Influencing Politics with Games

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Objectives

- Finding new ways of communication between people, mainly between the two sides of the conflict – Israelis and Palestinians.
- Utilizing a game platform to create a dialogue between users in a political context.
- Political games, can they influence and create a dialog.

This essay suggests that by combining the tools available on the net for written communication (talkbacks/forums) with a platform of a game that adds elements from a different discipline that enable to measure this interaction and translate it into data.

The combination of these tools creates a new ground for rules, rules that will define the border between the game and the real.

This essay examines political games, in the context of video games in general, and in the context of Internet as an online game medium.

A platform that enables games that not long ago where played as a single player games, to become games for multiplayer. And by that creating a new game world, one, which is not that isolated and imaginary anymore but a game world that is connected to real people, affect real people, and by that have real outcome on the real world.

A game world, that is in between fiction and real. One that can simulate life, create communities, influence.

In the spirit of the web 2.0 hype, why not create games, which to some extent relay on content created by the players. Instead of following the rules and solving the game, the player will follow other players and get to know the community surrounding the game.

This research is about political games. It would like to show the relationship between games and politics, and what are the ways this relationship can be controlled in order to influence politics.

The research intention is to explore the tools available in game design, and how they can, and are used, in order to take the game “out to the real”. This essay would like to show how by using these tools, it is possible to create some impact in politics.
The essay will mainly discuss Online games, as it is not only the game that is important in the sense of politics, but also the ‘Medium’ contributes to the effect the game has on real life. “The medium is the message”. Taking political issues in to a network environment and in to a game environment, changes the game and its message. [Mcluhan, 1964]

In many cases games are regarded as a break out of life, like the assumption in the following quote:

“I consider a game to be something that provides us with a common goal, the achievement of which has no bearing on anything that is outside the game.”

‘Bernard Dekoven’

The assumption of this research on the other hand will be:

“I consider a game to be something that provides us with a common goal, the achievement of which has lots of bearing on anything that is outside the game.”

The intention of the essay is to highlight the strong relation of politics and games; Research the similarities; research the ways to influence politics with games and games with politics; And establish a system to measure this effect.
Critical framework

This essay explores three elements- text based online interaction, games, and politics. It suggests creating a cross between the three that will strengthen them eventually.

Written/Text based interaction on-line

Network communities
“The true value of a network is less about information and more about community. The information super highway is more then a short cut to every book in the library of congress. It is creating a totally new, global social fabric.“  [Negroponte, 1995]

The Means
There are several common ways on the Internet, for people to communicate relaying on text-based interaction.
Forums, Talkbacks, Mailing lists, Comments on articles in on-line newspapers, and Blogs are all means of communication. Each means creating its own type of virtual community, with regular users, and with its own social conventions.

In ‘Forums’ and ‘Talkbacks’ the members interact by writing/discussing certain issues. Forums are usually used, as a place to talk and ask questions directed to all members, a place for holding discussions.
While in Talkbacks the discussion becomes more personal.
The topics of the Forums usually address social or professional matters. The personal aspect of talk back directs the topic to a more emotional area influence by ideology and believes.

The interaction in forums and talkbacks is a verbal one, the participants engage in a written conversation. They write their thoughts, opinions, and comments and react to each other by writing. They can choose not to interact with other participants. They can either talk, preach or lecture, get engaged in a dialog, uniting or confronting, with a feed back process.

Talkbacks are not regarded as the common user generated content sites, since the content provided for the most of it does not provide new and relevant information in the sense of journalistic news. It is mostly combined of slogans, emotions or other intellectual thoughts.
But the big popularity around them these days suggests they might just be the real story and hold within them important information and social behavior. [Haaretz Articles, Talkbacks]

‘Mailing Lists’ are used to advertise a product or an event. They are not meant usually to become a discussion tool but rather an informative one. A mailing list usually attracts people with the same interest to communicate through, because of its large target specific distribution structure.

It is interesting to see these Mailing Lists once they stop being used as a means of receiving and sending data, and become a place to react and interact. What happens when the addressee starts to comment, write back to all, regarding a certain e-mail that was sent through the list?

‘Spectra’ mailing list is a mailing list usually addressing new media arts, inform about exhibition openings and events, announcing deadlines for submitting works or funding.

During the recent war in Lebanon Spectra became a living tool to protest and shout. The list became active then ever, the emails where getting personal, people sent their opinions regarding the war, and got back a response. The list generated a political debate, and pushed aside all its daily issues.

[Blogs] are at their peak at the moment as part of the web 2.0 hype. It is referred to as the new way of journalism, in such, anyone can become a journalist and write. The content is provided by the users and for the users.

“Is a type of website where entries are made (such as in a journal or diary), displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject,
such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical Blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. Most blogs are primarily textual although many focus on photographs, videos or audio.” [Wikipedia entry: Blogs]

Blogs are considered a reporting tool rather than a discussion tool. Though their structure allows readers to add comments to Blog entries, these comments are depending on approval of the Blogs admin, and therefore users are not equal. Blogs usually do not create a community and a dialogue.

A new approach on news web sites (mostly online newspapers such as the Israeli Haaretz and Ynet and the British Guardian), is allowing the reader to interact with the article by writing a ‘Comment’ that will be shown next to the article. These comments usually relate to the article, but once the comments are piling up they tend to refer to each other. This phenomena got to the point that it is unclear which is the important part of the article, the article it self, or rather the comments submitted by the readers. This kind of interaction is probably the most intense one; it calls for reshaping the interaction permitted, and attaching some rules to it.

Why not allow a real interaction between the users. Enable them to challenge each other’s comments, and be held responsible for theirs.

When writing a comment one must consider that the newspapers editors, controls which comment will be published and which will not. When the writing is going through censorship process, it can not be a free and true interaction.

It is most interesting to look at these discussion tools once the topic addressed is social/political, or when they relate and refer to current events discussed on the news. Once presented in a political/social context, the chat then takes the shape of a political debate. It becomes a tool.

The purpose of the engagement becomes to deliver a message, promote an ideology and ultimately to convince and show the way.

There is no reward, or a way to measure the effect of the interaction, one cannot tell who “won” in a debate. Also, there is no real tool to position the conversation in a wider context out side the ’url of the forum.
What ways do we have to measure what effect/affect is coming out of any such interaction? Can we measure the amount of persuasion one has over the other? A measurable factor in these cases can be the amount of people supporting each comment. Once the interaction is not limited to writing a comment in return, but also adds elements of voting and supporting other comments, the numbers can be used to analyze a phenomenon, or to measure the public’s opinion regarding a political/social issue. Imagine a tool that can take all this factors into account and generate a valid statistic of the thoughts and opinions of users on-line.
Game Design

The second element in this cross road presented here is game design. In order to understand how Online Political Games can influence Real life politics, Outside of the screen we must first understand games and game design.

There are mainly two aspects to any game. The first is the User / Player: People usually play games in order to enjoy, pass time. Games are a popular means for entertainment, and in many occasions they are played/used, just in order to escape reality. Some games allow the player to put on a “mask” and pretend they were someone else or somewhere else. These are important aspects of games and should be considered when designing a game.

The other aspect to a game is the game Designer / Developer: When choosing to develop a game there is usually an Objective. In order to reach that objective there are many factors to consider. The first one is the users, and what kind of an experience the game is suppose to provide them with. As was mentioned before, in some cases gaming is a form of escapism. The Designer of a political game should consider that this might be a week spot for him. Paradoxically, in many cases this would be the reason for developing such a game. As escapism grows widely, games can be used as a refreshing way to reach the crowds, and succeed where the conventional tools failed. Using games to discuss politics is as if you enter the users mind using a back door.

Which characteristics determine the nature of the game? In order to determine a nature of a game several aspects must be regarded.

Consider the format of the game. online game versus a computer game, board game, or any other types of games. There are two main reasons why an Online Game is the right format for political games. Internet is everywhere. By using the Internet you can reach much more people then by any of the other mediums just mentioned. This fact is important because of the nature of political games, and the role that they try to take on themselves, in shaping the thoughts and believes of the players. The more people you get to play the game, the more people you influence. The second reason is that politics is not something privet you play with your self. Your thought,
acts, and vote, will eventually influence not just your own life but others as well. In this sense online games create a similar situation. Your decisions in the game might have an impact on someone you don’t know. Politics is about community and people. The Network is exactly the same. By using the Net you make them a part of something bigger, a part of a community. This will have an affect on users feel of belonging.

‘Design’ is a strong tool to deliver a message. The esthetics of the game can determine what kind of users the game will attract. By using different design conventions you can add another layer to the game, one that might be subtler, and help deliver your message. In many cases the design can promote an idea that other tools can’t because it is regarded as something in the back of the game, rather then its content. For instance, design can use known images and icons that are already “charged” with meaning in order to generate a certain reaction from the viewer.

The ‘language’, use of words, the terminology in a game is another tool to consider while developing a game.
Words can have a strong impact. The words chosen in a game, describing it and its rules can contribute and generate different responses.
Some games are completely text based; in these cases, each word chosen can create a completely different game experience.

The ‘Subject’ of the Game
Games can vary from pure entertainment to serious, from fun and relaxing to skill demanding and brain exercising. And can be about any subject from sports to war, or cards and sex. With the choice of the subject the developer is already obliged to certain conventions and game platforms. Sometimes even a defined set of rules.

‘Rules’
‘Rules’ are probably the most obvious connection between the game and its structure, and the real life, in our case politics and democracy.

The difference between game, and play, is rules.
While play is not confined to a strict set of rules, and is open for interpretations, Games are defined by their rules. And they allow no doubt. [rules of play, p.122-qualities of rules]
This is where an open end game would probably fall under the definition of play rather than a game, since it is lacking an ultimate goal or an ability to win.

The most important elements of any game are its rules. Any change in the game rules will create a totally new experience, and a different game. So by determining the rules of a game, the game developer can control what kind of game will it become.

“Why are rules so important to games? Rules impose limits - they force us to take specific paths to reach goals and ensure that all players take the same paths. They put us inside the game world by letting us know what is in and out of bounds” [rules of play, p.122-qualities of rules]

Shaping the rules can shape the game

In their book “rules of play”, Eric Zimmerman and Katie Salen say that rules are one of the defining qualities of games. Suggesting 6 general characteristics that all game rules must apply with.

- ‘Rules limit player action’ - Rules serve to restrict and stylize players’ actions.
- ‘Rules are explicit and unambiguous’ - Rules should be clear and precise, leaving no room for confusion or doubt
- ‘Rules are shared by all players’ - Interpretation of the rules must also be shared, all players must have the same understanding of the rules in order to be able to play the same game in the same way.
- ‘Rules are fixed’ - The rules do not change along the game.
- ‘Rules are binding’ - Following the rules is essential in order to play a game.
- ‘Rules are repeatable’ - If you wish to play the same game at different times you must follow the same rules as before.
- ‘Rules in context’ - What kind of context does the game provide for the player to make decisions?

They also suggest that game rules are different than real rules by being artificial, but most of these characteristics are true regarding real life rules, in exception that real rules are dynamic. Old and new laws are regulated daily. The context of these real life rules is a democratic environment that gives power to the user by implementing an election/voting system.
This essay claims that open end games, that to some extent fall out of Zimmerman and Salen definition, and are not considered to be a typical game, are the more accurate prototype of games and might relate to real life in a more accurate way, giving the freedom to explore and allowing several outcomes.

How can the rules control the game?

“The gamewright must avoid two extremes. If he draws his lines too loosely the game will be dull because winning will be too easy. As looseness is increased to the point of utter laxity the game simply falls apart, since there are then no rules proscribing available means.... On the other hand, rules are lines that can be drawn too tightly, so that the game becomes too difficult. And if a line is drawn very tightly indeed the game is squeezed out of existence.” [Suits, 1978]

The discussion the game developer makes of how tight the rules will be, control in some ways to who the game is designed. The limitations put in a game might come on account of the game’s goal. Making it easy or hard to achieve a goal, can effect the perception of that goal in the mind of the user. To play a game is to follow its rules. The rules are binding and set a path to the games goal.

The rules constitute the structural system that allows the users choice making to occur. By deciding on applying specific rules, the game designer controls the game; the smallest change in rules influences the whole game.

How can the game rules lead to a political agenda?

“Games are artificial systems, separate in some way from ordinary life. The authority of game rules only holds sway within the limited context of the game. The laws of a state, on the other hand, permeate the lived experience of its citizens in a much less limited way. It is true that laws are social construct, as are game rules. However, from a formal point of view, the artificiality of games keeps their rules from having an impact outside the magic circle of the game.” [Crawford, 2003]

Therefore creating a game that imitates real life, bound the players to rules similar to real life rules, creating a game mechanism that follows real living systems.

By choosing to play a game the player agrees to limit him/herself to a specific set of rules and limit themselves to the restrictions imposed by these rules.
This essay mainly refers to on-line² games. Games distributed or played on the Internet. In these games being single-player or multi-player games the player is asked to follow a script. The possibilities for games on the Internet are far greater than following a script, once you allow players to interact, and play with other than themselves and the computer code.
**Serious Games**

Human beings are sometimes referred as “*Homo Ludens*” - The playing species. Playing is an integral part of the human species.

“To our way of thinking, play is direct opposite of seriousness. At first sight this opposition seems as irreducible to other categories as the play-concept itself. Examined more closely, however, the contrast between play and seriousness proves to be neither conclusive nor fixed.

We can say: play is non-seriousness. But apart from the fact that this proposition tells us nothing about the positive qualities of play, it is extraordinarily easy to refute. As soon as we proceed from “play is not seriousness” to “play is not serious”, the contrast leaves us in the lurch-for some. Some play can be very serious indeed.”

[Johnson, 2005]

There is a growing new field of games referred as “Serious games”

Under this category you will find *Educational games* - games are entering the classroom becoming a part of the curriculum, designed to teach and follow a learning curve. *Training games* - games designed to improve certain skills.

*Social games* - games that highlight a social issue in order to raise awareness to it.

And finally, *Political games*.

**Educational games**

Educational games are games that are created in order to teach or support teaching. These are games that follow teaching methods. They are designed to have a learning curve with in them.

Educational games enable the student to develop thinking skills rather than memorizing. They are used to “teach thinking”. [Terdiman, 2004]

They utilizes the fact that students are engaged in gaming on a regular basis, so the habit is already acquired.

they also utilizes the existing computers infrastructure in classes to divert the use of them from playing only to education as well. [King, 2003]
**Training games/simulators**
Like in many other cases, video games were born for non-entertaining uses, as military simulators designed for training. [Gonzalo, 2003]

By playing a game the players perform the tasks themselves. Rather than getting second hand information they get first hand experience, which improves their skills in real life. [L. Foster, 2004]

**Social games**
Social games are a real tool of social awareness, protest and involvement. They achieve those goals using a game platform, thus involving variable audiences, otherwise would not have been socially involved. They also teach the user to recognize social faults and develop a sense of responsibility or even an action route.

“Like other elements of culture, games are shaped by the same dominant values that they in turn help shape, and as such reflect what a society is and wants from its people, what it would have them believe and learn, and what it would help them to forget. Insofar as they teach anything, raise socially useful expectations, substitute a make-believe equality for real inequality, allow people to let off steam and to dream while keeping them amused and occupied, games--overall--serve the social order.”

**Political games**
For many it might seem weird to combine games and politics. These topics might be regarded as two different worlds. Sometimes even opposite to each other.

One, Politics - is considered to belong to the adults. While the other, Games - is mostly regarded as kids activity.

In some ways this is true. And indeed in both areas there are built-in restrictions that make them like that. For instance in politics in order to vote you need to be 18 (In most countries). As for games one usually needs free time in order to play, which fewer adults have.

This separation is one of the reasons why combining the two is important; the young community of game players is usually not interested in politics. By creating political games it is possible to interact them with politics and educate them about the real world and help them grow and become better citizens, with a wide political and social awareness.
Looking closer on games and politics you will see that these two worlds have plenty in common, and in fact Politics is often referred to as a Game, and is often talked about, with the same terminology. (Phrases like “This politician plays dirty”). But the thing both Politics and Game mostly have in common are Rules. In both Politics and Games we are expected to follow them in order to participate. By choosing not to follow the rules we either play a different kind of game, or just disrupt the current one played.

At the end, life is a game we all take a part in. and by choosing which rules, laws and social conventions to follow, we get to shape our character.

When you sit down to play a game without knowing its rules you ask yourself - what am I suppose to do? You’re suppose to figure out what you’re supposed to do... [Johnson, 2005] Hopefully a political game will help people figure out what they are suppose to do in real life.

**What are Political Games?**
Political games are games that relate and refer to current events, government policies. Inspired by real stories from daily life. These are games with clear agenda; they are not merely for fun. They are used as educational tools, and hope to deliver a massage. Usually convey some critic and attempt to create some change in public opinion.

A political video game can deliver an ideology and convince voters to change their views on the political matter addressed in the game (Even more then television advertisements or political debates). [Ian Bogost, an assistant professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology.]

Ian Bogost argues that in five years, video games will be a staple of political campaigns. Interactive games distributed on the Internet will let politicians “get their message out in a much more effective and engaging and cost-effective way.” He states that the involvement of players is what makes the games so powerful.

In most existing political games, the player plays the game alone, following the game’s script. By using the internet as a game platform it is possible to design a game that requires interaction with other players, and create a multiplayer political game that by being so is more relevant to the way politics work.
The border between real and game

Play is metaphorical
“All play in some sense represents something from the non-play universe. We often confuse this metaphorical aspect of play as simulation. Play is not necessarily a simulation of anything in particular, but it does generate mental associations with real-world issues. In many cases, those associations are in fact generated by means of simulation.”

“There remains a huge opportunity here for games that operate in a metaphorical sense... A game should not be mere stripped down version of a simulation; it can reach far into the weird world of human emotional associations to find the truth.” [Crawford, 2003,]
Examin the border between real and game; there are ways to make them closer. Of course we wouldn’t want to allow crossing this border when it comes to war games. Unless by crossing the border the tools the game gives deliver a peaceful solution to the war.

“This event,..., presents some unique experiences in blurring the boundaries between game and non game space, off- and online lives, avatars and ‘real’ identities and bodies.” [Taylor, 2006]
**Socio Political context**

The third element introduced to this “cross road” is the Socio Political context. After dealing with the ‘means’ (text-base interaction online) and the ‘format’ (games), it is necessary to review the ‘context’ of it all. Though this essay refers to politics it is not about politics. This essay is not about politics and political studies. Certain elements must be addressed in order to connect these elements and understand the strength such a connection can provide.

**Rules**
The line between real and game blurs even more, when legislation of real rules can affect the game design. Examples for that can be in age limit for playing a game. Or relevant to this case is the laws that will force users to come forward with their real names, real identity. This might change the game completely.

**Democracy**
Rule by the people, which means rule by the majority.
“A citizen who is only asked to drop a ballot into a box once every few years easily gets used to giving up the rest of his rights. A living democracy is a democracy of partnership in the daily life of society, ongoing political activity and the upholding of a permanent connection between the voter and his or her representatives.”
[Zeev Sternhell - Haaretz articles]

**Freedom of Speech**
There is a growing call in Israel, which has reached the house of parliament in the form of new laws awaiting approval, demanding talk backers to step out of their avatar characters and usernames, and identify themselves. This law if passed will make it impossible to hide behind a false name. this might change the targeted audience of such interaction.

**Politics**
Though this work strongly relates and nourished from politics, this is not the main focus of this essay.
The only conclusions used in this essay regarding politics are these two:
- This is a democratic platform.
• No conflict will ever be solved by force, strong as it will be. The only way to resolve a conflict is by dialogue, by communication and compromises.

**Conflict and the Prisoners Dilemma**
The classic prisoners dilemma is when two prisoners are asked to describe their involvement in a crime, in order to decide on the sentence they each get.

Each prisoner has two options: to cooperate with his accomplice and stay quiet, or to betray his accomplice and give evidence. The outcome of each choice depends on the choice of the accomplice. However, neither prisoner knows the choice of his accomplice. Even if they were able to talk to each other, neither could be sure that he could trust the other. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoners_dilemma#The_classical_prisoner.27s_dilemma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoners_dilemma#The_classical_prisoner.27s_dilemma)

The dilemma arises when one assumes that both prisoners only care about minimizing their own jail terms. This makes it a game of trust, in which cooperation will bring the best results to both sides. There are many interactions in the modern world that seem very much like that, from arms races through road congestion and pollution to the depletion of fisheries and the overexploitation of some subsurface water resources. These are all quite different interactions in detail, but are interactions in which (we suppose) individually rational action leads to inferior results for each side [http://william-king.www.drexel.edu/top/eco/game/game.html](http://william-king.www.drexel.edu/top/eco/game/game.html)

**The Israeli Palestinian conflict The Occupied/Occupier Dilemma**
Like in the prisoner's dilemma, there is only one real option from which both sides benefit. When one side chooses to react with violent, and follow the extremists, the reaction on the other side would be a strong one sided from which no one will benefit but the conflict itself.

Like in the prisoners dilemma there is only one action that will serve both sides. Without talking, communicating, cooperating with each other nothing can be achieved.

**Net art projects**
This cross between elements just laid out positions us in the net art arena and suggests we take a look at some other relevant projects and aspects.

Art and Net Art within had always challenged convention and dared breaking the rules. Net Art is an expressive and critical tool commenting and observing on society, documenting and analyzing its findings and eventually presenting them

Art and artists were always considered to be social leaders for change.
The role of the artist changed and in some sense artists shifted from creating to researching and reporting a phenomenon.
Net artist creates new space for social exploration and observation.
Integration

Political Games - What is out there!

Examples and Analysis
A particular type of games sometimes referred as “serious games” is becoming more and more present. There are all sorts and formats of Political Games. These games varies, from games with a clear political agenda, in which the player is asked to accept the job of a president of a certain country, to games with a more social approach in which the player is educated about the world we live in, and is asked to “do the right thing” in order to heal the world, and help the poor.

An example for this kind of games is the game “Food Force”. This game is sponsored by the U.N, and is distributed Online for free.
In this game the player goes through a number of assignments, All are simulating real life activities which the U.N is doing regarding the supply of food to hunger struck places around Africa. This game teacher its players what it takes to bring food to these areas, How much it costs, and what ways there are to influence and help these places in the long run. Clearly bringing a subject so easy to avoid in our comfortable daily life in front of the computer, into the players awareness.

“Peace Maker” is a game that has a political agenda.
In this game the player chooses the role of the Prime Minister of Israel, or the role of the President of the Palestinian Authority. The game simulates the ongoing conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. At the beginning of the game something occurs, to which the player must react. His reaction initiates other events, and the game goes on. The objective of the game is to reach a stable peace between the two sides.
As Asi burak (One of the game developers) states, “There are so many games about war out there. Maybe there is a place for one game for peace”. Leaving no doubt that there is a political agenda for this game. [N.Y Times]
Another political game to address and try to analyze is an online game called “September 12th”.

In this game, there are very simple rules – the player gets a target pointer that can be moved with the mouse over the screen image of what seems to be an Iraqi city. On a mouse press a missile is fired, and hits the screen on the position on the mouse. The missile might hit terrorists or civilians. There is no end, nor beginning to this game, you can’t win it. As the text at the beginning of the game clearly say.

Another restriction in the game is that you have to wait 5 seconds between each shot taken. This rules makes sure that there will be enough time for the game to rebuild it self. So you can never destroy all the building or kill all the people.

At first it seems that the aim of the game is to kill the terrorists. But as time goes by in the game, the player should realize that for any civilian that dies, two new terrorists are born. This is a strong political suggestion by it self.

Note that the game designer didn’t apply the same rules to the “death” of a terrorist, which can be explained as another political statement.
The chosen name to this game - “September 12th” is packed with meaning. Referring to the day after 9/11 attacks. Suggesting that 9/11 is the reason for the U.S invasion to Iraq. The game design sends us to an Arab country and the objective is to kill terrorists. These points combined are delivering a message and shaping the players opinion on the subject of the invasion to Iraq and whether this is the right solution against terrorists. [N.Y. Times]

The website of “September 12th” and “MADRID” (another political game designed by the same group) has a questions and answers page about the game. In there, are questions like “Are September 12th and MADRID connected? To which the answer is “Well, both are games about terror” this question can be referred in many ways. The answer given regarded the political aspect of the game, suggesting that the connection between these games is terror. Further more, indicating that both terror attacks are also linked in real life. Another question asked is “Why “September 12th” does not explicitly show terrorist acts?” and the answer is “We decided to focus this particular piece on The War on Terror’s civilian casualties, since it is a subject that has not been treated in videogames yet. We assumed that our players are intelligent enough to realize that any form of terrorism is always despicable.” The designers wanted to address a subject ‘not treated yet’, and create a bigger awareness to it.

Another interesting point is the assumptions made by the designer about the thoughts and belief system the users might have.

Most of the political games examined during this research, are trying to promote an important idea, to manifest, to deliver a message. They are supporting a clear agenda. What if delivering an agenda was not the ultimate goal of a game, but the way it delivered is? The idea is to create a new way of reaching the game goal, by communicating, talking, fighting, helping. All in words instead of weapons. Just like playing prisoners dilemma, where helping each other will initiate the best results, it is possible to negotiate between the players what will be the outcome of the game.
**Related Net Projects**

'http://www.llor.nu' is an online game that resembles monopoly in its rules. Where players get money/points if other players step on their territory. The goal is to expand ones empire, build hotels, and become the “richest” player on the game. An interesting and relevant addition this game has compared to monopoly, is the ability to leave messages in each square the player lands on, to the owner of the square, or to other players to arrive at this spot, to read and respond to.

This “text-based” interaction is the basis of the interaction between players in dpi (especially during the “war” process).

‘Kadima’ political party website’

Before the last elections in Israel, there was an interesting project on ‘kadima’s’ (the now governing party) website. Showing an illustrated map of Israel, on which users are able to place a character/avatar that holds a sign with a comment on it. The comment is written by the users, and should support ‘kadima’ party. Creating a kind of virtual demonstration. This project relates to dpi, by similarly enabling the users to state their political opinion, and shear them with other users in an attempt to influence them politically. Another similarity is in the fact that the comments are attached to the map of Israel.

[Kadime Before Elections]
‘screening circle’ a project by andy deck Andy Deck creates online applications, which allow users to paint with a set of brushes and colors, on a square pixel grid. Also allowing the users to change others creations. Meaning each pixel/painting evolves as time passes. With no rules for the interaction.
[http://artcontext.org/act/05/screeningCircle/docs/circle.php]
This project can stimulate similar emotional response to the one dpi triggers. The feeling of creating something or having something after drawing a pixel, can easily change once the pixel is out of the users control and is being changed by another user. this kind of interaction enhances the interaction between the users, and is on of dpi’s goals.

‘The Million dollar web page’
The idea for dpi was thought, after coming across the “million dollar web site”. [0] A website with an empty grid of squares, 10x10 pixels in size. The user is able to buy any empty square (1$ per pixel – a minimum of 100$) then load 10x10 pixel image to it and make it a link to a URL/website.
Basically creating a 10x10 advert banner, in an advertisement space full with such banners.
This kind of interaction raised questions about ownership.
What does it mean owning a pixel, for how long is it yours, what can you do with it.
Questions about having or loosing, taking and giving.
Questions about occupation, Can a pixel be occupied?
It also raises Questions about online identity; and whether the users identity should be known or reachable, or can they hide behind a sophisticated user name?
Furthermore, when the ownership is of a virtual space, Is it possible to create an emotional attachment to a virtual space.
These issues are implemented and dealt within dpi, on a more complex level, since questions of ownership in dpi are related to occupation, with all the political meaning conveyed in it.
Project Description

Statement
dpi – digital palestine israel, is an online interactive political game of occupation.

The idea behind this game is to engage people in a political debate about the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel.
It is a platform that enables people to communicate and react to each other’s comments.
By creating a connection between people on both sides, to daily events, and to the real places represented by the map.

dpi wants to divert the war into words and help to establish and, protect the states with statements.

What is dpi?
It is a platform that integrates between design people politics and news.
It is a platform that network people in to a common cause, one that will help putting an end to violence, corruption, and occupation.
dpi calls for equality and for a non-violent activism.
It is a platform that gives back the power to the people. To protest, to shout, to take a stand, to make the news, to highlight all wrong so it would be impossible for it to exist.
It is a place that believes that design and art have a key role in moving the society to a better place.

Why dpi?
dpi is an acronym that originally stands for dots per inch. It is a measure of printing resolution; in particular the number of individual dots of ink a printer or toner can produce within a linear one-inch space.
This is what an image is made out of today. Every digital image is a combination of dots; the order of these dots makes the difference between each image.
It is also a way to measure the sharpness, quality of an image.
There is a race for better quality image, higher resolution. However quality is not just the resolution, it also has lots to do with the image it self - Who presents it and where (it doesn’t matter how good an image looks like if it has no conceptual thinking behind it).
dpi is also us, we are all fragments in this world, or if you wish, we are all dots, dots per inch in this world. The way we arrange ourselves with each other, the way we regard each other, network with each other, create the image of this world. Time frame by time frame, different places, all add up to create the next chapter in history. Our interaction with each other creates the image. Where we position our “dot” changes the entire image.

dpi is regarded as a platform that combines the two approaches discussed before - the user text provided content, with a game approach; that expand the interaction between people, make them emotionally involved, and is able to teach and educate while doing so.

In dpi the grid is a pixilated map showing Israel and Palestine. Each pixel can be owned, but instead of buying the pixels you want, you will occupy them. The objective is to interact people with the conflict and with other opinions about the conflict. Hoping to help people to understand occupation.

Money being the power behind the million dollar web page, dpi looks for other ways of ownerships. Which leads to different kind of owning/having. It can be based on “first come first serve” It can be based on skills of communication and persuasion. It might also become a place where money talks.

dpi is constructed of layers. In the same way a map has layers on it – might it be topography, population, climate... dpi has different layers, each providing different information. On the first level there is the game layer, then there is a layer that connects the project to the real places represented by the map. And eventually there is a history to follow. A layer of statistic analyzing of the users views and the events occurred in the game.

**Layer one – the game**

**Goals**

On the game side there is ultimately a goal for dpi - digital Palestine Israel. A player should try to occupy all the pixels on the map, or at least become the one to have the highest number of pixels and the most influential player.
On a higher level there is the dpi project goal as a hole, is to deal with aspects of occupation and the conflict.

**Rules of dpi**
- Create a player
- Fill in personal information.
- Choose an icon from database. (On a later stage player can design their own icon)
- Fill in an occupation caption (to be shown on role over) fill in an occupation comment (to be shown if pixel is chosen).
- Scroll over the map, read comments.
- Choose a pixel to challenge (the motivation to choose a specific pixel might be a reaction to the occupation comment of that pixel or due to the location of the pixel and the real place it represents).
- Choose a way to challenge it from a verity of ways
- Voting process
- Strike of luck (dice rolling)
- Wait for resolute and edit pixel if won.

**Game design elements**
In his book “Half Real”, Jesper Juul suggests a 6 game features that defines games:

1. Rules: Games are rule-based.
2. Variable, quantifiable outcome:
3. Valorization of outcome: The different potential outcomes of the game are assigned different values, some positive and some negative.
4. player effort: The player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome. (games are challenging.)
5. player attached to outcome: The player is emotionally attached to the outcome of the game in the sense that a player will be winner and “happy” in case of positive outcome, but loser and “unhappy” in case of negative outcome.
6. Negotiable consequences: The same game [set of rules] can be played with or without real life consequences.
What makes dpi a game?
dpi rules as mentioned above.
The ‘war’ process (voting/dice) is measurable and leads to an outcome.
There is an assumption that winning another pixel is positive, while losing a pixel is negative.
Since the comment is the players weapon, the players must invest thought about their comment, as an effort to win the war.
Writing personal opinions creates an emotional attachment, mostly felt if the pixel was lost.
The icons have strong embedded meaning that triggers an emotional reaction.
A game that is based on communication can lead to negotiations between players.

“What real life is full of rewards, which is one reason why there are so many forms of addiction.... In the game world, reward is everywhere. The universe is literally teeming with objects that deliver very clearly articulated rewards.... Most games offer a fictional world where rewards are larger, and more vivid, more clearly defined, the life. This true even of games that have been rightly celebrated for their open-endedness.... The very games that are supposed to be emblems of unstructured user control turn out to bangle rewards at every corner.... But most of the time, when you’re hooked on a game, what draws you in is an elemental form of desire: the desire to see the next thing.... If you create a system where rewards are both clearly defined and achieved exploring an environment, you’ll find human brains drawn to those systems.... It’s not the subject matter of these games that attracts.... It’s the reward system that draws those players in, and keep their famously short attention spans locked on the screen.” [Johnson, 2005]

dpi is a game where the users themselves decide whom to reward. The objective and the “right way” to play and interact is not set in advance like in most games, but to be decided by the players and the development along time.
Content provided by the users into a game is an exciting addition to games in general. It makes the game an open end game.

What makes dpi a political game?
Since claming to be a political game, there should be a political agenda to the game. The first message behind dpi is about occupation, hoping to trigger some thoughts about occupation, being occupied or being an occupier.
The element of deciding by a democratic vote adds another dimension of politics, and might
as well be interpreted as a political stand by the designer.
Freedom of speech, a key element of the game.
The political content, is mostly provided by the users, there is no attempt to force it on them.
The platform itself is designed to engage the user in a political debate in a subtle way, without forcing an opinion on the players.

The means/tools - Being an online game, free and accessible to all, can allow overcoming real obstacles such as the separation wall.
Design is a key tool in diverting the conversation toward politics.
(For some, a drawing of the map of Israel with out the Palestinian territory is a political stand/say).
Being English based (a neutral language for both sides to understand Ideally translated to Hebrew and Arabic).
Communication is best in a native language, since both sides speak different languages, a third and neutral language is in use.
The voting system relates the game further into being a political game.
On the other hand the dice, having one simple rule called luck, adds a sense of game, requiring less skills and giving the player a 50/50 chance to win.

In the context of the separation wall - A real barrier, which prevents communication and keeps people apart. The network - is a way, a tool of over coming the wall. by directing to these issues dpi takes on a political stand, and tries, even if only virtually, to break the rapidly built wall, that separate Israelis and Palestinians. When the growing majority in Israel seeks one-sided solutions to the conflict, (withdrawal of Palestine with out a peace agreement).
When negotiations conducted by the leaders do not take place anymore, when it was loudly announced, “there is no partner” (former prime minister Ehud Barak).
A new way of communication is needed. A tool that will help people regain trust, a tool that will revive peace efforts, a tool, that can help educate, a tool of communication is strongly needed.
**Audience**

dpi initial goal was to create a platform that allows a new kind of interaction for Palestinians and Israelis.
By the nature of using a tool such as a game dpi aims to reach a wide verity of users. And make it easier for younger crowed to relate to.

**Additional Layers**

**The Map / Real Places**
Each pixel will be a link to images, sounds, news, thoughts, and comments related to the real place on the map of israel and palestine.
The ability to load images will be location based. It is only possible to load images related to the real place the pixel is representing.
Images - stills, videos, design, can show how the conflict looks from a certain place, a certain point of view.

**Statistics**
A main goal of this project besides becoming a reliable statistic tool capturing public's political opinion at any give time and issue is to keep track of the history of each pixel. Who occupied the pixel first, how many times it was fought for, who won. Raising questions about ownership, suggesting the analogy to the dispute over the land in the Israeli Palestinian conflict.
Each comment by it self is not very significant, it is the ability to recognize public's opinion from these comments and serve as a pole or survey and follows a trend.
Aspects, such as: Measuring the effect of a game on its player is something to consider.
Looking to see if it is possible to realize the political effect of the game on users. Forming an admissible way to Asses this impact is necessary

Mapping the users into age groups, and nationalities.
Will diverting the subject of games into politics and real time events mean that the player of the game will be older? Will a common player necessarily be related to the games topic?

As an attempt to create a more artistic and expressive environment an extension that will allow registered users to draw their own icon on a 20/20 grid, and make them available as icons in the game.
[All the icons are packed with strong meaning and are intended to stimulate an emotional reaction from the players]

Providing additional ways (3\textsuperscript{rd} party/ 4 in a row/ icon characteristics) to attack a pixel (start a war), implying different rules for the interaction between players, on an already existed balance on the map (if existed) created by a different set of rules, will create a new balance, One, which will affect the outcome of the game, will shape the map, and change the dissection-taking place.
New ways to occupy a pixel might allow unpopular views to find their place on the map and in the game.
It can create different goals or local/privet goals for players in the game.
Just like adding new and different kind of weapons to a war, it can change history.
Analysis & Reflection

The process of designing dpi
The process of designing dpi went through some deadlines and testing points along the year.

PG Cert
An attempt to translate an idea into real space, Before choosing to use the internet as the medium/platform of the game.
Asking participants to interact with the project, introducing the map as the board game, not yet setting any rules to the interaction, nor addressing the political context.
The colored squares can be used as pieces, each color representing a player. Or as a ‘drawing tool’ creating patterns...

Will social rules be applied when there aren’t any other restrictions?
“People are playing the game even though the outcome and the goal might not be clear to them. Just for the sake of interacting with other players and the ‘fun’ of playing.” [Taylor, 2006]

Findings - users confused, do not know how to cooperate with the request. No real interest or attachment to the interaction.
Analysis - rules are essential to interaction.
Design elements
Referring to ‘game design’ in general, taking into account the concept of dpi, and relating it to ‘Pixel design’ (game/pixel/font/logo),
Fonts - initially a pixel based font, representing the digital aspect, as well as being popular font style in game design.
An additional font tested was ‘Edwardian’ trying to compensate on the fact the project is in English and not in the languages relevant to the conflict (Hebrew and Arabic). This font refers to the flow of the Arabic typography. [The font was not used eventually, after numerous users indicated a readability problem. It did however stay a part of the logo.

Rules of games (go/risk)
Searching after the means to occupy a pixel by implying existing games rules on the map. Dealing with the essence of owning a pixel and losing a pixel, the feeling of being an occupier or being occupied.
Each set of rules, creating a different goal to the game, and puts the game in a slightly different context.
Findings - Taking existing rules makes it harder to relate the project to the conflict.
Analysis – without ‘tailor’ designed rules for dpi, there is a feeling that apart from the map, nothing really relates the game to the conflict. When choosing rules, better apply rules that will be appropriate to the message in hand.

Subject (politics/religion)
Introducing the icons, suggesting politics and religion as the main interests.
An interaction with the game when there are no rules attached.
The rules direct to the concept of dpi. It narrows the interaction to a certain direction and issue.

Thin(g/k)s [Rave Atrium 20/01/06]: An exhibition of concept and game rules.
dpi was presented in an early stage of conceptualizing, getting feedback from visitors regarding the initial idea, examining user interaction in an environment without rules.

Takeaway [Dana center 30/03/06]: An exhibition of concept, design, and usability tests.
Introducing and sharpening the concept.
Once again taking the interaction “out of the screen” in a wider context. Asking visitors to react
to the project, positioning their opinions on a poster map.

Findings - the interaction with the game is understood to the users, though the cooperation is low. All the comments relate to the project itself and not to other comment.

Analysis - the users knowledge of the conflict is low. They’d rather write their opinion and feedback to the idea of the project.

PG Dip: database tests [who are the users? Age/nationality. Are they driven by the location of the pixel or by the comment attached to it?]

Presenting an online version of the game (design, registration information sent to database, choosing a pixel on the map).

Findings - Realizing users can register an unlimited time and use the map in new and creative ways, different then designed for.

Analysis - Roughly dividing the comments to three kinds:
- Nonsense (tests, fooling around).
- Comments about the project.
- Comments about the conflict and relevant issues.

Still very naïve, there is still no real possibility to interact with other users yet. (Except signing in as a new user and writing/directing the comment to a specific comment.)

**Online testing**
Creating small applications that tests the games concept and architecture. Learning how to layout the database tables.
Debugging, and getting a better understanding of the program, and the required code.
Finding and analysis

Code and programming testing leads to developing new ways to “challenge” a pixel, though diverting from the political (democracy) aspect, it does add a game element, and changes the odds in the game.

In some cases the design changes in order to adjust to the limits of the code writing.

Online testing of different modules exposes new directions to choose from. And leads to applying new rules or adjusting old ones.

MA Presentation: Exhibiting a working application of the game, with the ability to register, place a pixel on the map, navigate through other pixels, start war, win/lose pixel.

Need to figure out how long should a war last.

Findings – the choice of an online game as a platform is the suitable platform for generating an interaction between users as intended.

The set of rules chosen to define the dpi game gets the desired response from the users and enhances the sense of the game and the relevance to the political context.

Questions remains to be examined relate to findings established in usability tests and will be collected along time, such as:

How long should a war last? A rule that will create a form to the game, fast going or slow, with a chance to negotiate and talk.
Conclusions

Conceptually, dpi is wearing the form of a game, a political game that has evolved to fulfill the requirements of both a game and a political tool.
You can never know how the users will react to a platform, and which new ways that the design did not consider, will take over the interaction.
This is consistent with the definition of dpi as a kind of an open end game.

Play must be safe
“All these ideas violate one of the fundamental elements of play: it is safe. The whole idea of play is to give the player an experience without the danger that might normally accompany that experience.” [Crawford, 2003]
Creating a safe environment for people to use, a place to experiment war, a place to experience peace, exploring ideas and dreams, a place where communication is safe and leads to a safer political environment.

To some extent the dpi project only starts now. Only once the game is online and working, it receives a life of its own. When the database starts to fill, it is possible to pull out information and analyze it to any need or wish.

As outlined before, dpi was designed as a game in order to rise above the disadvantages of text-based user interaction, hence my final suggestion is, click
www.digitalpalestineisrael.net
www.digitalpalestineisrael.com
and play.
Appendix A | past dpi

**Realization and research elements**

*Establish rules for game* - what will be a pixel, what will be the interaction, how will you occupy (the rules are where I come in, I want to be a part of the project, by setting the rules I can lead people to my truth).

*Design / Visualization* - I want dpi to be a design related place; I need to establish the initial community of designers and artists that upload works to the site.
Learn web development software and programming. php / flash

*Study of theories of games* - Learn about political games (on-line) and strategic games (board games) such as go, risk, and diplomacy. See how dpi fits in with them. And how should I establish the rules for my game in order to deliver my message.

*Learn about location-based media* – in order to connect the pixels on the map image to the real places they represent. Give the users the sense of the place.

*Learn about cartography, map* - There is allot of data in side a map. The rules of the map can help me filter the data in my project data users get from the site and data available from and about the users. Just like there are different maps for weather / population / geography, the site will filter the data.
Cartography rules can also give me the initial design concept.

*Users* - Need to figure who will be my users (Israelis / Palestinians / Others), decide to whom I direct this site (Language issues).
Must consider that I want this to be a platform of communication for both sides.
Appendix B | future dpi

Future plans

- Additional layers
- Analyzing history

dpi stands for couple of things

design peace initiative
digital Palestine Israel's platform can be applied to any conflict area in the world. And with small adjustments it is possible to relate the game to a new context.
The use of a discussion tool, combined with a voting system makes this platform useful in any decision-making situation. It is possible to apply this platform to any such environment.
This will be the international platform, It will cover news / international affairs.

design pure information
This layer of the project will refer to current events. It will be reacting to news via RSS feeds from various newspapers, websites, and blogs. Bringing into the discussion updated information, exposing the users to different sources of information, views and interpretations.
The ability to embed rss feeds in the game, suggesting that the comments will address the feeds topic, creates another level of control in the game and of the game. It can become a game platform to any topic, or a decision making tool for any matter.
In addition this layer regards any user as news provider.
Handing the decision of what is news and what’s not to the users.

This platform would be for anyone that wants the ability to say what they see around. A place you can “talk” to the politicians, show them that you are not fooled by their spins. It is a place where the politicians will have to explain their behavior to the public, as if it is Election Day every day.
Allowing users to add other types of information to a pixel – upload images, submitting links, expand the users interaction and enhance the attachment of the user to its pixel. Doing so strengthen the attachment and the sense of ownership one might have to its pixel. Loosing a pixel

**display phone interaction**
All the platforms will relay and encourage people to send their own news, comments, images, and videos using mobile phones
Get feeds from agents - every mobile phone
Set up a “Reality TV” of reckless driving / violence in the streets / street hazards / neglectfulness....
This will be a platform to set up the real news, to let people know what really goes on show the real images that real people see, taken by real people, in real time.
Will be location based.

**design per ilan**
This will be my privet area here I will present my own work, comments and the spirit behind the platform (like the editorial)

dpi will be a **democracy - people’s internet**
A platform for people to respond and to decide, a place to protest, to start boycotts to comment and to design a better future for us all.
People in Israel hardly go to demonstrations any more (apathy / lazy / afraid to go to crowded places) this project will be a demonstration platform.
What you learn about something is what the media decides to show you. dpi will tell the true story. Allow people to make an informed choice, and to be the informers.
restore objectivity
Appendix C | Database establishment and crossing.

Examples of comments pulled from the database.

• ‘Make love not war’;
• ‘Once again....I’m here to occupy the designer....’)’;
• ‘Home sweet home’, ‘YAVNE’;
• ‘I live here’;
• ‘This is mine’;
• ‘The icon is not working’;
• ‘Kill them all’;
• ‘It s soo cool’;
• ‘What lies beneath’;
• ‘The dust will become us all, unite and go forward’;
• ‘First we take Manhattan then we take Gaza’;
• ‘I am so happy it works’;
• ‘This is my first pixel’;
• ‘Too small to see anything’;
• ‘What’s going on here?\Palestine rules!! \ arafat is the XX@#%@#$%@# on earth’;
• ‘Yalla Balagan’;
• ‘Tel Aviv - Oasis of Sanity’;
• ‘Willy the king’;
• ‘Studing is the best’;
• ‘Rock the casba’;
• ‘Don’t rock the casba to hard :)';
• ‘1-2-3-4! \ tefune kiryat 4!’
• ‘Next we take Iran’;
• ‘Occupation is hazardous to your health’;
• ‘You will never be able to understand’;
• ‘It took long and hard work to get to this point and i am only at the beginning’;
• ‘I’m a lover not a fighter’;
• ‘I am going to live for ever’;
• ‘I love Israel’
• ‘Stop smoking it will kill you’;
• ‘This is hard work...’;
• ‘Brilliant!’;
• ‘Make love’;
• ‘Oh no isn’t this sad!’;
• ‘Shocking behavior what’s going to happen’;
• ‘step off!!!’;
Appendix D | Screen Shoots

[presentation of other game rules]

[dpi on local server as presented on ‘Takeaway’]

[dpi beta version online, users writing her name with pixels]
Appendix E | Ways to Occupy pixels

Choose an Attack
- Vote
- Roll the dice
- 3rd party
- Game of skills
- Buy
- Take and pay
- Caracteristic

Ways to resolve conflict

List of Skills
- terrorist
- peaceful
- strong
- believer
- optimistic
- pacifist
- realistic
- stubborn
- religious
- settler
- aggressive
- weak
- ideologist
- pessimist
- war lord
- naive
- open for ideas
- atheist
Appendix G | Research Images

[Exhibiting in TakeAway]

[User Interaction in TakeAway]
What is your Resolution?

[User Comments form TakeAway]
[dpi online war testing]

[Advertising dpi with a comment]

[Building up Exhibition]

[dpi database]
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