



Art Cares

The Potential of Art as a Therapeutic Modality

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ABSTRACT

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This study suggests that part of the art economy's current crisis could be explained with an unrecognition of the purpose of art. The art field fails to present, sell, educate on, and create art according to how it serves individuals, communities, and society at large.

The purpose of this study was to comprise a review of the potential and significance of art as a therapeutic field by examining how it cares for people and society through the fulfilment of psychological human needs. The paper proposes a paradigm shift that might uplift the societal recognition of art's value and contribute to a positive change in the socioeconomics of the arts.

A literature review was conducted on feminist literature on care ethics and fine art's contribution to care. The study aims to illustrate a potential framework of fine art having a therapeutic role in society as a field of care. With examples and comparison to other frameworks, the paper illustrates ways in which art functions as an instrument of care, thus fulfilling its societal role through a unique kind of servitude.

These results indicate the potential significance of art as a field of care and invite further study of the potential of such a paradigm shift. The findings indicate that art can serve as a catalyst for societal development and care, fulfilling this in a way unique to it among professional fields, making it irreplaceable. Further research is required to gather quantitative data about the impact of arts in such a role. This data should be reviewed to address the need for new strategies for producing, commissioning, selling, presenting, and educating on art. This study expands on existing groundwork for further research in the subject, introducing a framework of therapeutic art and connecting it to a modern value proposition for fine art.

Key words: art, care, therapeutic art, purpose, art as care, art as therapy

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1 INTRODUCTION

My grandfather once asked me about my studies: “Do they do anything useful there?” This slightly provocative question lingered in my mind and developed into various questions about the ‘usefulness’ of art’ and its societal purpose.

Does art *need to be* useful? Kantian and autonomist perspectives still affect much of contemporary aesthetics discourse, maintaining the notion of ‘art for art’s sake.’ This viewpoint also sometimes called “aestheticism,” holds that art is its own locus of value and should not be assessed in terms of instrumentality, as in catering to ulterior motives. Kant emphasized art’s aesthetic function and argued that beautiful things cannot be thought to have a purpose. (Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 178). Another parallel argument is the formalist view which considers it the only purpose of the arts to create ideologically neutral aesthetic pleasure, (TUAS 2007, 11). The Kantians, autonomists and formalists argue that morality and art are incompatible, thus art cannot produce or contribute to any other values outside itself.

However, artist, researcher and president of the Artists’ Association of Finland and International Association of Art (IAA) Europe, Teemu Mäki points out that pondering the purpose of the arts is likely to be most important for the artists themselves, and that “the arts community has to discuss both the purpose of the arts between themselves and strive to open art for the rest of society, to justify its field by comparing it to other fields in a way which is commonly understandable.” (TUAS 2007, 10). The discussion of the instrumentality of art might be crucial for the benefit of the art world itself.

I will therefore delve into the potential for a paradigm shift of an instrumentalist view of art as a tool of care. My theory fits into what are called the ‘pragmatic’ theories of art, for I look at it as a means to an end, (Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 146). However, I highlight that this is already how art serves us, but we fail to recognize it. The problem tends to be how we present, sell and approach art. I will examine this potential of art as care through the intersections between care ethics and artistic practices. I will exemplify and illustrate ways in which artists

could engage with notions of care, and form a generalist perspective of therapeutic art. This paper gives one answer to my late grandfather's question, which at least for now gives me a direction for my future work.

2 THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF ART

In this chapter I will define the notion of care as a universal moral responsibility with references to feminist theory and care ethics in literature by Joan C. Tronto (1993), Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) and Wilhelmina Ojanen (2022). I will discuss the idea of care in the context of art and propose that art can act as a tool of care. Furthermore I will differentiate my notion of therapeutic art from art therapy, framing art generally as a therapeutic modality, a field with *caring* potential.

2.1. Defining care in the art context

By discussing the notion of care and how art might facilitate it, I will provide a framework of how art could act as a form of care for society. I define care with references to Joan C. Tronto's (1993) ethics of care in *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* and with references to Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) and Wilhelmina Ojanen (2022). From there, I discuss how art can provide care and constitute complete or partial processes of care.

2.1.1 Care as a universal moral responsibility

In *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa does not see caring as an option but as "a vital necessity of all beings," and asserts that "nothing holds together without relations of care," (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 67). She frames care as a necessity that maintains life, not only a predicament for welfare. Seeing care as a fundamental aspect of human life implies that it is a key part of humanity to be interdependent: "...it is a part of the human condition that our autonomy occurs only after a long period of dependence, and that in many regards, we remain dependent upon others throughout our lives." (Tronto 1993, 162). Nothing continues to function without maintenance, and we people need to be maintained by each other. Feminist political theorist Joan C. Tronto defined care as:

... everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Tronto 1993, 103)

Tronto (1993) argues that our cultural perception of *care* is fragmented and unbalanced. Care is undervalued and underrecognized in our society; isolated as something associated with lesser social values: emotionality, the private household and weakness. It is traditionally seen as a private activity, confined within households and families, which associates it as a problem of idiosyncratic individuals such as mothers, rather than a social concern. Publicly it is primarily associated with healthcare. Also, society perceives a need of help as a threat to one's autonomy, associating it with weakness. This strips us of our necessary ability to conceive ourselves as needing care and lowers the status of caring. Care is perceived as a marginal aspect of society and has little status, except when it is honoured in its emotional and private forms. (Tronto 1993, 118-122.)

Care has historically been undervalued and the values of caring: attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion & meeting others' needs, have been associated primarily with "women's morality" - female gender roles in private spheres. "Care raises ethical and political questions about who is expected to care," (Ojanen 2022, 10). Calling for a reconceptualization of care as a public and political concern, Tronto framed an ethic of care as a foundational principle in political and moral discourse. She contended that care should be recognized as a fundamental moral value - a universal moral responsibility. (Tronto 1993, 110; 124; 126.)

2.1.2 Care as practice

Tronto defined care as "both a practice and a disposition" (1993, 104). However, to see care *only* as a disposition would allow it to be sentimentalized and romanticized as something the individual *feels towards* something. To think of care in terms of a practice considers the complexity of caring as a concept intertwined in all aspects of life, rather than isolating it as an *emotion* which would

further restrict it within gender roles of feminine emotionality and masculine rationality. As only a disposition, care would again be associated primarily with women. (Tronto 1993, 118-119.)

A caring practice is one where “a practice is aimed at maintaining, continuing, or repairing the world,” thus *practices of care* can happen in all social fields such as healthcare, politics, education, or economy, (Tronto 1993, 104). Although Tronto argued that creative activity, or to create a work of art, is not care, she also proceeds to point out that some activities are aimed at both care and another end, (1993, 104). Thus art can function as a practice of care when it is directed towards such ends in some sense.

As a complete process, care consists of four interconnected phases: *caring about*, *taking care of*, *care-giving* and *receiving care*, (Tronto 1993, 105-107). The first phase, *caring about* is an acknowledgement of a need and recognition that it needs to be met. *Taking care* involves assuming responsibility for the identified need and determining how to respond to it. In *care giving*, it is almost always required that there’s a direct contact between caregivers to the objects of care. *Giving care* involves physical work, an action to fulfill a need. In *care receiving*, the object of care responds to the given care in a way that lets us know that the need has been met.

2.1.3 How can art care?

Exposure to art and creation of art can both act as instruments of care in various parts of a care process, or by encompassing the whole of it. Cuypers et al. (2012) demonstrate through a large-scale population study that both art appreciation and art creation are associated with increased well-being (as measured by perceived health, life satisfaction and anxiety and depression scores). Rollins et al. (2011) overview various studies demonstrating great impacts of art exposure to development and psychological health. Art provides care through communication of ideas and experiences that allow and give care. Art critic, writer and curator Lucy Lippard parallels with Joan Tronto’s notion of care as an other-oriented activity aimed at maintaining our world in the statement: “Art is a creative act; it’s supposed to be committed to life,” (Lippard 1985, 12).

We can embody and simulate experiences through perceiving artworks, enabling *caring* and therapeutic experiences. Art is a way to understand directly lived experience. (Joutsenvirta & Salonen 2020, 189.) Embodiment is the “profound bodily understanding of one’s connection to the world.” Choreographer Wilhelmina Ojanen argues that having a body makes care possible, as the embodied knowledge we gain through the body allows us to care, (Ojanen 2022, 52).

From one perspective art’s societal task is *care*, or the prompting and inspiration of practices that enable care for our society. Through acting as a form of thinking and communication, art can activate care processes (e.g. political art), act as a phase of a care process (e.g. activist art as ‘caring about’ through acknowledgement of human/environmental needs) or constitute a complete care process by acting as a therapeutic medium, e.g. doing the *caregiving* by enabling healing cathartic experiences. Art is therapeutic in that it can contribute to the fulfilment and attendance to human needs: art products or experiences can enable experiences of care. It can therefore act as a therapeutic modality, an instrument of care practices and an outlet of therapeutic experiences.

2.2. Art as Therapy

Referring to Alain de Botton & John Armstrong’s *Art as Therapy*, I propose instances or ways in which art might fulfill purposes mentioned in previous chapters. I will then illustrate a certain way of perceiving art, in which it is seen as a therapeutic field, whose purpose is, through communication, creative thinking and experiences, to provide care for individuals, groups and the society.

2.2.1 Art or Therapy?

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that “uses the creative process of making art to improve and enhance the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of individuals of all ages” (AATA, 2023). What is crucial to notice here is that art therapy, by definition, focuses on the act of creation, and usually in art therapy,

the customer is the one who creates. The other common orientation of art therapy is art psychotherapy, in which the focus is on the relationship between a therapist, artist (client) and a finished art product (Gussak & Rosal 2016, 1). Like in other forms of psychotherapy and counselling, art therapy fosters personal growth, increases self-understanding, assists in emotional reparation, which enable benefits such as finding meaning and insight in life, relief from overwhelming emotions and trauma and the resolution of conflicts and problems. Compared to other forms of therapy it is gaining popularity particularly because of the ability of communicating complex thoughts, emotions and experiences that are difficult or perhaps in some cases, impossible, to verbalize. The key to these benefits however is believed to be in self-expression and it is emphasized that the product is less important than the therapeutic process involved. (Malchiodi 2012, 1.)

Something is therapeutic when it heals, provides an experience of increased well-being, acts as a method of curing of a disease or medical condition, or produces beneficial or favourable results on the object. (Cambridge Dictionary 2024), (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2024.) The term comes from the Greek word *therapeutikos*, which means ‘inclined to serve,’ (Rakel 2024), which is rooted in words *therapeuein*, which means to attend or treat, and *theraps*, which means ‘attendant,’ implying a person who fulfills a need or attends to it, (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024). In a broad sense, then, therapeutics means “serving and caring.” (Rakel; Encyclopedia Britannica 2024). Something is therapeutic when it serves one by providing *care* to their physical, emotional, or psychological well-being. A therapeutic process is one of *taking* and *giving care*, with the object *receiving* it.

2.2.2 Art as a Therapeutic Modality

While art therapy is focused on addressing individual therapeutic goals within a clinical framework, art as a field in general possesses therapeutic benefits and potential. Art therapy is situated in the field of healthcare, but art is a field of its own. Trying to fit it into healthcare would result in a welfare-art perspective which diminishes the importance of artistic ambition and reduces the value of

art to be *only* that of healthcare – as artist Laura Nevanperä (2017) also points out that most of what we call art doesn't fit into the concept of welfare-art, (19). An artist is *not* a therapist or social worker, and thus I will aim to frame art as a therapeutic modality without reducing it to this sort of welfare-art.

Contrary to art therapy, I want to highlight the importance of the art product delivering such effects, namely the communication of complex thoughts, emotions, and experiences. This maintains that the artist as a professional is not only necessary but vital for such products to be created: an artist's expertise could lie in utilizing the power of art for the fostering of well-being, self-understanding, and psychological relief, among other benefits. I maintain that this is a *certain* function of art. I want to emphasize, that *care* is something that high quality art *already does*, and rather I want to discuss the ways this is possible – and how society and the arts field might benefit from a heightened awareness of this function of art. I think, as Alain de Botton does, that: “Far from humbling art, this is a strategy to give artistic activity the central place [in society and in our individual lives] it has often claimed, but rarely managed to occupy in practice,” (de Botton 2013, 73).

Alain de Botton & John Armstrong's innovative book *Art as Therapy* argues that despite our society deeming art as something very important, individual experiences of art often leave people feeling underwhelmed. We often walk into art galleries and museums expecting some sort of transformational or powerful experience but tend to end up feeling perhaps inadequate like we lack some capacity for feeling or are not knowledgeable enough to grasp whatever we just saw.

de Botton proposes that the problem larger: it is with the way art is taught, sold and present by the art establishment. He criticizes, that since the beginning of the 20th century, our relationship with art has been weakened by a reluctance to address the question of what art is for. Unfortunately, he points out, that this question has also come to feel illegitimate, considered even cliché. I also think this question hasn't been often treated with the adequate respect and seriousness that it demands - especially in the context of art education. de Botton argues that the reluctance to answer this question and the conception of

'art for art's sake' leaves the high status of art vague and vulnerable: its importance is "too often assumed rather than explained." (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 4.)

de Botton's answer to this problem is alike the notion of seeing art as an instrument of psychological caregiving. *Art as Therapy* proposes that art is, most of all, a therapeutic medium that can help "guide, exhort and console its viewers, enabling them to become better versions of themselves." The point of art, as the book proposes, is the conviction that *the main point of engaging with art is to help us lead better lives - to access better versions of ourselves.* (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 4).

Art can be a tool. A tool is a device that extends our capabilities beyond our bodies themselves. It's an extension of the body or the mind that allows a wish to be carried out and is required because of a natural physical inability. A tool is a response to our need yet inability to perform a given activity. To discover the purpose of art – what kind of a tool it exactly is, "we must ask what kind of things we need to do with our minds and our emotions but have trouble with." (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 4-5.) Art is a tool that can care for us by correcting or compensating for a range of psychological frailties.

3 THE SEVEN FUNCTIONS OF ART

de Botton & Armstrong (2013, 57-58) identify seven psychological frailties, and seven corresponding functions of art respond to those needs. By providing us help with these seven psychological frailties, art can assist us in dealing with difficulties in life that arise from these weaknesses of our minds. In these functions art can act as care directly in the process of care-giving, simply through art appreciation and exposure to works of art or their creation. I will examine these functions one at a time and discuss them in reference to supporting literature.

These seven needs and frailties are:

1. **REMEMBERING:** We easily forget what matters. Our minds are troublingly liable to lose important information, both factual and sensory oriented.
2. **HOPE:** We have a proclivity to lose hope.
3. **SORROW:** We suffer, and we feel that this suffering lacks dignity. Because of our biases and lack of perception, we have an unrealistic sense of how much difficulty is normal. We are lonely, not because we don't have people around us, but because "those around us can't appreciate our travails with sufficient depth, honesty and patience."
4. **REBALANCING:** We are unbalanced and lose sight of our best sides. We suffer from a weakness of will in relation to our highest ambitions.
5. **SELF-UNDERSTANDING:** We are hard to get to know. We are mysteries even to ourselves and this lack of self-knowledge makes it sometimes difficult for us to live with ourselves.
6. **GROWTH:** Because we are prey to superficial, prejudiced judgements, we too easily reject many things that have something important to offer us because they appear strange and inconceivable to us or come in the wrong wrapping.
7. **APPRECIATION:** We are desensitized by familiarity and habit. We live in a world of media that highlights glamour, which creates dissatisfaction at our reality.

The Seven Functions of Art that respond to the needs are:

1. **CORRECTIVE OF BAD MEMORY:** Art helps us remember and collect precious things of the past.

2. **A PURVEYOR OF HOPE:** Art keeps pleasant and cheering, encouraging things in view.
3. **A SOURCE OF DIGNIFIED SORROW:** Art reminds us of the legitimate place of sorrow in life and dignifies it.
4. **A BALANCING AGENT:** Art encodes the essence of our good qualities and helps restore equilibrium.
5. **A GUIDE TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE:** Art can help us identify what is central to ourselves but hard to verbalize.
6. **A GUIDE TO THE EXTENSION OF EXPERIENCE:** Art is an accumulation of the experiences of others. It can contain ideas and attitudes that we can make our own in ways that enrich us. It can challenge us to growth through delivering difficult things to us in a way which enables us to approach them and deal with them without immediate rejection.
7. **A RE-SENSITIZATION TOOL:** Art helps us recover our sensitivity and clears the habitual disregard for the value of things we are desensitized to.

3.1. A Corrective of Bad Memory

Art acts as a tool supporting our individual and collective memory. “Writing is the obvious response to the consequences of forgetting; art is the second central response” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 8). Nowadays we have a variety of other similar, handy tools which enable us to directly document information, such as: video, audio recordings and quick smartphone photographs: “The urge to pick up a camera stems from an anxious awareness of our cognitive weaknesses about the passage of time...” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 8). However: one cannot record everything. Trying to would result in an unlive life, due to a constant, futile attempt to hold on to the passing time and resist the consequences of forgetting. One has to prioritize, and that means one also has to deprioritize: it is valuable to know what is worth remembering.

We give high praise to an artist who can capture, in e.g. visual form a personality and *essence* of a real person. “The people we call good artists are, in part, the ones who appear to have made the right choices about what to commemorate

and what to leave out.” To achieve this sense, and art object needs to attain a certain level of sophistication. We call a work of art successful when it manages to highlight elements that are valuable but hard to hold on to. A high quality artwork pins down the core of significance, while a bad one lets an essence slip away. Art, in this sense, is a way of “preserving experiences, of which there are many transient and beautiful examples, and that we need help containing.” Art edits down the complexity of memories, helping us focus on the most meaningful aspects. It is a sign of good art, then, to know how to commemorate the appropriate details. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 9-12.)

3.2. A Purveyor of Hope

At the most basic level, we enjoy beautiful art because we like the real thing it represents. The water garden that Monnet painted is itself delightful. Unfortunately, love of prettiness is often considered a low or invaluable category of artistic expression, especially by people of taste and intelligence. Despite the aesthetics -movement’s reign during the time of Kant, when the prevailing autonomous perspective of the arts was formed, we now tend to be suspicious about beauty, much due to the modernist rebellion against the idea that art *has* to be associated with beauty. We now have certain two-fold worries about pretty pictures: First, they are alleged to feed sentimentality. “Sentimentality is a symptom of insufficient engagement with complexity by which one really means problems.” Secondly – analogous with the first – we have a fear of being unjustifiably hopeful. We fear that prettiness will numb us and leave us insufficiently critical and alert to the injustice surrounding us. “*The worry is that we may feel pleased and cheerful too readily. That we will take an overly optimistic view of life and be, and the world.*” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 12-13.)

These fears are however generally misplaced since most of the time we humans tend to suffer from excessive gloom. Rather than being naively optimistic, we tend to be too aware of the problems and injustices of the world. Current sociopolitical issues have caused widespread psychological troubles such as climate-anxiety and fear of war. Yet, contemporary society possesses all the necessary tools to cope with such challenges. The problem is rather that we

tend to lack hope: “*We might be doomed out not by a lack of skill, but by an absence of hope.*” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 12-13.)

In fact, the difficulties of life are what make beautiful things more appreciative. I need not elaborate on this Nietzschean idea except by quoting de Botton: *The pleasure of pretty art draws on dissatisfaction: if we did not like find life difficult, beauty would not have the appeal it does.*”

For a long period of art history, it was a central aspiration to embody idealizations of life. The notion of idealization is often associated doing injustice to reality. Artists would often express their longings for ideals through work that illustrated perhaps unrealistic ideas of what life might be like. Yet, de Botton argues, we can appreciate ideals while being aware of their fallibility and imperfect motives. Idealization’s counterpart – caricature – can exemplify how idealized images could be helpful to us: simplification and exaggeration can reveal insights that are lost in ordinary experiences. “Strategic exaggerations of what is good can perform the critical function of distilling and concentrating the hope we need to chart a parth through the difficulties of life.” One function of beauty, then, is that it gives us hope. Beauty can console us in bearing our afflictions by providing glimpses of beauty that may empower us by reminding us of its existence amid difficulties. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 20-24.)

3.3. A Source of Emotional Fortitude

Art can teach us how to suffer more successfully, (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 24). *Sublimation* refers to the psychological processes of transformation, in which base and unimpressive experiences are converted into something noble and fine. A key way in which art provides therapeutic and caring experiences is the transformation of suffering into beauty. For example, art can present sorrow in a way which dignifies it. Through expression of sorrowful experiences in a way which highlights both their ordinary nature and their importance, art can help us in finding honour in our worst experiences. Art offers help in finding dignity in our suffering and gives a social expression to our experiences, with which we might easily feel alone – which usually amplifies our suffering. Also, art can, by reminding us of what life can be like, console us and relieve us, but

more importantly it functions when it acknowledges sorrow. Art can normalize suffering.

Art can also care for us in our sorrow by making our problems seem *less* significant. Sadness is amplified by loneliness and lack of point of reference to the ‘magnitude’ of our suffering. Through the help of an artwork we can learn to appreciate our essential nothingness through getting a point of reference which reminds us of the insignificance of our problems. With the help of such art, we are better equipped to deal with the intense, intractable and particular griefs before us. For example, de Botton comments the work *Rocky Reef on the Sea Shore* (c. 1825) by Caspar David Friedrich, as a transcendental experience which can, in the middle of sorrow, detach one from their sorrow temporarily:

“The picture does not refer directly to our relationships, or to the stresses and tribulations of our everyday lives. Its function is to give us access to a state of mind in which we are acutely conscious of the largeness of time and space.”

Similarly, the cycle of sorrowful mysteries in the Christian artistic schema constitutes an elaborate psychology of sorrow that shows us the role of suffering in life and seeks to offer a perspective that strengthens our capacity to bear our afflictions. This canon, apart from its implications on an apparent spiritual reality, offers inspiration for the deliberate and systemic harnessing of art to aid us in our inner sorrows.

For example, the various depictions of Jesus’ agony in the garden of Gethsemane prior to his captivity, provide an immensely prestigious focus for a distinctive aspect of grief: the feeling that one is utterly alone, and a dreadful but unavoidable task awaits in the morning. In Paul Gauguin’s take on the scene in the historic of Jesus, the artist has made the painting also a self-portrait, thus projecting himself to the character of Jesus not only theoretically in a mental reflection, but also physically in the form of the painting. By projecting himself to the figure, he has emphasized the function of the image as a mirror to his own sufferings.



Image 1. "Christ in the Garden of Olives" by Paul Gauguin, 1889, Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO).

In *Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience*, Freedberg & Gallese (2007) point out that people often have internal bodily experiences from the observation of bodies in works of art that correlate with the bodies they see. Mirror neurons enable embodied simulation: a mechanism through which the actions, emotions or sensations we see activate our own internal representations of the body states that are associated with these social stimuli. Even still images are embodied in the simulation they activate in a viewer's brain. (Freedberg & Gallese 2007). This *mirroring* is also possibly a key mechanism in social cognition (Gallese 2007). We mentally simulate the experiences we perceive, bypassing the body, and our brains reproduce the somatic states seen in or implied by perceived artworks as if the body was presently in those states. (Freedberg & Gallese 2007; Damasio 1999). This kind of projection could increase our

engagement with the works of art we perceive. Freedberg and Gallese (2007) refer to Damasio, explaining:

“When we see the body part of someone else being touched or caressed, or when we see two objects touching each other, our somatosensory cortices are activated as if our body were subject to tactile stimulation.”

Particularly interesting about this function is the precision of the simulation, when discussing the mechanism in people’s responses to seeing Francisco Goya’s series of drawings *Desastres de la Guerra* which includes very physical and often violent depictions of human bodies: “the physical responses seem to be located in precisely those parts of the body that are threatened, pressured, constrained or destabilized. Furthermore, physical empathy easily transmutes into a feeling of empathy for the emotional consequences of the ways in which the body is damaged or mutilated.” (Freedberg & Gallese 2007.)

Such mirroring, can, in such instances help us more powerfully empathize with artworks, letting us *feel through* the artwork. In the case of Gauguin’s projection of himself to the figure of Jesus, he would’ve been able to transcend any experience of similar sorrow more powerfully by reflecting on it through the symbolic, story-like contents of his work. In this way, the work can be highly therapeutic for the purposes of transcending or dealing with sorrow.

While observing abstract forms, we perhaps subconsciously simulate within ourselves movements that are implied by the physical traces, for example in Jackson’s Pollock’s abstract paintings. “This also applies to the cut canvases of Lucio Fontana—where sight of the slashed painting invites a sense of empathetic movement that seems to coincide with the gesture felt to have produced the tear.” (Freedberg & Gallese 2007.) A substantial part of how we experience an artwork, is formulated in the relationship between embodied empathetic feelings in the observer and the quality of the work, with the quality of the work for example studied in terms of “the representational content of the work in terms of actions, intentions, objects, emotions and sensations depicted” or “the quality of

the work in terms of the visible traces of the artist's creative gestures". (Freedberg & Gallese 2007). It is the artist's conscious and unconscious skill in evoking an empathetic response that most directly impacts the esthetic quotient of an artwork.

The witnessing of tragedy in theatre develops emotional fortitude (Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 83). By observing suffering, we embody it through embodied simulation, and can thus become more accustomed to the effects of misfortune. (Ibid.) Hegel argued that art's representation of human emotions invites their reflection and loosens their control of us, (Hammermeister 2002, 94). Art can embody sufferings which we have not experienced and convey them in a way which enables us to relate to them without being controlled by our emotions, (TUAS 2007, 22). Art can also crystallize experiences we've had, enabling us to externalize them and process them through the art form.

3.4. A Balancing Agent

Few of us are entirely well balanced, we are often too complacent; too insecure, too trusting or too suspicious: too this or that. "*Art can put us in touch with concentrated doses of our missing dispositions, and thereby restore a measure of equilibrium to our listing inner selves.*" (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 29). By communicating experiences, emotions, ideas, and concepts to us which we lack in our lives, art can through its effects balance us psychologically.

In their dialog with an artwork, a viewer can safely experience things which they lack in their own life, such as love or terror of war. In such a process a person can e.g. expand their emotional spectrum and experiment with perspectives and meanings which are beyond their ordinary capacity. (TUAS 2007, 22). For example, art which visualizes perfection or is beautiful "is especially appealing to people who don't have what it depicts," (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 12). In this sense, it can act as a substitute for its subject, (TUAS 2007, 16) or enable us to enjoy the impossible, (Ibid.). Mäki declares though, that it can be something even more; in such a way an image can be cathartic; more complex

and practical than simply the substitute of its subject. It can enable rising beyond the immediate subject to a degree of higher philosophical contemplation, (TUAS 2007, 22).

Since we're missing different things, the art that can rebalance us differs greatly between individuals' needs. What specifically is the *task* of a specific piece of artwork depends *on the artwork* and the *viewer's needs*. The notion that art has a role in rebalancing us gives a hint of why people's aesthetic tastes differ so greatly. Our tastes would, in this manner, depend on how our emotional make-up is imbalanced and which spectrum of it needs stimulation. Every work of art is imbued with a particular psychological and moral atmosphere; thus our preferences reflect our varied psychological gaps. We hunger for aesthetic things that compensate our inner fragilities. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 30.)

Groups and whole societies can use art to compensate for things which are missing in our lives, (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 30). Quoting German playwright and philosopher Friedrich Schiller, de Botton argues that the ancient Greeks' lack of attention to landscape in their art was since they lived in close contact with natural landscapes, and thus had 'not lost nature in themselves,' and were not in need of artistic objects external to themselves in which they could 'recover' nature. According to de Botton, it follows that "art that pays a great deal of attention to the natural world would be prized only when there was some special need for it," (2013, 30). As human life becomes more estranged from nature and is increasingly artificial, our longing for a compensating natural simplicity is strengthened.

We can see that art dealing with nature and bringing it closer to us is a huge trend in contemporary art. A certain work that fits the notion of re-balancing in another way too was Doug Aitken's installation "The Garden," which evoked the concept of the 'rage room' as an interactive artwork. Aitken's installation was a gleamingly clean white chamber walled by bulletproof glass, containing contemporary domestic objects, including bedroom and living room sets with wine glasses and all, surrounded outside the glass by a lush green garden of tropical plants.



Image 2. Doug Aitken, *The Garden*, 2017, Photography: Anders Sune Berg (Byng, 2017).

Over the eight-week duration of the installation, viewers were handed out batons and invited to do whatever they wanted in the room, each providing a unique performative expression of their very physical dialog with the man-made environment. The visits were also streamed from multiple cameras. Thus, the viewer became partly audience, a participant, and also a subject of the work, through whom we could examine our various responses to the installation. Aitken said about the nature-artificiality dichotomy:

“I’m interested in how we came to a point where our living environments are so incredibly removed from any connection with nature.”

“This humid garden is a living, breathing artwork that’s deliberately at odds with where we are right now. It’s dislocated from its surroundings yet it’s flourishing. That speaks about the present and the landscape we’ve created for ourselves.” (Cited in Byng, 2017)

Visitors were given protective clothing and gear and were encouraged to physically destroy these generic elements of modern life. In addition to an urban-natural environment dichotomy with the lush garden providing a certain relief for anyone needing such a contact to greenery, the ‘rage room’ also allowed for –

at least – a temporary outlet of emotional relief. Although evidence suggests that, as an actual anger-management method, the rage rooms are more likely to lead to more anger, (Scott 2024). Aitken provides an example of how such an artwork could act as a balancing agent in many ways in dealing with emotions or our detachment from nature.

An understanding of the psychological mechanism of taste can also help us be more empathetic toward differing tastes. It would enable us to consider – and ask – what a person must lack to see something as beautiful. Thus, we can appreciate their taste even if it doesn't appeal to us the same way. This also gives us the ability to understand the particular of imbalances within historical periods by considering which works of art, movements or themes have been most popular during it (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 32-33.)

3.5. A Guide to Self- and Other-Understanding

Art builds self-knowledge and is an excellent method of expressing ourselves also to others. Art can latch on to aspects of experience which are hard to verbalize. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 40). A picture can capture in a vivid form, a part of who one is, a part that isn't particularly verbal. This is why we often tend to stress the objects we use to communicate our identities to the world: interior decoration, clothing, music and other aesthetic preferences. They reflect parts of us in a unique way, when we find something we 'relate to' in a work of art. We don't just *like* art objects. We are sometimes a bit like them. They can act as a medium through which we can come to know ourselves and communicate that to others, (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 43).

Artworks can also summarize life-long lessons and experiences into a form in which a viewer can have an embodied, second-hand experience of something that would take them a lifetime to live through, (TUAS 2007, 22). Such crystallized experiences can be more dramatic and intense than the viewer's own life, producing perhaps stronger impacts.

Research in neuroaesthetics suggests that in engagement with emotionally stimulating and potentially transformative artworks, viewers may have an inward, self-reflective metacognitive focus (Morrissey & Sherman 2017, 7). Vessel et al. (2012, 2013) have demonstrated that intensely moving aesthetic experiences activate the *default mode network* containing areas of the brain known to be involved in self-contemplation, self-reflection and self-referential thought. Morrissey & Sherman argue that contemplative pleasure that might be present in art experience is not merely valuable for its own sake, but also instrumentally valuable for deepening one's self-understanding. They point out that experiences of art appreciation prompt self-reflection, which is a clue to their potential significance for increasing self-understanding – a key goal of therapy. (2017, 8).

Art can also act as a path to understanding others and otherness. Morrissey & Sherman (2017, 9) elaborate at least two ways that art helps us understand other people and their experiences: a) cognitively and b) emotionally. Cognitive empathy refers to an individual's capacity to model others' experiences by deduction. This activity does not demand emotional investment, whereas emotional empathy involves an affective capacity to recognize and resonate with others' emotions (also called "emotional contagion" or "affect sharing"). Morrissey & Sherman suggest that engagement with art can recruit mechanisms of cognitive or emotional empathy and develop empathy, perhaps changing aspects of one's disposition, personality, and capacity to empathize in future situations. (Morrissey & Sherman 2017, 10.) Freedberg & Gallese (2007) suggest that embodied responses during art appreciation are forms of such cognitive and affective simulation, and that they play a role in facilitating an understanding of the artwork's representational content and the artist's intentions. They provide several examples demonstrating that viewers have physical 'felt' responses to visual representations, even if they are abstract, such as we saw in the chapter on sorrow.

Such embodiment experiences can help us understand others through empathy, which could facilitate care for others through our own art experiences. This mechanism enables artists' experiences to be 'felt' by the audiences in a way which can 'transport' an experience through the mirroring function, possibly

enabling a person to feel what the artist has felt. Such embodiment can be utilized in various aspects of how art cares.

3.6. A Guide to the Extension of Experience

Art is an immensely sophisticated accumulation of human experience. As noted in the previous chapter, art builds self-knowledge and can communicate it to others, (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 40). It is, in this way, a tool of collective learning. Philosopher John Dewey called art “the incomparable organ of instruction,” becoming such by way of communication, (Dewey 1934, 347). It can communicate others’ experiences to us in a format which is somewhat universally understandable, prompting us to decipher and analyse experiences which are not one’s own. Art can communicate things one relates to – or one’s we can’t.

3.6.1 The Educational Perspective

Extensive research already exists in the context of art’s educational impact. Rolins et al. (2011, 8-9) outline numerous studies that demonstrate that exposure to art experiences develops intellect & cognition, social readiness and improves learning, among other impacts. Cognitivist views of art support the argument that art can facilitate growth and learning. Cynthia Freeland has summarized the cognitive perspective as follows:

“(1) Artworks stimulate cognitive activity that might teach us about the world. [...]

(2) The cognitive activity they simulate is part and parcel of their functioning as artworks.

(3) as a result of this stimulation, we learn from artworks: we acquire fresh knowledge, our beliefs are refined, and our understanding is deepened.

(4) What we learn in this manner constitutes one of the main reasons we enjoy and value artworks in the first place.”

(cited in Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 121)

Francisco Matarasso's report *Use or Ornament: The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts* shows that participation in arts activities increases people's confidence and sense of self-worth and contributes to growth in an educational sense. (Matarasso 1997, 11-21). In a study included in the report he overviews a season of arts activities organized in the city of Portsmouth. In over 30 schools, students attended participatory art activities such as half-day workshops for junior classes to week-long residencies aimed at creating new work such as a mural. The programme was designed to be part of the curriculum, but also provided an opportunity to evaluate the influence of participation in the arts to the students' general development.

	Positive	Slight	No impact	Negative
Developing language skills	60%	24%	15%	1%
Physical co-ordination	62%	16%	22%	-
Observation skills	53%	30%	17%	-
Creativity and imagination	83%	9%	7%	1%
Social skills development	56%	31%	13%	-

Table 1. Impact of arts activities on students, as assessed by teachers. (Matarasso 1997, 19)

In a questionnaire given to teachers at 9 of Portsmouth's schools, a sample of 88 students in total was assessed by the teachers considering their development in five areas of growth. Table 1 (Matarasso 1997, 19) shows how teachers – who knew their students best – assessed them to have grown in all five cognitive, social, and physical areas during the season of arts activities.

The students took different classes including dance activities and storytelling, which all contribute to different areas of growth. It is easy to see which kind of art activities might contribute to which developmental areas. It can be argued that the art, or fine art specifically, have a role to play in general education especially through the acquisition of transferable skills. (Matarasso 1997, 21.)

It is exactly these transferable skills which seem to be highlighted in studies outlined by Rollins et al. (2011). Art experiences promote psychological well-

being in a very broad sense by facilitating development in various life domains. In this way art can act as an agent of developmental maintenance, providing care through aiding us in our growth and development.

3.6.2 The Communication of Alien Experiences

Things which are alien to us can help us come to face things we might shut ourselves from to our demise. Art that unnerves us or provokes us in some way, can help us face – in privacy – things which are alien or discomforting to us, and help us deal with them. It helps us step over our borders, outside our own ‘bubbles’ (Joutsenvirta & Salonen 2020, 188). “A lot of art is, after all, the product of world views that are radically at odds with our own.” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 45). Experiences with art that seem initially off-putting, offer us lessons in psychological growth. “Growth occurs when we discover how to remain authentically ourselves in the presence of potentially threatening things. Maturity is the possession of coping skills: we can take in our stride things that previously would have knocked us off course.” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 52).

Film director & scriptwriter Selma Vilhunen has stated: “Good art is uncomfortable because, by showing our own narrow perspective, it questions our wisdom and our importance.” Experiences of discomfort can also force us to face other persons and ourselves in whole new ways, and art can facilitate such experiences. “Such an experience can change a person’s life.” (Vilhunen 2019.)

de Botton argues, that because curators and art institutions are isolated, they often seem to fail to understand how particular or unusual their interests are. Thus, he complains, art galleries and museums often present quite peculiar things but fail to provide a sort of bridge of empathy between audiences by acknowledging this. They tend to assume that people are interested or understanding towards what is exhibited. Such things might easily put us on our toes and intimidate us, as otherness and difference often do. To resolve this problem and help us become better at odds with art that communicates things which challenge us, we must be less defensive. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 48-49.)

According to de Botton, “the first and crucial step to overcoming defensiveness is to be highly alert to its reality: to be generously aware of how normal it is to harbour strongly negative views about things.” The second step is to “make oneself more at home with the seemingly alien mindsets of people who created some of the world’s most revered works of art.” de Botton argues that art institutions should also be frank about such conflicts and perhaps even warn viewers whenever they might be walking into rooms displaying some particularly peculiar things. Now, a third step in resolving defensive responses is to seek out contact points in which there can be empathy between the artist’s mindset and one’s own. This is again the viewer’s responsibility, to find aspects in artwork that we can – with sufficient exploration – personally relate to. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 49.)

The artist must often reach out for quite fragile aspects of the audience’s experience to build an understanding of certain kinds of art. Flickers of interest and enjoyment in the audience’s experience often mean that the object or the artist are not beyond comprehension and some points of overlap between their mindsets about any subject in question are found. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 50.) An artist should not however try to please their audience and make the job easier for them by modifying whatever they do in favour of reducing alienation, since it is precisely the important element that promotes transformative experiences.

Pelowski and Akiba (2011; see also Pelowski et al. 2016; Pelowski et al. 2017) suggest that when an artwork violates a viewer’s expectations, the triggered metacognitive re-assessment of the artwork leads to the transforming of self-schema, changing one’s self-perception, and that studies on such cognitive mastery of an artwork “prelude the possibility for art to [truly] mark and transform lives,” (Pelowski and Akiba 2011, 81.) Powerful physical emotional experiences indicate self-reflection and changes in perspectives and self-schemas (Pelowski & Akiba 2011).

Discovery of alien things can expand our sense of who we are. “It is when we find points of connection to the foreign that we are able to grow.” This ‘anti-fragility’ and the ability to find personal resonance, even in things which

might initially be alien to one's own experience, is captured in the phrase by Roman playwright Terence: "I am human. Nothing human is foreign to me." (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 52.) Artist Olafur Eliasson agrees, highlighting that art represents one of the few areas in society where people can share experiences without necessarily agreeing on the shared experiences. Eliasson considers disagreement an "essential ingredient" (Eliasson 2016.)

de Botton's perspective somewhat aligns also with the theories of *Bildung*, which means: "the generality of a culture, the clustering of values by which a man lives, rather than specifically educational attainment." (Swales 1978, 14; cited in Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 116). *Bildung*, was a theory of self-cultivation (and religious transformation), which supported that art could act as a perfect vehicle for growth in a sort of self-development sense, encompassing more than a notion of a finite number of lessons, but rather a more intangible process also embedded with moral qualities (Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 115-120.)

Art is irreplaceable in a way for growth in this manner since profound individual change requires a significant amount of emotional processing and power of the intuition and the body. Change is the result of connection to oneself and others that spurs from presence and changes in an individual's inner world which invite change and growth. Art enables us to embody experiences which might not be our own and thus makes it possible to experientially understand things conveyed in it. This experiential knowledge separates the significance of art in growth from that of rational thought or cerebral knowledge. (Joutsenvirta & Salonen 2020, 188-189.)

3.7. A Re-Sensitization Tool

One of our major reasons of unhappiness, according to de Botton, is that we often lose sight of the value of things present in our lives. Habit, in this manner, can become a cause of misfortune, when it makes us prone to fail to notice things which despite their familiarity, deserve engagement – and which we ought to be attentive and grateful of, not taking them for granted.

Art can "lead us back to a more accurate assessment of what is valuable by working against habit." It can help us recalibrate our values and pay

attention to the important things around us. We become easily too accustomed to things of value, often assuming that “we have already seen them clearly enough,” which is “a prejudice that art proudly contradicts” by making such things noticeable. Art has power to honour elusive but real value of ordinary life. It can do the opposite of glamourizing the unattainable – which is a common illness of a media-dominated society – by reawakening us to the “genuine merit of life as we’re forced to lead it” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 55-56.)

4 CASE STUDY – *Optimizing Gameplay*

My bachelor thesis project *Optimizing Gameplay* (see appendix 1.) was a conceptual multi-channel installation which provoked the thought experiment: *What if you treated life as if it were a video game?*

A person's experience in videogames is usually *easier* in certain ways compared to real life: objectives are clearer in video games than in real life and the player is often lead to them with obvious visual cues. Timelines and events are better defined than in our minds. Avatars are defined and their customization is limited & simple. One has a clarity of *who & what they are*, and *what they're to do*. The work examines these challenges in real life from three distinct perspectives: life management, self-perception, and everyday experiences.

Beginning in 2021, the project was initially a lifestyle gamification experiment in which the aim was to therapeutically improve my life through applied psychology. There were two initial artworks (see appendix 2.): a 'main menu' for life, which consisted of tools such as a year calendar, a map and task-list on a large paper, attached to my wall. It was a creative way of teaching myself the essential life management skills I lacked. It evolved into a habit of using digital tools (see appendix 2.), fulfilling its task. The other deliverable was a series of photographs into which a character screen was traced and edited, depicting the artist like a videogame character. Both also included a performative process. In the first part I utilized the 'main menu' as a system for managing my life while learning to playfully treat my pursuits, dedications and challenges in a *gameful* manner. The second part included me creating a capsule wardrobe which included only the clothing used in the photographs to depict the available 'character customization' possibilities.

Both aspects of the performative part of the project were occupationally therapeutic attempts to simplify, organize and learn to direct my life in a way which helps me be present, orientated and focused. This way, on top of creating a conceptual art project, I engaged in a process of adopting new ways of taking care of myself through lifestyle gamification, while treating it as an artful intervention.

Later the work developed into a bachelor project, in which these deliverables were expanded. Three deliverables were created this time: a different version of the ‘menu,’ (see Image 4.) an interactive version of the character screen (see appendix 3.) with also a Big 5 personality trait -diagram and other details of the artist, and a first-person video (see appendix 4.) with animations that made the depicted grocery store trip seem like a video-game scene.

The first thing you see before you even step out into a videogame world is a complete overview of your character’s situation in their story. In *Anyone else wish there was a menu system?* - through compiling a collection of basic life management tools I adopted a *gameful* approach to life. It was an occupationally therapeutic, performative process, which delivered a conceptual work (see also appendix 1.).



Image 3. “Anyone else wish there was a menu system?” blackboard paint and chalk based markers, 2024, photograph reproduction

Player survey: are “you” your avatar? (see appendix 3.) defines some of the quantifiable and identifiable things that make up my identity, conceptualizing me as *an avatar*. As in videogames, in real-life we also *project ourselves* onto our *character*. We experience the world through this figure we inhabit but are

not the figure itself. Creating this work was an exercise in self-knowledge and understanding.

Really wish this game had quest markers (see appendix 4.) illustrates a hypothetical reality where one's everyday experiences are as linear and one's goals and tasks as clear as those in videogames. It's also an invitation to aim to make them so in our real lives, to help us approach our seemingly complex lives with more engagement, recognizing that they are in fact simple, and we can help ourselves experience them as such by clarifying our goals.

This project was both a conceptual artwork and a transitory, performance -like artful intervention. It was a concretely therapeutic process, which gave tangible care for the creator throughout the process, and acts as an invitation to take care, an encouragement to identify what would happen if we would begin to approach life in a gameful way in order to help us engage it as fully as we engage our fictional videogame lives.

5 A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW VALUE READING

Ideas of what counts as 'good art' are developed through long timeframes and elaborate systems of patronage. de Botton & Armstrong (2013, 62-67) discuss existing criterions according to which the value of art may be judged and introduce an additional theory. According to de Botton & Armstrong (2013), the value of art is currently discussed on four different categories:

- A) **Technical Reading:** invention and technical excellence in the chosen medium.
- B) **Political Reading:** The efficient and impactful communication of socio-political ideas. "Important points about man's search for dignity, truth, justice and the due allocation of financial rewards."
- C) **Historical Reading:** A work of art can be valued for what it tells us about the past.
- D) **Shock-value Reading:** The value of disrupting and shocking us away from our complacency, the revealing of the artificiality of norms and the exposing of revolutionary ideas.

E) **THERAPEUTIC READING:**

de Botton & Armstrong (2013) introduce a fifth criterion for judging art: that it can be deemed important insofar as it helps us in a therapeutic way; how well it caters to our inner needs, how well it can address one of the aforementioned seven psychological frailties. Through this value reading, art would be deemed not good or bad 'per se', but good or bad *for us*. It could be judged according to how well it *cares* for us, and how.

In this way: "Getting something out of art doesn't just mean learning about it - it will also mean investigating ourselves. We should be ready to look into ourselves in response to what we see [or experience]." (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 67). In this sense, before reaching a work of art, it helps to know one's character and needs, in order to be prepared to investigate artworks in a way which enables them to resonate or provoke one in ways which enable it to care for us and help us care for ourselves.

6 CONCLUSION

For long periods of history, religions and governments have wished to direct art according to their understanding of the needs of the soul and of society. (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 68) (Belfiore & Bennett 2008, 148;151). For them, art was simply propaganda for the most important ideas in the world. de Botton & Armstrong argue that we should reclaim the idea of having an agenda for art, that it can function like propaganda for “some rather nice, and important, things,” (de Botton & Armstrong 2013, 69). They propose taking on the challenge of rewriting the agenda for commissioning so that art can start serving our psychological needs as effectively as it has served those of theology or state ideologies for centuries.

de Botton wishes, that through this paradigm shift, art would find a place in society in which we would be able to turn to it regularly when we want effective help. I want to highlight that art *already has* these features, but it *has not been presented in a way which promotes this approach*. A lot of people find comfort and solace to difficult times in music that addresses certain kinds of suffering, but we don't buy paintings that would do the same – because art hasn't been produced, bought, sold, and presented in a way which teaches us to see the potential for such care in all kinds of art.

The idea is that we ought to become sensitive to the way artworks can be co-opted and directed towards helping us achieve virtue, relief, and well-being. All kinds of art can be therapeutic and provide experiences of healing; and we ought to remind ourselves about this importance. For art to serve such a role, we might have to *direct* it to be purposeful. We ought to consider if artists themselves might be enriched by paying more attention to what ends our art serves.

Professor John Carey argues that there is no empirical reason to believe in a transformational power in art. Referring to *Psychology of the Arts* by Hans and Shulamith Kreidler, he criticizes the idea that works of art produce behavioural change in people, since behaviour is too complex to create or be modified through art, (Carey 2005, 101). However, Carey proposes that we should direct more research to creating such empirical knowledge to learn if art

really affects and changes people's lives in a therapeutic sense. For future research I would also suggest examining how a paradigm of art as a practice of care or a therapeutic field might influence the art economy and whether it might produce improvement for the artist's socioeconomic status. Art needs to focus on the audience, Carey says, by creating a body of knowledge from sociology, psychology, and public health, about what the arts really do to people. "Until that happens, we cannot even pretend that we are taking the arts seriously" (Carey 2005, 167-168.)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Louhimaa, M. 2023. Applied Fine Art Project 2. project report.

1 (12)

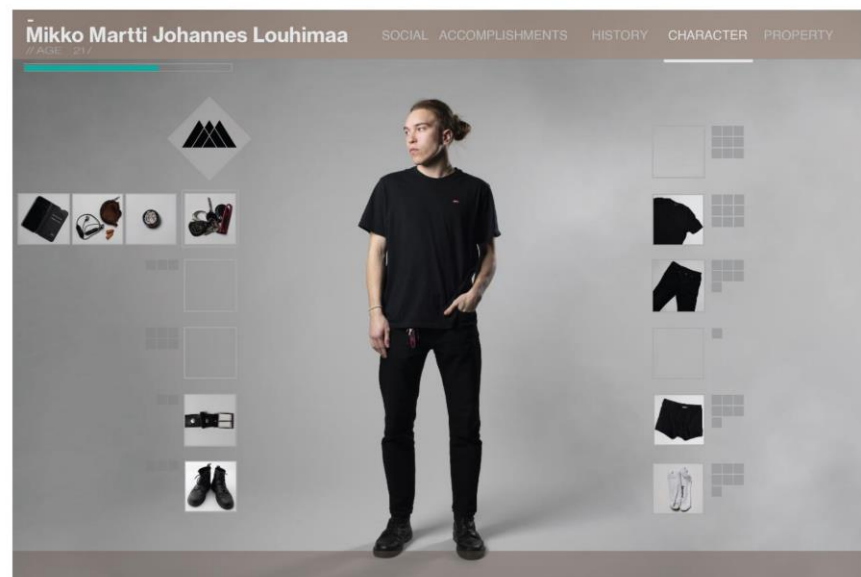
Project Report (Applied Fine Art)
Mikko Louhimaa
28.1.2023
Teachers: Sari Tervaniemi, Tiiu Baldwin
8 Credits

1. What if you treated life like a video game?
2. Pictures of deliverables

Avatar wardrobe -project:

UNIFORM

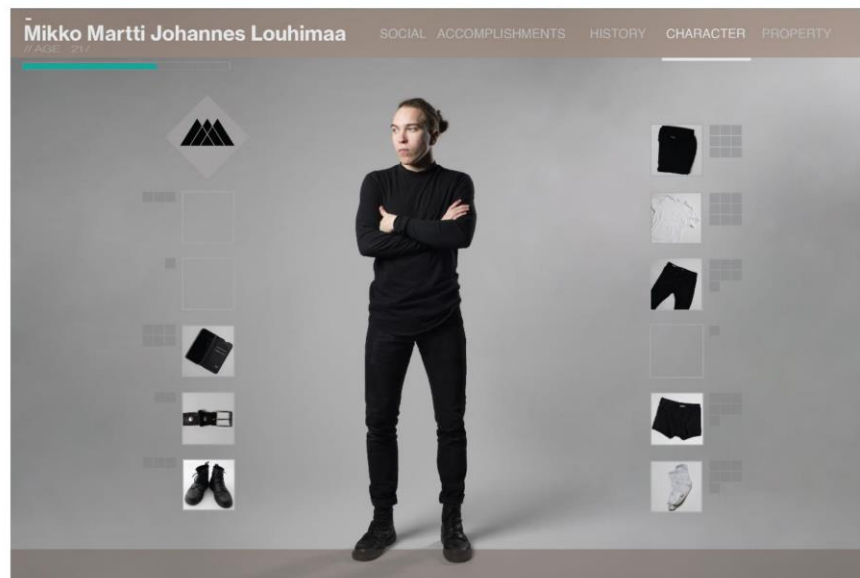
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SEMILIGHT



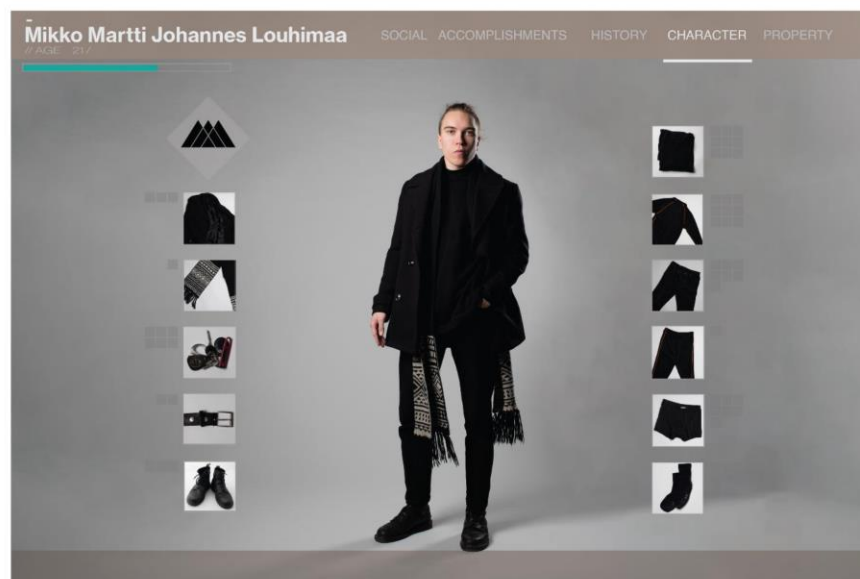
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MEDIUM



HEAVY (RELAXED)

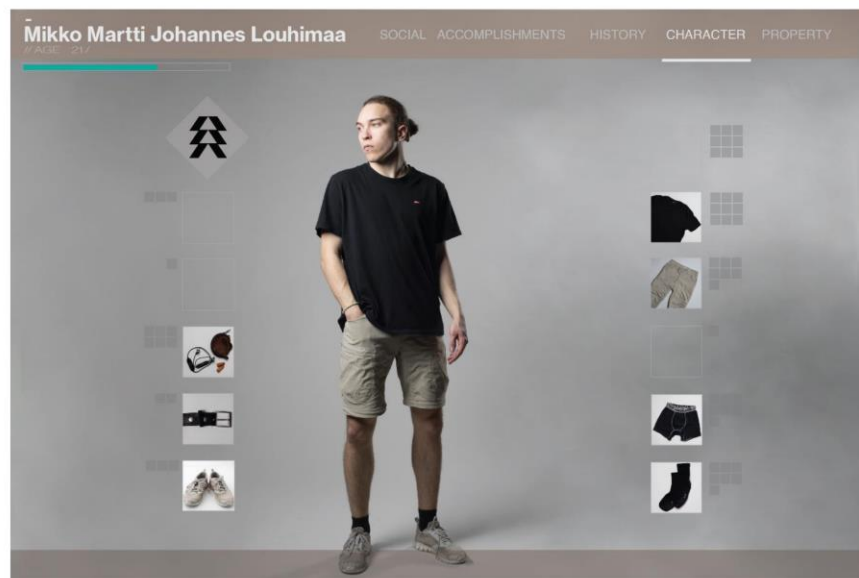


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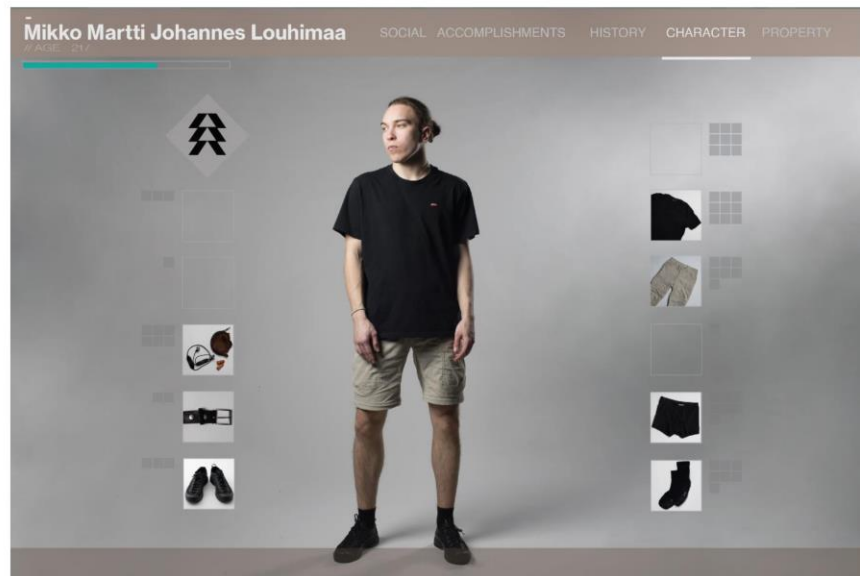
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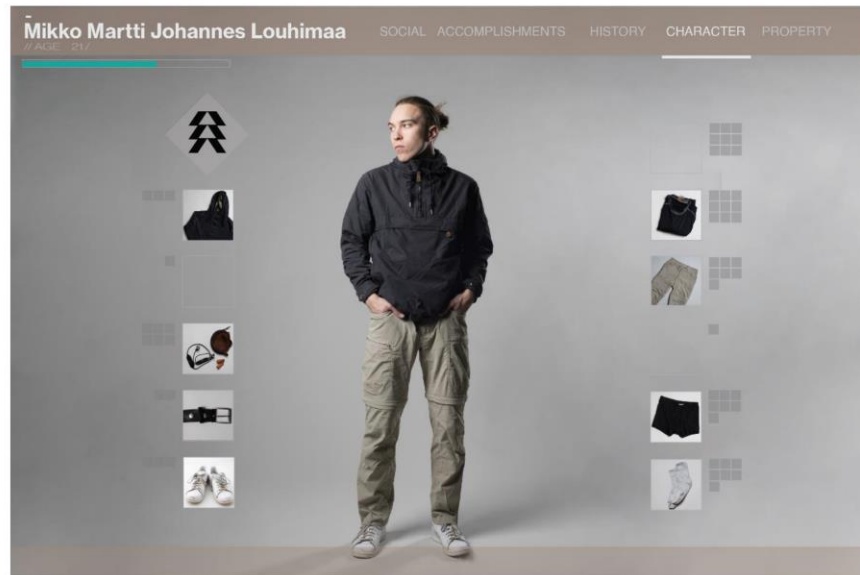
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ACTIVE - LIGHT - TRAIL



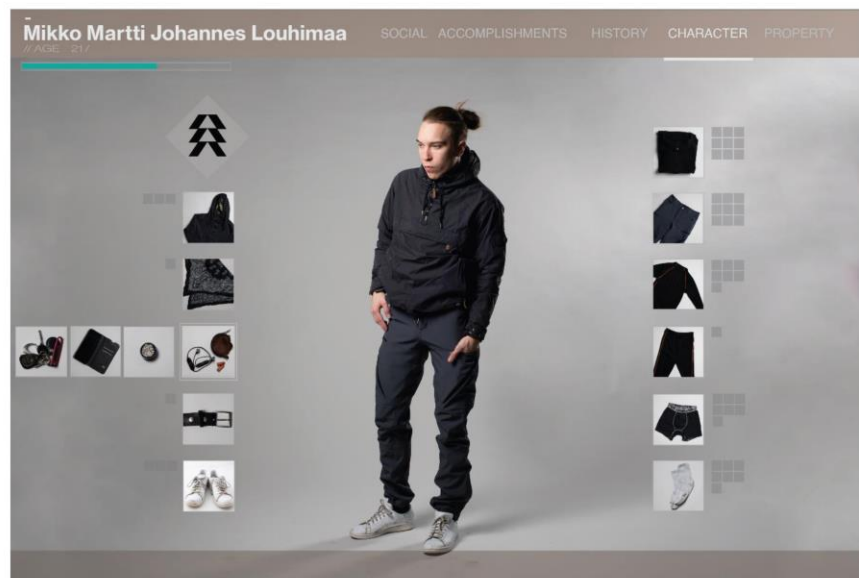
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ACTIVE - MEDIUM HEAVY



ACTIVE - HEAVY



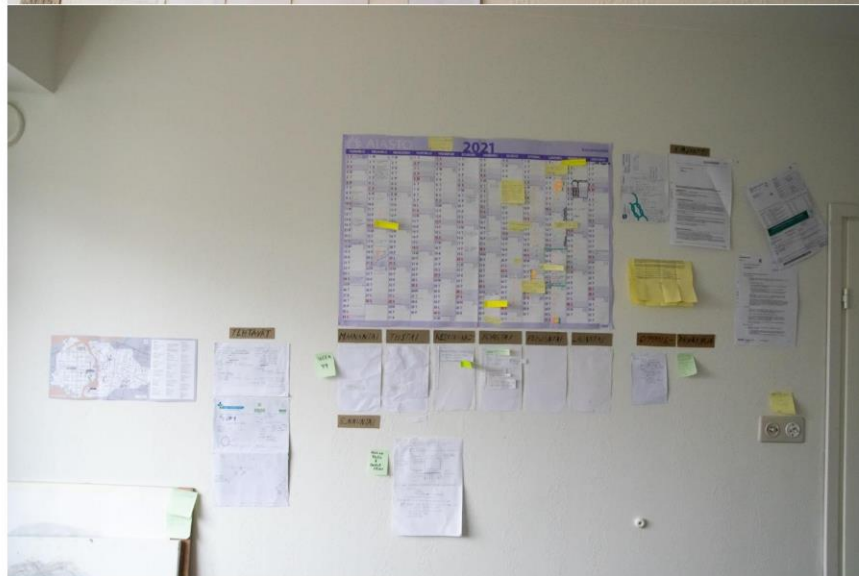
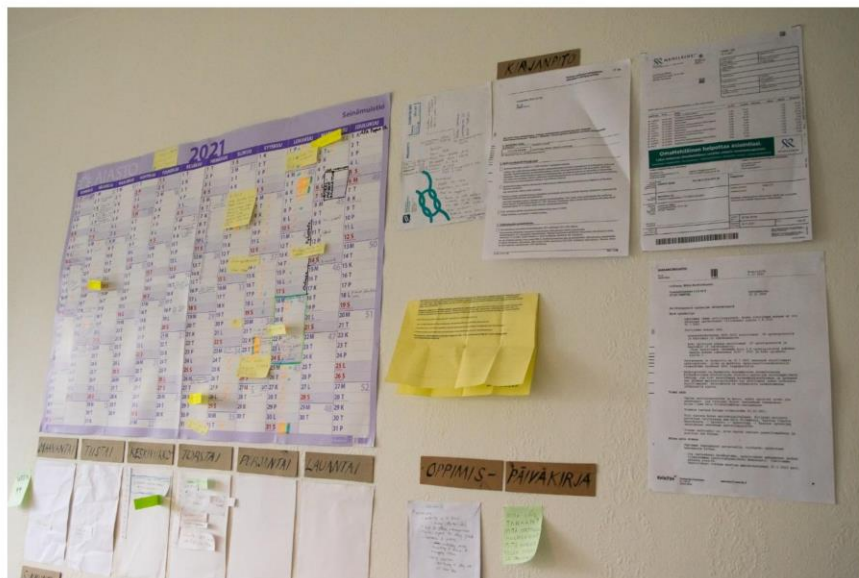
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COZY - MEDIUM

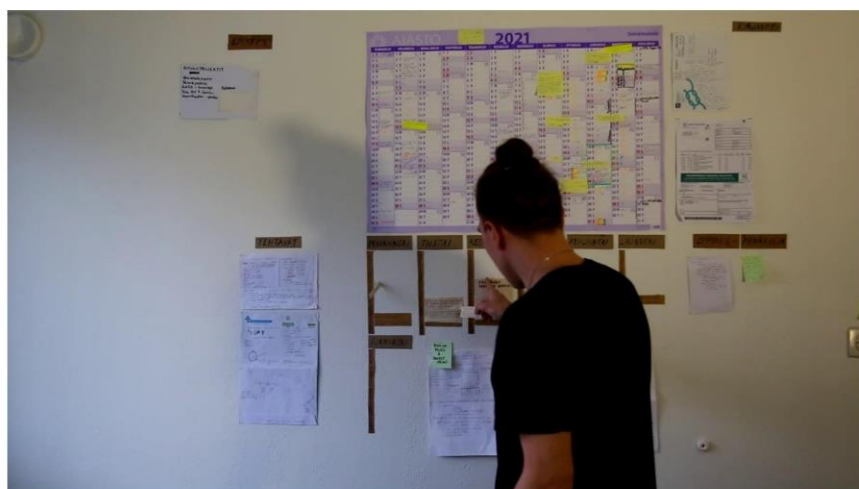
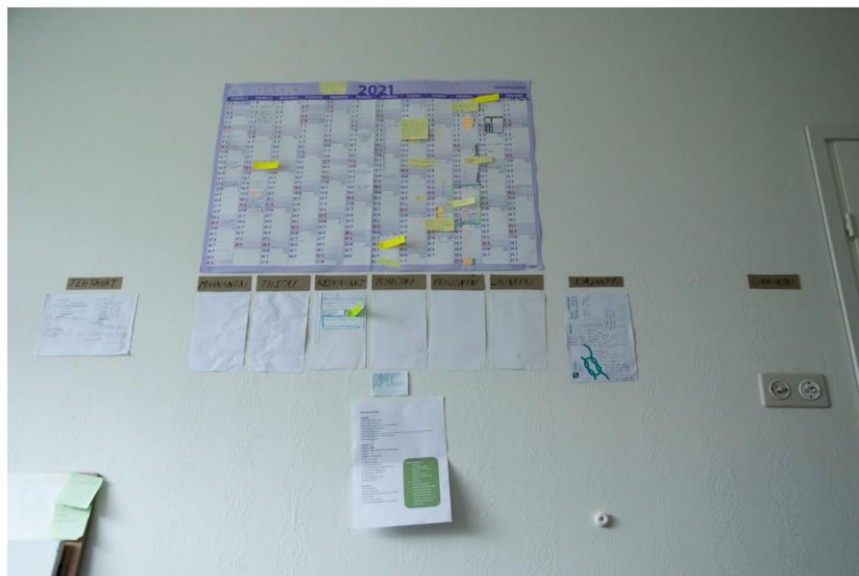


The Main Menu of My Life

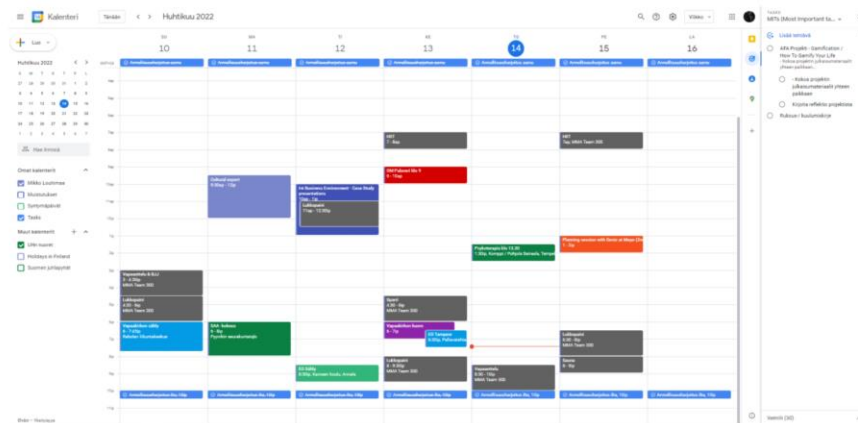




10 (12)



11 (12)



Appendix 2. Louhimaa, M. 2024. *Optimizing Gameplay*. Bachelor Project statement and documentation.

1 (2)

Optimizing Gameplay

This multi-channel installation provides a conceptual whole that introduces a thought experiment: *What if you treated life as if it were a video game?* The work examines the concept from three distinct perspectives: life management, self-perception, and everyday experiences.

On the subreddit r/Outside on the Reddit platform, over 700,000 people discuss life using gaming terminology and language, as if it is the biggest MMORPG - "Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game". The artwork titles derive from questions posed within the forum. Each title introduces a problem raised by "players" seeking advice on the forum, with the artworks serving as playful responses, offering insights to lifestyle gamification by experimenting with how:

- viewing certain areas of life as 'main questlines' helps organize one's life according to values
 - to manage 'gameplay' in various life domains
 - viewing challenges as paths to progress can help 'reduce difficulty'
 - clarifying and visualizing progress can empower and enrich one's experience
 - viewing oneself 'a character' can help us constructively detach from ourselves
 - logically organizing your 'character's' closet can help one think less about what to wear
-
- we can make things easier by clarifying objectives
 - we can learn to clarify the information we have for ourselves in our minds
 - the everyday experience could benefit from augmented reality through gamification

"What if we started to live our real lives like gamers, lead our real businesses and communities like game designers, and think about solving real-world problems like computer and video game theorists?"

2 (2)

“People who know how to make games need to start focusing on the task of making real life better for as many people as possible.”

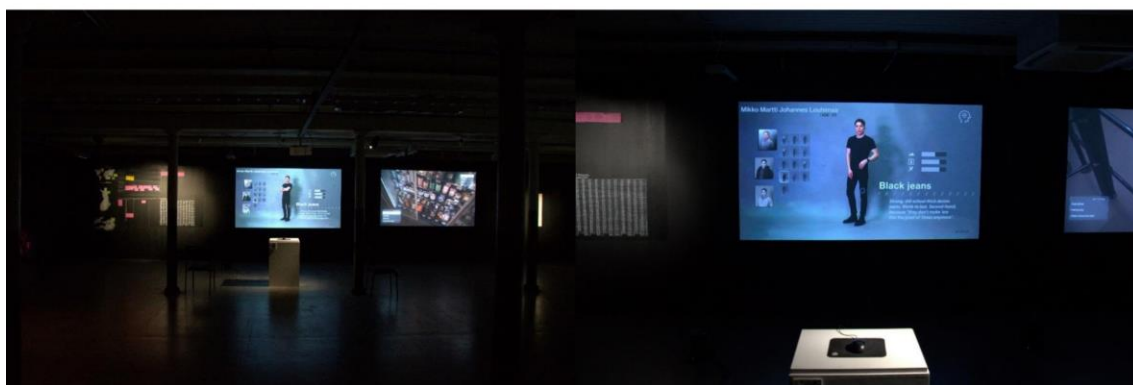
— Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*

Documentation

TAMK Media & Arts, Fine Art

Degree Show 2024: *Ambit*

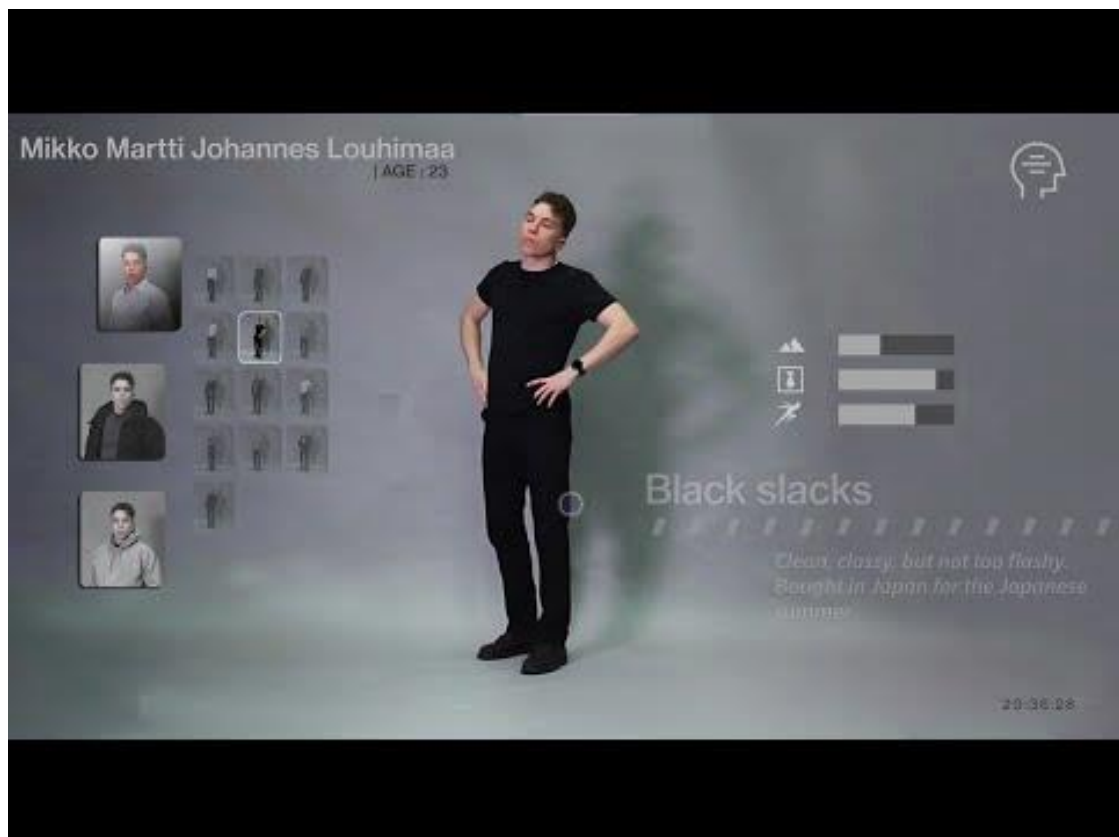
Galleria Himmelblau



Appendix 3. Kuoppala, P. & Louhimaa, M. 2024. *Player survey: are “you” your avatar?*

Interactive digital artwork. Screen recording. 2:46 min. *Youtube.com*.

<https://youtu.be/GE7ZoPWO19o?si=57PB28NmqeKEShD2>



Appendix 4. Voth & Louhimaa, M. 2024. *Really wish this game had quest markers.*

Video. 4:28 min. *Youtube.com.* <https://youtu.be/KM8Gw4fF3hM>

