Please note the version of this paper, published in Games and Culture, Volume 8. Number 5, misattributes the following quote to journalist Kate Wild:

"We will be keeping it as close to real life inspiration as possible because people have escaped, of course, using classic methods reminiscent of 'The Wooden Horse,' or 'The Great Escape' in terms of their ingenuity."

The quote is in fact from EFW developer Katharine Neil. The error has been corrected in this version, and a revision to the original article has been requested.

Abstract

In the realm of documentary, educational and serious games it is common to hear the implication that games about real-world (as opposed to fantastic) subjects engage players in real scenarios, environments, or subjectivities. But what does it mean to be a participant, specifically an enactor, within a designed experience such as a videogame? Drawing from performance and documentary theory, this research examines the function of enactment in videogame experiences, particularly in documentary videogames. It presents an analysis of *Escape from Woomera*, which enables an experience-centered performative inquiry within a re-created environment. I will argue such experiences are best understood as constituting a documentary third space, in which a past experience, read through the body, is vivified.

Keywords: documentary, videogames, docugames, performative inquiry, reenactment

Performative Inquiry and the Sublime in *Escape from Woomera*

> What happens when our expressive technologies also become perceptive technologies— expressing and extending us in ways we never thought possible, radically transforming not merely our comprehension of the world, but also our apprehension of ourselves? (Sobchack, 2004, p.135)

In the documentary game *Escape from Woomera* (2003), players search for the means to escape deportation while being detained at Australia's Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (1999-2003), a facility that had been subject to protests and accusations of human rights violations. The game world itself is re-constructed in a modified version of the story-driven first-person shooter *Half-Life*, based on photographs, first-person and official accounts, and maps the game's creators (the EFW Collective) were able to acquire despite a media blackout surrounding the remote facility. The research informing the game also includes primary research conducted at related facilities, such as the Baxter detention center (EFW Collective). Unlike *Half-Life*, primary gameplay does not involve any combat. The game is instead structured like a classic adventure game—playing as detainee Mustafa (RAR-124), players must query non-player characters (NPCs) in the facility in order to build a correct chain of dialog and action (primarily retrieval and exchange tasks) that will advance Mustafa's narrative towards freedom…or deportation. For example, by discussing plans for escape with the character Amir, Mustafa learns he is the leader of a planned escape, and that he requires a pair of pliers. By speaking to other characters, players discover they can find a pair of pliers in the kitchen, if they can get on the work list, etc. As with many narrative adventure games, progress can at times seem oblique and circular: NPCs direct you towards other NPCs to which you can speak, send you on various errands in return for information (that may or may not be useful, depending on the order in which the information is retrieved), or turn down your requests. Many recount their own experiences, despair, and desire for freedom. All the while, an indicator in the top left corner quantifies Mustafa's slowly draining hope—bottoming out at the moment of capture or deportation.

Developer Julian Oliver (Swalwell, 2005) states: "Games are an ideal medium to engage with this kind of content, better than a documentary could ever be, because to play is to become a subject of the content" (para. 12). In other words, games construct player subjects: in *EFW's Woomera*, you are not an objective observer, but an embedded participant. But what does it mean to be such a participant, specifically an enactor, within a designed experience such as a videogame? What might this gameplay tell us about being a detainee in Woomera?

Well, in *Escape from Woomera*, the primary experience emerging from the gameplay tends to be frustration. The player's sense of agency is undermined as it becomes increasingly suggestive that success (at least in any given playthrough) is perhaps futile, as only a specific and well-timed chain of events will even offer the possibility for escape. If this were a typical adventure game, we might object that the game is not providing enough support to scaffold player success, or we might blame our own lack of familiarity with the genre. But because this *is* billed as a documentary game, we are prompted to push further. Notes Oliver (Swalwell, 2005): "So much of gameplay, particularly in adventure based games, is about 'how do I get from here to the next part?' 'How do I move from this situation to experience something else?' 'How do I get out?' That's the frustration that is logically embedded within so much gameplay, and is actually logically embedded within this real situation," (para. 13). The performative outcome, the frustration, comments on the documented experience itself…even making a claim for its inherent game-like nature.

Woomera is a challenging game to critique, given that the work never advanced beyond the stage of single-level prototype (the level ends as Mustafa succeeds in acquiring the pliers Amir had requested). As such, any reading of the game brings with it a degree of speculation as to how the final experience may unfold. According to developer Katharine Neil (Swalwell, 2005), the original plan for later levels was indeed to include escape scenarios paralleling actual refugee escapes: "We will be keeping it as close to real life inspiration as possible because people have escaped, of course, using classic methods reminiscent of 'The Wooden Horse,' or 'The Great Escape' in terms of their ingenuity" (para.10). On the game's website (Escape from Woomera Collective, n.d.), the EFW Collective states their design intent was to, "steer away from a value-loaded, clear-cut set of outcomes representing 'winning' or 'losing'. Instead, (we) aim to set up a simulated environment where players are empowered to explore the possibilities, to be confronted with dilemmas: 'What would I do in this situation? What might happen if I do that? How would that make me feel?" However, at least in the prototype version of *Escape from Woomera*, this sense of exploration, choice, and empathy are restricted. Strangely—this is a compelling feature of the work. In fact, in enacting what seems to be an absurd game, player frustration and confusion is what vivifies the experience, moreso than a sense of presence in the game's drab environment, or the (somewhat heavy-handed) NPC stories. Woomera succeeds less by immersing players in a physical space, or revealing truths about the logic of Woomera and detainee strategy, and more in crafting insight into the enacted subjectivity of *Woomera* refugees, read through the player's embodied gameplay experience.

"Really there": longing for transparency

The desire for transparency is present in both documentary and videogames. In documentary, it is most apparent in the rhetoric of witnessing — the conflation of camera and viewer presence that lets the viewer observe, *really see*, the documentary subject. This becomes politically important in the case of social issue documentary, as it implies the viewer is implicated in the profilmic action, which in turn suggests an ethical responsibility to respond.

This is not simply a lack of media literacy (in most cases). This transparent viewing construct has been defended on the grounds that a camera invokes the act of perception. In other words, the film re-presents the image to the perceiving viewer, in the same manner as if they had been co-present with the depicted event. While it is tempting to view this sort of "direct access" as a documentary ideal, the construct is problematic for a number of reasons. We can critique this proposition on the basis of whether it makes sense to say such a disembodied and decontextualized surrogate perception is the *same* as non-mediated perception, creating a challenge to its indexical value. Garnett Buchardt (2006) argues that even if we accept a surrogate perception construct, the only thing we can say is true about the documentary image is that *something occurred*. In other words, perception is irrelevant without context; specifically the material embodiment in which we construct meaning. As such, Buchardt also charges transparency is ethically suspect, and, following Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, promotes an acknowledgment of the constructed frame as more ethical.

Realistically, in few cases do we truly conflate having "been there" with having viewed something in a documentary. Even if indexicality has effaced the camera as interface, most people do maintain a distinction between things seen in-person and via mediated representations, depending on context (“You *actually* saw that?” “No, but I saw it in a documentary”), suggesting a difference is both recognized and relevant. As Stella Bruzzi (2000) notes, documentary viewers are aware of the tensions between viewing the actual and the construct of documentary— in fact, she suggests this tension is part of the pleasure of documentary. While we watch documentary to see "the real," we simultaneously are aware of the fact documentary is a created thing, a designed thing that presents the real necessarily through the design of a human agent.

This distinction remains whether we’re watching a film, or enacting within a simulated environment. Action within games is not imaginary, but it is certainly artificial. Although immersion is commonly discussed in relation to games, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003) suggest the idea that the end-game (so to speak) of videogame progress is a play experience completely indistinguishable from the real world is an “immersion fallacy” that discounts our ongoing awareness (if not necessarily at the forefront of our mind at all times) that we are playing a game. Salen and Zimmerman stress the need to acknowledge the double-coded nature of games, which allow us to immerse ourselves deeply in play, while simultaneously maintaining such activities as being part of a game. They suggest that it is in fact this play between transparency and design that make games such rich and multilayered experience. In other words, for the game world to disappear, and for a player to "really become" a character, or "really experience" a virtual space, is a misrepresentation of the complexity of the game-player relationship, akin to the suggestion documentary audiences are "really seeing."

According to performance theorist Richard Schechner (1985), performance consciousness is always subjunctive— aware of contingency, and alternative paths. We can say that game players have value in a situated perspective without having to frame it as indexical, by viewing it as part of the documentary's expressive framing. Situated interaction is one of the more compelling opportunities presented by videogames, but it often comes paired with an unproven value proposition that situating perspective provides more agency and/or insight through active participation, as opposed to "passive" viewing. Situated interaction can actually encompass a variety of game structures, including implication within a (rational) system, performative inquiry, and immersion (transparency).

In the context of documentary videogames, situated interaction is at its most promising, and perhaps most defensible, in relation to the idea of a documentary third space evoking both the historical actual and the embodied insight of the participant. Performative inquiry within such a situated perspective can be particularly valuable as a means in which to reflexively encounter documentary subjects, and is distinct from the kinds of imaginative role-play commonly considered with regard to videogames. In a sense, performative inquiry encompasses the double-coded nature of the game experience suggested by Salen and Zimmerman, in that it seeks insight through both the performance and the performance construct (often in an iterative fashion).

Of course, how much one is situated, and how and what performance entails, depends very much on the sort of game one is playing. As both Galloway (2006) and Newman (2002) have identified, even within the same game (which may involve moments of passive viewing, configuration, action, reflection etc.), players are implicated in a variety ways. Enaction can also be seen as a different mode of engagement with media (one that can be theorized in different ways in terms of effect/affect). Like indexicality, situated interaction can provide an anchoring/bond function that seems to ground the experience in the material world (through the body)— but unlike indexicality, it does not provide evidentiary value. In other words, we are not arguing for indexical "sameness" (not the "same" frustration we have simply reinstantiated), but for a vivication of the documents anchoring the documentary experience.

Re-creation and enaction

One of the other techniques common in self identified documentary videogames is re-creation (event) simulation[1], similar to *Escape from Woomera*, *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30*, and the event simulation (as opposed to ballistics algorithm) in *JFK Reloaded*. These re-creations, which frame the documentary experience surrounding the work's documents, can be viewed in two broad categories: spatial and procedural simulations. Re-created environments using a spatial simulation, such as modeling real spaces within a game engine (such as in Nonny de la Peña and Peggy Weil's *Gone GITMO* and Faith Denham's *Block H*), are commonly used to situate a player spatially within an environment. Although this is a potentially interesting and modestly expanding area for documentary theory to address, such re-creations do not necessarily involve or require gameplay. Procedural simulations (specifically re-creations) implicate the player in re-performing or reenacting. The latter can be further explored in the context of theoretical work on reenactment drawn from film documentary, anthropology and the performing arts.

---

[1] Simulation designed to represent interactive environments, as opposed to abstractions etc.

While there are issues involved in an interactive simulation not present in a filmic recreation (which usually serves to visually re-embody an event rather that re-perform it), some of the discourse surrounding the ontological status and role of reenactment might inform how we come to understand enacting within documentary videogames. When it comes to reenactment, Bill Nichols (2008) stresses the distinction between indexical documents and our encounters with them. He refers to reenactment as a "vivication" of documents, but suggests this is an inherently artificial conceit: “Facts remain facts, their verification possible, but the iterative effort of going through the motions of reenacting them imbues such facts with the lived stuff of immediate and situated experience" (p.80). Nichols is clear that such vivification does not constitute an indexical bond, claiming "reenactment lines anchored, indexically, to the present distinct from the past it represents…the camera records of those we see on screen with indexical fidelity, but these figures are also ghosts or simulacra of others who have already acted out their parts" (as cited in Ward, 2005, p.52). Such enactments fulfill a persuasive and affective function, not an evidentiary one. For Nichols (2008), "(v)ivification is neither evidence nor explanation. It is, though, a form of interpretation, an inflection that resurrects the past to reanimate it with the force of a desire" (p.88). In other words, it is a product of the expressive framing of a documentary work.

This is not to suggest that it does not have a valuable role to play in crafting documentary actuality. Beyond simply reanimating documentary material, vivication may also help fill inevitable gaps in understanding indexical documents:

> (It) is also because the text locates on the person of its subjects, as it were, tensions, conflicts, contradictions, and paradoxes of historical moment, making them real, as though for the first time, because they are rendered with the specificity they've never had before. There is only to fear...where this impression of reality becomes credited entirely to the text... the represented instance clearly existed before the camera. But may not exist apart or presentation is the meaning, value, and affective experience of the situation or event in the subjectivity of others. History awaits us outside the text, but aspects of magnitude may be discovered within. (Nichols, 1992, p.236)

As Nichols (1992) notes, "What is needed beyond this is the vivification of existential paradox, lived contradiction itself, as tensions and conflicts that exist between the text and its world, to give form to its context and also informed the text in ways that can be apprehended" (p.241).

Peggy Phelan (2005) also notes the value of reenactment, suggesting that while reenactments may be warranted by historical documents and artifacts, "the body remains the vehicle that can carry the past into the present, that can give the past presence" (p.181). Both

Sabine Himmelsbach (2008) and Jennifer Allen (as cited in Cook, 2008) describe the body of the re-enactor as a medium for reproducing the past: Himmelsbach goes on to offer it is the body that in fact provides “a guarantor of authenticity" in terms of lived experience. As Richard Scheschner (1985) proposes, the reenactment is a form of “physically re/membering (= putting back together what time had dis/membered)” (p. 48). Reenactment fills in the lived space outside of evidence and argument, restoring experience left uncategorized within logic or system—which Nichols (1992) links to Roland Barthes third or obtuse meaning. Nichols suggests this is not spectacle, not facts and forces, but experiential awareness of difference knotted into contradiction by social construction of reality.

Vanessa Agnew (2004) also describes reenactment as a “body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience” (p.330). However she goes on to problematize the construct, noting “body-based testimony tells us more about the present self than the collective past” (p.335). Phelan (2005) observes reenactment creates a dynamic in which "a unique body has been replaced by an endless series of bodies that are interchangeable with one another, across time and space"(p.179). This again speaks to “sameness,” reminding us that the context and materiality of action are important, and can be effaced by reenactment. Nichols (2008) further critiques the ethics of reenactment; reminding us that going through the motions is its own pleasure. We submit to the psychic gratification of embodying actions within a false context. In other words, we cannot discount the role of *enjoyment* in such performance (even in viewing such a performance), and how this pleasure impacts experience.

The ludic (re) enactor: re-creation as performative inquiry

Reenactments are often theorized in documentary more from the point of view of the observer of the documentary than on the "enactor" him/herself. Discourse surrounding the documentary film *Battle of Orgreaves* is perhaps an exception. In the film, Mike Figgis had miners and police officers from an embattled mining town to reenact the divisive riots that had occurred in the town a decade earlier. The documentary chronicled both the reenactment, and how the reenactment process affected the re-enactors, many of whom had at one point been the original participants in the historic event.

As such, the reenactment testimonials (also included within the film) become our surrogate interrogation of the profilmic event. *Battle of Orgreaves* further used personal recollection rather than official and media accounts to re-inscribe/reencounter history (Blackson, 2008). Notes Robert Blackson (2008), "contemporary reenactments and their means are slowly eroding the need for accountability to an original source and relying instead on the efficacy with which its performance, or the reproduction of that performance, can act as an emotional and interpretive link between the past and our imperfect present" (p.127). Reenactments hinge on the reenactor's ability to draw personal experience through a combination of lived experience and historical touchpoints: "The degree to which performers empower themselves through layers of authenticity is secondary to their willingness to allow personal interpretation rather than verisimilitude to influence their actions...(the) shifting balance between personal involvement and the past continually shapes our regard for reenactment" (p.127).

While historical recreations, particularly of perceived “educational” times and places such as pioneer villages are common, Plimouth Plantation (MA, USA) is a particularly relevant example. The village sets up its participant villagers in an *interpretive performance* in order to better simulate visitors' exchanges with the real historic participants. Village enactors are given a dossier containing a documentary biograph (what is known, current opinion and learned presumptions based on probability) and a personation biograph (dialog sample, friends names, character notes)— material with varying degrees of indexicality. Their role goes beyond actors, as they are asked to interpretively improvise in response to questions, based on what their (contemporary but enacted) personal experience tells them their character would do, say and think. In other words, they provide "first person interpretation" (Schechner, 1985). The entire experience is hypermediated (this is not an attempt at complete simulation— for example the "characters" do not live on-site, and clearly the presence of tourists is a discrepancy), and the answers provided by the enactors are not put forward as historical fact— however, the structuring of their role around a performative inquiry designed to enrich the experience and understanding of character is one with parallels to documentary games.

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner has used performative inquiry as a way of enriching understanding of anthropological ethnography. Turner and his wife Edith (with the help of Turner’s students), established the practice of enacting, reflected upon, and iterated anthropological accounts. The primary goal behind enacting these processes—crafting, as it were, an “’inside view,’ engendered in and through performance’”(Turner, 1982, p.140)—was to reflexively find gaps in the logic of the anthropological account, and to apprehend details of it that are obscured by the on-page narrative[2]. This perspective brings Turner's concerns in line with Nichols (1992), who notes: "What vivification involves is more closely aligned with a felt sense of contradiction, dilemma, or existential paradox" (p.234).

Interestingly enough, through monitoring the successes and failures of this (re)performative approach, Turner developed a preference for enacting mundane scenarios over highly structured rituals, citing the tendency for the "otherness" of ritual to cloud enacted understanding. Moreover, for Turner (1982), rituals and myths "have their source and raison d'etre in the ceaseless flow of social life" (pp. 47-48) and as such are inextricable from their contexts. Turner's process was iterative: the performance itself was paired with a critique of the performance (i.e. the performance is not presumed to be "actual")(Schechner, 1985). Turner's awareness and caution surrounding the tendency of performance to lead to an othering or sensationalizing of experience is key. The enactments which supported insight are vivified through embodied encounters— not scenarios where we play pretend, but scenarios in which we maintain a reflective encounter that allows our experience to inform our understanding of another.

It is important to recognize that experiential or enacted knowledge need not be confined to the realm of affect. Ian Bogost (2006) notes, "all games entail some kind of subjective embodiment that transgresses the game itself" (p.134), even if what we are enacting is not typically seen as a subjective experience. In other words, while it's easy to think of performative inquiry in relation to personal subjectivity, it's also important to consider other types of enactments, such as logical (even abstract) systems and processes. A ready example is how performative inquiry features in the forensic sciences as a means of verifying the embodied logic of the forensic account (this may involve both reconstructions and reenactments.) Bogost suggests understanding the encounter between the subjective experience of simulations and the rules and configurations on which they are based may help overcome a "simulation fever" that results from the tensions emerging between our attraction towards simulations and our distrust of them. In other words, performative inquiry can act as a critical as well as an affective frame.

---

[2] Although as Lucy Suchman has argued, we can always devise a narrative that brings such practices to account.

Documentary as sublime third space

Paula Rabinowitz (1993) suggests all documentary is a reconstruction, "a reenactment of another time or place for a different audience — a graphing of history...onto the present" (p.257). For Stella Bruzzi (2000), history is "perpetually modified by its reenactment in the present" (p.32). Bruzzi suggests documentary viewing forms a "working reality" – a perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation. This "working reality," neither in the past, nor fully engaged with the present, can be articulated as a type of third space.

Nichols (2008) offers a third space construct as a means to distinguish the "place" of documentary experience from the place of the "actual," Philip Rosen (2007), returning to Ankersmit's concept of the historical sublime, frames this idea as a space of union between our situated contemporary understanding (in many ways contingent on our own embodiment) and a past, inaccessible reality. Rosen suggests contact between past object and present subject creates an alternate temporality that brings both into detached temporal now. This reflects our yearning for direct experience in documentary, despite the historical “DEcontextualizations; aporia, and politicization that we can never quite escape” (pp.35-36).

A sublime space apart, or third space, conception of documentary is a useful way to think about documentary without falling back into transparency fantasies, particularly in relation to enactment. Nichols (2008) evokes a third space "linking now and then" in the case of repetitive and performative constructs such as reenactment. He uses the term "situated fantasmic" (p. 80) to describe the relationship between the enactments and the ideal of a singular historical actuality. Reenactments, according to Nichols, create the sense of a fold in time — sense of breathing life into the lived experience of others. For him, this fold also incorporates the intention of the (filmmaker) and the emotional investment of the (viewer).

Still if traditional documentary viewing can already be conceptualized as a sublime intersection between an inaccessible past and contemporary embodied audience, what does a game do differently? Games take what is a cognitive interaction construct in traditional documentary, and extends it into explicit interaction. They provide a compelling framework for enaction, that enables documentary experience to take place, in such a space apart. Joost Raessens (2006) suggests that, in documentary games like *JFK Reloaded*, “players enact experiences of rupture that separated the past and present in a traumatic way. These experiences are paradoxical in a sublime way in the sense that they, as experiences that transcend the individual level, involve and unite both the loss and pain of the trauma and, at the same time, the satisfaction of overcoming these feelings in terms of precognitive historical insights" (p.22). The game presents a particular contact point between past and present moments.

Performed reenactments, what Schechner calls restored behaviour, can also be viewed as being part of a space apart; the sublime meeting of two points of subjectivity:

> During performance, if everything goes right, the experience of synchronicity as the flow of ordinary time and the flow of performance time meet and eclipse each other. This eclipse is the "present moment," the synchronic ecstasy, the autotelic flow, of liminal stasis. Those who are masters at attaining and prolonging this balance are artist, shamans, conmen, acrobats. No one can keep it long. (1985, p.113)

Schechner describes enacted experiences as transitional and characterized again by the same duality described by Salen and Zimmerman: "elements that are 'not me' become 'me' without losing their 'not me-ness'" (p.110).

There is no way to escape: return to Woomera

To say you are really experiencing the plight of Woomera's desperate detainees is a bit of an overreach. It seems closer to say, in the spirit of a documentary third space, that the player experience in *Escape from Woomera* vivifies the documentary content (which is in this case recreated in a spatial and procedural simulation). In *EFW*, there is little direct contact with the historical, material world of the Woomera detainees. Although the game is constructed on the basis of primary and secondary research[3], there is little attempt within the game itself to bridge what we see in the game world to this research and documentation. As such, the game lacks the kind of material anchoring that indexicality provides, and does not prompt the kinds of phenomenological shifts found in *Brothers in Arms.* Given that several facilities were researched, at best Woomera is an amalgam of places and experiences. This brings us closer to the systems-focused, generalized simulations of a game like *SimCity* or *Civilization* than the specific actualities of documentary.

Some of my own questions about *Escape from Woomera* as a performative inquiry center on this difficulty in gauging the actuality of the represented context. Perhaps one underappreciated feature of the motion picture documentary is its ability to carry with it a degree of representational excess. Regardless of what the documentarian intended to capture, we find additional visual details, expressions, sub-audible comments -- in other words, a richness of representation beyond the explicit intent of the documentary creator. In a game, we are seldom confronted with such excess revelations—in fact, knowing we are in an explicitly designed environment flags everything as intentional, if not meaningful. For me, a striking moment researching *EFW* was finally seeing physical image of the facility while watching video footage of riots at Woomera—in particular, the incongruous bright murals adorned the walls. This filmic Woomera contained information that was perhaps incidental to the gamemakers intentions (and given the logistics, including resource and technical concerns, involved in the production of videogame spaces, close attention often needs to be paid to the level of detail which is possible to produce), but which, for me, was an evocative detail bypassed by the game (Who created these murals, and to what ends? How do they play against the experience of the detainees?). The reductionist nature of simulation is well established, but for documentary — even if we discount simulation as a document— it carries additional significance in its potential to influence performative inquiry.

---

[3] To some extent, this research is revealed via the game's website.

Several other aspects of working with the game engine also have unfortunate experiential consequences that threaten to override the design goals of the game. While the game's explicit content speaks to the dehumanizing effects of being known as just a number (RAR-124), walking through the facility players repeatedly encounter "Detainee"—a generic character type which does not provide information and simply asks to be left alone. One soon learns that it is named characters that provide stories and information, and guards that provide access – but that the typical detainee simply fills out the space. This crafts a very instrumental perspective on the experiential space—then again, perhaps one that aligns with a clear and desperate goal such as escape. Dialog with characters is presented in multiple choice, typically including a dialog option in which the NPC shares a personal story (ostensibly based on an actual detainee experience, but this is not made clear either within the game or on the website), and a dialog option that advances the player's current quest(s). However because the game is time-based (the "hope indicator" really serving as more of a clock), there is actually a disincentive to engaging with character stories, unless there is a clear instrumental detail embedded within (e.g. the character needs a particular item). While the game's hope-based timer initially works on a metaphoric level (there is a sense of urgency not based on running out of time, but running out of hope), through gameplay this indicator serves to formalize the fluctuation of hope, rather than having it emerge experientially (which I would argue it does). This creates moments of disjuncture, where the player may finally feel agency in having laid out their escape scenario, only to have the game tell them they have lost all hope[4]. These elements of the game frame are conspicuous enough that they pull attention away from the represented experience (out of the third space), and towards the game itself (our present experience as game players).

Moreover, instrumentalizing and/or formalizing affective aspects of the experience works to disrupt the function of the game as a performative inquiry (Manuel Sicart [2009] has suggested this in relation to ethical engagement, but it applies broadly). I am not ethically implicated in my own enacted experience, as the game will tell me whether or not I am feeling hope, despair, boredom, or whether I feel a longing for conversation or connection, and quantify this accordingly. *Woomera* becomes less about the embodied insight created by enacting the experience of detainees, and more about advancing through the adventure game.

To what extent does our experience of *Escape from Woomera* allow us to critically appraise our presumptions of the experience of refugees in Woomera? For Turner, the design of a performative inquiry was necessarily iterative, as we uncover not only a better understanding of the account, but presumptions and bias we have build into the enactment itself. In *Escape from*

---

[4] The unfortunate part about this game/experience mismatch is that there is actually a very real time constraint on the character—Mustafa is about to be deported—which is causally disconnected to hope (i.e. He's not being deported because he has lost hope).

Woomera, we can iterate our performance, but not the model. In fact, Katharine Neil had originally hoped to allow modifications to the game itself (Swalwell, 2005), before funding was cut off to expand the game beyond the prototype level. In its unfinished state, *Escape from Woomera* emerges underdeveloped as a performative documentary inquiry. Lacking a strong indexical bond that would ground the game in the real, the game's strongest claim to actuality rests on the frustration and futility evoked by enacting the various information and resource exchanges from within the facility. Through navigating official and de facto folk bureaucracies recreated from the research, the frame that emerges for players is that of a discouraging game—a telling assessment of the Woomera experience.

References

Agnew, V. (2004). Introduction: What Is Reenactment? *Criticism,* 46.3, 327-339.

Blackson, R. (2008). Once More… With Feeling: reenactment in contemporary art and culture. In S. Himmelsbach (Ed.), *Playback: Simlierte Wirklichkeiten/ Simulated Realities* (pp. 126-129). Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag.

Bogost, I. (2006). *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism* (1st ed.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bruzzi, S. (2000). New Documentary: A Critical Introduction. London: Routledge.

Buchardt, G.C. (2006). On Ethics and Documentary: A Real and Actual Truth. *Communication Theory,* 16.4, 427-452.

Cook, S. (2008). The logic of historical reenactment: re-speaking and remediating in contemporary art. In S. Himmelsbach (Ed.), *Playback: Simlierte Wirklichkeiten/ Simulated Realities* (pp. 134-139). Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag.

EFW Collective. (2003). *Escape from Woomera*.

EFW Collective. (2011).“Escape from Woomera Design Preview.” *Select Parks Archive*. Retrieved from http://www.ljudmila.org/~selectparks/archive/escapefromwoomera/

Galloway, A. (2006). *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Himmelsbach, S. (2008) Playback_Simulated Realities. *Playback: Simlierte Wirklichkeiten/ Simulated Realities*. In S. Himmelsbach (Ed.), *Playback: Simlierte Wirklichkeiten/ Simulated Realities* (pp. 112-119). Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag.

Newman, J. (2002). The Myth of the Ergodic Videogame: Some Thoughts on Player-character Relationships in Videogames. *Game Studies* 2.1, n. pag. Retrieved from http://www.gamestudies.org/0102/newman/

Nichols, B. (2008). Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmic Subject. *Critical Inquiry* 31.1, 72-89.

Nichols, B. (1992). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 234-21.

Phelan, P. (2005). Hinckley and Ronald Reagan: Reenactment and the Ethics Of the Real. In S. Lütticken (Ed.) *Life, Once More: Forms Of Reenactment In Contemporary Art*. (pp. 179-181). Rotterdam: Witte de With.

Rabinowitz, P. (1993). Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory. *History and Theory*, 32.2. 119-137.

Raessens, J. (2006). Reality Play: Documentary Computer Games Beyond Fact and Fiction. *Popular Communication* 4, 213-224.

Rosen, P. (2007). Now and Then: Conceptual Problems in Historicizing Documentary Imaging. *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 16.1, 25-38.

Salen, K., & Zimmerman, E. (2003). *Rules of play: game design fundamentals*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press. 451-453.

Schechner, R. (1985). *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Sicart, M. (2009). The Banality of Simulated Evil: Designing Ethical Gameplay. *Ethics and Information Technology* 11, 191–202.

Sobchack, V. (2004). *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (1st ed.) Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

Suchman, L. (2007). *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions* (2nd edition). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Swalwell, M. (2005). A Conversation with the Developers of Escape from Woomera. *Scan* 2.3, n. pag. Retrieved from http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=28

Turner, V. W. (1982). *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play.* New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

Ward, P. (2005). *Documentary: the Margins of Reality*. London: Wallflower.