fletcher, Dai, & Wind, 2011; Wouters, van Nimwegen, van Oostendorp, & van der Spek, 2013).

Sociological studies in digital media and technology focus on issues such as power, race and gender in video culture (e.g., Embrick, Wright, & Lukacs, 2012; Hunteman & Payne, 2013). Digital media and technology scholars, for example, have carefully documented the reciprocal relationship between the U.S. military and the entertainment industry, known as "the military entertainment complex" (Lenoir, 2000; Lenoir & Lowood, 2002). A survey of the literature on the military–entertainment complex shows that each war, whether this concerns the fight against drug criminals, dictators, or widely disseminated terrorist networks, has served as the basis of a video game. At the same time, the army uses games in simulation training for soldiers. In these simulations of operational actions, soldiers have the feeling that they are actually in the real world, which Slavoj Žižek calls "post-modern transparency" (1997, p. 103). Additionally, images of existing wars are fused with special effects from video games. While images from the war in Afghanistan and Iraq are being incorporated into video games, advertisements of the American Army to recruit soldiers use digital pictures from video games.

Despite the fact that there is a growing research on critical issues such as violence and war in video games and their possible connection with the real world, there are surprisingly few studies investigating the concept of resistance within the game culture. Moreover, there has been little theoretical discussion about the concept of resistance itself within social sciences (see De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006; Brown, 2014; Meades, 2015 for exceptions). Most work that tries to "map" resistance in video games are case studies from the point of view of subcultural theory, considering how people construct and maintain virtual identities within virtual social systems. From this perspective, subcultures are seen as either places of symbolic resistance, or as formations that are complicit in the niche marketing of their own identities and thus call for a less-than-clear-cut perspective on dominant discourses and political power relations (Carbone & Ruffino, 2014).

Acknowledgment

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Notes:

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(1.) It is argued that French playwright Antonin Artaud was the first to use the term "virtual reality." In his book *The theater and its double* (1938), he speaks of the theater as "la réalité virtuelle": a reality that is both illusory and purely fictitious.

(2.) http://www.hebaamin.com/arabian-street-artists-bomb-homeland-why-we-hacked-an-award-winning-series/ (consulted: March 10, 2016).

(3.) http://www.gamescenes.org/2010/04/interview-joan-leandres-retroyou-1999-velvet-strike-2002.html (consulted: March 10, 2016).

(4.) http://www.underash.net/en_download.htm (consulted: March 18, 2016).

(5.) http://gamethenews.net/index.php/endgame-syria (consulted: March 18, 2016).

(6.) http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/23/arts/23thom.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (consulted: March 18, 2016).

(7.) http://www.gamesforchange.org/play/september-12th-a-toy-world/ (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(8.) http://www.martinlechevallier.net/english/A_vigilance.html (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(9.) http://www.persuasivegames.com/games/game.aspx?game=arcadewireairport (consulted: March 10, 2016).

(10.) http://steamcommunity.com/sharedfiles/filedetails/?id=92968782 (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(11.) http://gamepolitics.com/2015/11/17/trumpinata-lets-you-take-a-stick-to-donald-trump/#more-20919 (consulted: March 19, 2016).

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(15.) http://www.molleindustria.org/node/149/ (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(16.) http://ekurd.net/download/softwaregame3d.html (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(17.) http://youtu.be/qep9MAFWNMM (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(18.) http://www.gameology.org/reviews/quest_for_bush_quest_for_saddam:content_vs_context (consulted: March 19, 2016).

(19.) The essay "The public and the crowd" was originally published in 1898 as "Le public et la foule" in *La Revue de Paris*, and later republished in Gabriel Tarde's *L'opinion et la foule* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1901).

(20.) Next steps in the contagion theory can be found in the work of Robert Park, Herbert Mead, and Sigmund Freud. All argued in different ways that crowds allow the individual to disappear into the throng.

(21.) This section is based on chapter 3 of *Mediapolis: Popular culture and the city* (De Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006).

(22.) www.newstribune.com/articles/2003/05/25/export16774.txt (consulted: March 10, 2016).

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