Punk Games:
DIY Punk in game making

by
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Abstract

The game industry is in crisis and is unwelcome to game makers. The DIY punk ethos (a set of principles rooted in do-it-yourself, anti-establishment, counterculture and direct action to create local scenes) provides a sustainable framework for art practicing and community making. What if we could apply the DIY punk ethos to the game industry? Would we be able to formulate strategies to address the crisis and make the game industry more welcome to game makers? Punk Games is a research project that examines the DIY punk ethos and applies it to game making to provide sustainable alternatives for action to game makers. By using the DIY punk ethos, building upon similar game making movements like art games, queer games, and personal games, a framework to make punk games is created, separated in three stages: ethos, action and scene. This project uses a research-for-creation methodology to create a punk games framework that is tested through the creation of two punk game sketches and a zine that exemplifies punk games in their conception, making and engagement with the community.

Acknowledgments

Dedication

To all the punks who create safe spaces for independent thinkers

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Introduction

Having spent the majority of my formative years in the DIY punk scene of my hometown of São Paulo in Brazil, I constantly used the DIY punk ethos to grow a local scene where participants could share their art in a sustainable way. DIY punk provides a space and network where participant artists in a scene can create sustainable practices. I used the ethos to create relationships with other artists and distribute our music, constantly collaborating with other artists to create a sustainable independent scene. After years of following a career path in game making, my experience as a designer, maker and educator gives me a first-row seat to the shitshow the games industry is going through. For this research, I'll be using my experience with DIY punk in game making. Building upon the work of game makers that have used similar philosophies in the past, Punk Games points at creating a comprehensive way of applying DIY punk in the practice of game making, in search of alternative and sustainable approaches to the act in the field.

Punk Games is a research project about finding the intersection of DIY punk and game making, searching for alternative ways to engage with game making practice amidst an industry in crisis. In today's landscape, independent game makers face significant barriers to start and sustain a practice, while other game makers work for an industry grappling with fundamental issues of corporate greed with the growing influence of tech giants controlling the market. The issues identified raise a guiding question to the research: is it possible to make punk games today? And why now? Punk was a countercultural movement that empowered artists to create independent local scenes and communities to act against the growing commodification of art and culture in the 70s. Issues of massification and corporate control can also be seen in the game industry currently, and making games has been a risky field. To address these issues, this research applies the DIY punk ethos – DIY, direct action, anti-establishment, local scenes – to influence a local scene and create more accessible and diverse paths for game makers. The DIY punk subculture is a great example of how the creation of a space where independent makers can act and distribute their art for a local scene can benefit a larger community, making having a sustainable practice a viable option. DIY Punk's inherit refusal of definition provides a different way to explore one's own practice, where refusal is not inaction, but the refusal of certain actions or labels. For this same reason, self-definition as punk games isn't a requirement for engagement, while still providing space for similar practices to participate in the scene.

In a study called The State of Video Gaming in 2025 by Matthew Ball, the author gathered data points demonstrating how spending in the games industry have slowed down since 2021. User habits have shifted, catalyzed by a worldwide-struggling economy post-pandemic, consumers are more careful with what and where they spend money on, opting for older reliable game franchises or reducing game consumption altogether. Now that the market shifted priorities and took the spotlight away from games, after many decades of constant growth, the game industry is suffering the crash after overgrowth and mismanagement. The constant growth and merging of studios by big corporations created a bubble that is now bursting in the form of mass layoffs and entire studio closures across the industry. For the independent game makers left that are funding themselves through grants and other sources, it's a scarce pool of opportunities and hostile environment for new ventures. Online portals have evolved into gatekeeping mechanisms that often make it harder, not easier, for game makers to find sustainable ways to publish and distribute games. The biggest and most accessible game engines are constantly shifting their licensing agreements and directly impacting the viability of small studios with unreasonable rates.

These conditions create both a need and an opportunity to explore alternative approaches to game making that outside traditional industry structures. Enter DIY punk. This research project will show the origins of punk and its evolution into DIY punk, considering the context on the two main regions where the ideologies were created from the 70s and 80s and establishment as a counter-cultural movement. With the help of Global Punk, written by Kevin Dunn, the background on DIY punk movement and ethics is explained and serves as a way to see how it's being used nowadays and the parts applicable to the punk games framework. Through a historical and contextual analysis of game making, the signs of failure in the industry are pointed out and the places to apply the DIY punk ethos are clearer to identify. Contemporary works like Anna Anthropy's Rise of the Video Game Zinesters are seminal to the spread and support of a lot of similar ethos and thoughts on how to practice as game makers to punk games, writing and advocating for accessible tools and creative ways to distance game making from an industry. The Video Games Industry Does Not Exist, by Brendan Keogh, taps into multiple levels of game makers to breakdown different ways to practice game making while also shines a light on how even the idea of an overpowering games industry is not a structure that is sustainable anymore.

With a comprehensive understanding of DIY punk and game making, this research uses the principles of DIY punk and applies them to making games, following a Research-for-creation methodology (Chapman and Sawchuk 2012) – the data gathered through research leads and enables creation within my practice. A framework for using DIY punk to create punk games is then created, focused on three steps: ethos, action and scene. Following the DIY punk *ethos* to make punk games, game makers can take *actions* to influence their local *scene*, to create a more supportive and sustainable game making field. This framework is used to create two punk game sketches, focusing on the process (Agustin et al. 2007; Westecott 2020) and a zine to share the research of the DIY punk and game making with my local scene. The work is broken down as:

1. Development of a practical punk games framework:

    o Identifying key components of the DIY punk ethos, the punk games framework can be separated into three stages: ethos, action and scene

2. Publishing a zine establishing theoretical foundation of punk games, as another activity to demonstrate the framework of being ethos driven, action-oriented and create a scene:

    o Using other ways to engage with game making

    o Providing a space for local game makers to engage with and share their punk games

    o Community engagement through local networking, showcasing and game making events

3. Development of two punk game sketches, putting the ethos into action:

    o ILY ❤️ : A tabletop folding party game about cuddling and intimacy, distributed as a "print at home" game.

    o Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion: A narrative racing game using fair and open-source tools, challenging typical driving game expectations

The goal of this research is to establish punk games as a viable activity and demonstrate that they operate in the world differently outside of the structures and problems of the game industry in order to provide game makers a template for making games in a more sustainable manner.

Background

The first topic where a proper background is required to understand the perspectives applied to this research is the punk movement and subculture. Through a mix of readings and first-hand experiences in my local punk scene, key parts of the punk ideology were identified, enabling parallels between what punk did to music, musicians, the industry and its ongoing social impact. The second topic is the game making field. The historical background of game making and the formation of the industry was traced, and ways in which DIY punk and game making have already crossed was found. Despite this existence, the game industry still became the heavily commodified. Over a panorama on the shifts of the market and how the industry came to be, current challenges faced by game makers and studio of all sizes became clear. With years of industry shifts and commodification of the art form, this hostile space created by the dominant tech companies does not welcome change towards a more diverse and sustainable field. With both backgrounds, the connection between DIY punk and game making became clearer and showed how we're in a period where game makers can be inspired by the same counter-cultural principles of punk and use them to lead the game making field to a better place.

- ## What is Punk

Punk is both an ethos and subculture. It is a movement started in music to oppose the highly commercialized music of the 60s. The rise of unemployment and worsening economy, especially for working-class youth of the 70s and 80s both in the US and the UK, influenced the organization and anti-establishment position of the youth. Punk was created with its own set of ethics and alignment, consolidating itself as a counter-cultural movement and establishing its ideologies. Punk started as a musical movement in the mid 70s, first as a reaction against tendencies in popular music and mass culture from the time. It started almost concurrently in the US and the UK between 1974 and 1976, where a general rejection of mainstream culture and economical crisis happening in both places, as a need to change. Musically speaking, instead of technical and intricate, it is about rawness and honesty. Short, fast, and loud.

This strong mainstream rejection is one of the definitions that follows punk to its core, most punk principles can be traced to anti-establishment roots. Doing something different, going against profit-focused art production, creating a space where participants can practice these principles, share and collaborate for the betterment of all and the scene. The punk ethos a set of principles rooted in anti-establishment, counterculture and direct action to oppose the powers that be.

Even though it started in music, early and defining participants helped the idea have strong roots in more political views. The other major force within punk, something that characterizes it just as much as the above, is its DIY ethics. The do-it-yourself attitude is derived from this opposition to massification and alienation pushed by capitalism. Artists, venues, labels, producers and participants in their scene fostered a network of support for independent thinking and creation, trying to separate itself from commercial ideals of production as the standard to live by as capitalism tightened its grip on society. This

participation and action done from within the scene is the most important attribute to DIY punk to this day.

Another movement that inspired the first punks was The Situationist International (SI), with Guy Debord's The Society of the Spectacle being a seminal work for the SI and directly inspired many of the musicians and artists that would become members of punk scenes. Debord addresses the commodification of social life for the creation of the spectacle, opening the list of affirmations with:

"In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation."

Reducing experiences and relationships between people, art and other mediums to a product to be packaged and sold for profit is capitalism. Primarily formed by political theorists and artists, SI was connected to other similar political and artistical movements like Lettrism and Surrealism. Its Marxist leftist alignment and strong oppositional views to the establishment understood capitalism as directly worsening everyday life, proposing alternative experiences through direct action and collective organization.

The late-70s-to-early-80s saw the establishment of punk as a major subculture and ideology. Rejecting corporate capitalism, supporting and organizing around DIY, becoming more involved in social politics, creating community through the opposition to the system are all examples of the punk ideology in practice. This second wave of punk in the transition of the 70s to the 80s solidified punk and its DIY ethics as an alternate lifestyle and independent subculture. Growing far beyond a musical movement, punk influences participants to take a stance against the oppressive power of the establishment and continuous exploitation of everyday life for capitalism's profit. Artists from every field and any political person could access punk ethics to act for the best development of their environment.

Punk started in the early 70s, and at the turn of the decade gave punk a fertile space to grow. Punk had a political expansion and created stronger stances towards political issues and the ways politics influence people. Political positioning gave punk a powerful tool for participants to connect to.

"When I talk about punk as a set of social activities, as opposed to a specific, fixed musical style or fashion of clothes, I am particularly focused on this notion of do-it-yourself. This book is on DIY punk, a term used by many to draw attention to the difference between the organic cultural products that emerge from a DIY punk community and those "commercial punk" products sold by major record labels and trendy mall stores such as Hot Topic" (Dunn 2016), he says. "Punk won", as Ian MacKaye says in an interview in the book's Prologue. Scenes exist, they open space for mutual resistance, they influence change in multiple levels and succeed in affecting their participants' lifestyles and personal understanding of their world. Dunn's dive into all different facets of DIY punk and how it continues to be a force for alternative ways of living is a very thorough analysis of all points of action commonly found in DIY punk and scenes today. He differentiates DIY punk from punk for two main reasons: DIY and the commodification of punk. The term "punk" does not fully translate the true values carried by the real participants within the scene, being more superficial and connected to commercial punk (music and others). The focus on DIY is the most important factor, to understand the real values of punk and the combination of its origins and the bigger encompassing DIY ethics.

Dunn's focus on the creation of local scenes and the application of DIY punk in the everyday life, influencing local communities clearly shows a focus of the ideology. "DIY punk provides the means by which alternative ways of being are imagined and realized at the individual and local levels, with profound implications for the lives of its participants" (Dunn 2016). By focusing on the change from a local level, by influencing and motivating those around you, there are multiple ways for a community to strengthen from it. The creation of the local scene is the first step in a chain of changes that can lead to the creation "learning communities" where "goods are shared, ideas exchanged, practices emulated, and collective actions planned" (Dunn, 2016), members turning interactive participants, finding a "regional accent" and more. Scenes require participants, though, and its impact is only fully realized when enough people are engaging, making, changing and interacting directly within their scene via DIY punk's multifaceted cultural production methods.

The use of DIY punk in multiple platforms and mediums is a great example of its effectiveness and how much the power of its participants acts as a "force multiplier", meaning "within these (local) scenes, individual acts of resistance take on greater meaning and power. Personal acts of resistance become symbolic of larger, collective, oppositional meanings and consciousness" (Dunn, 2016). The collective anti-establishment action and resistance to global capitalism take multiple shapes and gain traction through the collective local DIY punk scene. Dunn walks through some seminal DIY punk zines and record labels and provides insights within international DIY punk scenes, showing the power of the "local" in different parts of the world. From a desolate small town in northern Russia where DIY punk is used as motivation to survive the brutal living conditions, to the harsh political and religious oppression Indonesian punks suffer, where punk is seen as a crime, local scenes are often the strongest sources of support one may have to resist and act.

One last concept Dunn explains is how much one can "throw" oneself into punk. We already know DIY punk can vary depending on context and that there can be multiple different ways of resistance depending on where it is being applied, but that also happens on the personal level. One's personal development and ideas change and people who once considered themselves punks might not identify as such over time. Regardless of the level one chooses to engage with DIY punk, local scenes are spaces where the deconstruction of ideas and thinking is always there. About the formation of a punk habitus (a set of social practices and categories that help shape a group within society), Dunn affirms, "Is there a punk habitus? I've already suggested that the social field of punk is always being made and re-made, always contested. But there are some core elements of DIY punk that contribute to a punk habitus, namely an anti-status quo disposition and a dedication to DIY. Together, these provide the opportunity for disalienation" (Dunn, 2016).

- ## What are Games

Through gaming history, there are multiple ways it's possible to identify the DIY punk mindset being used. Games are defined as an organized set of rules in order to create play (Salen and Zimmerman, 2003). Physical and spatial games, like football and other sports, tag and hide and seek, provide a low barrier of entry for making and playing games, often with a short and easily modifiable list of rules. Games using pieces, like dominos and chess share the same flexibility in design and gameplay. These games have been passed down by generations, with each having its own version depending on location or background. Tabletop games don't always require a board or pieces, like in tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) like Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). As long as the players are following the same set of

rules, game on. They can be complex or simple, short stories or months-long group epics, anyone can create their own game if you design a concise set of rules and organize a group to play with. No pieces needed, just engaging storytelling. These examples, most of them pre-dating video games, are great to show the open nature of game making and playing, following different needs and constraints, being accessible to a wide range of players.

Some of the very first video games were simulations of the games mentioned above. Pong tried simulating Tennis. Ultima created a role-playing video game. The foundational years of games were a constant evolution, with each arcade, console and game coming every year pushing the digital era forward. The open-source nature of software development has always been a part of the growth in game making, with modifications (mods) of arcade boards, like Super Missile Command and Ms. Pacman, being very popular. Computer (PC) games like Wolfenstein 3D exposed their source code for fans to play and create their own mods of what is considered the first first-person shooter ever. The same studio, id Software, would later release Doom in 1993, one of the most anticipated games of all time, as a shareware game. This means the game's first level and its source files were shared for free, and later levels and updates would be paid. By the time id released the first paid expansion, fans were already breaking the initial levels of the game and creating their own mods. Doom is the most modded game of all time, being played in the most varied range of devices, and is a free and accessible stepping stone into game making (you can run Doom on a [TI calculator](#), a [modern microwave](#), or a [pregnancy test](#)). Every gaming generation after, regardless of legality, has had a significant modding communities and games.

Doom's popularity helped grow the industry and brought many game makers together to start developing their own games. While making games was possible, there were high costs associated with the technology required between developers and publishers. For anyone to be able to publish a game in a specific platform, for example the PlayStation 1 made by Sony, one had to buy a developer kit (devkit) to have access to the technology. Other licensing costs and the expertise required to use such tools makes game making not a cheap venture. The industry was growing during the 90s and there was a lot of space for innovation. Quickly, we could identify bigger companies dominating the space, like Nintendo, SEGA, Electronic Arts and Ubisoft.

More accessible points of access to digital game making would come later in the decade. With better technology becoming more accessible through the 00s, many different game engines were more widespread available. RPG Maker and Macromedia Flash were some of the most common software used to make games during the decade. With the growth of connectivity and internet access, games continued to grow strong through online communities of game makers and hosting platforms for independent games. Unfortunately, with the high costs of entry controlling the industry for many years, only studios with enough funding or investment could create a reputation and release games for the worldwide console market. With that long-lasting stranglehold, accrued industry traumas can be found having exacerbated the industry's landscape even further. Games have never been easier to make and distribute, at the same time, it has never been more difficult to have a sustainable game making practice. These cracks are some of the signs that punk games have a place and a space to thrive, positively impacting a local or larger community of game makers, to act beyond what is believed to be the "industry" and carve their own game making path.

In Rise of the Videogame Zinesters, an influential book for independent game makers, Anna Anthropy talks about the homogeneity of the current industry, saying how "mostly, videogames are about men

shooting men in the face." Anthropy reinforces that "videogames as they're commonly conceived today both come from and contain one perspective" (Anthropy, 2012). Even though things have improved since the book was released, a lot of the same problems still plague the game making space. "Since the industry sees itself as ubiquitous–as the only possible means of creating games–it feels no need to change itself for the benefit of either its employees or its art", Anthropy affirms.

Anthropy uses of her own experience making games and accessible tools to motivate creators by showing unique approaches to game making and lower the entry bar to game making. Finding this book amongst so many others that give examples and alternatives directions in rethinking game-making helped the framing of punk games to act as complementary to established frameworks. There are a lot of resources on how to make games already, but DIY punk can provide not only assistance on learning and creating games but also in how to support and participate within a bigger community. Combining Anthropy's idea with the larger DIY punk modus operandi of an ethos that creates action to affect a scene, we can create punk games thinking about how to act within the game making practice. How to not only be game makers, but cultural producers, to elevate the practice and our peers (as punk and punk bands do within their local scene).

One of the best overviews on today's current issues on the gaming industry at large, touching on different facets of game making at different levels, is Brendan Keogh's The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist. Keogh writes a thorough analysis, performing interviews and a historical assessment of his local scene in Australia, bringing a proper look at the levels in which game makers engage with their craft and their field of work. It serves as a great "zoom-out", understanding what we call "the industry" as what it is: a narrow slice of how games are made. It is important to provide a proper look at what goes into making games and how, even though most of the times one will read about publishers and developers as entities, games are made by people. By drawing lines like AAA, indie, industry and independent we're also limiting the area of action of game makers. When games stop being able to fit into such categories, the legitimacy of the practice is taken into question. Keogh highlights that even though video game production as an industrialized field has been "well articulated, the ways in which video game production is cultural production, remains underexamined" (Keogh, 2023). Citing Casey O'Donnell's This is Not a Software Industry, "video game production viewed as an art world, rather than an 'industry' constructs a much more critical and nuanced perspective" (O'Donnell, 2012), also reinforcing how the industry, being the understood dominant way of game making, ensure the delegitimization of any non-dominant position within the field (Keogh, 2023).

- What are punk games

Punk games are games made using the DIY punk ethos and using game making to act within a larger cultural scene or create its own. Creating space for punk games to show the different possibilities of the medium will help us appreciate the craft, skill and thinking that goes into the art form. Or, how Keogh puts it, underground game makers use "bottom-up tactics as an "art of the weak" to find ways to 'make do'", and that they "seem to be determining alternative measures of success beyond the economic rationalist measures historically dominant in the field" (Keogh, 2023). The bottom-up approach reinforces the need for a more organized underground punk games scene, one that open spaces for creators to showcase their games and connect with their local community. Not everyone who goes to a punk show likes the music, but everyone who goes to a punk show must be open to their expectation of what music is turned upside down. You may not like punk music, but punk music showed you that 3

chords make a song. One might think that game making can only be done using "industry tools", but playing a tabletop game might change their perspective on what is possible within game making.

The space of punk games is a noisy landscape. As mentioned by Dunn, there are many levels to which one can "throw" themselves onto punk, and like in the original music scenes, this has also been commodified in different ways by bigger corporations. To identify punk games nowadays, developers should follow the DIY punk ethos and act to create a game to serve their community independently (without the influence of a corporation). Games like We Become What We Behold, by Nicky Case, criticizes mass media and the bad influence media can have on social engineering and spreading misinformation. A game expressing a political opinion through unique gameplay to bring attention to an issue and raise awareness within a community. Having commercial success doesn't correlate to success, since following the ethos through making games and passing it along is the goal of punk games. Financial success can still be achieved while maintaining a sustainable practice, and a good example is Larian Studios, makers of Baldur's Gate 3, the critically acclaimed biggest release of 2023. Larian created a strong connection with their player base after two successful crowdfunded games. They tried a unique approach in the development of BG3, selling early-access copies and gathering feedback from players years before the final version released. Despite hefty offers of corporations to buy the company, maintaining full control of the studio was essential to navigate a novel distribution model without the negative pressure of a capitalist company breathing down their neck. Having the support and trust of their player base gave Larian what they needed to release one of the best modern games. Smaller studios practicing new forms of funding and that have found their way towards a sustainable practice are the studios Sokpop Collective and PUNKCAKE Délicieux. Both studios are funded through an online crowdfunding platform, and release one game a month. Other studios, like KO_OP, are worker-owned and operated, giving control and transparency to every member of the team.

Punk games can be made by well managed large studios or developed by a single game maker. Following the ethos is the measurement for success, not profitability or reach. Focusing solely on commercial viability negatively impacts the development and diversification of the game making field, privileging and limiting participation within the field only to bigger corporations. Punk games and following the DIY punk ethos is taking direct action against a hegemony on the means of production of games, strengthening game making as a cultural production field. Diversifying the ways in which games are made and shown to the public, lowering the bar to game making can also help make game making more pervasive. As the comparison continues, like punk did to music and resisting the growing commodification of music and the art form, punk games are made to resist the growing commodification of game making and praise it as an art form. It creates a space where more game makers can connect and support others, enabling participants to become active members within a scene.

This overall re-education of how to approach games and game making can only be done within a space where punk game makers can show their games. As noted, there have already been places within the game making field that DIY punk can already be seen. If punk games are an attempt at that approach, the spaces that already exist need to be respected and considered. For online spaces, Newgrounds is still a very active community, and Itch.io continues to see more and more games and game makers publishing their games on the platform, but online distribution, despite the low cost of entry, is a difficult space to navigate and find your audience effectively, dodging possible social media traps and sharing an overcrowded space. The creation, engagement and support to maintain a local scene is where the change can also happen and making that accessible is required. In my local scene in Toronto, the

pandemic also caused a rift, where once there was a much livelier scene, with collectives like Dames Making Games and Gamma Space that were very active being dissipated or reduced their activity post-pandemic. There are regular networking events like Bonus Stage and Dirty Rectangles. Hand Eye Society and Toronto Games Week are the two current ones running events that have showcasing of games, but the events tend to be bigger in scope and sparse. To make punk games more prevalent, like punk shows, punk games events should be nimbler, with a tighter focus and a longer-lasting space for more game makers to showcase their creations. Keogh's book has been an inspiration on trying something and putting effort into uniting other game makers to showcase their games more often, creating deeper connection to the creators and the space in which everyone would like to act within. "To stress, what I am calling for here is not simply a distinction between "arty" videogames and "commercial" videogames", "I am calling for a more nuanced appreciation of the contexts of videogame production and a dehomogenizing of the measures against which all videogames are evaluated." Punk games is the wider idea of what games can be, a more accessible approach to games as an art form, more organization and community-facing events, a stronger connection within that community, with an opportunity space to showcase games that do not conform to any commercial idea, AAA or indie, and "to create alternative spaces of videogame production and circulation to change the space of possibles." (Keogh, 2023).

Methodology

This research project follows a research-for-creation methodology (Chapman and Sawchuck, 2012), where information is gathered in the research period that will directly influence the experimentation and creation of new work. For Punk Games, I have gathered information to define the DIY punk ethos and how to apply it in game making. DIY punk is understood as an ethos and subculture characterized by anti-establishment views, DIY, promotion of individual freedom through direct action and self-organization. Applying the DIY punk ethos to game making, a framework following the cycle of ethos-to-action-to-scene of DIY punk was created to help define punk games. With that, we can analyze the current game making field and industry to understand where punk games fit. To demonstrate the framework, two punk games in the form of game sketches and a zine are made to showcase the possibilities of punk games.

Research-Creation is a methodology used within creative academic research field to enable researchers' experimentation in mixed and new media. Recognizing how all-encompassing the term is, the authors created four subcategories for the methodology, with research-for-creation being about frontloading the knowledge part of the research to guide the making part of the practice later. Through my experience in game making and a contextual background of the field, I identified how the game industry is being increasingly commodified, creating a crisis for game makers. By mapping out the values of punk through research and firsthand experience, I could define the DIY punk ethos and its application. DIY punk has been used for protest similar commodification in the music industry, growing into a counter-cultural movement that provided space for independent and sustainable local punk scenes to thrive. I can now articulate the use of DIY punk ethos within game making to create the punk games framework, building onto important frameworks like art games and queer games, while providing a more direct path to action aiming at growing and supporting local game makers.

The research starts within the DIY punk movement and ethos, where important guiding points help the understanding of the subculture. The DIY punk ethos is the set of principles rooted in anti-establishment, DIY, counter-cultural, direct action and promotion of individual freedom in local scenes. The application of this ethos at a local level is an important part of the ethos that provides a focus for action and change to a local community, where it has the most impact according to Dunn. "DIY punk provides the means by which alternative ways of being are imagined and realized at the individual and local levels, with profound implications for the lives of its participants" (Dunn 2016). Focusing on the creation and growth of a local independent community is a direct way to engage with game making in a more sustainable and independent way and go against the construct of an industry. Making games that challenge the format of commercial games and focus on unique mechanics and formats instead of profiting is using the ethos to expand the understanding of game making as a cultural production field, outside of commercial purposes. (see Appendix B and C for punk background)

With ethos being our starting point, DIY punk requires action. For punk music, making music and organizing a local scene that reflects and spreads the ethos is the most direct actionable change one can make. A lot of the DIY punk ethos could be seen through the way the music was made and distributed independently. To make punk games, game makers can apply the same ethos into their game making practice, going against the highly commodified game industry. Using alternative ways of game making, like tabletop and board games, or creating specialized hardware to fit a specific mechanic, shows the possibilities beyond the expectations of fitting into a market. Subverting expectations of certain genres

and mechanics, exploring themes and designs outside of industry structure. Choosing platforms, engines and distribution channels that provide a fair space and service for game makers without exhortative trade-offs is acting in support of a more sustainable and accessible way of making games, reflecting at how Keogh talked about the "bottom-up approach" by underground game makers (Keogh, 2023; see Appendix F for more on Keogh).

The action of applied DIY punk leads to the creation of or connection to a local scene. In punk music, connecting with other locals to organize shows and distribute local art and music; creating, in turn, scenes that made the creation, distribution and growth of local art and music, generating opportunities for a sustainable independent practice. Looking for change at a local level in search of a more independent game making field is beneficial for local game makers to connect through their practice and makes independent games and game making more prevalent. With local organization and engagement, the creation of a space for networking and sharing of locals' games, where a community can be strengthened through mutual support, helping the growth and sustainability of a local game making field.

Using the DIY punk ethos, I'm able to create and articulate a framework for the creation of punk games following these three steps: ethos, action and scene. For the making of punk games to be rooted in the DIY punk ethos, game makers can choose from the inception of their practice to directly act against the established game industry's expectation of commercial success. By aligning oneself with the ethos, the action of making games follows the principles by approaching new creative themes, mechanics, platforms and other facets that work together to position the game to oppose trends and popularity. By choosing to make games that counteract the pressures of capitalism, game makers can act at local scenes to provide real support for the growth of an independent game making field. Ethos, action and scene – this is the punk games framework.

To demonstrate the framework, the making of punk games is shown through two punk games sketches, applying and acting on the guidance of the ethos. Game sketching is a way to make games that enables exploration through iterative design to find the optimal design and decisions to move on to a possible next step. As Westecott states in her homonymous paper, game sketching "enables the maker to explore both 'how' and 'what' they wish to make before moving on to prototyping" (Westecott, 2020). Game sketches are also very aligned with the ethos of punk games, since "exploring a way to frame and discuss the early stages of making games as a sketching practice is important to both game design education and game design research in that it opens up a discussion of different ways in which a game maker can approach their practice beyond industry norms and settings – there is no one right way to make games" (Westecott, 2020). Game sketches also show the action of DIY punk through the design and making process, translating more aspects of the ethos into actionable change in my practice.

The final part of the punk games framework, scene, is engaged here through the creation and distribution of a zine, the Punk Games Zine (see Appendix). Another cornerstone of the DIY punk movement: zines can be defined as independent and self-published, often non-commercial and small-batch periodicals, usually around specific topics made to reach local communities and scenes. Punk zines range from music to politics to manifestos and discussions around the ethos and movement. For the punk movement, zines represent an independent and free-thinking space disconnected from the establishment and big media-controlled outlets and create focus from the scene, for the scene. As Stephen Duncombe puts it "The medium of zines is not just a message to be received, but a model of

participatory cultural production and organization to be acted upon. The message you get from zines is that you should not just be getting messages, you should be producing them as well" (Duncombe, 2001). Many zines provide a space for others to engage and connect with their local community via community boards, articles, or sharing and supporting local bands and other artists through the publication. The Punk Games Zine aims to create a similar space where the ideas and ethos behind punk games can be explored and shared, discussions on alternative ways to resist commodification and where like-minded game makers can share their thoughts on the subject. Creating this space to expand on punk games and engage with my local scene is the best way to complete the final step in the punk games framework. "Personal acts of resistance become symbolic of larger, collective, oppositional meanings and consciousness" (Dunn, 2016).

Two punk game sketches and the Punk Games Zine are the continuous work exercised throughout this research. By using DIY punk ethos and applying it to game making, it enables the creation of the punk games framework, consisting of three main steps to approach game making: ethos, action and scene. Following these steps, game makers can create or find alternative ways to act in the game making field and oppose large corporations' structures of the game industry.

Work

Being involved in DIY punk from a very young age shapes the way one interacts with their surroundings. Since I had the opportunity to create, engage and grow with my local punk scene, it not only influenced me how to engage with my practice, but it instilled the DIY punk ethos in every facet of my life. The do-it-yourself mindset, asserting creative independence through the anti-establishment position and continuously seeking ways to improve my practice and surroundings via direct action is often the starting point of any creative endeavour. These values have brought aspects to my process that also relate to the DIY punk ethos through accessibility and usability, use of fair tools, direct support to other makers and focus on player engagement as opposed to commercial viability or profits.

After going through game design education in 2015, the cracks in the game industry started becoming clear to me. The industry has always been known to be competitive and selective, opportunities can feel few and far between. Independent studios, even sustainable or profitable ones, are smaller with fewer positions available. Getting a job doesn't equate good working conditions. Projects get cancelled at any given moment, wasting valuable work, demoralizing developers. Layoffs are rampant and the industry is volatile. Starting a studio from scratch requires going through legal and financial steps that immediately pose hurdles and pressures. Making a game that can fail feels too high of a risk given these high costs. Finding funding becomes a minefield of promises, usually perpetuated by big corporations and publishers. Trying to fit into these steps and overall expectation from the industry can be a major discouragement for any game maker. Working for a big studio or having a profitable studio are the only markers of success.

Inspired by some of the movements that I related to punk games in previous chapters, like queer games (Ruberg, 2020), art games (Pearce, 2006), and political games (Pedercini, 2003), the combination with the DIY punk ethos became my way of applying and mixing the ideas in search of alternative ways of practicing game making. Keogh's book provided a lot of insight on the different facets of game making but crucially pointed out the necessity in growing the understanding of what the game making field can be. The exploration of alternatives led me back to what I did when in my local DIY punk scene, finding a way to contribute and lift important movements. A framework that aims at growing a local scene can provide a possibility space for all game makers to support each other not available at the scale of the game industry. The punk games framework around ethos, action and scene is the culmination of all these philosophies that are aligned with the DIY punk ethos, providing a way of direct action to create punk games and go against the established idea of the industry.

- Zine

The research started with the initial question: is it possible to make punk games today? By combining DIY punk and game making, could punk games be made and create similar alternatives as punk music has? The Punk Games Zine was created to help frame and navigate this question, organizing the research findings as I started. Zines are a quintessential self-publishing format heavily adopted by the DIY punk movement used to create a platform to express thoughts by the author(s), create a space for other participants to engage with the scene, as well as share and express support to local artists. Creating a zine about punk games is an effort to have such a space where discussing alternative game making ways and have a platform for participants in the scene to share their opinions and connect to like-minded makers.

Zines demonstrate the punk games framework being aligned with the DIY punk ethos on their inception. With the independent self-publishing nature of zines, it is widely adopted by counter-cultural movements to have a platform to exchange ideas and thoughts more freely. A zine about punk games gives me the space to write all the background information necessary and break down the details behind the perspective and positioning of DIY punk and game making I'm taking for the research. It is also a continuous effort in spreading the ethos of punk games seeking better ways to practice game making.

- Zine #01

The first zine presented the research question and sought out to create the first connection between DIY punk and game making. As DIY punk and punk music in general are, defining punk games also comes with some difficulties. The initial connections are made more open, providing the starting ground with enough space for the exploration of the DIY punk and game making overlap to happen. I also give my background as a maker and educator and how my experience has guided this research, the questions and answers I'm seeking to improve the game making field.

Sharing more punk games through a recommendation section in the zine gives me the opportunity to share games that I can identify the punk games framework in, via their development method, design, mechanics, theme, and often self-published. You are Jeff Bezos, by Kris Lorischild, give a grim but funny look into the absurdity of being a billionaire as a clear critique of capitalism. Or MindfulOS, a thought-organizer in the shape of an operational system to help players clear their minds. Both games were made using free and open-source engines, were self-published and available to play for free online. The games accompanied devlogs or updates, giving a space for players to connect with creators and follow the development or send a message. The ethos, action and scene stages of the punk games framework can be identified in these games. Using the zine to share and support other game makers that are aligned with the DIY punk ethos is one more way to connect with the scene. There are recommendations made in every zine, and as more game makers sign up and participate in the zine, more local game makers will be featured.

Writing the zine gave me something tangible to offer and reach out to my local scene. A printed version of the first zine was distributed at an event in Toronto called Bonus Stage, where I presented the punk games framework in a talk to local game makers. At that talk, a local event organizer asked me to collaborate on the creation of a punk games jam and showcase event, and I connected with independent game makers interested in discussing the ethos of punk games.

- Zines #02, #03

After an introductory first zine, the next step in the research was to break down what are the values of DIY punk, what I was basing myself off. Punk is a wide, nuanced and debated movement, leading to varying definitions and understandings. Using my own experience and authors like Kevin Dunn, Dylan Clark and Ryan Moore, punk's inception, alignment, growth and evolution could be traced. This background is seen previously in this paper (What is Punk?) and through the zines in the Appendix. The research extracted and defined the DIY punk ethos as the set of principles rooted in anti-establishment, DIY, counter-cultural, direct action and promotion of individual freedom. With this understanding of the DIY punk ethos and movement, I apply the same research to define and contextualize game making.

When starting the zine, 45 people (between peers, colleagues, makers, teachers, students) had signed up to the zine, distributed as an email newsletter. I have also received emails from other teachers and

game makers that have heard about punk games from someone or found a copy of the zine somewhere. The response, albeit a small sample, seemed positive, but most importantly it opened a space worth exploring.

- Zines #04 to #06

Zines 4 to 6 provided the same space for setting the background and my experiences, now for game making. Game making also has a lot of different facets and an interesting path. To focus on the parts related to the punk games framework, I started by analyzing early game makers that were involved with modifying games. From arcades to PC games, makers were picking apart existing games to make their own and sharing them for free. Masters of Doom by David Kushner shows Doom as a pioneer in having a popular game, shared for free, heavily supported by other makers. The popularization of games as an entertainment form opened the conversation for games as an art form. Using earlier research papers on topics such as Game as Art by Celia Pearce and Gaming in Art by Phillipa Jane Stalker, it puts games on a much closer perspective from music, where DIY punk comes from. Game makers like Molleindustria (Paolo Pedercini) with their New York Times Simulator, where you manage the paper's headlines to favour the interests of the rich and powerful, show how to use games as a political tool. Queer games, as argued by Anna Anthropy and Bonnie Ruberg, is another perspective on game making focused on creating a more inclusive design through representation and validation of a wider player profile. These topics form the background where the punk games framework starts being created.

Brendan Keogh's The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist provided a broader view of the game making field and made it possible to situate where punk games can have an impact. Even though Keogh's book is focused on Australia, I could find parallels to the field in Canada and worldwide, where big studios are losing power, and the field is oversaturated with struggling workers. Overall, Keogh's analysis pointed to the need for change, "to create alternative spaces of videogame production and circulation to change the space of possibles." (Keogh, 2023). To propose something new, a different type of action. Through the steps of ethos, action and scene, the punk games methodology is proposed for the creation of such alternative spaces.

The zines were also a form to follow along the steps of the Research-for-creation methodology. I was able to identify what aspects of DIY punk to use and their relation to my experience. Studying the background provided me with a better way to situate the project in the field of game making. Publishing these findings and the steps through a zine, I could use the punk games methodology and start a new space. The continuous application of the ethos to enact action within a scene. It's a process. Only through continuous action and working within the scene that change can really happen, as per my experience with my local scene. Responses from peers and locals have been positive and show that with more effort put into developing this space to support and highlight game makers, the more opportunities to enable the creation of an alternative to the game industry can happen. Ethos, to action, to scene. Repeat.

- Games

To demonstrate the punk games framework in game making, two punk game sketches were made to showcase different applications and the range of what can be considered punk games. Using game sketching as the format of game making in this research enabled me to break my own design bias and expectations. By having the space to explore what works best for the experience I can reach a fun design

faster. Having a tighter scope make it for a nimbler development as well, making possible to sketch drastically different and more efficient ways of game making.

- ILY 🩵

ILY ❤️ is the first game sketch made with the punk games framework, providing an idea that challenged my perspective on game making and influenced the creation of the framework. ILY ❤️ is a tabletop party game about cuddling by folding a paper character. The DIY punk ethos is integral to my practice, so I aways start by finding ways to question established views and structures. A game about cuddling and intimacy came to mind trying to approach everyday moments from a game design perspective. Making a game about physical intimacy is not often explored outside of a sexual context, and intimacy is often not portrayed in games. When thinking of the design, I was inspired by a game called Boxlife (Skip Ltd., 2009), for the Nintendo DSi, a game about cutting and folding boxes. Folding bodies, as a paper or as a pillow, to tightly cuddle could be an interesting mechanic. Folding a paper as a reference to origami was the final choice.

Originally, it was a mobile game, since they are more accessible in terms of usability and reach. The touch screen interface provides accessibility for a range of disabilities and more intuitive gameplay for a wider demographic, while the free-to-play model popular for mobile games provides a low barrier of entry and incentivize for players. I immediately encountered hurdles too difficult to solve with the resources available, and the idea was set aside for years. Revisiting this idea gave me the opportunity to test the initial ideas around punk games framework on a new design. Pushing further into the ethos and seeking more creative ways to make games, choosing to make it a tabletop game forced the exploration of a format often neglected by the game industry. It also reinforced that by rooting choices in the DIY punk ethos, it positively impacts other decisions for the rest of the making. Since design choices are guided by previous constraints and directions taken, creating a positive feedback loop in the process.

The tabletop format was a direct translation of the mobile version of the game. It felt natural and an obvious choice in hindsight, but more aligned to the punk games framework. The path to action was more direct. During the making of the game, exploring intimacy included a discussion about bodies. Following the inclusivity and feminist focus of queer games (Ruberg, 2018), different bodies started to be considered for the design, but given the scope of the game sketch, this was pushed for the future. The playable character is shaped on a wide T pose (see Fig.1) and cut out of paper. The NPCs are shaped in various sleeping positions, and are laser cut acrylic for durability. The first version of the game was free play with the pieces, without many rules. Here, action blends with scene. Gathering player feedback through playtests I ran with the first pieces was crucial to connect with possible players and define a direction for the game. Reactions were positive, but beyond cuddling, there were even more aspects of intimacy that players alluded to that could be explored. Playtesting the game with over one hundred people, I was able to gather great feedback and create interest around the game.
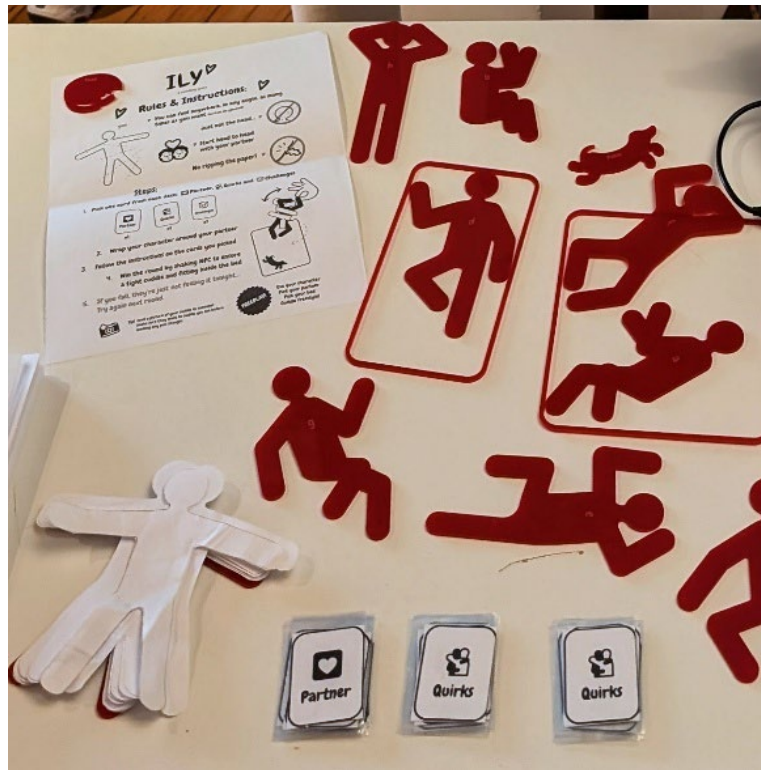
Figure 1: A table showing all the pieces to ILY 🫶

The current version of the game contains three decks that guide gameplay: Partner, Quirks and Challenges. Partner narrows down the partner in a specific pose you must cuddle with. Quirks reveal a quirk that your in-game partner has that you must respect, creating limitations to increase challenge. "Use 1 leg and 1 arm" or "Use only legs" is an example of a quirk. Challenges introduce external factors, also increasing challenge. "Sleep with Pablo, the wiener dog" or "Use a twin bed" are examples of challenges. Using cards is an easy tool to create and guide gameplay and worked well with the rest of the design.

The format chosen also made for more accessible publishing options, as another extent of the ethos influence within a project. Choosing paper as the material, it is possible for anyone to print the pieces, cut them and play the game. To increase accessibility, the game will also be available for free, with blank cards for players to create their own Quirks or Challenges. It is available to download on my itch.io, an online platform that provides players a platform to host and sell their games. It also contains a growing community of game makers worldwide on its forums, constantly hosting game jams and creating a space away from the industry. All these steps have used and constantly reinforced the punk games framework.

Much like in music, where punk is now a lot more connected to the ethos used behind the making of the music than in the style itself, this is also applicable to games. Choosing to create games that challenge structures put in place by a larger game industry and adding new perspectives to games and how people interact with them reinforces and validates the practice into a larger cultural context. We can identify that punk games can be created by game makers in multiple forms, so another way to guarantee that a game being made is punk is to reinforce the position against an established structure. The most common pipeline of game making currently is creating a game that fits or combines popular genres in search of

commercial success, usually distributed through the biggest online platforms. Any direct attack to changing these ways is using the punk games ethos. Making a non-commercial game about a political topic, approaching established genres from a unique perspective, engaging with independent consoles and systems, or making games for older consoles using new tools are all good examples on ways to rethink game making. The active support of other creators and companies that align with the ethos directly makes a scene possible.

Figure 2: Two couples in ILY 🫶 cuddling.

ILY ❤️ usage of the Punk Games Framework:

Ethos	Action	Scene
• Tabletop format • Intimacy theme • Folding mechanics	• Paper provides quick prototyping and development, and is an accessible material for easy distribution	• Free, print-at-home online distribution • Player's feedback on improvements and updates • Blank cards for modifications

- Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion

Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion is born out of a broader idea of using the punk games framework to create a racing game series. There's very limited exploration in the genre of racing games given how expensive vehicle licensing can be. Racing games are focused on car enthusiasts as their demographic,

and licensing real cars attracts such players. Using realistic cars with original designs is possible, but gameplay is limited steering a car, with little innovation. The challenge of making a racing game that is not about steering a car stuck out, starting an exploration of mechanics possible to explore. Thinking of racing games less from the driving the car, more from the car enthusiast perspective. Could I create a racing game that is about learning and appreciating what it takes to race a car? Racing revolves other skills outside of steering the car. AT: MotC is a game about being in the mind of a racer. Focusing on the mental strength and strategy that it takes to race highlights a different aspect of racing. Dialogues and choices are mechanics more commonly used in narrative games, where dialogue trees (conversations with multiple choices) are the main gameplay mechanics, with player's choices impacting the outcome of the story. A narrative racing game aligned many choices that directly oppose established racing game design and provides a unique combination of mechanics.

Dialogues and choices are mechanics more commonly used in narrative games, where dialogue trees (conversations with multiple choices) are the main gameplay mechanics, with player's choices impacting the outcome of the story. A narrative racing game aligned many choices that directly oppose established racing game design and is a unique combination of mechanics. Narrative games are also a very accessible style of game making, with many free and open-source engines available for different skill levels. Game sketching was crucial in testing and choosing the right design and engine to be used in this game. This game went through three iterations in different engines. Twine was the first and most approachable of all engines tested, provided a very quick and easy branching creation tool. This let me test some basic dialogue options for the game and play it in text format. Although the branching showed me the game could be fun, integrating visuals to the game wasn't as easily available. For the second version, I tested using a tool called Dialogic for the Godot 4 engine, a growing game engine. It allowed me to make a game sketch with graphics and more dialogue options, but organizing ever growing branches of dialogues was difficult. The current version was made using Ren'Py, an engine dedicated to narrative game design and visual novel style of games. Very inviting for beginners, it's easy to expand on fundamentals quickly. Remaking the previous sketch in the new engine was significantly faster, thus improving gameplay and graphics was easier.

These decisions are directly connected to the perpetual motion of the DIY punk ethos. Choosing to use fair or free and open-source software, for example, is actively choosing not to invest in large corporations that only look for profit with predatory subscription models and investing your money on independent companies or creators that have a lot more to benefit from your investment and your relationship. This investment and support of one's own scene is a key component of the ethos being put into action.

Figure 3: Title design for Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion.

The decision making follows three separate timelines following a track, where player's choices lead them to timelines ending in success or failure. The theme chosen was 70s racing, vintage motorsports are less explored than modern cars in videogames. Old photographs and digital photocollages were the first tests for art direction for the game. For this version, pairing hand drawn sketches with primary shapes and colours made an abstraction of the driver's view and created a tunnel-vision feeling (see Fig.4).

Despite limited playtesting, players provided valuable feedback. Through direct feedback and observation, future improvements will target gameplay length, player's attention retention, UI design, device compatibility and clarifying general points of confusion. A surprise from playtesting was the interest of players from demographics outside racing game fans. By creating a game that don't rely on physical skills from the players, it is more accessible to car enthusiasts with different preferences. The punk games framework shows again another positive feedback loop. Sticking to the ethos influence choices that have long lasting effects in the game, even if not initially seen or outside of the original scope. As in ILY ❤️ , AT: MotC is published on itch.io and can be played online in any device with an internet browser. Making it available to players outside of the demographic showed to be a good thing, and accessibility can further help that connection. By publishing and making it playable online for free with accessible mechanics, a wider range of potential players can be reached. Playtesting and integrating feedback are ways to reach out to your local scene to seek improvements and reinforces the effectiveness of using the punk games framework.
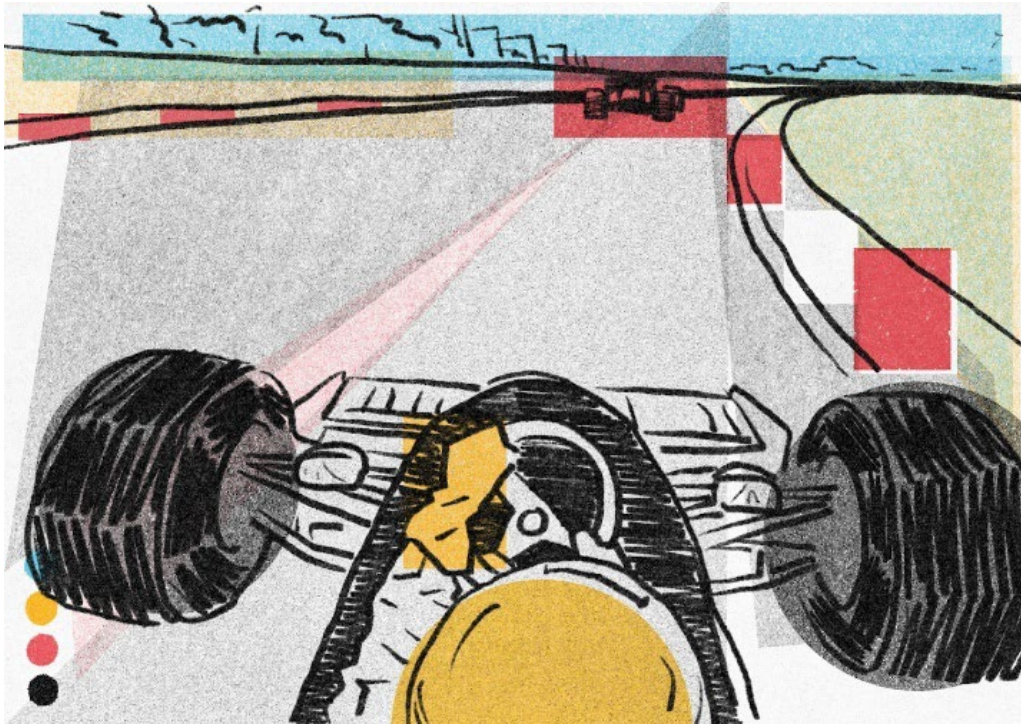
Figure 4: Initial art direction tests for Auto Turismo's gameplay.

Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion usage of the Punk Games Framework:

Ethos	Action	Scene
• Narrative racing combination breaks genre conventions and provide more accessible gameplay	• Prototyping in multiple free and open-source tools • Hand-drawn art direction is unique to the genre while also benefiting scope and efficiency	• Playable online for free • Also available in multiple formats (Android, Linux, Win)

Conclusion / Future Work

Punk Games set out to answer the research question: is it possible to make punk games today? With a thorough historical analysis of punk and game making, we're able to extract the DIY punk ethos and identify current issues in the game industry. With the DIY punk ethos focusing on DIY, anti-establishment and counter-cultural action, its application in game making resembles its inception and rise against massification in the music industry. The current state of the game industry is overly focused on commercial games and established tropes where profitability is the bottom line. Using my experience turning the ethos into action to foster my local punk scene, the punk games framework is created to apply the same path to action in game making. By following the framework of ethos, action and scene, game makers can oppose expectations from the dominant game industry, and focus on making games in more ethical, sustainable, and approachable ways.

To this day, DIY punk's activity is proof that growing local scenes is essential. Acting at a local level for change can create bigger and more powerful networks of social resistance. DIY punk is a way of life. It's a social practice, where active participants resist forces of alienation and corporate-capitalism and challenge the status quo. DIY punk is a process. As such, Punk Games create the space for this process to be consistent with game making, with the framework providing a direct path to action, and rippling through a community with the focus on scene.

During this research, I identified that action is the most important step in the framework for me, and the one that most encapsulates the DIY punk ethos. Via my experience in DIY punk and feedback received when presenting the research to the public, the ethos is easier to understand and agree to, and action is what sets things in motion. Action is what gave me the clearest path to just start making games, it set the boundaries of my practice and created a clear path to just start. The zine was started to create a space to explore the ideas proposed, an action to understand this intersection of DIY Punk and game making. Making ILY ❤️ a tabletop game was the action to make this game finally exist and showcase its ideas. Making Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion using narrative mechanics is also a way to lower the development level to be more executable and expandable, speeding the making process. Knowing the ethos, seeking different ways to enact them can lead to interesting solutions. Punkraft, third game sketch made for an independent console, Playdate, was also started. Sewing clothes using the Playdate's crank is the unique mechanic proposed, and taking a more political stance highlighting the environmental impact of fabric waste is how the ethos is influencing my design choices.

As part of the conclusion for this research, the project was presented in a weeklong exhibition showing the research and the games. Attendees could play Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion and ILY ❤️, watch a trailer for Punkraft and collect a free printed version of the first zine and of ILY ❤️, with more info online provided for all three titles. When explaining the research to visitors, the ethos was understood very easily, even if their understanding of punk was broad or stereotypical. While visitors could see the framework in use on both games, ILY ❤️ was the most popular game, with people finding the theme and mechanic combination creative and unique, sticking to DIY Punk connection.

Lowering the bar to game making by providing steps into action is an aspect of the framework people have liked when presenting the project, and the same way it influenced the start of my solo game making practice, others can use it for their next steps. Having a starting point is really important here. DIY punk is the starting point for many artists and continues to foster strong local scenes. The punk

games framework showcases similar ways to act in game making to create a starting point for game makers and grow sustainable independent local scenes.

An example of someone directly impacted by following the research and successfully starting their game making journey is a close friend of mine, Marcelo. Since reading the zines and having discussions around them, they have created a handful of game sketches and prototypes. While having experience working for game localization before, the step into game making require a different approach. After a shared interest on the Playdate, they created one full game by following Playdate tutorials. This led to them reaching out to the creator of the tutorials, a developer called SquidGod, and a collaboration to localize their games from English to Brazilian Portuguese started. The punk games framework, with the DIY punk ethos and incentive for action can motivate game makers to find their own approach to engage in a scene. This is one example of how the framework can provide different types of access to game making to different people, creating a connection via design, or techniques and tools, or community values amongst other ways. And regardless of their self-definition, if it aligns with the values of Punk Games, then it will be sure to positively effect the game maker and their community.

Creating showcase events to highlight local punk games and game makers is another way to have a direct impact on my local scene in the future. There are events happening in Toronto every year, and some of the organizations mentioned, like Toronto Games Week and Hand Eye Society, have great events calendar, with events bridging independent game makers and local industry. There are networking events in Toronto both run by studios and other groups too, like Bonus Stage and Dirty Rectangles. But showcasing events inspired by DIY Punk events, that are smaller and local, can happen more frequently and require less resources. Putting punk games in front of an audience more frequently and making game making more pervasive lowers the barrier of entrance into the practice and enables the growth and support of local game makers. Toronto has a strong and ever-growing community of game makers working across all areas in the field. The punk games framework provides an alternative way for many to connect through these values. Other adjacent ideas include game jams (short events where participants make games around a theme) and workshops (showcasing the punk games framework and ways of action).

The research continues, exploring punk games and how to create a space to make game making a friendlier space for new and old game makers. The Punk Games Zine will continue to be published, improving to a more robust email deliveries system and through the creation of a website where everything Punk Games can be stored. The reach will continue to grow, and the zine will always have space for anyone to share their thoughts in the zine. The website can provide a classifieds section, for local game makers to contact each other, and a calendar with local events. As an educator, discussing the repercussions of supporting a hostile industry can expand student's understanding of the field, hopefully more game makers look for their own ways around the practice. As a game maker, the punk games framework will continue to influence me into action, looking for ways to engage and improve my local scene.

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Appendix

A. Punk Games Zine #01- Introduction

So... ok.

- ### What is this?

This is an online zine to talk about Punk Games, the theme of my thesis research. If you're included in this message, I'm sorry I trapped you into receiving this, but hey... we're here. And I have to start somewhere, and I hope this is going to be interesting for me and you. Wow, it's been a while since I wrote anything remotely close to something like this, so I'll end this first paragraph here to put all of that self-awareness and awkwardness of writing behind us and move on.

Punk Games is a theme that has probably been right under my nose for many years, and it took me the last 10 to be able to see it. This zine is what I'm seeing, and how I'm acting on that. I'm also excited to share this point-of-view, since it touches on so many topics that have been integral to my development. In short, I'm merging a lot of what I learned from being involved in the DIY punk scene into game-making, in a direct attempt to motivate and incentivize game makers to create, collaborate, distribute, support and participate in game-making and their scene (as punks do in their local punk scene).

So I want to start by breaking down some of the basics.

First of all, emphasis on the word *research* here. I've been letting myself off the hook a bit too long with this and I need to attach myself to what this really is. As much as I'm defining what Punk Games are, this is actually a larger look at the current state of the industry, a question to see if this is even possible, and (possibly) most importantly if it is even necessary. My obvious bias says that it's, you know, *pretty necessary*, much as many countercultural movements' anti-establishment views and search for alternative ways of acting within society. Punk using that within music. Punk Games to-use-that within game making.

Some of the research questions we (yes, I'm including you in this collective pointing of finger at the games industry at large) have, so far:

- What does punk "fix" or address in the current game industry?
- Is punk possible in games?

There will be other questions along the way, rest assured. Since those set the general direction we're heading, let's tackle the first introductory question.

- ### What are punk games?

I'm considering punk games, much like punk music, games that follow punk ethics in their creation. In broad terms (and we will go down the rabbit-hole-paradox-trap into defining what punk is in the future), punk ethics are defined by DIY, anti-establishment, anti-mainstream, anti-corporate mass culture values, and taking direct action on these beliefs. Punk uses these values to create a space fostering the action of do-it-yourself, questioning established systems and turning the creation and distribution of that art possible. When seeing this in action with punk bands, music, festivals, distributions, etc., it's clear to see the application of these ethics.

For punk games, I'm talking about games that are actively going against what's established in the current game industry. Games with unique mechanics, going against commercial themes and design, using open-source engines, unique consoles, self-funded and self-distributed, with a focus on experience as opposed to length of the game or profitability, and sustainability in its development.

Some of the hardest parts of translating some of the beliefs and reimaging punk within game-making has been the technical requirements of game development. There's space to discuss how music can also afford the same requirements, but this is not the focus. It is the space to reframe game development and game making, though, and how we can apply some of the teachings of punk in new ways of designing games, to go against said technical requirements and have more space and reach for the games and game makers that embrace punk.

Punk games is still an area to be charted. There's a lot to be defined and specified and questioned and tested. *But it already exists*... I guess? Yes and no... right? We can think of commercially successful games made by commercially successful independent studios that fall into this category ([Hades](#)), we can think of big independent hits made by small independent studios ([Celeste](#), [Hollow Knight](#)), as well as giant solo-developed behemoths ([Stardew Valley](#), [Undertale](#)), experimental narrative games ([Clickolding](#)), commentary on working culture and human condition ([It is as if you were doing work](#)) and a journal game about transitioning ([Dys4ia](#)) all fit into what we said. So there's a lot to explore and connect the dots between all these wildly different games but with a similar soul

- Why this project

One of the first symptoms that triggered this research was being in contact with many aspiring students of game development. As a teacher, I get to see hundreds of students going into the game industry hoping to get a job every year. Getting into the game industry has always been extremely competitive to begin with, but in recent years, developments in the game industry as well as the global economy have seen an enormous cut in the available positions in big studios and the viability of maintaining a studio.

To briefly categorize how we understand the game industry: we have AAA studios - the massive studios creating the biggest marketing success in the industry (Bioware, Bungie, Activision, Riot), which are often owned by a mega-corporation (EA, Sony, Microsoft, Tencent, respectively). These mega corporations often tap into creating and/or funding independent endeavours, since independent games can find the attention of an audience that doesn't give a fuck about the next Call of Duty. So for independent studios, we often look into studios that are self-funded or with some level of investment, creating unique games that appeal to this audience. Independent games started as a genuine way of creating games that are unique, opt for personality over marketability, and were paving the ground for original games and game makers with its rise in the late 00s and early 10s.

With the rise of the game industry with the tech boom of the 2010s (the industry doubled in revenue from 2010 to 2020) and these giant players understanding there is a lot of money to be made in games, they started buying or entirely funding "independent" studios. (Any coincidence to what also happened to the music industry with some of these same labels and understanding of music and music production through the 00s is an odd *déja-vu* that you should definitely believe in.) It's now hard to categorize independent. Which is great! It makes defining punk games even easier. *(I repeat to myself, laughing nervously.)*

Independent studios vary a lot on team and project and funding and workforce and focus and overall infrastructure. Ultimately, assuming sustainability (this is definitely another bookmark for later) as a business, independent studios are often small, with not a lot of opportunities open to the job market. The "independent" studios that are more heavily funded tend to grow and lay off teams to the desire of the owner of those studios and the projects at hand. In 2024, Microsoft closed 4 studios they owned without a valid reason, even though the studios had successful console and mobile games under their belts.

Now, to connect back to the why of this project. The game industry is impossibly and unrealistically difficult to get into for someone looking to work in games, and independent studios can be a hit or miss, that is *when* they even have available positions to offer, we have a surplus of game makers out there looking to legitimately release their games and be able to support themselves from their profession.

- Why now

Not only the industry is going through a really rough time, the market is not super welcoming to small releases that don't conform to what's popular, making publishing your own game a game on its own, extremely difficult and competitive. Sure, it's the invisible hand of the market, but this is an important aspect that makes punk games a new alternative to be practiced. With the ins and outs of how current publishing platforms work is a moving target (there are prices and tradeoffs that come with each platform and tool you engage with), changing to the will of the market, turning to a more local focus on the way of development and distribution of your game can be the sustainable start to a practice.

Here's where applying punk ethics really comes in place as a direct action against the established values attached to game-making nowadays. There are a few ways to engage with game-making using punk ethics, and there are many sections within the game industry that this would reach to (from making to distributing, to marketing, creating community, playing, engaging and supporting games and game makers are a few), but it's another aspect of the research that needs to be scoped properly. *I'd love to talk about gamers(!), I'll tell you that much!* But trying to change the behaviour of an entire consumer base might be just out of our reach here (both in scope and patience.)

Tracing the needs across selected sections mentioned above will be us diving deeper into the contemporary needs and application of the punk ethics for this research. This might also serve as the guiding light of what will be the "practice" part of this research.

...Exciting.

The biggest corner of the internet I can point to right now as a good starting point for our theme is itch.io. Not saying all games there are punk, but itch.io is a place where game makers can post their games to be played by anyone, under their own terms. Pay-what-you-can, free, small, big, DRM-free, experimental, funny, horror, you name it. It's the Bandcamp (a famous fair platform for independent musical artists) of games, and it's great. (That's a demographic-setting reference right there.)

- Why me

Remember when I said this was right under my nose and I didn't see it? So yeah... In its simplest form, I'm joining my experience and alignment with DIY punk and my experience and alignment in game

making to shine a light into a legitimate way to make games that can use support and reach to create a space that makes it sustainable to make games, unique and different games, and think outside of the commercial game production pipeline of current studios.

I've acted in the DIY punk scene for many years, having and playing with bands, creating a music label, zines, collections, setting up shows and amplifying other bands. Acting to create a space for like-minded people to enjoy and share their music was an incredible look into the sustainability of a scene.

The other reality of this research is the years I felt invalidated or unfit to consider myself a game designer or game developer or "in the game industry" for all sorts of reasons. Examining the quirks of the music industry and its participants is not what I want here, but it's inevitable to talk about some of the quirks of the game industry. There are hierarchical values carried from the years of development of an industry led by questionable individuals, and the pains of that we see in the industry today. My feelings of inadequacy are shared by many, in many different ways, and that's also something we'll talk more about later.

Despite these feelings, I act as a teacher in the industry and have worked and contributed to different projects in different studios throughout the years. Like many, I want to create and distribute my own games, reaching an audience and forming a community of support among players and other developers alike. I'll act on that going forward and share the results *with the forum* as I have them.

- Next steps

I have to start from the start, I guess. So next step is to define: What is punk?

- Recommendation

You are Jeff Bezos by Kris Lorischild

-fiaca

10/02/2024

B. Punk Games Zine #02 – But what is Punk? Pt.1

Alright, this one's a hefty one.

Indulge me in a brief introduction of my history with today's topic.

I'm biased to talk about something that has had such an influence on how I live my life. I mean... *Welcome to my Podcast–likeandsubscribe.* As with many, my introduction to anything that veered within punk's direction was through music. It started with stealing some CDs from my brother's room, like Dookie and Americana (the true gateway drugs), and the curiosity to find *something different* started. The feeling of being so intrigued and perplexed. After meeting the two besties Marcelo and Lucas, doppelgangers! was formed, and thus officially started my involvement with punk and DIY.

10-year-long story short: we released a bunch of EPs, created our own music label, made and distributed zines and CD collections of and with friends and different bands, organized shows, connected with people all over Brazil and internationally and even travelled to play other cities (That's the dream!). This was our life. And it taught me how to do *everything* I know. Mainly, it really just taught me to *do*. I went deep into photography, created posters, designed albums, videos, comics, and zines, recorded, built, organized, produced... Nothing is impossible. If we want to make something happen, we can make it happen, we just have to figure out how to do it.

Between nerding out about music, bands, styles, scenes, subcultures, movements, politics, art, life and many other topics that we'll inevitably talk about for many zines to come, punk really showed us that the *something different* is constantly acting and reflecting about yourself and your surroundings on how to make it better. How to create a space for empowerment and insight, to encourage and embolden people as much as they encourage and empower me. More sustainable, more accessible, more collaborative. That we can do something to live a more ethical life, and we can do something to bring that to our everyday life. Punk empowered us to follow what we believe, and led us to live a more "authentic existence." (Clark, 2003)

At least from the perspective and teachings of The Bible of Ian MacKaye, evidently. *Amen.* (I will make no more jokes.)

It's time to start.

Asking "What is Punk?" is kinda the same as asking "What is Art?": it's everything and nothing, extremely personal and mostly contextual. If you ask 10 people what punk is, you'll have 10 different answers, and somehow most of them will be valid. There are many ways to use punk and shape punk to make a difference in our lives, and that will be very dependent on one's surroundings and agency. And even then, it's also about going beyond that.

There's nothing I can say about punk that isn't already extensively documented from many different angles. So my expectation is that this is a more compact timeline of the events, more focused on the things to be weaved with Punk Games later; the larger forces that played in the creation, growth and dissemination of the subculture. And, finally, the knowledge presented is taken from documental readings and general research done passively over the years, summed with my experience in and out of scenes acting directly with punk and DIY, and more recent academic readings that connect really well with the scope of this project and helped increase the angles on which we'll look into punk. Punk?

- What is Punk?

Punk is both a subculture and an ideology. It is a subculture started within music to oppose the highly commercialized and overly polished music of the 60s, which, together with the rise of unemployment and worsening economy in working-class youth of the 70s and 80s both in the US and the UK, quickly formed its own set of ethics and alignment, consolidating itself as a counter-cultural movement and establishing its ideologies.

- Origins

Punk started as a musical movement in the mid-70s, firstly as a reaction against tendencies in popular music and mass culture from the time. There were a couple of planets that aligned for punk to start almost concurrently in the US and the UK. Who's first? Let's call it serendipity. Between 1974 and 1976, with a general rejection of mainstream culture and economy happening in both places, there was a need to change. Musically speaking, instead of technical and intricate, it's about rawness and honesty. Short, fast, and loud.

This strong mainstream rejection really defines a lot of what punk is about. Most punk principles we'll be defining can be traced to anti-establishment roots. Trying something different, going against profit-focused art production, creating a space for participants within a scene (we'll continue to call a "scene" a group created around a shared vision and lifestyle alignment) can practice these principles, share and collaborate for the betterment of all and not capital. Even though all of this started through music, some early and defining participants helped the idea have strong roots in more political views.

The other major force within punk, something that characterizes it just as much as the above, is its DIY ethics. In my view, it is very clearly derived from this opposition to massification and alienation usually pushed by capitalism and such, although a lot of it also came directly from within the movement. Artists, venues, labels, producers and participants in their scene fostered a network of support for independent thinking and creation, trying to separate itself from commercial ideals of production as the standard to live by as capitalism tightened its grip on society.

Not surprisingly then, the ideology of punk was growing stronger.

During a recent presentation of this project, I was questioned on some initial values expressed in punk, specifically nihilism. I was kind of caught off-guard since yes, nihilism has been extensively present and showcased in punk since its inception, with many songs using the topic and musicians conversing on the topic. But even though that connection exists, this belief is now shared more strongly by other musical genres and within different branches of punk, nihilism seems to be a topic of criticism in lyrics, often pointing to political reasons and posing questions on values and ethics, suggesting other ways of thinking that more actively engage with a problem instead of idly watch it pass by.

Anarchism is the most common political view associated with punk. And it kinda makes sense, right? Anarchism is anti-authority, anti-hierarchy, about the decentralization of the state. Capitalism and state (a.k.a. the *establishment*) is about the accumulation of capital and controlled hierarchy. Punk is anti-establishment. But while anarchism is a political movement and political philosophy, encompassing a larger group of thoughts and ways to organize itself, punk is more nimble and applies similar thoughts on a more personal level through the creation of scenes. Am I way over my head yet? It feels a bit. Anarchism ideals started being present in punk and sang about in classic anarcho-punk bands like [Crass](#) and [Subhumans](#). The sub-categorization of punk also becomes a theme quite quickly.

The Situationist International (SI) was one of my biggest revelations so far in my readings. It was one of those extra layers that I just never dug enough to find out more about, but in my understanding of the conception of punk, it felt like the Rosetta Stone for some reason. One of my undergrad courses introduced me to Guy Debord's work [The Society of the Spectacle](#), which resonated with bands that I already liked at the time, and is a key work in the SI movement. Still (arguably more?) pertinent nowadays, Debord addresses the commodification of social life for the creation of the spectacle, opening the list of affirmations with "In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." Reducing experiences and relationships between people, art and other mediums to a product to be packaged and sold sounds just like–*everyone together now*–capitalism. Crazy.

The spectacle is a key component of the SI, an organization started in Europe in 1957 and with its disbanding coinciding with the rise of the punk movement. Primarily formed by political theorists and artists, SI itself was connected to other similar political and artistical movements like Lettrism (Debord included) and Surrealism. Its Marxist leftist alignment and strong oppositional views to the establishment understood capitalism as directly worsening everyday life and proposed alternative experiences through direct action and collective organization. Sounds familiar yet? All this was during the 60s, Instagram wasn't even a thing. It's great to be able to read all of this again, dive deeper, continue to identify so deeply with it and yet navigate our current world. It influenced key characters in the formative years of punk like [Jamie Reid](#) and [The Clash](#).

- The Second Wave: Punk as Ideology

The late-70s-to-early-80s saw the establishment of punk as a major subculture and ideology. The message was being spread across multiple bands, with everchanging influences and styles, but maintaining the core principles of punk: rejecting corporate capitalism, spreading the DIY way and becoming more political and involved in social politics. This research has also shown me parts of the foundational ideas that created punk that I've seen very little of before. It was refreshing to understand the influences of anarchism and the Situationist International, not only bringing back some memories of books that were present in my formative years but also seeing connections to ideals and inspirations that go beyond what I had initially seen for the first time.

This second wave of punk in the transition of the 70s to the 80s solidified punk and its DIY ethics as an alternate lifestyle and independent subculture, growing far beyond just a musical movement and influencing people to take a stance against the oppressions of capitalism, worsening economic landscape, commodification of culture, authoritarianism, unethical governmental behaviour–*all the bullshit out there*. Artists from every field and any political person could use punk ethics to act for the best development of their environment.

A collective feeling of unease with the worsening economy pushed the spread of the punk ideology even further. From the US perspective, they had the Vietnam War (the land of the army and the home of war crimes), ending in 75, topped with the economy spiralling down and the rise of inflation, only facing even more challenges with Ronald Reagan coming into power in 1981, working diligently for 2 terms to ~~fuck~~ruin worker's rights and unions, cutting back welfare benefits, perform the largest redistribution of wealth to, *you guessed it*, the top 1%, and–one of my personal favourites–started and lost, but not without leaving a legacy of issues so deep that might be beyond our species to even fix, the war on

drugs. Quite a bit to rise against, if you ask me. Punk tried, but nobody could stop this shitstorm. The world is a worse place today because of it.

The UK dealt with the rise of unemployment during the post-war and went through a recession for most of the 70s. Because everything good comes in pairs, they also had their own version of a great leader named Margaret Thatcher, in 79. Achieving a lot of the same milestones that her North American counterpart did through slightly different means, with the exception that she stayed in power for longer. More time to twist the knife. Ensue 11 years of raging unemployment, privatization of state services, and civil unrest amongst other policies that would continue to brittle the shaky state of the economy. Again, a breeding ground for punk, which had already drawn a big target behind the royal family's back, to fight against a common enemy.

Punk started in the early 70s, but the end of the decade and beginning of the 80s gave punk a fertile space to grow. Even though the fertilizer is an insurmountable pile of shit. Here's where punk had a political expansion and created stronger stances towards political issues and the ways that politics influence people. That was the last piece of the puzzle. Political positioning and thinking gave punk one final, powerful growth elixir! Finally becoming what it is pretty much to this day. And punk in current times is what we're going to break down in the next zine.

- The Part That I Chose to Skip

Funny enough, the part that I chose to skip is also my favourite part of this whole thing. Or at least the decades of punk that directly influenced me. I guess great achievement is born out of great sacrifice or something like that? The decades following showed the growth and pollination of punk through multiple different subcultures, some of which have their own sizeable impact on punk subculture and worldwide culture **cough***Nirvana***cough**. During the 80s and 90s is when things really got serious but also more spread out, reaching and creating different audiences, musical styles, subcultures and sub-ideologies in itself. It also brought to life some of the best music ever. Ok, I'll dial it back.

It'd be irresponsible of me to ignore that there are a lot of branches of punk that can be very problematic and some that even go against some of punk's core values (to be clear, Nazi Punks fuck off.) I'll hold back an entire incredulous rant on that, but *isn't that fucked?* Even though that is probably one of the most extreme examples, another punk subgenre that has gotten backlash is hardcore, one of punk's first branches. Being one of the scenes that made punk faster and more aggressive, it is also what made it a bit of a boy's club. It didn't start that way, but the macho outlook of hardcore was quickly formed given the bands, their image, their shows and, mainly, their audience.

Using my own experience (and I'm not blind to my privilege as, amongst other things, a white cis man,) I understand there's the same level of misunderstanding, misrepresenting and misusing the ideas of punk for different topics. I lived through scenes that definitely tried to impose their own values on top of the scenes', sometimes making it exclusionary and edging on thoughts contrary to punk entirely. Still, without the external influence of other participants and further reading of the thoughts, lyrics and meanings of the words by the artists the message is often clear. 27 years of straight-edge has really helped me nitpick other people's judgements. Although I understand that going "but it says over here..." won't make a scene safer for the people who would like to feel safe and participate in said scene.

So the branching of punk subculture into its infinite web of influences and subgenres that all feel part of the same underground, all feel equally misunderstood or misheard, and all fight against the

establishment for the improvement of everyday life makes punk that much more special. Riot Grrrl, skate punk, queercore, garage punk, thrash metal, emo and heavy metal are some of the other scenes I have to mention due to their popularity and influence in their own respects, ranging from political and social-political messages to pushing the DIY attitude, community establishment and independent production while helping it proliferate worldwide and be able to influence different participants in wildly different contexts, different levels of access to information and agency on their surroundings and political

At least for the legitimate ones. A growing pain of punk as a movement has been the commodification of punk itself. No one goes by unscathed from the appropriation of capitalism solely for its profit, *amirite?* There's also the argument for capitalism's packaging of punk as a way to demoralize and invalidate it, which is another super fun thing. Almost a 5th-grader move, but with literally billions of *money* and support from the ones that matter (the rich), only for them to make even more money. I hope I'm not sounding too tinfoil on anyone. So for some, punk always had to constantly "prove" itself since now you're either a true punk or a sellout, *you poseur!* I choose to believe that to a lot more, usually the active participants of the scenes, punk always has its ups and downs, but it also continues to be a safe space for self-organizing, self-expression and empowerment for many.

I guess I'm not skipping much, eh? I swear I just want to make everything clear and at least brush up on the most important parts. In part 2, I'll bring it to nowadays and the influence of punk on life 50 years after its inception. This is where I'm stopping for now.

Two books that I can recommend that cover pretty much the most important years of the eras I skipped on punk and DIY, for anyone interested: *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, by Michael Azerrad, covers 81-91, talking about Black Flag to Sonic Youth to Fugazi and Dinosaur Jr., highlighting also the participation of the Dischord Records independent label and their massive importance for the growth of the DIY scene; and *SELLOUT*, by Dan Ozzi, covering 94-07, basically starting from where the previous book left off, talking about all the bands that were influenced by the previous ones and all the news ways that capitalism starting seeping it's creepy-ass hands around punk bands and how people in the punk, emo and hardcore scenes reacted to it. So two books that cover all the stuff I chose to leave out, by credible writers, interviewing all key members in the growth and maintenance of punk throughout the last few decades.

In clearer terms now: punk is a subculture and set of ideologies largely characterized by anti-establishment views, DIY ethics, and the promotion of individual freedom through direct action and self-organization, having political and social stances in their actions.

- So, to wrap up

Punk is pretty cool.

- Next steps

Maybe I just get skeptical when I have to talk about something that I'm so passionate about. That natural excitement that comes when vomiting words about everything you love, I've always been very judged when doing that. So even though punk might not be your area, I hope to have covered it in a more universal way, being less specific about music, fashion, politics and a lot of the specifics of punk, but talking more about the forces and movement of the subculture and development of its ideologies. It's the most important for this project, and even though there's one more part on punk, hang tight, we're getting to games soon.

I hope.

Next time you'll see this I'll cover what means to be punk nowadays, and why that is relevant to the idea of punk games. A great hint at that can be see–

- **!** BREAKING NEWS **!**

The good side of being a bit late with this zine is that Summer Eternal is now a thing. Summer Eternal is a game studio formed by former members of ZA/UM, the studio behind Disco Elysium (a great adventure RPG, with some of the best writing in recent history.) While ZA/UM was a collective of artists (nodding to its self-organized nature and egalitarian structure,) that didn't save it from problems dealing with the handling of sudden growth due to a huge hit and the plans of each member with it. After legal battles and such, ZA/UM is no more, rendering 3 studios from it. Summer Eternal is one of them.

Disco Elysium is a game full of political themes and strong positioning, even through its intricate writing, web of characters, world and backstory. You're a washed-up cop investigating a murder in an area of the world being overthrown by a moralist-capitalist alliance. Take a second to unpack that one, and it's just the tip of the iceberg. I feel like they align pretty strongly with what we are talking about here.

Summer Eternal is a pretty significant part of the group that made Disco Elysium. Even though the studio has not announced any games yet, which is typical for new studios to do ("X, Y and Z developers of whatever-combination-of-studios, joined forces to form new studio, now creating giant-game-and-seeking-investors!" Bonus points if it ends in "And they're hiring!") what they did announce was something never seen: a new structure for a studio, dividing the ownership of what's produced with all its participants, while organizing it into four co-ops (companies owned by their workers), with a percentage on how much each influences the process.

With the help from the Institute of Economic Democracy from Slovenia, Summer Eternal d.d. (*dioničko društvo* - the denomination of joint-stock companies in Bosnia and Croatia), based in Croatia, is going to be divided into 4 parts: the creative team is the first co-op, with 50% of the shares of the studio; workers outside of the creative team co-op will have their own co-op, having 25% of the shares; a Limited-Liability Company (LLC) holding 20% of shares will take care of investors and business related work; and the 5% of shares are left to go to a non-profit organization where players can join via a membership, as a way to "formalize the community" and integrate the studio's supporters into the development process.

Just go read it, it's so sick. Read their Manifesto and about their studio architecture. This is the most punk thing that I've seen happen in a while, and I'm very excited to see where this goes. Maybe I'll try to reach out and ask a few questions to them, it seems like a great opportunity to get a perspective from people going to that scale of organization in the industry right now.

The entire thing is a highlight, but here's a specific one:

*...the disposability culture operating at the ruthless core of this industry wants us to think of ourselves as **cogs in the machine**: rudimentary craftsmen, disposable career workers, inert producers of made-to-order marketing-driven "content" — empty calories leaving the soul hungry.*

*The Profiteer knows that by keeping your dignity low, he will keep you **crawling on the treadmill of passion** until he lays you off for the sake of the red number in his book.*

The formation of game studios and how we can implement punk in game making, what punk game studios could look like, co-ops and sole-developing creators and many other topics are about to come. And I'm excited to share that with everyone.

- Recommendation

MindfulOS, by Classy Goblin.

-fiaca

10/13/2024

C. Punk Games Zine #03 – What is punk *now*? Pt.2

"Punk is dead. Long live Punk."

(graffito in use since 1970s), in The Death and Life of Punk

This issue will finish talking about punk and contextualize its importance nowadays, and, through that, start creating the connection with games central to this research. The application of punk nowadays turns out to be incredibly relevant to the current state of the game industry, and we'll explore what the "current state" is better in the next issue. But in broader terms, even just thinking of our world's situation and political divide and civilization's downfall, using punk's tools to create a space of organization and action within your community is still very powerful. As I went further into the research, it was awesome to find papers and books on punk in our current day and age, the 21st century, you know? A lot has happened since punk's inception, and even in recent history there have been some... trying times. So we'll base our dive today in recent times with the help of some readings.

Before we get to that, here are some things I felt I could mention here briefly to acknowledge just how broad punk is and to continue building over what we already talked about previously. Naturally, I felt there were a few things left out in the past that I should've talked about. You've probably noticed that there's **a lot** to punk. Maybe even more than you'd care to learn or know about (you can thank me later). So there are a lot of details that are significant and help build our understanding of it even more. Starting with how different punk's application looks depending on location and context. Some of the ethics and ideologies of punk we have already established influenced people and countries differently than others. Following the same connections in punk we saw in the US and UK, countries with a traumatic history, from current war-torn locations to repressive systems and religious pressures, found in punk the same needed fight against the establishment, local organization and counter-cultural strength to act within their contexts and push changes in their community.

We can find strong punk scenes around the world, in Spain, Germany, South Africa, Canada, Australia, Japan, Russia and so on. In all places, punk always connected with outcasts, leftists, anarchists and marginalized groups. If the priority before was to show the origins of punk, we're now jumping to punk being fully integrated into a lot of lifestyles, growing steadily as it is continuously needed. It happened pretty much as soon as punk started to legitimize itself, not only as a musical movement, but also with stronger political alignment and other social contexts. So by the turn of the 80s, punk was already present and had strong roots being placed everywhere around the world. The big boom and commercialization of punk that we can see during the 90s (with all different genres, fashion trends and bands profiting hard during those years) is not surprising once you see the steady spread of punk during the 80s. No surprises too that punk also grew strong communities in colonized countries that went through tough periods of dictatorship. So Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and other countries in Latin America have strong anti-establishment art groups and scenes that gave birth to several iconic artists.

In fact, it would feel negligent of me to not mention Brazil's punk past and give it space as I did for others, given my own background and how it also influences this same research. A military dictatorship regime was instituted in Brazil from 1968 to 1985 (with the help of our *friendly neighbourhood* US of A).

Going contrary to the rise of military conservatism in the country, Tropicalia was an artistic movement that sought to criticize the military regime and create original expression through different art forms. Independent movies, theatre and poetry are a big part of Tropicalia, with a lot of these productions being censored by the military, with many artists being pursued, kidnapped, tortured, and even killed in response to their stances. Even though there were other problems and questioning behind the movement up to its demise, the songs of resistance and the path carved during the years of dictatorship paved the way for the growth of punk in Brazil and other genres and bands that also have counter-culture running through their veins. Modern artist Oswald de Andrade wrote the Anthropophagist Manifesto in 1928, which was a major influence for Tropicalia artists, and therefore a major influence in Brazilian art in general: a manifesto about not bowing to the oppressive culture brought/imposed by colonizers, and promoting its fusion with local culture, style and inspirations for the creation of something new; using both Brazilian and international culture to create something uniquely local and original – to make use of imported culture and add a Brazilian touch. The negation and response to that type of oppression experienced through colonialism rooted Brazilian modern art and artists on original grounds, influencing far beyond our area of study. For the Tropicalia, a personal highlight is Chico Buarque, with the album Construção being full of songs criticizing the military dictatorship and censorship. After the end of Tropicalia as a movement in 1969, other movements alongside punk carried the torch forward, with some of the first Brazilian punk bands being formed at the end of the 70s and early 80s, with some personal highlights being Cólera and Ratos De Porão. By the end of the dictatorship regime in 85, there were artists across multiple genres, regions and backgrounds that used what Tropicalia started to resist repression and censorship and set the stage for the start of a new era for Brazilian art.

"Tupi, or not tupi that is the question."

Anthropophagist Manifesto, Oswald de Andrade (1928)

So I sought to shout out Brazilian punk and ended up talking about a fundamental thinking principle that influences Brazilian artists to this day. My middle school art teacher would be proud right now. It's funny to be able to recognize this in hindsight. I'm especially proud of being able to recognize this element in many of my peers' works, being it a purposeful reference or not. Tangent over.

I hope that was a good enough example of how different of a context that was to breed a similar environment for the growth of counter-cultural, anti-establishment movements and how punk coming into the scene (pun not intended) was a catalyst to more empowerment and resistance. The scars of such a time can still be seen and felt, especially in the last few years with the rise of similar ideologies throughout the world, making the need for punk to again be the catalyst to the creation of a space of resistance and action against the deeply fucked structures we find ourselves in. I will stop here, but the expansion of punk's political links, organic alignment with minorities and groups marginalized from society and other qualities of the movement could be continuously traced via the aspects discussed so far.

~~Enough, we don't even want to read about punk anym--~~

- Ok, what is punk *now*?

Things evolve. Punk changed, but what makes it still relevant to this day is that the core ideology goes fundamentally unchanged, and over the years it only grew through its application in the most diverse fields. Punk is synonymous with DIY, with breaking structures, with creating something new, and this thinking can be applied by many, in as many different ways as one can think of. It's easy for me to micro-categorize all these highly specific behavioural quirks obsessively because it's natural for someone growing up inserted and trying to fit in a scene to find a place to squeeze in. Funny enough, punk is the place for the ones that feel exactly that way. To *not fit* is the punk way.

Juxtaposing this now in our current environment, with the collective knowledge so far on technology and its effects on human behaviour, where the pressure of being connected all the time, being bombarded by questionable information about everything and anything, in a world on the brink of collapse, it's a lot to take in. And it takes a lot to fight against that. So there's a lot of space for punk to enable pockets of resistance in everyday life, on many different levels. You can start by cutting back on animal products and byproducts, for example, since it can be an incredibly wasteful, ecologically harmful and a shockingly cruel way of producing food, and any reduction in the need for meat could have a positive impact globally. You can start by supporting local and small businesses, directly helping the growth of your community and the livelihood of an independent business owner and the ones they employ. But there's something more about *the way of punk*. The essence of how all these choices connect to each other and create new forms of being and participating in the world. Punk binds the powers of resistance, and empowers its disciples.

A few different readings are used here to support me on these topics. It's funny to have had the experience within the field for a really long time, to have read and watched an unfathomable amount of material on this very specific topic, hours and hours digging through Wikipedia pages and zines, to the point where, over time, some of these things I started taking for granted, only to get here, where I'm putting a lot of that knowledge together, and now I keep finding amazing readings to help increase the volume on my yell of how powerful punk and the structures created and enabled by punk are. Probably a good problem to have? The readings here are being used to contextualize punk in today's environment, as well as poke everyone's heads even more on the questioning of what punk is. A little bit of punk is, in fact, inside of all of us, so we can all try to connect to that feeling. The readings will help us cover, from a cultural side, punk applications in our current world, which will lead us to finally start the connection with games.

- The Death and Life of Punk, The Last Subculture, by Dylan Clark

This paper is where I got the quote from the beginning of this zine. Clark goes through the origins of punk but with an interesting focus on its struggles since the beginning to gain respect as a legitimate subculture. Soon after its inception, it was already possible to see the claws of capitalism profiting from the image of punk, with punk "becoming just another element in the grand media circus." "Suddenly, the language of punk was rendered meaningless." (Clark 2003)

The paper shows that regardless of the packaging of punk as just a subcultural commodity to serve the Culture Industry, punk itself still stands against that, "being a way of being subcultural while addressing the discursive problems of subcultures." (Clark 2003) Clark's slice of punk and the constant push and pull that exists in the subculture between legitimacy and commodification shows a fragile (and very interesting) side of punk. "Many witnesses fail to see the dialectical motion of the discourse of

subculture." (Clark 2003) The life and death, the meaning, significance, commodification and anarchy all waged war on each other and themselves seeking validation for the subculture in a way. We can see these scars translated through jokes of varying degrees about punk, coming from all sides (see Poseur Cops from the last issue.)

From the beginning, though, he states clearly: punk is not dead. The ideology transcended the music scene in which punk was created and "[articulated] a social form that anticipates and outmaneuvers the dominance of corporate-capitalism" (Clark 2003). Post-punk is the current acting subculture of punk. Punk was originally created as an opposing force to the mainstream, but the mainstream still made punk commercial. "Post-punk, or contemporary punk, has foregone these performances of anarchy and is now almost synonymous with the practice of anarchism". (Clark 2003) The anti-establishment, anti-hierarchy, freedom of punk ideology still fuels change. This is where I got the citation from last time: "Current punks are partly in pursuit of an authentic existence." (Clark 2003)

This quote is worth in full: "Punk can be hidden even to itself. Punk had to die so that it could live. By slipping free of its orthodoxies – its costumes, musical regulations, behaviours, and thoughts – punk embodied the anarchism it aspired to. Decentralized, anti-hierarchical, mobile, and invisible, punk has become a loose assemblage of guerrilla militias. It cannot be owned; it cannot be sold. It upholds the principles of anarchism, yet it has no ideology. It is called punk, yet it has no name." (Clark 2003)

So punk is, now, even if not blatantly labeled as such, the active participation in challenging manifestations of corporate-capitalism.

- Punk: The Do-It-Yourself Subculture, by Ian P. Moran

So what does "the active participation in challenging manifestations of corporate-capitalism" mean? DO. IT. YOURSELF. Moran's point-of-view of punk here is more focused on the DIY aspect of the subculture. Through a qualitative analysis of interviews with participants and using his own experience in the field, Moran shows how DIY is the glue that keeps punk together, going as far as enabling the strong international connection between different punk scenes from around the world. Fitting name for the article.

With an initial literature review, Moran points at works that connect his optics to other punk scenes around the world, using examples from Mexico, different parts of the US and Canada, as well as citing some reference studies for subgenres that are significant to DIY as the subject. This paper is short and a bit limited in the amount of information Moran could cram into it, unfortunately, and I'm glad it took me to the great next article, although the highlight of DIY and the equivalency of DIY and punk is very helpful.

One problem could be identified in his methodology, though. Through interviews with participants in different punk scenes in different locations in the US, even though valuable in showing the authentic connection and action the participants of the research had with their scene, the selection lacked representation from a more varied pool of members from different backgrounds in the punk scene. Still, his argument of how DIY is the primary characteristic shared by all participants within his study and the punk scene at large, and how every participant felt the long-lasting effects of empowerment brought by participating in a scene, is very much how I personally feel about it. Just how much all the tenets of punk already discussed are basically being entirely carried by DIY.

- Postmodernism and Punk Subculture: Cultures of Authenticity and Deconstruction, By Ryan Moore

If DIY is the glue that keeps punk together, what are the pieces that it's gluing together after all? Last zine I mentioned some of the growing pains of punk and now we can actually identify some of the internal conflicts of punk and the scars that it left. The way I told the story of punk followed a more chronological order and, for the most part, some of the issues that were pointed out through the formative years I consider them more punctual and related to that point in time with the movement. By the time I started describing the later stages and evolution of punk, I counted a lot of those issues to be replaced or overlooked as other intrinsic ideologies to the subculture were starting to be embedded by participants, and the political problems that were going around at the time took the focus of how I approached it.

Moore says punk has two sides; from the initial boom of what punk was (more reactionary to their environment, going against what was initially seen in the 70s context), to the part of punk that also connects more to nihilism and a general aversion to that culture of oppression, Moore calls it the "culture of deconstruction". That side of punk, per Moore, "can simply be understood as the response of young people raised within a mass-mediated, consumer-driven environment who have turned signs and spectacles against themselves, as a means of waging war on society" (Moore 2004). So for the initial years, that was the *modus operandi* of punk. Naturally so, we can see that as the initial reflex response to that massification of culture.

What I called the second wave of punk last issue, Moore labels it the "culture of authenticity". The moment when punk was growing and spreading its wings and having more and more political influence and connection, seeking the consolidation and legitimization of the movement as capable of change. So at this point is all about "a quest for authenticity and independence from the culture industry. (...) (this way) attempts to go "underground" and insulate punk subculture from the superficiality of postmodern culture" (Moore 2004). Here's also where organized punk scenes start taking size, and the exchange and cooperation between scenes from different parts of the country and later the world is to this day a vital part of punk.

He finishes by explaining that both sides are valid in their own ways and "represent divergent responses to the condition of postmodernity" (Moore 2004). The culture of deconstruction was a direct attack on massification and mainstream culture, but without proposing a possible future or change. The culture of authenticity, in the search for spaces of action outside of mainstream culture, embraced DIY and created networks of cultural production accessible to any participant in the scene, often to create and act in forms against the same fundamental issues pointed out by the culture of deconstruction.

DIY really is the glue that binds both sides together.

- Global Punk: Resistance and Rebellion in Everyday Life, by Kevin Dunn

However, by far the best look into the application of DIY and punk is via Kevin Dunn's Global Punk. Do you want a 250-page answer to the question "What is punk?", this is it. I'm here to give you a shorter version of it a couple of lines below, though (and in a lot of future zines). Truly, "Punk won", as Ian MacKaye says in an interview in the book's Prologue. Scenes exist, they open space for mutual resistance, they influence change in multiple levels, and succeed in affecting their participants' lifestyles and personal understanding of their world (arguably the most important place to start a change). I was already immediately drawn to this book after seeing the cover made by Mitch Clem. But Dunn's dive into

all different facets of DIY punk and how it continues to be a force pushing alternative ways of living, cultural production and exchange, social mobilization and self-empowerment is a very thorough analysis of all facets of action commonly found in DIY punk and scenes today.

(So is it punk, DIY punk or post-punk?! *If you ask 10 people*– Don't lose track.)

Dunn differentiates DIY punk from punk for two main reasons: DIY and the commodification of punk. That's all. The term "punk" now doesn't necessarily translate the true values carried by the real participants within the scene, being more superficial and connected to commercial punk (music and others). The focus on DIY is the most important factor, as we have seen in the previous reading, so nothing more natural to understand the real values of punk and the combination of its origins and the bigger encompassing of DIY ethics. "When I talk about punk as a set of social activities, as opposed to a specific, fixed musical style or fashion of clothes, I am particularly focused on this notion of *do-it-yourself*. This book is on DIY punk, a term used by many to draw attention to the difference between the organic cultural products that emerge from a DIY punk community and those "commercial punk" products sold by major record labels and trendy mall stores such as Hot Topic" (Dunn 2016), he says.

Much like how I tried to make it here between these two last issues, music style is almost the least important thing about DIY punk now. Maybe you noticed that I've been purposefully focusing much more on the broader understanding of punk than talking about punk music. Of course it started in music and music is a big part of it (and my personal life, but I won't make a playlist for this though), but as mentioned above, it's so beyond music alone. Dunn does add a lot more bands in his references throughout the book, adding his personal experience and interviews with multiple bands, musicians and participants in multiple different scenes around the world.

It's important to notice the focus of the book on the creation of the local scenes and the application of DIY punk in the everyday life, influencing local communities. "DIY punk provides the means by which alternative ways of being are imagined and realized at the individual and local levels, with profound implications for the lives of its participants" (Dunn 2016). By focusing on the change from a local level, by influencing and motivating those around you, there are multiple ways for the community to strengthen from it. The creation of the local scene is the first step in a chain of changes that can lead to, amongst other things, the creation "learning communities" where "goods are shared, ideas exchanged, practices emulated, and collective actions planned" (Dunn, 2016), members turning interactive participants, finding a "regional accent" and more. Scenes require participants, though, and its impact is only fully realized when enough people are engaging, making, changing and interacting directly within their scene via DIY punk's multifaceted cultural production methods.

The use of DIY punk in multiple platforms and mediums is a great example of its effectiveness and how much the power of its participants acts as a "force multiplier", meaning "within these (local) scenes, individual acts of resistance take on greater meaning and power. Personal acts of resistance become symbolic of larger, collective, oppositional meanings and consciousness" (Dunn, 2016). Be it through organizing shows, creating zines, making art, playing music, collaborating with other members, or having your own label and distributing music, the collective anti-establishment action and resistance to global capitalism take multiple shapes and gain traction through the collective local DIY punk scene. Dunn walks through some of the classic DIY punk zines and record labels, as well as provides insights within international DIY punk scenes, showing the power of the "local" in different parts of the world. From a desolate small town in northern Russia where DIY punk is used simply as motivation to survive the brutal

living conditions, to the harsh political and religious oppression Indonesian punks suffer, where punk is still seen as a crime, local scenes are often the strongest support one may have to be able to resist and act.

One last concept that Dunn explains that will also help us localize better DIY punk and its application in games, as we'll do later, is how much one can "throw" oneself into punk. We already know DIY punk can vary depending on context and that there can be multiple different ways of resistance depending on where it is being applied, but that also happens on the personal level. One's personal development and ideas change and people who once considered themselves punks might not identify as such over time. Regardless of the level one chooses to engage with DIY punk, local scenes are spaces where the deconstruction of ideas and thinking are always there. One of my favourite aspects of DIY punk is how local scenes provide a space open for any members to do more, to engage and create, to become a direct participant in the scene. About the formation of a punk *habitus* (a set of social practices and categories that help shape a group within society), Dunn affirms, "Is there a punk *habitus*? I've already suggested that the social field of punk is always being made and re-made, always contested. But there are some core elements of DIY punk that contribute to a punk habitus, namely an anti-status quo disposition and a dedication to DIY. Together, these provide the opportunity for disalienation" (Dunn, 2016).

DIY punk's activity to this day is proof that these spaces are extremely needed, and acting at local levels for change is still the best way to create bigger and more powerful networks of social resistance that carry its ethics.

One more time for the ones at the back: what is DIY punk?

DIY punk is a way of life. It's a social practice, where active participants resist forces of alienation and corporate-capitalism and challenge the status quo. DIY punk is a process. Punk Games continues to share its origins via its name, much like DIY punk does, so the name remains. As anything DIY punk, though, this is much more than just a name.

Honestly, I feel *re-radicalized*. It's not like any of these thoughts have ever left my head, but damn... This is what I meant by "this project felt like it was under my nose all along". DIY punk gave me so much, and I think what I was feeling was that I wasn't properly giving back and participating in the way that I needed. But this is *it*. *(Of course I'd say that, look what I'm writing.)* This one hit me so hard that I teared up, as Dunn was making a metaphor about a personal situation: "A scholar's *habitus* is often shaped by academic expectations regarding proper behavior, intellectual objectivity, and professional advancement. In some cases, those social pressures actually work to neuter an individual scholar's political activism." (Dunn, 2016.)

All this to say that punk games already exist. You can find these same values and ethics applied in multiple games and game makers, already making their own games in their own ways, self-publishing and marketing under their own rules. Wait... But that alone doesn't actually make a game into a punk game, right? As we can see above, it requires a much broader stance in practice for something to be fully connected to the ways of DIY punk. We can also understand how completely fucked the games industry is at this moment in time and how some of the ethics of DIY punk could very well be used. So in the connection of DIY punk and games in the coming issues, I'll address the current state of the games industry, we'll better categorize DIY punk in games to have a real understanding of what Punk Games

really aim for and start navigating all facets within games we can apply all these values. We'll do that while also contextualizing where we can already see DIY punk being applied and the background of practices within games that already stay true to this way of engaging with the world.

- Demo

On the 22nd of October, I had a demo exhibit of what I have so far for this research. Since I'm trusting the process, what the end of the tunnel looks like is still a mystery. Not a total mystery, but you know... You gotta roll with the punches. I've mentioned the printed version of the first zine already, which was great to make. Something about the physicality of things. A feeling not too far from this same research, I'm trying to capture this idea too. But mainly the making of something easily tangible. Having to think for the format. It also gave me the idea of bringing some [GameFAQs](#)-style ASCII titles to this. *Iykyk.* Sorry mobile readers.

As a way to demonstrate some of the concepts that we're discussing here in the zines, there are a few things I'm trying to create to approach the application of the principles of punk in game-making as a whole. It's hard to gauge how effective they'll be, to be honest, but I've been thinking about this for long enough and some of these projects influenced me to create the connection between punk and games anyway. Starting with this zine. The written part of the research. There might be more that I want to plan and make relating to the research too, but I'll just talk about them when they're viable.

For games, *how many* is the question I've been wrestling with a lot, when in reality the question really should be *wtf am I even doing?* I'm not a programmer, how am I supposed to even make one game? (It's great to be an artist and live in the world of imagination.) So harvesting the power of DIY punk here is coming really handy. One idea I've had for the longest time was this puzzle game about cuddling I called ILY ❤. Originally to be played on mobile devices, you use the touchscreen controls to fold your character-puppet around an assigned partner-NPC (Non-Playable Character). After years with that idea floating around my head, even after creating a nice GDD (Game Design Document) for it, I've never been able to make it. Then, for one of my classes, I just decided to put that idea to reality, I have always been very excited about it, so time to actually make it exist. So I laser cut some acrylic NPCs and cut some character-puppets in paper and made it a game about folding your *paper* puppet around a partner. So basically the same, but now it exists! And it's physical! You'll be able to see it in the photo below, but I'll be posting it on my itch page very soon, and anyone will be able to download and print their own copies to play (may you want to). For this one, I wanted to talk about intimacy in a light-hearted way, and through discussions with others, I think there's also an angle to explore about the body, kinks, relationships and feminism. Very unique topics to discuss via such a tactile medium. Also, this was probably the one project that symbolized my need to apply my DIY punk to my game-making and was one of the seeds of this research.

The idea was to make **5** games. For a good few months there, I was so convinced. 🗿 So I just thought "I'll make games", and I'll go as far as I can and as far as acceptable can be. Within reason, creating solid prototypes (or sketches, we'll go more into the methodology later) of ideas that I can demonstrate the application of DIY punk via different angles, the connection I'm making here might make more sense. One of the other ideas I had that via conversations I've gotten good feedback on is a narrative racing game. Narrative games can be a hit or miss in my opinion, but I'm confident this idea can be interesting and I'm trying to design some fun interactions and choices to bring more weight to the choice-making and bring the excitement of the moment-to-moment thinking required from a driver. The game is part of

a bigger megalomaniac series of racing games I'm creating called Auto Turismo, and this game is called Auto Turismo: Mind of the Champion. You can read the first devlog on the game on my itch page via the link, the password is **666**. I'm using a free plugin for a free and open-source game engine called Godot, and I'm trying to create a game within a genre that is known for the lack of variety in the current market. The full devlog of each game made for this research (or at least everything I manage to complete for the period of the research – this will continue beyond the research period) will be published in later zines.

Lastly (so far), I wanted to make a game for the Playdate. I'm almost tired of preaching the Playdate around, but it's a pretty cool little handheld console with a lot of personality, made by an independent company, with a free development environment and avenues of self-publishing through the console's store or itch.io. One of the Playdate selling points is that it has a crank as an input device. Literally, one of the "buttons" to use for your game is a crank. Quirky. There are many very cool examples of games that use the crank in the most creative ways possible. My idea is to use the crank as a sewing machine, and create a game about a little punk character that is learning how to make their own clothes, from sewing a patch on a jacket to making their own pants and shirts. The working title is Punkraft, and you can read the first devlog for this one too. (Same**6**password**6**as**6**before.) This one definitely was a direct response to having this topic on my mind for so long, and it's been a great journey rethinking some of my own concepts within game design to start creating games that are more strongly connected to DIY punk.

I've gotten generally good responses from people who stopped by and talked to me about punk ethics and games. Some played the games and found the ideas all very different and fun, but no focused or deep feedback about anything at this moment. It was reassuring to put everything together and work on the games for a little bit in the end, so I'll keep following my path here. I feel like it is taking me to fun places.

- Next Bat-Time, Same Bat-Channel!

Cool, I guess we know about DIY punk now. Put that in your pocket and let's move on to games. What can we see in the industry right now? First, we'll start with a breakdown of the industry to understand some of the common groups we'll be seeing going forward. I'll cast a big net to cover some areas that can more instantly relate to punk, but the plan will be to point out some problems and contextualize them backwards. There are some very interesting books and readings coming, so I'm happy I'm done with DIY punk for now. Surely I'm not the only one.

- Recommendation

No Players Online (Classic), by Adam Pype.

-fiaca

11/03/2024

Good day, kind folk!

Hope you all take the time to ignore the fact we're in this uncontrollable downward spiral of doom called life while reading this. Hello. I hope the last two zines gave you a good overview of the lens through which we'll understand DIY punk for this research. As a primary connection between the two words, last time I wrote and you read, I finished somewhere around the point that this idea, Punk Games, may not be anything new. Kinda. Yes, going against industry-established design structure and expectation, self-publishing and marketing, following your own rules... None of that is new, definitely not in game-making. And those characteristics alone don't inherently make something punk. Maybe inspired by or strongly influenced by punk, so why do I feel something's missing?

In this space, I will be talking about games as a whole, so we'll consider tabletop and role-playing games all the way to video games of all kinds. "Games" means a set of rules that interact to create gameplay. So *play*. Things you can play, being as direct with the term as possible. The approach to games will be loosely chronological. A lot of ancient tabletop and folk games have a rich history of rules that travelled across the entire world and everywhere they passed through, a new, slightly different variant of these games they left. For focus, and with the help of the advent of technology, the timeline of **video** games is more comprehensive, and that's where we'll spend the majority of this research's time. The history of video games is, much like punk's history, a large web of connections made by a lot of people around the world at around the same time since technology gave everyone a similar starting line. This time, instead of the US and the UK (as it was for punk), it's the US and Japan. Atari was the main player on the US side for a little bit in the early years, and Japan already comes with a strong history of innovation with some arcade companies like SEGA and Taito. I'm getting ahead of myself.

- Once there were games! Then there were video games!

The oldest known playable board game is The Royal Game of Ur. The British Museum made a great video about it with a playthrough of it a while back, which gives us an amazing history lesson on both games and the board game in question. We can go through plenty of other amazing ancient board games, arguably more important than the above and from different regions like Go, Chess, Mancala, card games like Karniffel and Euchre, more modern board games like Sorry!, Monopoly (although don't be fooled, Monopoly sucks ass), Risk, Scrabble, role-playing tabletops with Dungeons and Dragons, and current board games like Azul, Root, Modern Art (I'm nowhere near qualified to talk about board games, these are recent ones I've played in an attempt to get more into newer board game design). Much of this story is fundamental to the creation of video games, since these rules, before applied to physical pieces or spaces, would now be applied in digital spaces.

Tabletop and Board games are awesome (by Tabletop: anything that can be played on a table; by Board games: tabletop games centred around a board). They have a very low barrier of entry, for making and playing, and by nature feel like a very punk way of making a game. Or kid-like, it can be another way to think about it and be inspired to design games like this. Just put some stuff together, draw a few things, use a few pieces, and with a few rules you can have a fun new game to play. Or spatial and physical games as well, like tag and statue and other variants. Sports are a great example of games, sometimes I think that connection is not given enough attention. A classic game-making and design exercise is to create a board game. Any random limitation to this challenge can be applied here: using playing cards,

not using dice, making a board, using an hourglass to track time and other mechanics in the toolbox are all accessible and ready to be used. Or not! Make your own stuff, it's your game, your rules, your way of presenting it. Liberating. I have to say that it took me a while to stop belittling board games in my journey of understanding game design. No wonder one of the projects that also inspired this project (ILY ❤️ , mentioned last zine) was my own venture into tabletop games which finally forced me to put an old idea out into the world. So even though the focus will be mostly applied to video games as the hegemonic medium of consuming games currently, tabletop and board games are just as important as a way into game making as any other way of making games. So when I say games, all games are included.

Some of the super early video games like Spacewar! and Tennis for Two are some of the games that I even mention in some of my classes as the earlier iterations of games. The facts that Tennis for Two was played using an oscilloscope and is a sports game are some of my favourite facts. The 70s was the decade of the arcades, with pinballs leading the way to then programmed boards with the first arcade video games, with Pong and Space Invaders being the two most popular early arcade games. So not too long after games came into popularity, here's where I already want to start talking about some of the earlier signs we can see DIY punk coming into application--in the earlier years of video games. Worth it to mention some of the earlier iterations of text-based adventure games started around the same time, although mostly being difficult to program and share. The popularization and development of more user-friendly programming environments, although more technically limited, influenced the creation of the first Adventure, RPGs (Role Playing Games) and Dungeon Crawler (exactly what it sounds) games. But arcades were truly where *it* was at. The first episode in the documentary series High Score (2020) does a great job of showing the earlier makers and players and how some college dropouts started tinkering with Pacman arcade boards to add more levels and mechanics to the game, basically creating some of the first mods. Funny enough, Atari sued a group of programmers who were *modding* (modifying) some of their arcades and actually preferred to settle and hire them to become programmers in the company since they were clearly doing a good job. To clarify: their intentions were to mostly monetize their pre-owned arcade cabinets *even further*. So the idea was there, but the ethics might not.

Games are the new thing, the 70s and 80s saw the boom of video games as the new form of entertainment. A lot of companies were coming into the market and pouring money to participate in the space in the hopes of getting a bit of this newfound gold. By the end of the 70s, some of the first third-party publishers (companies making games for another company's system) started being founded, with Activision being one of the first third-party publishers founded by ex-Atari employees in 1979. So the classic culprits here like Atari, Taito, Konami, Nintendo, Namco, SEGA and now **a bunch** new third-party companies started pumping **a bunch** of games into the market seeing the seemingly nonstop growth of the video games. And would you look at that? Boom! The video game market bubbles and crashes. Multiple factors contributed to such a crash, but let's just blame capitalism for the sake of simplicity. From 83 to 85, the market dropped to a fraction of what it once was, and the effect was widespread. A lot of companies vanished, and the ones that survived went through some level of restructuring to endure and understand the next steps. By the end of 85, Nintendo would release its first console, the Famicom, then exclusive to Japan, as the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System) in the US market. With that, a series of measures would come in place to standardize the games published by third-party studios on Nintendo's system. Most notably, Nintendo's Lot Check is the process of certification that a game has to go through before being made available for the system to ensure it meets all its requirements. From performance tests to networking, language, localization and more, these tests are Nintendo's way of

protecting their system from shit games. Not infallible by any means, but it directly helped the recovery of the market. In another way, it was Nintendo's way of strengthening their own product and at this very moment, set themselves to become the titan they are today. This enabled many third-party studios to thrive and popularize game-making for home consoles.

We can't ignore that this whole time, computers were also all steam ahead. More reliable than home consoles, and more useful than arcades, the more powerful personal computer could have more intricate and complex games given its advantage in processing power. Not as popular at the time, but it was soon to change. By the end of the 80s, many games were being ported and developed for the personal computers of the time, some of the most famous ones being the Apple II, the Atari 400/800, the Commodore 64, the MSX and the ZX Spectrum. Most of the biggest, multinational game studios still around nowadays, coined the "AAA game industry", like Ubisoft and Electronic Arts, started at this time. Sierra (King's Quest series) and LucasArts (Monkey Island series) were also two great studios that released some of the best earlier graphical point-and-click adventure games in the late 80s. By the 90s, video games had recovered well from the crash and between arcades, home consoles and personal computers, games had multiple different audiences already. Here we can also clearly understand the start of the divide between companies and how this structure is followed to this day: companies that owned systems/arcade boards had a considerable chunk of the market; third-party studios making games for these companies or these companies' systems could have a wide reach, releasing games for multiple systems, but it also required a decent size for operation; computer games was a more open and accessible space compared with the previous two, and here really is where we could find more interesting games that were not so closed within a short loop for arcade purposes or confined to the requirements of a target system.

It's been a ride already. I wouldn't be able to go forward without giving a bit of a background like this on the industry and its foundation. Granted, I have already been trying to bring attention to the parts that mainly interest this research, but I rather we all be on the same page. The next steps are some of the earlier signs I could identify as some defining applications of DIY punk in game making.

- Doom, the first punk game?

Most likely not. That's the answer. Was the Ramones the first punk band ever? Most likely not. But their impact as one of the flag holders of punk and a clear marker of the foundation of the movement is undeniable. That's more along the lines of how I'll be talking about Doom here. I'll use the documentary High Score here again as a reference, as well as Masters of Doom (2003) by David Kushner, a book retelling the story of the early years of id Software and the creation of Doom. John Romero, John Carmack, Adrian Carmack (no affiliation with John, though, funny enough) and Tom Hall worked for Softdisk, a subscription magazine that shipped with a floppy disc with a new game to its subscribers monthly. The team was already used to the monthly development cycle, but under the magazine's direction, the games were not the best. Looking for the creative freedom to create better games, the 4 nerds joined forces and created id Software.

Firstly working on their projects parallel to working on Softdisk, the team partnered with Apogee Software in secret, first under the name Ideas from the Deep, and hidden from their boss at Softdisk. Their partnership with Apogee brought to life Commander Keen, a side-scroller game about a genius kid who builds a ship to travel to space while his parents are asleep. This was also the start of their shareware distribution model, used extensively by Apogee in some of their previous games. Shareware

consists of sharing a part of the game for free (in this case, the games were split into three episodes, the first one distributed for free to draw players' interest) and making the rest of it available for a fee. Soon after Commander Keen, Carmack's experimentation with creating an early version of a 3D engine led to the creation of Wolfenstein 3D. Without a doubt, one of the most important games of all time, Wolfenstein 3D was the first commercially successful 3D first-person shooter (FPS). Also released episodic as a shareware, the game was another major commercial success in id's career. Shooting Nazis was a nice extra.

The studio, now officialized and relocated from Louisiana to Wisconsin and Texas later, was now on to create their biggest release yet. After the great success of Wolfenstein, the team started putting together their next game. Doom continued with the evolution of Carmack's 3D engine, now the Doom Engine, pioneering techniques that are still used to render real-time graphics (a fancy way to call video games) to this day. After a year of development from 92 to 93, and with great expectations of fans of their previous games, the first free episode of Doom was released for free at the end of 1993. Doom, also released as a shareware, clogged servers all over the country with players trying to download the first episode of the game. I may be painting shareware in such a light that it aligns well with the background of DIY punk in this research, but don't be fooled: it's still a marketing tool. The thing though is that the team at id, especially John Carmack (strong advocate for open-source software), were very open to the idea of creating a game that was not only half distributed for free (Romero in High Score confirms their confidence in making the best game ever, *inevitably* it would be a commercial success), but also easily modifiable by the players. Knowing fans were already making great *mods* of Wolfenstein 3D, Carmack consciously made the game so its files are easily accessible and editable. By the time Doom released the other paid episodes for the game, people were already modifying the shareware episode and creating their levels.

The month after Doom was released, the first Doom modding tool was created and shared between fans. Online multiplayer was included a year after the game's release, creating one of the first online multiplayer shooters, definitely one of the most popular ones. In 1997, the source code for the game was released by Carmack, boosting even further an already vibrant community of mods. For years, the joke of porting (adapting) Doom to any possible device with enough processing power has dominated different cultural circles (you can run Doom on a [TI calculator](#), a [modern microwave](#), or a [pregnancy test](#)). Modding Doom was also much more than just adding levels, as modders created entire new games using Doom. One of my favourite mods is [MyHouse.WAD](#), a Doom mod inspired by the book House of Leaves. It breaks the engine, it makes things that shouldn't be possible to make given the limitations of the engine, and that adds to just how crazy terrifying it is. Beauty. Speedrunning, the act of playing games as fast as you can to finish within a certain set of rules, can also be traced back to Doom, or even Wolfenstein 3D (where Romero's times were recorded as a baseline to give the player), growing Doom's influence in very different areas within the gaming community.

I'm not gonna put my finger on it and say that Doom is the first example of DIY punk in games. That would be a lie. But the way Doom shared their core experience for free, how they enabled an entire generation of players to modding Doom, learn about game making and design, make their own games out of Doom, create new levels, and new rules, experiment with everything they had made for the game, opening the source code... These are all conscious design choices that really changed games forever.

And ok, Doom may also be responsible for things that would later start in the industry that there would be no way to blame it for. The hegemony of shooters for the decades to come, mainly from the late 90s to the later 2010s, could be traced to Doom, but that's a stretch. By the end of the decade, id had come out with Quake (the *next* most important shooter on the list, chronologically) with good online gameplay, Epic MegaGames (now just Epic Games) was working on Unreal Tournament (the *next* next on the list), and with Half-Life and its modding community also coming into play, FPS games were the big new genre. As we'll see later, the general complaint that games "are all the same", that there is no representation in games for multiple different communities of people and personalities and other general discontent thrown at the industry, will be usually aimed at FPS games for its 20-year sovereignty. And even though I agree, there were a couple of things happening at the same time that brewed this perfect storm. All (shooter) games mentioned above released entire editing and modding tools for their games, enabling the creation and sharing of these games with your friends. Paired with online multiplayer, making a map and immediately jumping into it to play with your friends is a pretty cool feeling.

- (Personal) Background

To continue with the background on games, I'd like to walk through these next few decades from a more personal perspective. As any nerd who's ever talked about games ever in any context, I'm no different than any of them: I have been playing games since I knew how to hold a controller. Which can be pretty sad, depending on your point of view. My older brother, I don't know when exactly, was gifted a SEGA Master System by my parents. The earliest memory I have I was probably 3 or 4 years old, and I was playing something in the Master System in the bedroom I shared with my brother in our childhood house. The Master System was SEGA's competitor to the NES. Mostly a failure in the two biggest markets (the US and Japan), but surprisingly a hit in Europe and Brazil. Go figure. Games for the Master System were great: Alex Kidd (a platformer) was the game that came preloaded into the console, and the system introduced me to Sonic, Shinobi, California Games, Wonder Boy and Turma da Mônica (a reskin of Wonder Boy using a famous Brazilian comics IP).

The Master System is already such a weird little starting point for a console, in hindsight. Then, it didn't really matter. I'd get my hands on anything game-related I could. Super Nintendo (SNES), Mega Drive (or Genesis in North America), Sega Saturn and CD, Game Boy, PlayStation 1 (PS1), Nintendo 64, PlayStation 2 (PS2), PC, I'd play anything and everything. The thing is that, in Brazil, imported goods are really expensive. They were then, still now. So besides the Master System, which was officially produced in Brazil via the company Tectoy, all other videogames that came after were imported, making them expensive, hard to get (mostly illegally), no warranty on any devices or games, no official tech support and no games. This is where piracy became a major part of the way I started consuming games, and it has influenced directly the way that I think about games.

Piracy is a really interesting topic, and it became even more interesting to talk about after joining "the industry". I understand all the legalities and ethical dilemmas that are brought up with such a discussion. No one wants to have their work stolen or illegally distributed. Games are made by a lot of passionate talented people, and it sucks to possibly be affecting the hard-working teams that make and release games. Although, when you're pirating something from a giant company, let's say EA (I definitely did not pirate, burn and sell copies of Need for Speed Underground and many other games to my high school friends, no sir), you're not really taking money from the people that made it, you're taking money from

the giant fucking corporation that EA is. The workers have already been paid for their job. But I didn't have any other options at this point. I'll either buy stacks of burned pirated games for 5 bucks or buy a single imported original boxed copy of a game for 300 Reais (a lot of money). The consoles themselves would easily cost 2000 Reais (an even bigger amount of money if my math is correct). Even while acknowledging my privilege of being able to buy some of the consoles in the first place, pirated games were the only way to consume games in Brazil, at least while I was growing up in the 90s and early 00s. And what a beautiful thing that was, I gotta be honest. It put me in contact with so many weird, amazing, horrible, unique games that I wouldn't otherwise think about playing.

So between fake game boy cartridges and burned PS1, PS2 and PC games, I played a lot of games. By the end of the 90s, PC games started becoming a lot more prevalent in my life. With the influence of my brother, I started playing Half-Life, which eventually led me to play Counter-Strike (CS). As another marker of the evolution of mods, CS, one of the most played games of all time, was originally a mod of Half-Life. The original mod was created in 99, but Valve, seeing its popularity, bought the license for it in 2000. One of the things I remember the most about CS was playing in custom maps and game modes, changing the game's rules with command prompts directly into the terminal, and playing custom servers. The modding side of CS was always very vibrant and had a strong community all around the world. From modding the same game, we also had Team Fortress and Day of Defeat. Team Fortress also became a more recognized original game years later, and Day of Defeat (a World War-themed online shooter) was one of the original inspirations of and held team members for some of the most popular shooters nowadays, developers that would later work on Medal of Honor and Call of Duty.

Between all the shooters that were coming out around the time, I was already getting bored. CS will always be my shooter of choice, but my interest in it didn't last as long as I would've liked. Falling deeper into the internet rabbit hole of the early 00s, and with an ever-growing hunger for more games to play, I discovered emulators and ROMs. Emulators are software designed to imitate consoles, and ROMs are the files containing a game's data. You can safely assume that, in order to obtain both an emulator and a ROM, piracy is also involved. At that time, only older consoles had emulators capable of imitating their system, covering most consoles older than an SNES. Much like I did with the piles of burned games from before, scavenging around and trying the most obscure games for a bunch of different platforms was a favourite pastime activity for me. I understood the concept of modding from CS, but once I found ROM hacks (a game's ROM that is modified), modding games felt more feasible. Even though I never tried to hack a ROM myself, again seeing the community that formed around some of these niche game versions was almost liberating. Sometimes they were hacked to work better using a certain emulator, sometimes there were new levels or new characters, and sometimes they were entirely new games. One of the best examples of a ROM hack (a hack for good, in this case) is the fan translation of [Mother 3](#) (only released in Japan, the last one in the well-regarded [Mother](#) series of games).

Here's where a natural interest in making games started becoming a bit more real. From participating in forums, I started gathering some starting points of what could be possible ways of making games at the time, mainly finding RPG Maker. The engine was a very easy-to-use, plug-and-play type of engine. Almost no coding was required, which was awesome because my dumb ass couldn't figure out that C was a programming language until decades later. As the name suggests, though, it is an engine specialized in creating RPGs. More specifically, RPGs that look exactly like every Japanese RPG (JRPG) that came out around the time (top-down in an overworld-type of view, with turn-based combat scenes). But it was great! It looked legit, it was more about putting your pixel art sprites on the screen and creating

interactions between NPCs, locations, items, and enemies. I made a small RPG! My character could walk around, open a chest, open some doors, and talk to a few NPCs. I guess that's what you do in an RPG, right? Despite this masterpiece, I couldn't wrap my head around more complex interactions, and after bumping my head for a while, I moved on to just creating pixel art. RPG Maker (I believe I used the XP version) was easily accessible and free to use, and it was incredibly eye-opening to be able to make something as small as I did but be able to run my game and play it.

Around the same time, the other engine that was widespread, and certainly an inspiration to this research, was Macromedia Flash, soon to be bought by Adobe (2005, and discontinued in 2020). Flash was a crazy piece of software that can be used for many different things, but focusing on game-making here, it supported scripts written in their own ActionScript language (now nested under the wider JavaScript language). That meant that you could attach them to objects and make images move on the screen. You know… Games. Actual games. The boost in the creation of games because of the platform led to the creation of many "mini-games" websites and places where people could post their games, animations and art. Newgrounds and Miniclip were the two websites that I remember using non-stop. Kongregate was popular, although launched a few years later than the previous ones, so by that time both Newgrounds and Miniclip were very strongly consolidated. Newgrounds was a breeding ground for creatives, some creators that started on the platform continued to make games as their career, and some games that were released for free to be played online on the website found a strong community and enough desire that rewarded ports to the entire active generation of consoles at the time (I'm looking at you, Alien Hominid). I said "was", but Newgrounds is still up and running, has an active user base and still is a destination to publish your games online and connect directly with a community. Miniclip was another big hit, with another (at the time) seemingly infinite catalogue of flash games to choose from and play. I remember distinctly a lot of games on Miniclip to feel and play very polished, whereas Newgrounds felt a lot more DIY with more artistic games. Miniclip was bought by Tencent (one of the first signs of this ridiculous trend of giant companies buying out entire studios) in 2015 and shifted to developing mobile games. Very funny that many years later I'd end up working on a competitor game to Miniclip's biggest success, 8 Ball Pool. Life is crazy.

We're now in the middle of the 00s. With the release of the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3, and clearly including PC games here, online play is only rising in popularity, and we're neck deep in online FPS games, World of Warcraft and AAA blockbusters like GTA and Splinter Cell. Here's where online services were also rising, with a subscription to Xbox Live (XBL) and the PlayStation Network (PSN) being mandatory to play multiplayer games online on each respective console and access their storefronts for digital downloads. Notably, both had a highlight section/category of "smaller" games and via the Xbox Live Arcade (the section of cheaper, smaller, sometimes-independent games inside the XBL) or just the PSN (somewhere in there, big companies are really bad with naming their products, honestly), games made by smaller teams starting piercing the bubble of AAA console games, with some of the best games of the decade being released through these services, like Castle Crashers (made by The Behemoth, the same team behind Alien Hominid mentioned above), Limbo and Bastion. These games were some of the first examples of what we call indie games: smaller games, made by independent studios (hence the nickname), with a focus in development usually aimed at tighter or unique mechanics. Or so that's what we could see. Nowadays, as we'll talk later, the term comes with baggage. Regardless, without the pressure of big teams and high expectations, these games surprised a lot of people showing amazing quality, sometimes considered better than their AAA competitors.

The wave created by indie games became its entity. Indie games were the new hot thing. You know what a really popular topic needs? A documentary, no less! Indie Game: The Movie was released in 2012 and followed the development of three games that became poster children for indie games: Super Meat Boy, Fez and Braid. The documentary is a great showcase of what goes into creating a game and how big of a task it is. Making games is a lot of work. But not all games need to be a massive multiplayer online (MMO) open-world randomized RPG with procedurally generated worlds and a thousand different endings. As I mentioned before, a focus on what makes a game fun, like a unique mechanic, or a different take on a classic game style with a fun twist is enough for a fun game to be created. That meant smaller teams, smaller budgets, and smaller expectations. Seeing these games being made and the audience they garnered made a lot of people see new possibilities in games. All of a sudden, there was space for a lot of different creators to make games.

Again, the trend here clearly shows that it's not about trying to create something that is brand new but platforming something that needs a platform to grow and shift the industry in new directions. It's not like indie games didn't exist before. It's not like Newgrounds, Kongregate and Miniclip didn't have thousands of games published by their creators, or the RPG Maker community before that didn't have some crazy cool games being shared, and the engine or platform that preceded it and so on. Each of these examples could very well fit into punk games in some of their moments of structuring and growing. Many have retained that spirit, but many haven't. But the growth of independent games flagged the space, the willingness and the need to poke a hole through the walled garden of AAA games.

- Cool story, bro

That roughly covers 1990 to 2010-ish. Basically, since I was born. Since what we're looking at here will be focused on the current independent game market and how indie games became what they are now, I needed to give a general industry background before engaging with the readings I've been doing that have influenced my research and to also support the more intricate parts of how I'll start breaking down different areas within game making and the community at large. Of course, there were many other corners of the internet where one could find different communities formed around different engines and other niches. TIGForums has been a strong place for anything independent game-making since 2007 (I recently read the [devlog for Disco Elysium](#) that was posted directly to the forum as they were working on the game), GameMaker has been around since the same year. It's not like the technology for board games has ever been inaccessible, I've made my Magic: The Gathering clone and drew my own board games, definitely a universe in itself. Anyone who grew up wanting to make games will have their own stories of exploring and discovering different entry points into the practice.

Next time, I'll talk about the beginning of the Steam Greenlight program that served as the entryway for another massive wave of developers and independent games and the growth of the platform. A breakdown of the industry will help us understand the current scenario better, and we can start identifying where punk games can be found, some of the movements are and were, pointing at the recent background related to this research, its creators and other references. I was pleased to come across papers by participants of the game-making scene in Toronto as well, which I'll use to direct the light to the local game scene, weaving in my own experience, and how I can start applying punk games around me. Definitely how I can be of more value and become a better participant in the current scene in my city.

As I reach out to different friends around me, all these connections with the background and the possibility of punk games start becoming clearer even for me. I was happy to meet with Unai Cabezon, narrative designer, teacher and co-founder of 13AM Games, to share some thoughts. I choked at defining what punk games are upon request, but Unai's eloquence helps me write here maybe the first definition out of what will sure be a list of definitions (a BINGO card, actually, but more on that later) to help guide the vision of punk games. Much like punk, *if you ask 10 people what punk games are...

Punk games are games where the author wants to say something - that should be a goal of punk games: to make you think. (Something that) makes the player think about the game they played.

Unai Cabezon

Punk's counter-cultural power thrives in thinking outside of the box. Punk games do the same. May it be via the creation method, the topics approached, the mechanics created, the technology used, the story told, or the magical combination of some or all of them, a punk game should make players think about what they just engaged with.

Awesome. Thanks, Unai. ❤️

- Recommendation

We Become What We Behold, by Nicky Case!

-fiaca

11/23/2024

E. Punk Games Zine #05 – More than artgames

Through a mix of historical and personal background, I gave you some insights on things I've identified in my own growing up within games that connected me to game making, the larger audience and community, access to such games and general background to put us on the same page. Much like we did with punk by breaking it down into background and context, and talking about current times and applications, the latter is where we are, here, for games.

Let's set the more contemporary way of how things are happening. We stopped around 2012, when Indie Game: The Movie came out and indie games were on the rise, with great titles being released and a lot of shifts happening in the industry. This has been happening for a while, I'll repeat again and again, but things only really start to evolve once the ones who have money see an opportunity to exploit and profit off of new trends. We can trace independent games all the way back to the early 00s, but platforms like the XBLA and PSN creating space for these games to be distributed on their platform suddenly brought a lot of eyes to smaller games. This landscape was about to be boosted even further with the introduction of the Steam Greenlight program in 2012.

A crash course on Steam: Valve (creators of Half-the Life and Portal series) created an online storefront and publishing platform in 2002, where they initially exclusively distributed their games. Having Steam was necessary to play anything within the Valve catalogue. Over the following decade, Valve acquired a series of studios and games, becoming a powerhouse in the game industry. Not only did they create games that are well considered some of the best of all time (deservingly so, to be fair), but they created the biggest gaming distribution platform, having today a near-monopoly on the gaming market. Valve is a really weird company. In 2005, selected companies were invited to distribute their games on Steam. By 2012, Steam would create Steam Greenlight, a program to make publishing games on Steam more accessible. Throughout the years, Greenlight would be phased out, but the spirit remains through many iterations and improvements, like Steam Direct, Discovery, and Early Access. It is impossible to overstate how giant Valve and Steam are, and the pull they have on how games are made, published, distributed and maintained nowadays. Go on YouTube and choose amongst the thousands of gurus telling you how to publish your game on Steam and walking you through all the steps of a "successful" release campaign. I'll wait.

Over the 2010s, other online platforms akin to Steam would be launched, with major publishers having their own versions (with or without subscriptions required, like Ubisoft Connect, EA Play and Epic Store), and the evolution of the previous platforms mentioned (Xbox/Microsoft now with Gamepass and PlayStation Plus for Sony, especially for consoles) becoming almost mandatory for anyone wanting to play games nowadays. I'd say that's a stretch on my part, but we all know these services are making **bank** with these services, and making some of the publisher's games exclusive to their platform forces players to join these services. Nowadays, if someone wants to make a commercial career making games, a lot of the time it's just a matter of time for them to fall into the beaten path of dealing with these platforms and hoping for the best.

So we can understand the industry to be separated between AAA/AA studios and games (the big companies and studios: Nintendo, Microsoft, Sony, Valve, EA, Ubisoft, and studios they own or directly fund, in case of AA), indie studios (in general, smaller *independent* studios with small budgets making smaller games, often good at finding investment/funding for their *commercial* projects), and *everyone else*. Maybe. Let's go back a bit and start tracing where punk games could fit in this environment.

- Punk games before punk games

To understand games from an artistic perspective, I'll use three papers that raise the question in an important moment of understanding the growth of game development (mid-00s). To start this conversation with my own statement: any questions of "What is art?" or "Are games art?" are meaningless and I consider the "validation" often tied behind such questions valueless. It is a waste of time to engage in such conversations, and we're starting from a point where we understand there's value behind practicing anything that will lead to the making and creation of something new within a field.

- Art games

But who cares what I think, right? That doesn't stop anyone from having these conversations and certainly, I can't go back in time to maybe raise my hand during those talks and ask them to move on. Regardless, these discussions are fundamental to setting up the environment in which the conversation around such mediums and their importance within a larger area of practice and the arts can be situated and connected. Given the way games started, they've always been taken as a commercial endeavour, as we could see with arcade machines and using games as a profitable product. An exhibit held in 1983 called "ARTcade" was the first time games were exhibited inside an art museum, and another exhibition in 1989 called "Hot Circuits: A Video Arcade" also displayed games as works of art, as mentioned by Phillipa Stalker in the paper "Gaming in Art". Talking about games as an art form started amongst developers at the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s, with the creation of the Computer Games Developers Conference (CGDC, shortened to GDC later). The industry is at full speed ahead, though, after the gaming industry crash of 1983, and by the early 90s with the release of new consoles, there was a lot more focus on making profitable games, and the market then was a lot more welcoming to game makers releasing their games on the consoles of the era. By game makers, at that point, we are looking at studios with skills in programming and focused on creating games with arcade-level quality of gameplay loop (a reference at the time, given arcade games needed to be polished to make money).

- Games as Art, by Celia Pearce

In "Games as Art", Celia Pearce connects the growth of game development to the Fluxus art movement of the 60s and 70s (with Yoko Ono and John Lennon being involved in this scene), focusing more on the process of creation of the art than on the results themselves, being interdisciplinary (or intermedia), and open experimentation with different forms of art altogether. Through examples of Marcel Duchamp's career (his handmade chess pieces and performances involving playing chess), Pearce starts the conversation of understanding different ways to engage with games. She goes on to identify the open-source methodology of software development as one of the strongest assets within game development, showing examples of game mods that started breaking away from the norm of what was expected of them and showing alternate ways of participating in the game, both through playing and modding. I especially like Pearce's comments on how games have historically never been taken as a serious art form, despite their potential and complexity, and that in itself attracted a lot of Fluxus artists to create FluxKits and FluxGames: to "create play patterns from found, e.g., "readymade" objects; create kits that can be reproduced easily and sold cheaply" (Pearce, 2006), as it also related to modding. Lastly, Pearce talks about how "digital games have many parallels with Fluxus game art and music practices, they also represent what could be considered evolutionary steps to bring some of the tenets of Fluxus to fruition." (Pearce, 2006)

- Gaming in Art, by Phillipa Jane Stalker

This perspective on art games was a great starting point. I found more on the beginning of art games and how we can start separating art games in "Gaming in Art", by Phillipa Jane Stalker. From the beginning, she separated 4 distinct categories of possible art games: art mod (made via mods), physical manifestation (when players are physically involved in playing the game), Machinima (an artwork that looks like a game, but without player interaction) and 3D Real-Time games. Stalker goes on to also mention Duchamp and the Surrealism movement's use of interactivity in art to subvert the values of engaging with the art itself and define it as a key component of any digital art and breaks down different types and ways to engage digital art using Michael Rush's New Media in Late 20th-Century Art: Computer Art, Digitally Altered Photography, Art of the Worldwide Web, Interactive Digital Art and Virtual Reality. Ultimately, for today's context, I consider such a breakdown a bit obsolete, and the field of game development has used and modified each one of these terms in multiple ways over the years.

A strong point made in the paper is that art games' beginning could be traced to the modding community, and the games that started the idea of art games are "the kinds of games that are significant to those people within the art community that deals in modding. For example, Doom, Quake etc. The online possibilities of many games are exciting for artists. These are the kinds of computer games that are significant in an art game timeline because these are references for many artists in the art/computer game/art game debate. Games such as Myst are games that are always almost brought up in papers regarding the study of games." Remember when I talked about Doom? Stalker categorically analyses SOD, a deconstructed mod of Doom's predecessor Wolfenstein 3D, and Escape from Woomera, another Half-Life mod using the same engine used by Counter-Strike's creators, but it is now an adventure game serving as criticism to the treatment given to imprisoned asylum seekers in Australia.

In the last chapter, Stalker creates the connection between art games, modern art, postmodernism and a few other examples of the intersection of art, digital art, games and other mediums, showing the importance of understanding and situating game-making as an art practice. There are great discussions on how to approach game-making and the relationship between artist and art, also as it connects to the same discussion of that relationship in the growth of modern and postmodern art.

- Arcade Classics Spawn Art? by Tiffany Holmes

In one of the first papers to really explore the intersection between art and games, Holmes talks about the use of retro-style art to bring different meanings to a specific expectation that the art style brings, paying homage to arcade classics while offering something different than what commercial games do. Holmes describes art games as "an interactive work, usually humorous, by a visual artist that does one or more of the following: challenges cultural stereotypes, offers meaningful social or historical critique or tells a story in a novel manner." This is one of the best starting points of what we could consider punk games, *give or take*. "Art games are decidedly noncommercial in that they function primarily as a single-use, or even disposable experiences due to their limited playability." Another great take on the idea of art games, but we only really let ourselves think of it that way because of the arcade inheritance of a needed gameplay loop with infinite replayability. We don't think of movies, often a one-time *consumable*, under the same guides. Is the comparison valid? It doesn't really matter. The value that someone gets out of a movie is personal and untradeable. Same with games.

Most importantly, this paper also shines a light on the beginning of feminist games (which would later be joined by queer games). Games and gaming culture is a horribly, terrifyingly insular community to this

day, and while there are more and more people with diverse backgrounds playing and making games every day, it is still a strongly white straight male-dominated community. On top of that, gaming culture tends to only look inwards and be short-sighted and self-referential, which helps create an environment where new games and designs are also not incentivized, resulting in a lot of the same games, using the same mechanics, a lot of the same points-of-view, games that are heavily nostalgia-based, recreating older games, without much innovation, and inevitably focused on the same target audience. Even though the effectiveness and safety of creating a space like this online for the participation of a selected group of members can be considered "a blinding net utopianism", I argue that we have more tools currently to create safer communities and with stricter moderation for underrepresented groups. Here Holmes mentions a few good examples of games made with women as an audience in mind, like Adventures of Josie True, Sissyfight and The Intruder.

Art games can also be a place to explore and criticize other layers of society. Via games, we can create gameplay around race and class, class hierarchy and stereotypes, focusing on sensitive issues that otherwise would have no place in a commercial game production scenario (much like we could see with Escape from Woomera). Pointing to the possibility of also designing games as art installations, Holmes finishes her foundational paper on art games by saying "It is our responsibility as artists to "break out" our software design abilities to continue to refine, via formal structure and cultural commentary, the realm of game architecture to create new interactive structures for expression." (Holmes, 2003)

- Political games

As I mentioned before, these websites were also some of the earlier signs of DIY punk being applied to game-making and distribution. Via online platforms, now anyone making games could actually host their creations on these websites and share them with their audience. Parsing through all the titles on such websites was not an easy task, often the rankings and popular releases took over the homepage and influenced most peoples' choices. Such an open space also served to post games with a more political tone. I was recently reminded of what I can possibly say was the first punk game I actually played, The McDonald's Videogame, by Molleindustria. Ever wondered how fast food chains work? It's pretty fucked up, even if the game is a very cute version of it. I remember specifically going to Kongregate to play this game. Even McDonald's commenting "We're not affiliated with this game whatsoever" was hilarious. Paolo Pedercini, the game maker behind the game, focuses on making socio-political games often with strong criticism of major issues or events. He positions Molleindustria as "A project of reappropriation of video games; A call for the radicalization of popular culture." Through short experimental games, he has explored labour alienation, 9/11, the Catholic Church's pedophilia adventures and other super fun topics that the AAA industry (or any studios focused on commercial games) wouldn't touch with a 100ft. pole. Pedercini's latest game can be found at the bottom of this zine.

In the Molleindustria Manifesto, Pedercini creates an interesting parallel by mentioning the film industry: "When the Nouvelle Vague critics got sick of bashing the film industry from the pages of the Cahier du Cinema, they began to make their own films, with the limited means at their disposal." That's exactly the idea: games suck now. We can find other artistic fields that have, in the past, stagnated and underwent movements that shook their structure and provided a space for change. Modernism, post-modernism, Surrealism, and Dadaism as general art movements were all criticized to no end. Punk (!), metal, jazz, and rap are music styles all demonized at some point by the music industry (still are to this day, let's be honest). French new wave movies, Cinema Novo and Marginal in Brazil, German expressionist movies or

the Cinema of Transgression in New York all broke the expectations of storytelling in cinema. The videogame industry is still very young (art and music can be dated to tens of thousands of years ago, the camera obscura, a bit younger, was discovered around 2500 years ago, with photography being invented in the 1800s) and may not have had the time to create movements that impact the way people consume it. It was also immediately monetized, without having time to be understood as an art form before being a business model or profitable venture. There's a lot of space to still be created and explored in games, and it's ever-expanding with tech advancements and new platforms every day.

The McDonald's Videogame was one of the first games that I remember looking at and thinking that games could be a medium for critical expression. Of course, there were some interesting games around that could teach you to demonstrate different political angles, different outcomes for varied historical events and periods (Civilization, Age of Empires), or that influenced your view on your surroundings on multiple levels (SimCity, Cities Skylines and urban planning). Games are a perfect platform to engage with and learn complex topics, especially when they are well-designed. One game that I found different sources pointing to is Balance of Power. A 1985 game was released for different platforms that put the player in the control of either the US or the USSR during the Cold War, and the main objective was to avoid a nuclear war. Through diplomacy and making careful moves, being aware of the other nations in the world and de-escalating different issues that pop up over time, the player has to be strategic in how to approach each turn, which is a year of in-game time. If the player does, in fact, trigger a nuclear war, the game explicitly condemns it, showing a black screen saying "You have ignited a nuclear war. And no, there is no animated display of a mushroom cloud with parts of bodies flying through the air. We do not reward failure."

Figure 5: Fail screen of Balance of Power (1985)

My surprise is that this game was made by the founder of the Game Developers Conference (GDC), Chris Crawford. GDC is, today, the biggest conference for developers in the world. There have been many, and there are still others around the world with varying focus, but even since I started my career in game making (2014), attending the conference to network and show your game to the public is pretty much the dream of every independent game maker, it almost feels like a fetish. I was surprised to discover that Crawford, after starting the conference from his living room with the help of a few other developers and designers, tried to create GDC as a free and accessible space for game makers to push the boundaries of what the field of games could achieve. Crawford has always been very vocal about his discontent with the highly commercial focus of the games industry, and after a lot of turmoil on the goals of GDC as a whole (together with a lot of changes in structure and organization), he [was kicked from being chairman of the conference](). He has since removed himself from the games industry and game development almost entirely, focusing on the development of his interactive storytelling engine. Crawford is probably one of the very first people I could find who focused on pushing games as an art form, especially considering the growth and profitability of the industry when he released Balance of Power (1985).

- [Rise of the Videogame Zinesters, by Anna Anthropy]()

Bringing the timeline to a more contemporary side of things, in Rise of the Videogame Zinesters, Anna Anthropy touches on a lot of the same points that cross with this very *punk games* idea. In this seminal book for independent game makers for the last decade, Anthropy talks about the homogeneity of the current industry (I use "current" since it is still valid to this day, although I'll touch on more recent developments later), saying how "mostly, videogames are about men shooting men in the face." Much like I mentioned before, Anthropy also reinforces that "videogames as they're commonly conceived today both come from and contain one perspective" (Anthropy, 2012). Even though the book was published in 2012 and things have improved since, a lot of the same problems still plague the space. What we can call "industry" most likely will never really have any incentive to change their ways, thinking mainly in profitability, the numbers continue to go up. "Since the industry sees itself as ubiquitous–as the only possible means of creating games–it feels no need to change itself for the benefit of either its employees or its art", Anthropy affirms.

Through calls to think differently about game design, to motivate new creators to enter the space and for current players to also see what the field can provide in terms of new experiences and unique perspectives, Anthropy uses her own designs and dedicates entire sections of the book to show accessible tools for game making and unique games often developed by a single person or a small team, and small enough with a focused mechanic for players and readers to possibly even think about how they were made and that making games is not impossible. Finding this book amongst so many others that give examples, alternatives, directions and cues on how to rethink game-making helped me understand that my focus could go not only into making my own games and suggesting my ideals through them, but to shift focus on providing other parts that game making is missing from DIY punk. There are a lot of resources out there on how to make games already, but DIY punk should provide not only assistance on learning and creating art but also in how to support and participate within a bigger community. We need to think about how to act within a gaming scene, how to not only be game makers, but cultural producers to elevate our peers, like punk and punk bands do within a local scene.

Through digital distribution, platforms to catapult often ignored voices do become the main spaces where game makers from varied backgrounds can show their games on. We could go back to

Kongregate, Miniclip and Newgrounds (which Anthropy touches on how Tom Fulp, its creator, began with it via zine when he was thirteen years old) and again reiterate the importance of having these spaces. Since the book was published though, a new platform was created and is showing to be the preferred place for game makers to distribute their games on: itch.io. Much like the aforementioned ones, itch.io lets people post their own games: any type of games: tabletop, card games, playable online, download only, with the option to make it free, pay-what-you-can/donation or for a price, with the most accessible and lowest service fee charges for hosting the games on their website of 10%, the lowest of any online distribution platform today, or other forms of art as well (you can find music, books, comics, experimental software and others), becoming a fast growing place for independent creators. Itch.io also provides tools for anyone to organize a Game Jam, post resources, engines and other software for game making, a space to create devlogs, and a forum for the community. A one-stop shop for any independent game maker.

One of Anthropy's most important games, [Dys4ia](#), which I have mentioned in the past, is one of the best examples of autobiographical storytelling through games touching on her experiences overcoming gender dysphoria and undergoing hormone replacement therapy. The experience is beautiful and very educational to be able to see the experience from her own eyes, even though it's deeply personal and traumatic. She describes her relationship with the game itself in a [somewhat recent devlog](#). Personally, one of her creations that deeply touched me is [Queers in Love at the End of the World](#). You have 10 seconds to enjoy the end of the world together with your love. Go.

Rise of the Videogame Zinesters is a great push to just go make a game. In a short interview for the never-released documentary [You Meet the Nicest People Making Videogames](#), she says "I want more people who aren't saying what I've already heard. I want more people making games" (Anthropy, 2010) That's exactly what I want. More people making games is the way to put these games in front of others who need to know that there is an alternative, that there are different ways of thinking about game making, and that what the general audience understands about games is but an extremely thin layer and a very, very loud minority that holds the "industry" in a chokehold. "Every game that you and I make right now–every five-minute story (...)–makes the boundaries of our art form (and it is ours) larger" (Anthropy, 2012).

Around the same moment that the book came out is where this fun new category of games called independent games, or Indie Games for short, forked, in a way. I understand Indie Game: The Movie, as cited before, as the fire for the indie game scene to blow out of proportion. Given the popularity, though, it was easy to see that making indie games was the new goose that laid the golden eggs. The uniqueness, creativity, style, and, through that, commercial success, that oozed from indie games has tried to be captured relentlessly by smaller creators and AAA studios ever since. Some manage to do it, but many fall flat. The problem is that if games made independently, both personal games and other commercially-focused games, could fit within indie games, what does it even mean? If Indie Games are about showing the possibility of making small games, on smaller teams or *one-person shows*, with personality and using its production limitations as its strength (lack of budget, lack of skill, lack of everything else pushed by the industry), having now gotten to a point where studios are calling themselves III (a play on AAA games, but "independent") sounds absurd. After years of huge indie successes hitting the market, now there's an aesthetic and a marketability expectation around games called "indie games". Indie games became an idea of trying to hit the jackpot: "Let's try to replicate an "original"-style to sell and reach a different audience." That's not to say there aren't good, original indie

games, but that is absolutely to say that when Microsoft or Tencent or NetEase hoard smaller studios to capitalize on their originality, or opportunists see this as nothing more than an opening to try and make some money, we're not doing anything else other than accepting that being independent now means nothing but a cute title.

The closest I got from the combination of the words "punk" and "games", as I looked for other spaces, other creators, and a scene that assimilated to the idea of this research, I found an article called, look at that, "Punk Games", written in 2015 by Zoë Quinn, another prominent voice in game making. Quinn, alongside other strong feminist voices in game making, was targeted in a harassment campaign called Gamergate in 2014, where, in short, a bunch of sexist manbabies couldn't handle the thought of games also being a medium where diversity, feminism, politics and unique voices could also participate in. To not be too light with something that resulted in rape and death threats being sent to a few creators in the space, disrupting entire families and careers, and resulting in an FBI investigation that (surprise surprise) didn't really do much at all, and to also not deviate too much from the focus of this research, this is a prime example of why we need more people making games, more opportunities to show aspiring game makers there's more than one way of thinking about games and game design, and why we need a space to showcase those games to a wider audience. Quinn starts the article by saying "It's no secret independent game makers are feeling the ever-increasing pull these days between making art and making rent. What's more, being an "indie" — if that even means anything anymore — and publishing on community-driven digital platforms can put you directly in the crosshairs of an increasingly-hostile online audience. Believe me, I'd know" (Quinn, 2015).

Quinn proposes Altgames as a very close parallel to what I'm proposing here with Punk Games, although I intend to go deeper and connect even more with my experience with punk. Reading the article, and seeing so many of the examples that I have already mentioned in the past and other creators in the space also joining on the same way of thinking, it was almost as if I found some of my own. The issue now is that, upon looking for altgames, besides a category on itch.io, it doesn't seem like any of the creators mentioned in the article, nor other creators in the space, are talking about or actively engaging with the idea. Most online records show posts from around the same time of the article, not much more.

One well-known engine/platform for game-making that is free and open-source, easily accessible and beginner-friendly is Twine. In both Anthropy's book and Quinn's article, as well as in multiple different readings, Twine is usually the first engine mentioned and recommended as a first step into game-making. The engine is focused more on narrative adventure games and interactive storytelling, and its power relies on its nimbleness in providing one of the fastest idea-to-playable game tracks. One of the first games I had to design when going to game design school was a *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*-inspired adventure where the player was tasked to track down one of Jimi Hendrix's "magical" guitars. It was a transformative experience to be able to quickly put something together and share it with friends and teachers. One of the games being created for this research also went through a few prototype iterations on Twine as a proof-of-concept. Narrative-driven games are a major community in game development and one of the places where we can see impactful experiences, stories and voices being shown to the world, and where I can identify a lot of punk games being made.

Game Jams tend to be another great space for free experimentation and a punk attitude towards making games. Game Jams are weekend-long events where a theme is proposed at the beginning of the event

(usually on a Friday), and participants have to make a game over the course of the next 2 days and showcase their games to other game makers on Sunday. Themes, briefings and length vary, but the idea is always the same: start from scratch, use whatever you can, and take a game. I've participated in a few game jams over the years and showing yourself that making a game over a weekend is possible is pretty transformative. There have been lots of games that started as game jam games, tight in scope, focusing on the main features (whether that may be mechanics, narrative, or a simple loop), getting it as close to playable as possible, that then went on to become full releases.

So I realized my big gripe with games is that the majority of what is widespread and considered popular, definitely the ones that get put in digital storefronts, are just super fucking boring. Or have been, mostly. Let's say that is an effect on getting older? Perhaps. But it's not any less of an interesting medium that is full of space for exploration and all sorts of weird things, and yet we get rehashed ideas and half-baked copies from a lot of game makers. You can make so many different sounds and experiment with so many unique tools for making music. You can do exactly the same with games, even more so(!) if I let myself be too obvious. And not to say that there's not enough people making cool shit out there (which, given contexts, may also be true), but definitely to say that there's a lack of space for these really cool and unique little experiments and weird games made by even more awesome game makers to be shown and shared with an audience. An audience that may also be in need of exposure to those types of games and game-making possibilities. This is where we are after the aforementioned.

- Punk Playthings, by Sean Taylor and Chris Lowthorpe

Sean Taylor and Chris Lowthorpe were among the team that launched the first Grand Theft Auto in 1997, working at DMA (later acquired by Take-Two Interactive and renamed Rockstar North). The two wrote Punk Playthings, a nice proposal on approaching game-making from different perspectives, proposing a series of *provocations* to shift game makers thinking. The book consists of a lot of small sections, often comparing and bringing references to unique design thinking from multiple creators, seeking examples from different fields. It is written in a very optimistic tone, really enticing game makers to push the boundaries and take risks in game development, and that risk-taking is what often leads to finding your voice, personality, style and preferred methods of making games, leading to the natural honing of one's skills.

I was very excited to read this book when a friend first recommended it to me, knowing the theme of this research. The chapters vary wildly in topics, always related to game-making and throwing yourself into the craft. Using examples from areas outside of game development touches exactly on an issue I have talked about before, with gaming culture and game-making still very insular. But it didn't take me long to get a really weird feeling about this book and the suggestions the authors were making. Starting early in the book, they talk about an important topic we just cannot escape living in this deeply-rooted capitalist world we live in: money.

I'm not looking away from the reality that for anyone to make a career out of making games, or for anyone to make a career out of absolutely anything and be able to work with what one wants to, making enough money to be able to feed oneself and have a roof above their head should be the bare minimum. It is not the world we live in, unfortunately, and the economic ups and downs across the world make this increasingly difficult year after year. Art for art's sake, in today's context, is utopic. They start with a thought that I'd like to agree with, saying "Real independents can't afford to ignore making money because it doesn't fit an indie identity. Do that and you won't be independent for long. If you

want to be in the business of making games, you need to act like it. There is nothing wrong with making money so you can make better, more creative, more radical games. But there is everything wrong with a self-limiting identity that either ignores or devalues the realities of business in an attempt to celebrate itself." But after quoting musician Jim Reid, they take a wild turn saying "The lesson is: if you want to be truly independent, forget transient regard from the uniformed worthies; sustained popular adoration is far more liberating." Wait, what? I understand having an audience is needed to have a sustainable practice, but jumping to the *need* for popularity (even using the word adoration rubs me the wrong way) raised a red flag for me.

I had this realization when I was younger when reflecting about the word and the feeling of being a "sellout". "*So and so* band signed to a major label, *SELLOUTS!*" When thinking of one of my favourite Brazilian hardcore bands, Dead Fish, after they signed to a label distributed by Universal Music Group, it really hit me: artists have the right to sell their art, and they have the right to seek a sustainable living doing so. There are really bad ways of doing that, but there are (dare I say) ethical ways of doing it as well. A relentless chase for connection to a wider audience and an exclusive focus on growth and profitability is definitely not the punk way to do it. How I want to focus this subject within punk games is in the creation of having a sustainable way of doing it. There are great examples of that already. Summer Eternal, mentioned in a past zine, is a great attempt at restructuring how game studios work. Digital distribution and crowdfunding platforms like [Patreon](#) also made collectives like [Sokpop](#) and [PUNKCAKE](#) [Delicieux](#), making one new game every month, has a flat studio structure and is funded between the sale of their games and their supporters on Patreon. Worker-owned studio cooperatives like [KO_OP](#) and [Motion Twin](#) are another great alternative to steer away from the classic hierarchical structure of incorporated game studios. Knowing that there are alternatives that don't require game makers to invest a lot of their money upfront can take a lot of that weight off their shoulders. Focusing so much (or exclusively) on the commercialization of games is actively working against game makers. The best idea from the book is what I'll truly take and repeat to everyone: "Start a band, not a business."

Unfortunately, there are so many moments where the authors seem to contradict themselves and appear to be incredibly tone-deaf, and definitely have nothing to do with punk. They complain about the "just make it" approach that a lot of game makers and educators (myself included) pass forward to anyone wanting to make games, comparing it to "building a bridge without measuring the gap. You end up with something nobody wants." Making is a process of thinking just as much as thinking is also a process of making, you cannot have one without the other. By making, one can finally understand their thoughts and can find how they'll be able to translate their thoughts and ideas. Thought paralysis is one of the main reasons I see game-making enthusiasts and students get freaked out and stop making games altogether. It seems like they just ignore the fact that each person, and art form for that matter, has their own way of engaging and being engaged with during each one's creative process, and that's what lets different folks come from different areas, use different tools, and apply different thinking to game making.

I want to connect to this book so much. Some ideas and ideals are there, and it's great to be able to read them being put in such a wide context. "Why do most of us now exist only in one domain or culture? How did we arrive at a point where a whole body of knowledge is closed to us and our endeavours?"- when they talk about the "two culture" theory, where the sciences and the arts were split into two different streams of education, "it became acceptable for specialists in one culture to be ignorant of issues in the other." Also talking about the decentralization and deindustrialization of the sector and

disregard of the corporate structure, usually taken as necessary for a studio to be creditable, aligns well with the new platforms and online distribution that we've already gone through. But even though the endpoint is positive and approaches how to act in an unpredictable world, they use a lot of military parallels and tactics that are pretty fucking weird at the very best, especially in a book carrying the punk name. I guess if you really do ask 10 people what punk is you will def–*nah*, that's downright against what punk is about. Remember, we're talking about a movement that was created in reaction to global economic crises in a post-war world. It seems like they are, much like the people who think punk is just a fashion style, using punk to embellish their ideas. Actually, that's exactly what it is.

This book can serve as a great starting point for anyone looking for a bit of inspiration on how to shift some of their thoughts and how one can understand games. But I'd rather poke my eyes out with a power drill than see, in a book called **Punk** Playthings, a quote from the one and only Ronald Reagan?! Is this a joke? It reminded me a lot of a book I read growing up, Paul Arden's It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want To Be. Arden acted as the Executive Creative Director of Saatchi and Saatchi, one of the most successful ad agencies during the 70s and 80s. It was a great read when developing my creative senses and I used the book a few times to motivate myself to try different things in my own creative practice, but in retrospect, it also feels a bit off to take advice from someone who had the capitalist backing of a major agency. Risk-taking doesn't exist when you're rich. For Punk Playthings, even though I respect the authors' backgrounds and work, and I recognize the value it has in proposing new ideas and motivating game makers to break the mold and focus on what makes their ideas special, using punk in the title without a proper punk context, and using Quentin Tarantino, Steve Jobs and Malcolm McLaren as examples to "punk thinking" lacks the substance the ideals took so long to conquer and establish.

- Bye

Next time we'll talk about the community that most assimilates with punk games and analyze, with an up-to-date look at the industry, "why we should think beyond commercial game production" (Keogh, 2023).

As always, if there are any ideas here that resonate with anyone, let's start a conversation. Did any of this make you question or think in any way and you'd like to participate with some writing? Reach out. Are you in Toronto and have/made/are making a game that aligns with this? Please send it over, and we can start putting some games together for a punk games event. We'll figure something out. We just have to get together.

-fiaca

11/29/2024

- Recommendation

The New York Times Simulator, by Molleindustria.

F. Punk Games Zine #06 – Destroy the industry

Is this making any sense?

Is there such a thing as giving too much background on something? ...Probably. I just feel a little like a broken record at this point. Anyhow, now that we're getting closer to the application of DIY punk in game making, there are two last references I wanted to talk about that will also influence how to think about that intersection.

I can only really find it ironic how gaming culture came to the point that it is. The industry's commercial-focused beginnings make sense, the nerds taking over and making all these silly games and using their coding magic to create unique expansive worlds is awesome, but the long spiralling into a community known for either being "for kids" or incredibly toxic and bigoted is nothing but crazy to me. Games, the space that lets anyone be anything and everything they want, free of the shackles of reality, can be this incredibly hostile place for creativity, self-expression and even escapism.

It took me longer than I'd like to admit, but when I understood the growth of feminist and queer games, creators bringing their personal experiences in beautiful playable metaphors on incredibly complicated topics, as a direct result of them growing up playing games where they could act however they felt more comfortable, away from the judgement and politics of the outside world, everything made sense. Do you want to play as a female-looking character? Go for it. Do you connect with the way this anthropomorphized character looks and feels? Great that they could use these examples to feel a certain way. So no surprise that one of the biggest communities that pushed the creation of games outside of the commercial norms, talking about deeper feelings and stories in a way that studios would never do, is queer and feminist games.

In no way would I ever want punk games as an idea and ideal, as my future way of perceiving games, community creation and connection to other game makers, to ignore, replace, or invalidate queer games and game makers. If I'm doing my job correctly, all of this is done to strengthen marginalized and often disrespected voices, give more creators a way into thinking outside of the norms and find their own identity as game makers. Much the same way that punk music and scenes, even with all of its own issues, also showed and provided an expansion of what music could be perceived as, that way being the space where the Riot Grrrl movement, QueerCore and many other independent movements were created. This time it's the other way around: I'm using queer games as the place of birth for punk games instead, being directly inspired by their ways of disrupting the system and destroying what one can consider what a game is. I want punk games to bridge all positions of game making outside of industry norms, and a safe space where anyone can showcase their games and grow a local game making community together.

- ### The Queer Games Avant-Garde, by Bonnie Ruberg

The underrepresentation of women, minorities and marginalized groups in media is just sad. The heteronormativity reinforced by the ones in positions of power to push this narrative through different forms of media is impossible to deny. Women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ folks and anyone from marginalized cultures and groups are not only underrepresented but very often used as token characters or crutches to a specific narrative, often undervaluing those characters in their specific media (films, series and games). As Ruberg affirms in the first chapter of The Queer Games Avant-Garde, "despite the fact that women, queer people, people of colour, and others who are often perceived as "different" have

been playing and making video games for decades, games and the cultures that surround them have a long history of underrepresenting, misrepresenting, and at times fostering open hostility toward those who do not fit the image of the white, straight, cisgender, male" (Ruberg, 2018). (Again, I'm not blind to my own privileges fitting into this profile. Although my upbringing taught me that this heteronormativity is detrimental to free thinking.) These roots are so deeply fixed in current forms of entertainment that exists tests to showcase how much these pieces of media are completely ignoring or misrepresenting minority groups, such as the [Bechdel Test](#) for female-presenting characters in film; the [Vito Russo Test](#) for LGBTQ+ characters; or the [Riz Test](#) for representation of Muslim characters.

I have been using the term "game maker" instead of developer or designer, since the other terms carry meaning and weight to them that are intrinsically connected to the concept of the game industry as a whole, as that's a choice derived from Brendan Keogh's book, the next one on our list. "Game maker" is more encompassing and does not designate any specific field for the production and distribution of games, and focuses on the making process, which is exactly the point that I want to make with punk games. More on that later. That is also to say that Ruberg's use of the signifier "queer/queerness" as "both the identities of LGBTQ people and more conceptual notions of non-heteronormativity", even though not everyone interviewed identified as such. This angle also aligns well with punk games, where the breaking of the structured thought of the game making field is fundamental.

By conducting interviews with 22 queer game makers, Ruberg draws a clear picture of what she calls the queer games avant-garde: a general force pushing the making of queer games and boosting queer voices on multiple different fronts. Through talking directly to game makers about various topics, Ruberg touches on pretty much all points that I'm talking about here from a DIY punk perspective but within the queer games community, from how to approach game design from a queer perspective, how to use game design in unique ways to bring queerness to their game making, creating a community of inclusivity through queer games and even creating tabletop queer games, shifting the focus away from digital play.

It's undeniable also that given the personal nature of queer experiences, highlighted in Ruberg's interviews with queer and trans folks, a lot of these games have an inherent political way of existing in the world and focus on applying their perspective in different levels in game making. That results in a lot of narrative games, for example, made using Twine and other narrative design tools. Not limited to that, though, queer game makers also use of abstraction and resignifying symbols and mechanics to bring queerness to games, as exemplified by Avery Alder, one of the interviewees, on their game [Monsterhearts](#), "a game where you play as teenagers who are contending with two kinds of monstrosity. The first is literal monstrosity. Your character is a vampire or a werewolf or a witch or a fairy. The second is metaphorical monstrosity, where you feel shame and alienation. Those feelings might stem from class or race, but the central topic of the game is queerness" (Alder, 2017). For Ruberg, "Alder's work has been influential for her groundbreaking claims about what she calls "structural queerness": the idea that game mechanics themselves can be queer" (Ruberg, 2018).

Not surprising either that queer game makers use the movements also mentioned previously, although Ruberg affirms "While there are many echoes between these earlier moments and the queer games avant-garde, the queer indie games discussed in this book also bring something new and crucial to avant-garde game-making. They bring queerness: queer identities, queer politics, queer joy, queer pain, queer resistance, queer worlds of play." And that even though these inspirations and connections put queer

games in the avant-garde of the game making field, there are a lot of other aspects highlighted by queer game making and how they are " by nature, a hybrid creative-critical practice, informed at times by queer and feminist theory and at other times by concepts of queerness that emerge directly from the body" (Ruberg, 2018).

I find there is a constant connection trying to be made and validated throughout the book though, which is how much queer games are influencing the overall industry, or even the question of if queer game makers seek the validation of breaking into a wider audience. Although she says "that the queer games avant-garde, taken as a whole, is not interested in seeking approval from the art world for its own sake", its "approval is one potential tool for supporting queer creators and their subversive work" (Ruberg, 2018). Here's where I'd also like to point out that the perspective on punk games is the rejection of the industry, finding strength, sustainability and longevity through a focused community instead of garnering a wider audience. Most queer games I've seen and played, and even based on Ruberg's interviews, give me the same sense I'm talking about, in the book the weaving of the larger game industry in the discussion happens more often than I'd have liked to see. Let's just leave the mainstream behind, where it will always be.

From the punk games view, thinking of the game industry as a whole feels like punching the edge of a knife, ultimately wasting energy. Why try to change of something that doesn't want to change? It needs the change, but it's also controlled by billionaires. There's no way to try and change that from the top unless all these companies magically go bankrupt all of a sudden. Honestly, as much as sometimes I'd love to see the world burn, I wanna make sure I throw a big disclaimer here to tone myself down and not come across as "BURN ALL GAMES!!1" and that I love my FIFA (I'm Brazilian, I don't have a choice) and CS from time to time. I love even more to discover awesome indie titles like [Children of the Sun](), [art of rally]() or [Tactical Breach Wizards](). I don't even attach myself to genres, all games are awesome. And the people who make them should be getting much more out of their careers than they currently are, some of the most talented and creative people in the whole world. If people want to work for a AAA company, they should absolutely go for it. Just know that by understanding AAA/commercial games as the only way of making/supporting/playing games, you might be inadvertently voting for the [Leopard's Eating People's Faces Party](). Or very advertently, who knows. That idea can be applied in any cultural field, for that matter. That's alienation. What we need is something new, starting from the bottom, re-educating the understanding of games to new game enjoyers. Punk games are the underground of games. And the underground never needed "the industry" in the first place.

The last part I'd like to outline is the last chapter of the book, where Ruberg interviews cultural producers engaging directly with the community within queer games. In the first interview of the chapter, I was surprised to read an actual mention of the punk scene! Even though it was shitting on it. I kid. Sarah Schoemann, former organizer of the Different Games Conference (at the time of this writing, it seems like the collective is inactive. The last event recorded was in 2017 at OCADU in Toronto, with the most recent update being about their participation at GDC 2023), mentions "the way that punk scenes, in general, tend to be white and tend to be male", much like the "internalized sexism of games and computer culture. The worst parts of nerd culture were being imported into the worst parts of the DIY scene" (Schoemann, 2017). And she's not wrong, obviously. Again, I'm not blind to the problems of the punk scene, I have participated in punk scenes where I could see these same issues. But it takes two extra seconds of thinking to see how alienated and self-indulgent these spaces are. Unfortunately, a lot of participants in such scenes never had the opportunity to see how open and diverse participation in a

community directly strengthens *everything* about it. Maybe this comes out as a cheap argument given this interlocutor, but hopefully, the actions speak louder than my words here and in the future. Like Schoemann also says "I also feel incredibly self-conscious as a white woman who presents as cis being the leader of a diversity conference. It has not gotten past me that that's problematic. I think about that a lot: whether it makes sense for me to occupy this position. On the other hand, doing the labor of organizing the conference is something I can contribute" (Schoemann, 2017).

That's where I am with DIY punk and punk games. Create a space to value and display games by as many game makers, from as many backgrounds as possible. I want my peers, my friends, and my students to have a better outlook on what it means to be a game maker, and how they can engage with game making in ways that are not widely shown. The Different Games Conference was very refreshing to find, unfortunately, I'm a bit too late though. But I'll talk more about the community-making aspect that I'm bringing to this research at a later stage.

So there's a lot of the same ethos we can find in queer games that overlap with how I'm applying my experience with DIY punk in punk games. Even though Ruberg's approach is broad in including more than queer creators for queer games, saying "the work of the queer games avant-garde represents far more than video games as we already know them with a rainbow veneer", that "these games that disrupt the status quo, enact resistance, and use play to explore new ways of inhabiting difference", and how "queerness and video games share a common ethos, a longing to explore alternative ways of being", there are many other ways of making games that we could embrace within punk games that wouldn't necessarily fit or be easily approached from a queer games perspective.

But the book that really fucked me up, one of the best overviews on today's current issues on the gaming industry at large, touching on different facets of game making at different levels, is Brendan Keogh's The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist. Keogh writes a thorough analysis, performing interviews and a historical assessment of his regional scene in Australia, and brings a proper look at the levels in which game makers engage with their craft and their field of work. It also serves as a great "zoom-out", understanding what we call "the industry" as what it is: a narrow slice of how games are made.

- The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist, by Brendan Keogh

Is there a better title for a book?

Keogh starts by highlighting that even though video game production (to keep within the standards of this research, video game production == game making) as an industrialized field has been "well articulated, the ways in which video game production is cultural production, remains underexamined" (Keogh, 2023). Citing Casey O'Donnell's This is Not a Software Industry "video game production viewed as an art world, rather than an 'industry' constructs a much more critical and nuanced perspective" (O'Donnell, 2012), also reinforcing how the industry, being the understood dominant way of game making, ensure the delegitimization of any non-dominant position within the field (Keogh, 2023).

As we talked about punk previously, game making also suffers from much of the same commodification by a larger economic field to profit from the emerging, and often informal and noncommercial, practices within game making. "The story of media economies - and indeed cultural production - is a Möbius strip of informal practices circumventing or emerging beyond the regulations of the formal economy, and the formal media economies adapting to, co-opting, and incorporating informal practices in turn" (Keogh,

2023). Parasites! Again, the similarities are uncanny! No, they're not. Don't be naive. Just as it happened to punk, the powers that be (capitalism) feed off innovative marginalized fields and use them to profit at the same time as they ignore or, worse, destroy those fields altogether. A good example of this is AAA studios buying independent, smaller creators or studios entirely, just to shut them down a few years later after their output doesn't align with their owner's unquenchable juggernaut. Microsoft shutting down Arkane Austin and Tango Gameworks, just for the latter to be bought once again by another major studio, Krafton (it's literally a joke at this point), or EA shutting down Ridgeline Games are some recent examples. As I've been also acknowledging so far, "independent videogame production existed long before the increased visibility and necessity of indie development", existing "in the shadows of the aggressively formalized field", the same field that "obscures all the other forms of (game making) that are unable to speak directly to the most dominant commercial positions" (Keogh, 2023).

Original and creative game making forms are being appropriated by the larger industry, and game makers and prospective workers trying to get into the industry are being exploited as well. It's been known for the longest time, and not only since pop culture absolutely took over the world, but the deep connection that players (readers, watchers, writers) create with favourite games, stories and characters, turning that passion naturally into a professional pursuit. Which, in turn, surprise surprise, lead to industry practices "where individual workers are asked to be motivated by their *drive* and their *passion* for the task rather than an uncouth desire for adequate pay and entitlements". As any **art** practice that ever existed, interestingly enough. Any attempt to rely on your skills in game making as a career can only lead to the industry, delegitimizing any other approach in pursuing game making in other sustainable ways. But like in any other medium, there are sustainable ways of doing it, and that is not communicated as valid for game makers in today's landscape.

Even though educators have appeared and participated in previous readings, here we have a much closer analysis of what game making education entails, and some of the questions and challenges that come with formal education in such a field. Keogh does a great job at talking to educators directly and analyzing how schools market their courses on game making (even though it's locally to Australia, this can be seen in multiple schools across the world) and how that can also just add more to the reinforcement of the view of an industry and focusing on commercial games, as well as how they target a specific type of "gamer", even though there's often little overlap between liking games and wanting to make games. That is not always the case, but it's undeniable there's a bias on these strategies. As a teacher, and using my outlook on things (this research being an example, I hope), it's hard to not see the gears grinding and spitting out students into this structured industry that is highly competitive, unbalanced and extremely exploitative of game makers' passion just to feed the machine. Worse even that the non-commercial route is not even considered to be highlighted as an alternative. Other artists acting in other mediums understand the different possible career paths within a certain set of skills, but game makers can only opt for a commercial approach. I'd like to quote Keogh directly in his interview with Aaron Williams, a teacher from Brisbane, on how students going into game making have a shocking misconception of the process and effort that making games requires, something I also see:

Williams explained the challenges of getting students to think of their own practice in this way, in part because of the popular narratives surrounding videogames that emphasize a creator's eventual commercial success and not the extensive noncommercial work that preceded it:

The thing that always shits me when I hear people talk about Super Meat Boy and talk about the significance of Super Meat Boy is, like, you're negating the fact that Ed McMillan (one of the developers of Super Meat Boy) made 30 to 50 things beforehand that were all made for nothing, released for free, and had very little attention in the beginning. . . . But I don't think we go through those stories, I don't think we look at those small, weird, experimental trash art games that developers start off with. That you have to start off with. . . . You start off making these small, weird ideas that go nowhere and do very little but (are) where you identify who you are and what you want to make so that you're prepared to tackle that larger project, so that you can put more stringent restrictions on what your bar of quality is. But you need to do the work. You need to put in the effort to do small things, to throw shit at the wall and see what sticks, before you can reach that point. But I don't think we communicate that as an industry globally. As an industry I don't think we communicate that there is a starting point for this.

The concept of the starting point is so incredibly important here. Somehow when I started my journey to get anywhere near game making, there were 2 options of game design programs in São Paulo and no real perspective of a space where I would be able to distribute my own games. If I wanted to work in the industry, I needed to approach it by developing a specialized skill set. I chose graphic design because anything else felt unachievable. I don't regret my decisions, I'm also not saying that such a community didn't exist at all. I later met and understood that game makers really came from an engineering background, and games didn't really reach "art school" levels. *Which is dumb, and stupid*, and I sound like a dumb art school kid. Should there be a space and wider community to understand a friendlier approach to game making, maybe I'd have picked up some tutorials and made my first game earlier. But there was hardly a punk way to approach game making in a country that is (was) only seen as a *consumer market*. I haven't been in contact with any information on a possible Brazilian game making scene, unfortunately, so maybe the outlook has changed and I'm not aware. So no further talking about a scene I'm not a part of. I have heard many of my friends and other professionals tell me how Brazil has some of the most innovative, raw talented artists in the world and Brazil is such a crazy exporter of artists, and that's because there is a strong art scene there. In my little punk scene, there are so many mind-blowing artists who went on to create some of the best art I've ever seen coming from the most diverse mediums, sculpture and illustration and animation and music. Game making was unheard of as a possible medium to convey art. I have now lived enough to be able to see how having a space to share your art develops a powerful movement amongst its participants that lasts and changes lives for decades after.

Music seems a more approachable art form because it's more prevalent. People can start bands and try to play in bars and immediately get in contact with what it takes to make music in the world. There's a starting point. Making more space for punk games, showing the possibility of using it as the art medium that it is, and spreading game making to be more prevalent as an artistic pursuit will help us appreciate games and think about the craft, skill and thinking that goes into the art form, and not just the technical aspects that can only be attained or funded by working for a AAA company. Or how Keogh puts it, underground game makers use "bottom-up tactics as an "art of the weak" to find ways to 'make do'", and that they "seem to be determining alternative measures of success beyond the economic rationalist measures historically dominant in the field" (Keogh, 2023). The bottom-up approach is again mentioned, reinforcing the need for a more organized underground punk games scene that opens space for creators to continuously display their games, and possibly reach an audience that can start to be introduced to

what games can provide. Maybe not everyone who goes to a punk show likes the music, but everyone who goes to a punk show has their expectation of what music even is hopefully turned upside down. You may not like punk music, but it showed you that 3 chords make a song. One might think that game making can only be done using Unity or Unreal, but playing a game made for the Pico-8 might change their perspective on what is possible within game making. Or someone's custom map in Garry's Mod is a sign that there are so many more ways to engage with FPS mechanics.

This overall re-education of how to approach games and game making can only be done within a space where punk game makers can show their games. While trying to survive the last few years, I haven't been the most active within my own local scene, and I'm not blind to the fact that there are events where game makers can showcase their games. Especially before the pandemic, there was a much more lively scene, with collectives like Dames Making Games and Gamma Space that were very active, but have dissipated or reduced their activity post-pandemic. There are networking events like Bonus Stage and Dirty Rectangles, the latter being the most similar to punk games in my opinion, but putting playable games in front of people's faces is what is important. There are networking events funded by bigger organizations and connected to the industry with the possibility of showcasing space, but these are more for commercial games. Hand Eye Society and Toronto Games Week are the two current ones running events that are more connected to the game making community as a whole, but the events tend to be bigger in scope and sparse. To make punk games more recognized, like punk shows, punk games events should be more nimble, with a tighter focus and a longer-lasting space for more game makers to showcase their creations. More on the creation of that space in the later stages of this research.

Keogh's book has been a little kick in the butt on trying something different and putting effort into uniting other game makers that would like to showcase their games more and more often and have a deeper connection to the creators and the space in which everyone would like to act within. "To stress, what I am calling for here is not simply a distinction between "arty" videogames and "commercial" videogames", "I am calling for a more nuanced appreciation of the contexts of videogame production and a dehomogenizing of the measures against which all videogames are evaluated."

I hope all the background and readings that we have gone through in the last few zines have filled enough of the gaps and given context to the themes and topics we have now examined in Keogh's book. And actually, I hope you can more easily understand the possible paths we can forge for game makers. The background was the dots, this was the easiest part of connecting those dots. It's not about something new, it's just about more. A wider idea of what games are and can be, a more accessible approach to games as an art form, more organization and community-facing events, a stronger connection within that community, more space to showcase games that do not conform to any commercial idea, AAA or indie, "to create alternative spaces of videogame production and circulation to change the space of possibles." (Keogh, 2023).

- Time flies when you're having fun

Wow... I'm gonna be optimistic and say that this touches on all the main points and background needed to show that there is a space for DIY punk in game making. That should take care of one of the research questions, "What does punk "fix" or address in the current game industry?". The other question "Is punk possible in games?", might have also been answered. I'll be taking some time to focus on a bit of the making over the upcoming holidays and try to organize some of the thoughts that I still want to talk about in a few more zines, more on the space for punk games, and the application of punk games in

different levels of game making, the local Toronto scene, possible studio structures and maybe a bit on the unionization movement that's picking up speed. All that, of course, scope and timing permitting.

I will work on getting the website punkgames.diy up and running, with all previous zines posted there. And, once again, is this making you think? Do you want to turn those thoughts into words in digital format and send them to me to be put in the zine? Recommendations, suggestions, reach out.

- Recommendation

Passage, by Jason Rohrer

(P.S.: This one does look a bit sketch, but I promise it's fine to download.)

-fiaca

12/06/2024