Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension*:
A politics of performance in gamic space

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ABSTRACT

Wafaa Bilal's Domestic Tension:
a politics of performance in gamic space

Adam van Sertima

I argue that considering the performance, the artist and the elements of the performance–
in this case, a robotic paintball gun– as boundary objects sets the stage for a political
strategy that reaches across demographic and ideological lines in politically charged art.
This thesis is anchored in a close reading of the video blogs that Wafaa Bilal posted as an
ongoing diary during the 31 day performance *Domestic Tension* (2007) and considers the
use of boundary objects as means to create social space in performance artwork. This
consideration is contextualised through other artworks using similar themes of violence
in the social and political contexts in which they occurred. The two most specific
examples discussed are Francisco Goya's painting *The Executions of the Third of May,
1808* (1814 Oil on canvas) and Chris Burdon's infamous performance and subsequent
film "Shoot!". This strategy is predicated on granting a form of agency to art objects. The
theoretical underpinnings of this analysis are found in the work of Anthropologist Alfred
Gell, Sociologists Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law and the work of Susan
Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer. I suggest that one of the effects of granting agency to
non-human actors (actants) is that it creates fluid spaces, especially in the context of
performances that resemble digital games. This allows us to contextualise digital games
both historically vis-a-vis similar themes in other media, and better analyze the activation
of art works, especially performative ones, in our currently internet connected age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Wafaa Bilal is an Iraqi-born artist and academic whose work frequently addresses issues of politics, power and virtuality in relation to his native Iraq. Bilal recreated his living room in the Flatfile gallery in Chicago and lived within that space for thirty one days while visitors to a related website shot at him with a robotic paintball gun and/or communicated with him by internet chat. This performance is a response to the death of Bilal's brother in a US air strike in their home town of Kufaa, and an attempt to reach out, primarily via internet, to people who would not normally visit art galleries or engage with critical artistic discourses about the war in Iraq or about political conflict in general. The simulacra of a First Person Shooter (FPS) game that is simulated in Bilal's performance provides a means to reflecting on the similarities and differences between commercially available FPS and the dialogue between the two streams of visual/digital culture.

My first chapter presents the general thrust of my argument, introducing the biography and work of Wafaa Bilal, his position as an artist of Iraqi origin and the stakes he raises by means of his artistic production. I pay particularly close attention to how he creates spaces for discussion of the political issues his work addresses. I briefly exposit how he uses YouTube video blogs and a subsequent book to document his performance. This chapter concludes by outlining the relationship of the spaces Bilal creates to the notion of empire and it's antithesis, multitude, as discussed by Michael Hart and Antonio Negri and Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter in their respective writings.

The second chapter of this thesis looks at previous artistic production whose themes intertwine within this thesis. The first of these themes deals with performance art and conflict. By drawing on writing about extreme performance I suggest a direct line

between Chris Burden's performance "Shoot!", and the short film that documented it through to Domestic Tension. The second theme deals with the political images of conflict specifically using the case of Francisco Goya's paintings dealing with the Peninsular war. The third theme deals with literature exploring the growing cultural ubiquity, and possible cultural dominance, of digital games and their relationship to 'Empire' and 'Multitude'.

The third chapter is a close reading of Bilal's video blogs of his performance and two primary written sources dealing with it: his book, written with journalist Kari Lyderson, *Shoot an Iraqi: Life Art and Resistance Under the Gun* and the record of internet chat that comprised a significant element of the performance and its attempt to reach.

The forth Chapter explores discussions about virtuality and space and especially the body of writing centered on Henri Lefebvre's book the *Social Production of Space*. Some of the discussion here turns back on artistic practices such as those of Marcel Duchamp, who understood that the resistances offered by his work would eventually be turned and subsumed into modernist, capitalist discourses and power structures. Much of this chapter serves to contextualise the concluding chapter of this thesis by demonstrating previous relationships between art, games and the social spaces they both inhabit and create. The role of the boundary object, a concept developed by Susan Leigh Star & James R. Griesemer, is introduced as a way of explaining how the agency of an art object, including that of a performance piece, can be deployed to create such spaces, particularly in cyberspace.

The concluding chapter will discuss the formal aspects of both *Domestic Tension* and FPS digital games and show how the space they create resist and subvert spaces created by 21st century capitalism, while at the same time, being limited by tendency of Capital to subsume all spaces presented by it. I argue that the agency of the performance itself, the paintball gun, and it's game-like quality present a particular deployment that provides an example of such a resistance. I suggest that this analysis can fruitfully examine previous works which were created prior to the rise of digital communication and robotics.

Chapter One

Section 1.1 Who is Wafaa bilal?

Wafaa Bilal is assistant Arts Professor in the department of Photography and Imaging at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. His works span from paintings and drawings he did in his native Iraq through to performances such as *Domestic Tension*(2007)*(Fig1)*, *Virtual Jihadi*(2008) *(Fig 2)*,....*And Counting*(2010), and his latest work *3rd I me* (opening 15 December 2010). In his memoir *Shoot An Iraqi*, he recounts how his early works were often aimed against the oppression of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime and the violence that plagued Iraq both from the outside– the Iran/Iraq war, Gulf Wars 1 & 2– and the internecine violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as violence against opponents to the regime which in turn exploited these conflicts to maintain its grip on political power. Bilal's art works, often critical of the Iraqi government, eventually caused a reaction from the state that forced Bilal to flee for his life first to a Saudi refugee camp, then eventually to the United States, where he continued his studies of art.

Bilal was born in Kufa, Iraq in 1966. The third of 7 children, he attended Baghdad University, majoring in Geology although his efforts were primarily focused on painting. These paintings were often critical of the Baathist regime, and Bilal would hide them, for example, by rolling up the canvasses and storing them within hollow bedposts.[1] Several of the shows he put on during that period were closed by the regimes security apparatus.[2] Paintings as innocuous in the Canadian context as portraying people living in poverty, were seen as anti-government, with some of them being seized by the Iraqi government.[3]

In 1991 Bilal publicly refused to volunteer for military service with the threat of an American lead coalition looming as a result of Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.[4] Lest he "disappear" as other dissident students had, Bilal left Bagdad University and fled Iraq, eventually being interned at a refugee camp in Saudi Arabia. There he attempted to continue painting, despite the declining material conditions within the camp and threats of rape and abuse at the hands of the Saudi guards. He and his brother, Alaa were granted refugee status, arriving in the United States in September 1992. He would subsequently enroll in the school of Arts at the University of New Mexico.

Bilal's artistic production after leaving Iraq dealt with such themes as violence and dehumanisation as in his Honours exhibit *Sorrow of Baghdad*. *(fig 3)* This gallery installation used the sounds of a baby crying from within a coffin, a besuited pig laughing at short videos and a room with the faces of Iraqis trapped in a space, the only exit a

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[1] Bilal Wafaa & Kari Lydersen. *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco, CA. City Lights, 2008 p. 64

[2] ibid p. 64

[3] ibid p. 65

[4] ibid p. 68

window looking out onto a battlefield.[5] His subsequent works include *The Absinthe Drinker(2006)*, which would electronically insert the gallery spectator into the digital frame causing the central figure to become animated and react to the movement of the spectator. This general approach would be repeated in *The Bar of the Follie Bergères* (2007) (*fig4*), and *One Chair*(2007). In each case, the work makes a direct reference to an antecedent art work; those on the impressionists, in the cases of *The Absinthe Drinker* and *The Bar of the Follie Bergères*, and to DaVinci's *The Last Supper*, in the case of *One Chair*. All of them allow the visitor/spectator to interact with the work, and in the case of *The Bar of the Follie Bergères* have a presence with in the frame. This apparent agency, with the art work interacting with the spectator would become even more actualised in *Domestic Tensions*.

Previous academic writing on Wafaa Bilal includes Luke Bullock's M.A thesis which dealt primarily with systems of surveillance. He mentions that Bilal's artistic work frequently deal with issues of surveillance society especially by means of participation.[6] This participation included shooting paintballs at Bilal. Erin Conner discusses the ramifications for non-violence inspired by violent game play[7]. She discusses how the popular press reported players feeling guilt after shooting Bilal and suggests this empathy is strengthened by the lack of consequences enjoyed by playing a video game. [8] Her discussion of Bilal suggests that the flexibility with which participants could engage with

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[5] http://www.wafaabilal.com/html/sorrowBaghdad.html

[6] Bullock, Mark Luke. *The Evolution of Surveillance Technology Beyond the Panopticon* M.A. ThesisUniversity of California Santa Cruz 2009 p.37

[7] Conner, Erin "A Response to White" in *Speaker & Gavel*. Volume 46/2009

8 ibid p.121

Bilal, but her discussion does not theorise how the affective dimension operates.[9]

Andrew Yashar Ames specifically includes Wafaa Bilal's work in his M.A. thesis on the art history of digital games, but focusses on Virtual Jihadi and the political controversy it engendered.[10]

Section 1.2 How Wafaa Bilal creates spaces for discussion of the political issues his work addresses.

A significant theme that Bilal annunciates throughout *Domestic Tensions* is his wish to "Keep the conversation going".[11] While the second Gulf War has provoked highly polarised rhetoric within the United States and between the citizens of its allies, who have mostly opposed the invasion of Iraq, actual debate has been relatively absent, with few cases of either side expressing respect for the other's opinion. In that respect, Bilal's paint ball project has been highly successful, in that it drew people into contact that would have been unlikely to ever interact, let alone discuss the issue. It would be a gross mistake to assume these conversations were uniformly measured, thoughtful and polite. However, these chat room conversations did place people with a position on the violence and significance of the American invasion of Iraq in touch with each other. Some would use these chat room spaces to hurl racist epithets and jingoistic rants at Bilal and those in the chat room who opposed the war in Iraq. But verbal abuse is as much a part of what Bilal refers to as a zone of conflict[12] as mental and physical abuse.

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[9] ibid

[10] Ames, Andrew Yashar Games: The Art of Making, Bending, and Breaking Rules M.A. Thesis Rhode Island School of Design 2009 p.22

[11] Bilal explicitly states this during the video blogs of days'17 and 31

[12] Bilal & Lyderson p.4.

This contrast that Bilal draws between the zone of conflict and that of comfort is central to his artistic choices. He wanted to place himself, living a comfortable life as an academic and artist in a large US city, once again in a zone of conflict as a means of expressing solidarity with his family who would not, or could not, leave Iraq.[13] More over, he has written that this performance was intended to provoke a crisis for those residing in a zone of comfort "shielded from the actual horrors of" the campaign in Iraq.[14] As his biography makes clear he is no stranger to threats of violence and intimidation, arising from the wars, repression and bigotry he has encountered both with in and with out Iraq as well as within his home town of Kufa and even his family's home there.

Yet this space of conflict he had created, by providing a means of committing physical violence, via the paintball gun, a means of discussion via the internet and within the gallery space, itself, and by means of spectators viewing his YouTube blogs and the media reports generated, has allowed communication to take place that would have otherwise been unlikely to have happened.

Comments like:

"Make that chair spin"

FIRE!!!!

fuckin' Iraqis

contrasted with:

_____

[13] ibid p.11

[14] ibid p.1

Peace to you and your people, Wafaa

This guy has heart

Don't shoot him, he's fucking human being!! [15]

The expansion of the discussion space arose when the popular internet reference site DIGG.com picked up on the performance via an article in the Chicago Tribune. This reference in DIGG lead to an exponential increase in visitors to the *Domestic Tension* website. As the more people drawn to the site via DIGG in turn "digged" the story, pushing it up to the top of the lists, more people were lead to encounter and explore the it.[16] This social networking operated in concert with Bilal's attempt to create a community, although I sense that this was serendipitous as he more straightforwardly publicised his performance in atypical websites(for a high art project) of paintballnation.com. The net result was over 80 million hits, from 136 countries during the course of the performance.[17] Ascribing the quality of *space* to a chat room, the quality of *community* to people who may be shooting at you, and the quality of *discussion* to such things as a low velocity projectile fired at one's body may seem to be stretching the definitions of these terms. But the relationship of these terms to Bilal's performance may be better understood if we look at both Bilal, and his companion-for that is how he came to describe the paintball gun[18]- as boundary objects.

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[15] Bilal & Lyderson p. 79

[16] ibid p. 79

[17] ibid p.xvi

[18] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa)*The paint ball project day 10* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=mz6zAwrkolc livepage.apple.comaccessed 2010-08-27 11:55:53 Bilal also mentions this on page 93, during the day 16 section of Shoot An Iraqi.

A boundary object is

"both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several

parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across

sites...They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is

common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of

translation".[19]

This concept was developed by Susan L. Star and James R. Griesemer as way of

considering how different social groups and their members might interact using an object

that carries different significances for either group. Star and Griesemer's concept was

orignally developed and applied to the interactions between professional groups with

disciplinary standards, as in their 1989 paper on the interactions between amateur and

professional biologists engaged in creating exhibitions together.[20]

Thus the paintball gun might be perceived simultaneously as a weapon, an art

object, a threat and/or a toy depending on the social milieu of the person activating it. At

the same time Bilal himself, appearing rather like a non-player character(an NPC,

essentially a "robot" simulating a person, animal, monster or some other agent in a digital

game) functions as a boundary object: at once an artist, a target, a human being and so on.

This multitude of meanings allowed different participants to be drawn into the

performance without immediately confronting a didactic message that might have caused

[19] Star, Susan Leigh and James R. Griesemer. "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39" in *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Aug., 1989), pp. 387-420

[14] Star, Susan Leigh and James R. Griesemer. "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39" in *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Aug., 1989), pp. 387-420

those opposed to Bilal's anti-war stance or those unfamiliar with contemporary art practices to remain disengaged from the discussion of the Iraq war and the common lack of engagement with the broad and profound implications of a military conflict. He recounts how he was an anti-war symbol, a target for hateful bigots, entertainment and company for the bored, lonely or flirtatious, or topic for academic and philosophical discussion, among other roles.[21]

A common response was for participants to fire a paintball round at Bilal, feel guilt and then engage in conversation. Obviously, some participants simply enjoyed the anonymous physical and mental abuse that they could express. The degree to which this was prevalent rather shocked Bilal.[22] Yet the variety of people's comments and responses suggests how successfully he engaged large numbers of people in what Henri Lefebvre would call a "representational space, embodying complex symbolisms...linked to the clandestine...side of social life, as also to art".[23] Lefebvre's conception of space includes art works, as well as architectural structures, that hide power relations. In Chapter 5 of this thesis I will discuss in depth how Bilal's project negotiates these spaces.

Section 1.3 Spaces of Comfort and Conflict
Wafaa Bilal speaks about the contrasting zones of comfort and conflict. His displacement of virtual and physical presence reflects his experience, throughout his life, of being in overlapping zones of conflict. From his early childhood, with his often violent father, to his neighbourhood that became increasingly divided by religious factionalism,

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[21] Bilal & Lyderson p. 110

[22] ibid p.78

[23] Lefebvre, Henri *The Social Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1991 p.33

through the internal violence of Iraq's repressive Ba'athist regime, to Iraq's external

conflict with Iran, Kuwait and the American lead coalition. Yet as an emigre, and a

university Professor, he now resides in what is ostensibly a zone of comfort. Yet he finds

that zone troubling. partially because so few others recognise it as such. So his work

seems to often involve placing the audience as an active participant within an unfamiliar

setting. He deliberately chose to set up *Domestic Tension* as a performance that requires

spectator involvement, that subverts expectations of a triple A first person shooter game

and that creates a space for those who might normally ignore or simply denigrate

conceptual and performance-based art. That he can cross these ideological divides

suggests how in the age of Empire, typical moves to create space as a project of 21st

century capitalism can be resisted, subverted or evaded. At the same time, Bilal's project

is very much a product of twenty first century US culture, with it's references to digital

games, paintball and internet sociality.

Bilal is explicitly opposed to didactic readings of his work. He does not ban

people who post vicious words, although he did restrict players who attempted to alter the

physical operation of the paintball gun. Hackers had effectively turned it into a machine

gun by remotely rewriting the code, for example. That the rules are simple, fire the

paintball gun if you want, hit want you can and write what you will in the chat room left

space for many different responses. This was similar to the experience of such games as

Splinter Cell(Ubisoft, where players could chat in the virtual lobby of the game, or even

during the actual play. At the same time, they could shoot or snipe at target avatars. The

ambiguity of the perceived game play helped lead Bilal's audience to his objective- an

ongoing discussion of the conflict in Iraq, the significance of remote control violence.

That it initially appeared as some multiplayer online shooter game made it accessible to those otherwise unreceptive to the political discussion Bilal wanted to conduct.

Section 1.4 Spaces of Conflict within Empire

Bilal describes his reaction to a 2007 TV interview with a young soldier who operated a robotic drone from her base in Colorado.[24] She trusted the information and orders that she received causing her to launch missile attacks or guide other aircraft to attack the targets she had acquired. This apparent obliviousness to the violence committed by remote control filled Bilal with feelings of hatred and rage, as a similar remotely guided attack had killed his brother Haji. Yet, Bilal was able to reflect that these were "mostly just kids caught up in a cycle of greed and power they don't understand".[25]

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri offer an analysis of this when they assert "the passage to post-modernity and Empire prohibits any such compartmentalization of the life world and immediately presents communication, production and life as one complex whole, an open site of conflict".[26] Hardt and Negri see this conflict as a creative militancy linked to biopower and as such inevitably functions within a world that knows no outside.[27] Thus this attachment to the means of production means that the resistance of Bilal's 'virtual human shield' is analogous to the deployment of young cyber soldiers, as with the young drone pilot just mentioned.

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[24] Bilal p.10

[25] ibid

[26] Hardt, Michael &Antonio Negri. *Empire*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, Mass & London, 2000. p. 404

[27] ibid p. 413

Empire is greatly predicated on production becoming the result of communication and on the absorption of all spaces into Empire.[28] In contrast to traditional Marxist analysis, Hardt and Negri assert there are no exterior spaces for capitalism to exploit; rather it must create new spaces within itself. However, the possibility of these spaces also offer a place for the "uncontainable rhizomes" through which the Multitude reappropriates fresh spaces that realise the desire of the multitude to construct concurrent freedoms[29]. Hardt and Negri present the movement of workers from Mexico into the USA as an example of the contradictions of Empire, in that it requires the labour to function, but can only attempt to control it by rendering it illegal.[30] At the same time they characterise the free circulation of biopower, of the proletariat, of people as a fundamental freedom desired by the multitude. Thus, the networks of biopower serve both Empire and the Multitude that resists it. However, I argue that this binary fails to account for the multiplicity of readings offered by conceptualising artistic practice as spaces interconnected by boundary objects.

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[28] ibid p. 404

[29] ibid p. 397

[30] ibid p. 399

Chapter 2

Section 2.1- Art and Firepower

Wafaa Bilal's memoir *Shoot an Iraqi* features the subtitle *Life, Art and Resistance Under the Gun*. This gives a clue to his explicit goals and also the historical place his work fits into. His work refers to conflict in Iraq between the U.S. lead coalition and various factions within Iraq. His work also employs the image of the video game, with its social interactivity and it relationship to the use of remote control weapon systems such as the drone that targeted Bilal's brother subsequent to the launch of the missile that killed him. This particular performance would only have been possible with the current technology of our era, and indeed much of it's meaning is specific to a culture where communication and deployment of weapons is digitally mediated. None the less, the portrayal of violence in visual culture dates back to the earliest extant paintings we know of, such as images of hunting found in the cave paintings of Valtorta Gorge*(fig 5)* and Altamira. Images of archers in Classical Greek pottery are some of many found through out antiquity. But the particular significance of these images lies in their political or religious elements of the time. The celebration of the hunt, as portrayed in the images found in rock paintings dating back some 40 000 years, or the celebration of military victories, as often portrayed in Hellenic pottery are two examples of early missile weapons and the significance granted them.

This significance is changed when we consider paintings such as Francisco Goya's (1746-1836)' *The Executions of the Third of May 1808*, which portrays the massacre of Spaniards by occupying French troops during the Peninsular War*(fig 6)*. This portrayal of the unarmed citizenry against the troopers of a then powerful French empire seems to

echo in the mechanism of *Domestic Tensions*, with its unarmed protagonist facing an armed audience. A century later, Picasso's *Guernica* would make a similar protest against an attempted imperial power, after the Luftwaffe was deployed against the civilian population in the town of Guernica as part of the fascist terror campaign against the Republican forces during the Spanish civil war.

These later works memorialise violence but do not laud it. The editorial element, if I may describe the subjective element of these art works, contrasts with the formal elements found in the endurance-based performance work of Vito Acconci and more specifically, the work of Chris Burden.

Recorded on film, Burden's infamous performance "*Shoot!*" of 1971 shows the artist being shot with .22 calibre rifle at close range. Shoot was performed in front of a small group of invited friends[31] at F Space Gallery in Santa Ana, California.[32] Many of Burden's subsequent performances dealt with similar tests of his physical limits, such as *Transfixed*(1974) where he was nailed crucifixion-style to the hood of a Volkswagon Beetle or *Doomed*(1975) where he lay beneath a sheet of glass until a random observer interfered with the piece (a security guard moved a pitcher of water to with in Burden's reach, causing him to end the piece after 45 hours).

Section 2.2 Goya and the framing of violence and protest

The face of the defenceless in the face of violence has a particular poignancy. As works of art, both Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* and Francisco Goya's *The Third of*

[31]Tumlir, Jan. "Chris Burden - First Break" in *Art Forum,* Dec 2001 downloaded from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_4_40/ai_80856183/   19 November 2010

[32]Horvitz, Robert. "Chris Burden" in *Artforum* magazine, Volume XIV No. 9 (May 1976).pages 24-31. downloaded 19 November 2010

May 1808, share some similarity, in as much as they take a stand against war, especially

against the toll paid by non-combatant's caught in zones of conflict. However, the

differences in content and form suggest differing forms of resistance from two artists

separated by time, but united in an opposition to militarism. Where as Bilal's performance

put a true non-combatant(he had fled conscription into the Iraqi army) in the line of fire,

his performance was strongly inspired by the death of his brother. This brother was

manning a check point barricade, defending his community, when he was killed by a

missile strike from a U.S. Army helicopter.[33] The civilians portrayed in Goya's painting

were in fact local militia, who had defended Madrid against the invading troops of

Napoleon. Goya, like Bilal almost two centuries later, found himself living within the

regime that killed his loved ones, as Goya was appointed to create paintings for the

puppet king Joseph Bonaparte the First.[34]

Bilal and Goya, share a fraught relationship with the respective invaders of their

countries, as Bilal fled to the freedom that the USA offered, especially in comparison to

the Ba'thist regime of Iraq. Goya, like many artists and intellectuals of his time, believed

that Napoleon would disseminate the enlightened goals presented by the French

revolution.[35] In that case, Napoleon's machinations convinced the Spanish monarch to

ally against Portugal. King Ferdinand was deposed and fled when he realised the French

had no intention of leaving Spain. It was only after the defeat of the Napoleon's armies in

the Peninsular war that Ferdinand regained his throne. A despot himself, it is not clear

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[33] Bilal & Lyderson p.

[34] Vega, Jesusa "Dating and Interpretation of Goya's Disasters of War" in *Print Quarterly*, 1994 p.3

35 Bareau, Juliet Wilson. *Goya's Prints*, The Tomás Harris Collection in the British Museum. British Museum Publications, 1981.

that there was a material improvement for the majority of Spaniards. Indeed, Goya's

Allegory of the City (1810 Oil on Canvas) was originally painted during the French

occupation(*fig 7*), and art historian Sarah Symmons notes that the painting was modified

several times to reflect political changes.[36] For example, inscriptions portrayed on a large

lozenge to the upper right of the painting honoured the Spanish constitution imposed by

the French king, Joseph Bonaparte. The subsequent restoration of the Bourbon monarchy

lead to additional changes representing the concurrent changes of the Spanish

constitution, until finally the inscription honours the Spanish insurrection of the 2nd of

May, 1808.

Symmons notes that the image of the *Third of May, 1808* does not show partisans

of the Iberian peninisula, from whom the term *guerilla* originally arose, as warriors but

rather as casualties and victims.[37] That perhaps reflected Ferdinand the Vlll's desire to

quell any popular resistance to his autocratic regime.[38] Indeed, the central figure has a

obviously Christ-like pose suggesting sorrow and terror rather than stoicism or defiance.

The communication of a loathing for war would be more poignantly realised in Goya's

The Disasters of War(1810-1815) etchings, with their often macabre and grotesque

portrayal of the brutalities of war, especially on the civilian population.

In that respect, Goya and Bilal follow interesting but divergent trajectories that

none the less offer a resistance to the political power that ultimately be said to have

supported them. Goya's sympathy for the Spanish resistance is tempered by his portrayal

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36 Symmons, Sarah. *Goya*. Phaidon, 1998 p.234

37 Symmons, Sarah, p.238

38 Boime, Albert *Art in the Age of Bonapartism 1800-1815*. Chicago and London. U Chicago Press.1990

of the violence committed by the respective regimes of Joseph Bonaparte then the Bourbon king Ferdinand, though both were his patrons at some point in time. Bilal's open dialogue of *Domestic Tensions*, with its illusions to First Person Shooters (but a mechanic more closely adhering to the early NES game, *Duck Hunt*) gives way to his portrayal of himself as a Saladin-like character in his subsequent video-game-based performance work. In *Virtual Jihadi*, he embraces a more violent representation of himself as an islamic guerilla, rather than a non-combatant. These different trajectories perhaps reflect the nature of power as it is exercised in a modern constitutional democracy versus an autocratic monarchy. The choice of art works reflects the means offered by the productive capabilities of a essentially pre-industrial culture versus that of a post-modern, digital society. How we can analyze the means by which an artwork interacts with its artist and audiences I will explore in chapter 4.

Section 2.3- FPS: A Brief History of Virtual Mayhem

The term "video game" often brings to mind the images of either the popular puzzle game "Tetris", or the First Person Shooter(FPS), of which *Wolfenstein 3D*(Id, 1992) was perhaps the earliest example*(fig 8)*. An significant example of the FPS genre of games is *Modern Warfare 2*(Infinity Ward, 2009), which currently occupies the attention of up to 25 million people playing online at any given moment, according to the game's community manager, Robert Bowling[39]. The popularity of this genre of game has created frequent moral panics as to their effect on players, especially promoting the idea that

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[39] http://content.usatoday.com/communities/gamehunters/post/2010/03/number-of-modern-warfare-2-online-players-tops-25-million/1. Numerous online gaming portals, such as Blizzard Game's Battlenet post player statistics indicating hundreds of thousands to millions of players on-line at any given time on each different portal.

playing such games will promote bloody shooting sprees.[40] More significant is the notion

that these games may function as recruiting tools for various militaries, notably the game

America's Army.

The technical execution of these games has increased in sophistication over the

preceding two decades, with the quality of the games evolving from a few polygons that

created the forms of the player avatar and other figures, up to the near photo-realistic

appearance of MW2*(fig 9)*. Likewise, the play has become more sophisticated with the

scenery appearing to behave as it would in real life, with water rippling, clothes and hair

shifting with programmed breezes and blood spattering on concrete that shatters with the

impact of ordinances modeled on increasingly precise physics (but then calibrated to

make gameplay more enjoyable, as multiple head shots are possible in-game, while

obviously incapacitating or fatal in real life).

Perhaps the most significant change, however, is the appearance of on-line play.

With this, players can communicate and interact with each other through their avatars, via

text-based chat-rooms or via headsets which function essentially as telephones conveying

conference calls between players. The sociality of on-line combat is a phenomena

explored by Maria Frostling-Henningson.[41] Her ethnographic study of game players

discovered that they valued the social aspects of combat games such as *CounterStrike* and

World of Warcraft and avoided playing solo games. Indeed, her account emphasised that

the groups of people preferred to play in close physical proximity in internet cafes, rather

[40]Power, Marcus. "Digitized Virtuosity: Video War Games and Post-9/11 Cyber-Deterrence"
 Security Dialogue 2007 38: 271

[41] Frostling-Henningsson, Maria."First-Person Shooter Games as a Way of Connecting to People: "Brothers in
Blood"" in *CYBERPSYCHOLOGY & BEHAVIOR* Volume 12, Number 5, 2009

than via home computers[42]. As one of her subjects says ""'I cannot do night 'gibs' any longer, since I am too tired to go on; before, I could because of the spirit of community—you know, with friends. If you have gaming as an interest, you can exchange experiences. It is a lot, a lot of communication in the games'' (Cherin, 23-year-old female)"[43]. The result of Frostling-Henningsson's research is that it reveals a much more social, and more nuance series of exchanges than is often presupposed. These exchanges are not necessary to the gameplay, as she reveals in the cooperative behavior of two female friends. These two young women are nominally counted as adversaries in the game world, but choose to work together communicating both within the game by actions such as shooting into space to identify their position, and covering each other so as to maneuver within the virtual game space.[44]

Section 2.4 Art Agents: Cybernetic Performance and Robotic Art

Domestic Tension was conceived as a work of performance art. It's antecedents are perhaps best exemplified by the works of such extreme works as those of Vito Acconci and that of Chris Burdon, whose performance, "Shoot!" strips down the mechanics of projectile themed performance to its brutal basics, and arguably Mathew Barney's *Cremaster Cycle*, which combines elements of platform style video games with machismo driven elements of digital role playing games. When Barney's central character, played by a young and handsome Matthew Barney himself, climbs the interior of the Guggenheim museum in New York, and cavorts with nude women, in a surrealistic

[42] ibid p.558

[43] ibid p.558

[44] ibid p.560

environment, I sense much of the same impulses that drive the *Duke Nukem* series of games, albeit with a much more developed theoretical rationale.

Domestic Tension has none of the apparent glamour of the *Cremaster Cycle*, nor the short, sharp imperative of Chris Burdon's "*Shoot!*". Burdon's work lasts for only about a minute. The performative element spanned the time his friend aims at Burdon's arm, until seven seconds later Burdon orders "shoot!", the friend fires and a bleeding Burdon walks unsteadily past the camera. The film is the only record of the performance, and the performance would have only been available to the small audience gathered there at that moment. This contrasts with the interactivity of Bilal's performance, and the ostensive elements– that which sociologist Bruno Latour labels as that which does not dissipate versus the performative[45]– such as ongoing discussion as people review the YouTube blogs that Bilal published during the performance, and the excerpts from chatroom blogs that he published in his memoir about the performance. Most tellingly, Latour offers that the dance finishes when the dancer stops dancing as the denotation of the term performance.[46]

Perhaps the most salient point about Bilal's performance is the role of robot as a participant in the performance and the crux of the performance. Bilal declared the performance over when he disconnected the gun. Without the menace, the performance would have been emotionally void. Moreover, the specifics of the paintball gun versus a painting, were that its relationship with Bilal developed over time in a specific shared space, as opposed to the brevity of Burdon's "Shoot" or with Goya's works which were

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[45] Latour, Bruno *Reassembling the Social* Oxford University Press, 2005

[46] Latour, Bruno *Reassembling the Social* Oxford University Press, 2005 p.37

displaced substantially in time and space versus the events they addressed and the artist and audience they involved. After all, a painting could only be viewed in one space and were created several years after the conflicts they depicted. They could not affect an audience virtually in the same way that an internet performance can spill out from the space in which it occurs. Goya's painting, and Burdon's film of his performance, lack the obvious effect of agency deployed by a remote controlled, internet mediated paint ball gun.

My intention is to observe how a cybernetic paint ball gun might appear to have different agency than a painting or a film. This agency is suggested by Bilal when he states that he felt lonely whenever the gun broke down during the performance. It is important to remember this performance was 31 days long. Apparently, Burdon did not express similar emotions towards the rifle he was shot with. Even though we are unlikely to assert that paintball guns, robotic or not, are imbued with intentionality, we still appear to be able to think about them as having a character. This suggests that although it is easier to imagine a moving, three dimensional object as having agency(a discussion I will elaborate in Chapter 4).as I will later argue, we can ascribe a parallel agency to any art work. However, at this point, I want to simply consider some artworks that thematically resemble *Domestic Tension* i.e. *The Eighth of May, 1808* and "*Shoot!*" but also contemporary artworks that utilise robotics and cybernetics as a means to expression.

More crude and violent devices were the massive robots used by Mark Pauline and other members of Survival Research Laboratories. These robots often used fire as well as battering attacks to create performances critiquing technological domination and the use

of violence in governance.[47] Chris Csikszentmihalyi produced his robot *Hunter Hunter*

(1993), which was automated to load and fire a 9mm round towards a loud noise[48]. Other

Robot art works that suggest *Domestic Tension* include *Epizoo,* created by Marcel Li

Antunez Roca and Sergi Jorda. This performance consisted of a robot that deformed and

manipulated the body of Antunez according to remote commands of the audience.[49]

Edaurdo Kac's robot *Ornitorrinco* has performed in several different events, for example

exploring telepresence in multiple cities during one performance.[50]

  The use of weapons, telepresence and robots have now several generations of

deployment in contemporary art practice. However, the final element that has to be

considered is Bilal's forceful allusion to digital games that simulate shooting, either in the

sense of game art(art that refers to the game as cultural object) or art game(games that are

positioned as art objects in the broad sense). In that respect we can look at the some

examples of art games.

Section 2.5 Avante Garde or Countergame

In his book *Gaming:Essays on Algorithmic Culture,*[51] Alexander Galloway introduces the

concept of countergaming as a example of artistic practices where the artist subverts the

expectations of game play. Galloway points out that artists can manipulate the visual

elements of the game via a common practice by both game players and artists, that is

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[47] Kac, Eduardo "Towards a Chronology of Robotic Art" in *Convergence* 2001 7: 87

[48] Kac, Eduardo "Towards a Chronology of Robotic Art" in *Convergence* 2001 p.100

[49] Kac, Eduardo "Towards a Chronology of Robotic Art" in *Convergence* 2001 p.103

[50] Kac, Eduardo "Towards a Chronology of Robotic Art" in *Convergence* 2001

[51] Galloway, Alexander R. *Gaming:Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. Minneapolis & London. U of Minnesota Press. 2006 pp.143

known as skinning. Bilal's succeeding work *Virtual Jihadi* was a skinned version of the al-Qaeda sponsored game *The Night of Bush Hunting*, which in turn was a re-skinned version of *The Hunt for Saddam* an independently produced FPS. In each case the Non-player Characters(NPCs), the player's avatar and the surrounding architecture are altered to represent different characters and locations, but the underlying computer code and the rules of play remain unchanged. A second way of subverting the player or audience's expectations in Galloway's discussion is by changing the underlying code or simply revealing it. He presents examples such as the artist duo JoDi's works SOD(examples include *Ctrl-9*, *Ctrl-F6*)[52]. Galloway argues that the final way to subvert games are by altering the rules of play.[53] It is here where I would argue that that is only true of the popular, mass market digital game titles, such as the HALO series(Bungie) and Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto* series. However, there are antecedents of subverting game play as an artistic strategy prior to the arrival of digital games.

The Fluxus movement experimented with such attempts at countergaming as with giant chess-like games that used rules that forestalled the possibility of winning[54]. That particular variation by the artist an musician Yoko Ono was an explicitly antiwar statement.[55] These experiments are reflected in the analysis provided by Galloway. Building on a comparison of avante garde with commercial film, Galloway offers six axis to consider such counter games:

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[52] ibid p.118-19

[53] ibid p.125

[54] Pearce, Celia. "Games as Art: the Aesthetics of Play" in *Visible Language* vol4 no1 2006 p. 80

[55] ibid

1.Transparency vs Foreground- As with cinema where the process of filmmaking becomes evident in the action of the film, countergaming calls for a stripping away of the simulation of reality and revealing the underlying mechanism by which the mechanism operates.

2. Gameplay vs Aestheticism- The contrast of narrative gameplay versus experimentation in non narrative and formal elements.

3. Representational modeling vs visual artifacts- A game may attempt to model the physical or phenomenological world or make use of glitches or other "non-natural" visual elements in the game.

4. Natural Physics vs Invented Physics- Many games simulate natural, or newtonian physics where as other games may choose to ignore the presentation of such physics, or manipulate them.

5. Interactivity vs Noncorrespondence- Where the index of controls no longer matches the movement or action in the game as a deliberate strategy.

6. Gamic action vs radical action- Galloway considers this most significant as it offers the same potential for political and philosophical change as Duchamp's Fountaine or Godard's Alphaville.[56] An example might be a game where the rules deliberately preclude any possibility of winning.

Built into Galloway's assumptions is that digital games simulate reality. His categories 1 through 4 gain significance if a digital game is assumed to achieve a simulacram, in the sense that Jean Baudrillard means it. However, these strategies map well onto the examples of art games that I discuss here. Game designer and games

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[56] Galloway p.126

theorist Celia Pearce discusses such attempts to subvert game expectations in the creation of the art game "Velvet Strike".[57] Based on the popular FPS *CounterStrike*(Valve), instead of spraying virtual lead at adversaries, the players spray peace-oriented slogans on the surfaces in the game produced from the barrels of virtual weapons(*fig10*). Another earlier example that Pearce cites is FluxChess in it's various permutations, such as Yoko Ono's version based on a board having only white squares and white pieces.[58] Pearce argues that as games are realised in play, rather than observed they are difficult to integrate into museum practices that focus on collecting things. This performative aspect, she argues, grants art games their expressive and subversive possibilities.[59] This performative aspect and the possibility of both presenting and breaking rules is explored in *Domestic Tensions*. By setting up something that registers as a game, with a particular set of expectations based on typical rules for a genre, the significance can be changed and expanded beyond what is normally expected. Bilal's attempts to exploit and mobilise these expectations I discuss in the next chapter.

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[57] Pearce p. 77

[58] FluxChess- pearce p. 80 Pearce also questions the formula of gallery presentation arguing that the playful qualities of Flux games capture the "letting go- losing - play mechanic of John Cage" Pearce p. 84

[59] Pearce p. 88

Chapter 3

A series of observations of and about a thirty-one day performance

The ephemeral nature of a performance raises particular difficulties in comparison with art works such as paintings and sculpture. *Domestic Tensions* provided its own traces in the form of video diaries that offered glimpses of the artist's reflections on the ongoing experience. I have written a description of these video diaries, descriptions which also offer accounts of my reactions to then. In lieu of a first hand observations, this allows readers to engage with the performance should the videos that generated my reflections on the issues that Bilal's work raises. Some of these reflections have been incorporated into my argument. Others I have left as my own trace, I hop to engender future scholarly work, on my part and others, to better contextualise my decisions in discussing this work, and "to keep the discussion going" as Wafaa Bilal expressed it himself in the video of the final day of the performance.

DAY 1

Bilal's first video blog synopsizes his project. He is seated in the gallery space, where he explains he moved his living room,[60] and had built a robot that is "connected to a website that you can go onto and shoot at any time". He explains that he will be living in the gallery for thirty days and virtual visitors will have 24 hours a day access to the paintball gun and can shoot it at will. Bilal says that in just over the first twenty four hours 1000 shots have been fired. The yellow smears of paint are visibly dripping down the walls behind him. He says before he gives a tour of the space, that he recounts his lack of sleep due to being disturbed by people shooting the paintball gun. He mentions that he must constantly dodge shots as he can't predict when a visitor will fire. He then

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[60] Bilal, Waffa (mewaffa), The *Paintball Project Day 1*, *http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=F_L6BC9O0rY*

uses a plexiglas shield to protect himself as he approaches the gun. The half-full hopper is visible on top of the gun, which is then attached to a steel or aluminum cradle that is attached to servos to move the paintball gun. The mechanism is secured on top of a table and underneath is the computer that transmits information to and from the gun and its camera.

Bilal then turns his video camera back towards the room, revealing a simple bed, with a coffee table beside it and a floor lamp at the head. He pans the camera slightly to the left exposing a desk with a computer on it, situated in the corner. He explains that he built the shield he is using to protect himself from getting shot if he were to stand up placing his head in the line of fire while still still sleepy. At that moment, the paint ball gun fires, and the volume causes the audio to distort loudly and abrasively.

Bilal moves back giving a better sense of the space and showing the gun, bed, desk shield and a protective window for gallery visitors to stand behind. He explains that there is a computer available so visitors can shoot at him from within the gallery space itself. Bilal demonstrates how the room and gun appear on a computer screen, panning from side to side and firing a shot, which can be heard from within the space. He mentions that there is little interaction, just shooting then signs off, saying he will update the next day.

DAY 2

During this video report,[61] Bilal remarks that the table lamp is the second favourite target after himself but "is in better shape than me". Visibly tattered by several paint ball rounds but still functioning, the lamp serves as a metaphor for Bilal's physical and mental state. In the previous day's video, he had already mentioned he not sleeping for two days.

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[61] Bilal, Waffa (mewaffa),The *Paintball Project Day 2*, http://www.YouTube.com/user/mewafaa#p/u/33/wdb9VTrlu5g

In his memoir he described the great difficulty he had in getting any rest, especially during the first several days of the performance.[62]

As a performance, this piece had very specific issues. Being virtually mediated to most of its audience, technical issues informed the performance. Rather than constituting a failure, Bilal himself would later note that these low fidelity elements call into question whether or not the images appearing on the audiences screens are real.[63]

This made me reflect on the possibility of describing *Domestic Tensions* as a kludge. A potentially graceless but functional answer to an operational challenge, the kludge marks the point where theory ruptures. A kludge forms a resistance to utopic and dystopic notions of process. This can be embraced as an aesthetic choice as with the found art of Marcel Duchamp or the aleatoric music of John Cage. The picture perfect images promised by technology fail as servers hiccup, causing web cams to freeze.

Bilal's technician says webcam visitors to the performance are "shooting blind" because the webcam cannot provide real time imagery. My immediate reaction was drawn to reflect on mediated weapons systems like the predator UAV which is operated by, among other organisations, the United States Air Force. A drone aircraft, frequently mentioned in the the media due to its increasing use in modern conflict, it is deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, but its pilots are based in the continental USA and they operate the vehicle via satellite communications. This sophisticated system is supposed to operate under all conditions using visual and infrared cameras, ground scanning radar and other sensor systems to guide it as it reconnoiters and attacks targets using onboard

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[62] Bilal, Wafaa and Kari Lydersen. *Shoot An Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco. City Lights. 2008 p. 73

[63] ibid p. 101 also p. 82

missiles or it guides other weapons from allied aircraft or artillery. A 2002 executive

summary, attributed to then Director of Operational Test and Evaluation Thomas P.

Christie,[64] describes how operational units utilised "work arounds" to overcome failures

in design, including what his report describes as "human factor" design failures.[65]

DAY 3

Bilal is already expressing great discomfort with lack of sleep[66]. He visits a sound

artist preparing for a show that evening. in another section of the gallery The artist

compliments Bilal on his installation but notes the constant sound of the gun is

disturbing. Bilal offers to disable the paintball gun during the performance if it is too

disturbing. Bilal returns to the installation space and also reads from some email from

visitors to the website and chat room. He leaves again to try and sleep in a sunny spot in

the gallery. He says the constant sound of the gun has kept him from napping. Even

though he is out range of the projectiles, the sound effects him. He concludes the days'

entry with "I wish people could just enjoy life, and stop this senseless killing" [67].

This sequence seems to run against the implication that Bilal would be restricted to

the actual play space for the entire thirty days. It contrasts with endurance based pieces

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[64] Thomas P. Christie was sworn in as Director of Operational Test and Evaluation for the U.S. Department of Defense in 2001. http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=2984 downloaded 4 June 2010.

[65] *Executive Summary of Operational Test and Evaluation Report on the Predator Medium-Altitude Endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicle*, October 30, 2001 downloaded from Project On Government Oversite(POGO) http://www.pogo.org/investigations/national-security/predator.html#Related_Resources, 4 June, 2010

[66] Bilal, Waffa (mewaffa) *The Paintball Project Day 3* YouTube video, http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=7L19JzTZ1_g posted May 09, 2007 retrieved 5th June, 2010

[67] ibid

such as Chris Burden's *White Light/White Heat*(1974) performed over the course of

twenty two days at the Ronald Feldman gallery in New York. Burden's piece involved

him lying unobserved on a triangular platform. The spectators, if the term applies in this

case, were invisible to Burden's view. A different piece of Burden's, *Doomed*, had him

lying under a slanted piece of glass. A clock counted off the time he spent lying

motionless until a museum guard placed a pitcher of water within his reach, thus

triggering the end f the piece, as Burden smashed the glass and the clock at around the

forty five hour mark.

The sense that the walls are more porous is alluded to by Bilal when he writes "I

was separated from the crowd...I tried to be a good host while also being the object of the

art".[68] He notes that he is not exposed to the same level of danger as his family in Iraq.

Yet I think in many respects when he retreats to a sunny spot in the gallery to try and get

some sleep he replays his search for temporary respite during past events in his life

DAY 4

Bilal showed signs of normalising the presence of a paintball gun threatening him.

He described the day as uneventful, although there was "a lot of shooting".[69] He

interviews his friend, Meredith Hope Clarke and she expresses her thoughts about having

to shelter behind a screen and her feelings of great unease at their situation. She

specifically mentions her distress at the sound of the movement of the gun.

Bilal begins by introducing his friend, Meredith Clarke and she goes on to say it

feels like being on the other end of a video game "but the difference is that you're a real

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[68] Bilal, Wafaa and Kari Lydersen. *Shoot An Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco. City Lights. 2008 p. 29

[69] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa)*The paint ball project day 4* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=zLjaJ2VwJ3g,

life person and bodily harm can happen". She expresses a curiosity about what the audience is thinking and where it crosses the line from "being a game to being a real person on the receiving end".[70] Responding to prompts from Bilal, she suggests the relatively slow traffic through the site at meal times reflects that violence is a response to boredom and that people engage in it when they have nothing else to fill their time at that moment. Bilal notes that midnight to four o'clock in the morning is the zenith of activity for the project.[71] As the YouTube video continues, Bilal escorts Clarke out of the space demonstrating how he uses a plexiglas screen mounted on a rolling clothes rack. He gives his guest a full head paintball mask to wear until they exit the space. After a brief discussion, they decide to eat dinner together in the space but behind the plexiglas shield.

He sets up the camera to record any attempts to shoot at them while eating. At the beginning of the Day 4 video Bilal reported that he had been shot five or six times in the stomach and chest and that he was"trying to stay strong" although his body was slowing down and "giving up".[72] Now he is sharing his meal with another person for the first time in the space. Clarke expressed anxiety and did not think she would be able to sustain such a piece for thirty days. Bilal says that eating dinner under the threat of the paintball gun reminded him of eating together in a small space during the 1991 aerial bombing campaign against Najaf.

This leaving and entering the space microcosmically provides a metaphor for forces exfiltrating a theatre of combat. The danger to coalition troops in Iraq and Afghanistan is

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[70]Bilal, Wafaa and Kari Lydersen. *Shoot An Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco. City Lights. 2008 p.

[71] ibid

[72] ibid

greatest during entry and exit and generally while moving from one place to another, as during reconnaissance and other operations, and while trying to land or take off from airfields such as Kandahar and Bahgram. The expression, a theatre of combat, reflects the simulacram within a simulacram of a performance piece, simulating a game, simulating a conflict. Theorists of play and games Jesper Juul, Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois in their respective works discuss the elements of a game, one significant criteria being that it not contain an actual weapon.[73]

DAY 5

On day five,[74] Bilal invited his digital imaging class from the Art Institute of Chicago to receive their final critiques in the gallery space. The day's video begins with Bilal bantering with his students about shooting him. After an anti-climatic misfire, they succeed in getting the paintball robot to fire, this time with two shots in quick succession. This anomalous event- the system was supposed to fire once every thirty seconds- was followed by expletives and gasps from the students gathered behind the robot. Bilal explained to his students that some visitors to the gallery would pick up misfired, un-ruptured paintballs and just throw them at him. The video then cuts as Bilal leaves the immediate space of the gun to conduct his class critique.

When Bilal resumes the Day 5 video he reports it is about six thirty in the evening. He expresses pleasure in his student's visit and their work. He then goes on to discuss the

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[73] Juul, Jesper. Half-Real:Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds. Cambridge,Mass. MIT press, 2005. p.41. Juul provides counter examples as to the deletrious consequences of some games. The prohibition against weapons is implied in Huizinga's discussion of the "magic circle" of play and Callois' description of play as an escape from capitalist modes of production. These are also discussed in Juul's section on classic models of games.

[74] Bilal, Waffa (mewaffa), *The Paintball Project Day 5*
YouTube video, http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=mfX4ynCr0M8 posted 10 may 2007, retrieved 7th June, 2010

failure of the robot's server due to an overwhelming demand from visitor's logging onto the project website. Bilal expresses the hope that the problem could be fixed and the server speed increased. In the mean time, he hoped to get some rest while the gun was non-operational. Mentioning how great his fatigue was he then turned off the camera. He continues his blog less than an hour later, having been hit twice by paintballs. He thanks his technician then says that a nap "isn't going to happen". He then began to tear up. The video ends with Bilal saying that "he could not gather his thoughts". His demeanor conveyed a sense of overwhelming fatigue.

DAY 6

Day 6 begins with Bilal describing it "as an amazing and violent day" [75]. He mentions that there was a lot of news coverage[76] and that he was happy because a dialogue had begun to start. From the beginning, he apologises for donning goggles.

Bilal emphasises that he had to fix the gun, but as a result the velocity of the paintballs was increased, causing more damage. He walks around the space, pointing out damage to the walls, the shattered plexiglas shields and the destroyed table lamp. He expresses his pleasure at the increasing dialogue between people. He describes it as a critical time to stop military aggression in Iraq. "A short but busy day" is how he describes the day, with visitors and media stopping by. " The media are part of the community" is how he describes them, and says it is not the exposure that he is happy

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[75] Bilal, Waffa (mewaffa), *The Paintball Project Day 6*
YouTube video, http://www.YouTube.com/v/MOb6JQ3y76Y posted May 12, 2007, retrieved 7th June, 2010

[76] Two articles, for example, were Artner, A.G (2007 May 10)"Iraqi Artist Takes His Best Shot at Political Message" *Chicago Tribune* and Caro, M. (2007 May 10) "A Point-and- Shoot Exhibit:Display's creator lives under the gun controlled by web viewers" Chicago Tribune. referenced in Darts, David et al "Scopic Regime Change: The War of Terror, Visual Culture and Art Education

about. He mentions that the site had been receiving hits from all over the world, and thanks everyone for their participation. He especially thanks those who take control of the gun and turn it away from him[77], thus keeping him safe for a moment. He describes this as an "amazing dialogue between violence and non- violence".

As Bilal winds up the blog video, he mentions he will be conducting his class' final critique in the gallery. He also mentions how the server had crashed due to the demand from the many people visiting the site, but that the server speed would be increased the next day. He encouraged people to try and log on if they couldn't. He thanks Dan Miller for coming into the gallery to help. He mentions a couple of times that the energy in the gallery is fantastic, but he is tired.

One point to note is this video seems to have been transposed with day five in Bilal's original postings. In other words, he got his titles mixed up. Was this a reflection of his increasing fatigue? Is the internet, and the virtual interface of games and screens, a frame for empire or a window for the multitude?

DAY 7

Bilal begins his Day 7 blog by enthusing about the energy in the galley. He reflects back on the previous day's class criticism, and apologises for being outside of the actual space while he conducted his end of session class in another room of the gallery.[78] He notes that on returning to the room it is a mess, with a thousand paint balls being expended over the last day. Within the gallery space he points out the surfaces are

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[77] He would later refer to this as a virtual human shield. Individuals would log on and use their turn at the gun to keep it pointed away from him. This would temporarily prevent those who wished to shoot at him from doing so.

[78] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa)*The paint ball project day 7* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=-zPb2JbzWPo

covered with yellow paint and the remains of the vinyl paint balls shells. As result of this barrage, all the plexiglas shields that he had constructed to provide some protection were broken. He then turns his camera onto a lamp, which has been badly damaged by repeated rounds of paintballs fired at it. As with almost all the videos during the performance the repeated crack of the paintball gun firing can be heard. Bilal says " today is clean up day" but notes he must still be aware of the gun as it tracks him.

Bilal mentions that a friend has brought him towels to help clean up the paint covered space. He gets down on his hands and knees and begins wiping away paint from the floor. A shot rings out and he notes that it was "right over" his head. At this point he stops recording saying he will update the video later.

The video resumes with Bilal saying the clean up is almost done and he goes on to introduce Susan Aurinko, the performance curator, over whose help he enthuses. She appears, and says a few words to Bilal, encouraging conversation over the sound gunplay in the background. He explains that she lives above the gallery and is very accepting of the constant sound of the paintball gun. She says it's okay because her loss of sleep "is for art". Bilal then stops the camera for another break.

When the video resumes, Bilal says it is still day seven, at about 9 O'clock. He explains that he is repairing the gun again, but has left the camera operating so as not to "deny access" to the "watchers". He goes on to say he did not consider the need to maintain the gun or to clean the space which he describes a "disaster" as he pans the camera across the paint covered room. He then says it is both figuratively a disaster due to the mess, and also a disaster as everything was breaking down. He shows a part of the gun in his hand after it breaks again.

On his forth segment of the day, Bilal says he will replace the gun but leave the camera on. On the fifth segment, he seems to have begun replacing the gun. After two more brief clips, he announces the gun is again functioning. He explains he is about to do something, but the clip ends before he can continue.

DAY 8

Bilal introduces "Ben"[79] and asks him to explain what they are doing to correct a problem with the server, as it was being overwhelmed by the number of hits as people logged onto watch, chat and fire paint balls[80]. Ben observes that it is an uncanny experience "in having to fix a computer issue so that more people can come and shoot your friend".

Bilal then relates how he had discussed with another friend, Aaron, how frustrated some people had become with the difficulties logging onto the website. The video then cuts to Aaron Ott, who related that after the story appeared in the newspapers he began receiving angry phone calls from people who couldn't log on the site due to the sudden increase in traffic through their server. He mentions one particular individual who phoned several times demanding to know why the site wasn't functioning. Aaron went on to report that the person said they were impatient for Bilal to get shot. Aaron said he could hear others in the background laughing. He mused that performance art often calls for participation, but in this case, the anxiety was in eager anticipation of shooting someone with a paintball gun.

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[79] Ben Chang, a professor at the Art Institute of Chicago, had collaborated with Bilal on previous interactive art projects.

[80] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa),*The Paintball Project Day 8* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=_4yApRkisa4

Bilal mentions that one of the objectives in his project was both its success (which has mentioned elsewhere as reaching people who would not normally be involved in art galleries or performance art) and its failure. He describes the failure of technology, networks as part of his manifesto. He then says he will update the blog later and says goodbye.

The day 8 video resumes about an hour later. Bilal says he is under constant bombardment and the damaged shields are permitting paint to splatter him. He lets the camera roll for a moment, flinching each time as the gun fires. The recording then obviously stops and restarts. Bilal begins again by thanking louis for bringing fruit tapes and Ben then describes how suddenly the gun fires rapidly, rather than with a thirty second gap, as the computer had been coded with. Ben then says they traced the IP address to MIT "And we're onto you". The tape then stops again.

Bilal returns reminding us that it is day eight, saying there are a few problems. The ability to shoot rapidly has further damaged the screens, so Bilal sets out to repair them. First he asks Ben if the gun can shoot, then asks him to fire the paintball gun. Bilal points to the damage, and then mentions that someone using an MIT IP address had done this damage. The implication is that it could have been Bilal that was hit by a concentrated stream of paintballs. The video breaks with Bilal saying he would be back soon.

When Bilal returns he is speaking to his friends saying that he wants to make sure they are not being shot at, so he asked Ben to test fire the gun to make sure it was disabled. A pause in recording is followed by a sequence of drilling holes in plexiglas and attaching it to the screens with zip ties. Bilal notes this is a temporary fix until he could get thicker plexiglas. He then goes out of room to reactivate the gun. In this video

recording, Bilal ponders how long it will take before the gun is fired after it is reactivated. The answer is less than 25 seconds. Bilal says his goodbye for the day and the video recording ends.

DAY 9

The blog post begins with Bilal in bed.[81] He says it is hard to wake up and the gun is still firing over his head. He said he had started to be bothered and to become agitated by "it" which I took to mean the performance.

Bilal noted the pace of firing had been quite steady for the previous two days, but usually the pace varies with peak periods at certain times of the day. People on the chat asked where he was. They even demanded he stand or move so thy could see him. Bilal responded that it is his home and that he wanted to explore the experience of living under threat.He did not want to "play silly games". Bilal asks for continued "support". This is especially relevant as he notes the expense of paintballs and gas for the gun, as well as it's maintenance.

As Bilal gets up he is wary of being shot. He says he is bothered by how everything is being trashed. He had noticed his favourite table lamp had been destroyed. As he moves around he remarks that when he moves around the volume of fire increases. He is almost hit and castigates himself for being careless in the line of fire and for not covering his eyes with his goggles. As the video ends, he goes into another part of the gallery to get a cup of tea.

DAY 10

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[81] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa),*The Paintball Project Day 9* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Rqw79wTB7M0&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

"An emotional day", Bilal reported, because of both technical failures with the server again being overwhelmed by the quantity of traffic, and sadness over the deaths of his brother and father.[82] This video post was quite short, less than three minutes.

The ongoing problems with the site traffic overwhelming the server lead it to be shut down for about 7 hours. Bilal reported a ongoing series of server upgrades that he hoped would accommodate the visitors to the site. He thanked several of his supporters for visiting the gallery to help with various logistical challenges to the performance. Bilal went on to say that the issues he had not dealt with surrounding the deaths of his brother and father "hit him particularly hard". As he expressed this, his voice began to crack, though he remained composed through the post.

Perhaps the most remarkable comment, was that with the gun silenced by technical malfunctions, he felt "depressed". He described the gun as his company and how emotions welled up when he could "let his guards down" because he was safe from the gun, at least for the moment. In *Shoot An Iraqi* Bilal describes himself as being "lonely" because of its absence.

He concludes the post by listing three URL's by which his site could be accessed: wafaabilal.com, crudeoils.us and flatfilegalleries.com. He then signs off by describing the day as very challenging and emotional and saying "thank you" at the end.

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[82] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa),*The Paintball Project Day 10* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=mz6zAwrkolc accessed 2010-08-27 11:55:53

DAY 11

Day 11 begins with Bilal mentioning that not much had happened except there was "a heavy bombardment to the lamp" [83]. This bombardment had destroyed the second lamp which had just replaced the first. Bilal said it made him sad because the lamp seemed o be the only thing beside himself that "stayed alive" inside the space. He then goes on to describe how "Matt", a stranger, brought a replacement lamp. At this point Bilal chokes up, then composes himself sufficiently to continue the story of how Matt had seen the lamp being destroyed online, and so decided to show his support by bringing another. Bilal says this brought him feelings of both joy and hope and he then expresses his thanks to Matt.

The video shows the destroyed lamp from a middle distance then we see several different close up shots of the badly damaged lamp. A woman's voice says that it will be a disaster if the bulb is broken. Bilal cautiously turns off the lamp, to avoid his being hit by a paintball or by shards of broken glass if the bulb were to be hit.

The video then returns to the original location of the day's video, with a street in the background and with Bilal addressing us. He expresses the hope that the person who had repeatedly shot the second lamp would one day come to regret it.

The video then cuts to an interview with Matt, who brought a new lamp. Bilal smiles broadly, as he chats briefly with a fit, middle aged man who explains that "sometimes you need all the help you can get". Bilal says "bye" then comes back with a 6 sec clip explaining he forget to mention, "Matt is a Marine".

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[83] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 11 http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=5AkwY9g-iDA&feature=YouTube_gdata_player*

DAY 12

Bilal introduces day twelve by saying things are going well at the gallery but he is suffering a little from lack of sleep.[84] He said this was nothing, at that time he had about two hours sleep. Bilal mentions that his energy was good and that friends had visited him, brining company and food

Bilal mentions some people either did not understand or believe the gun was there, so he gives a more extended demonstration of it in action. He shows a close up of the gun, then uses his camera to show the view from the gun. He then closes into the gun, which is tracking from side to side. Bilal then moves in for a close up on the solenoid which eventually pulls the trigger of the gun, firing it.

Bilal closes that section of the days blog by mentioning how the gun sounds louder in the relative silence of the gallery at 4 am compared to the more muted effect at 4 pm when the gallery is busy. Bilal signs off saying his energy feels great "but to keep participating by sending email, and support".

When Bilal returns he mentions that some people had complained that no paint was coming out of the gun. Bilal surmised this was because because is was hard to see individual shots of yellow paint on yellow paint. Using a squeegee to clean the paint from a plexiglas screen Bilal then set it up with himself and his documentary camera behind the it. Few seconds later, a loud crack rings out as the paint ball gun fires and a splatter of yellow paint blossoms on the other side of the plexigas. "Beautiful marks that come from a violent act, which is sad" said Bilal. He then predicted that more shots would fly at him. He mentions that he is glad the gun mechanism was designed only to pan but not to tilt.

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[84] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 12* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=bNJXpBkRwJw

He then looks over the screen and across the room where we watch as the gun tracks jerkily from side to side. Bilal comments that the sudden right/ left movements are due to people fighting for control of the gun. He says that it becomes obsessive to watch the movement of the gun.

Bilal signs off for the day, saying it is "unwise" of him to stand unprotected in front of the gun but he knows how to protect himself by following the pan line of the gun. As he is speaking he frequently glances in the direction of the gun. With a "Good bye for now" from Bilal the video ends

DAY 13

Day thirteen of the paint ball begins with Bilal lying in bed[85]. He seems oddly relaxed as he discusses the bombardment just above his head. I would conjecture this is because he is no longer surprised by the shots, but also knew what the limit of danger was to himself as he recorded this entry.

Bilal mentions he had been banned from paintball nation(paintballnation.com). "Shame on you, paintball nation) Bilal said, repeatedly. According to Bilal, no reason was given for the ban.

Bilal then continues to note that paint and shrapnel sprays him. He says that he can't easily get up as the gun is aimed right above him, so he decides to remain in bed, and temporarily signs off. Later, he returns and tries to demonstrate how he can get out of the bed. Bilal notes how the gun is jerking back and forth as "people trying to defend me" attempt to turn the gun away from him. He mentions that at any given time from 20 to sixty people are logged on to his site.

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[85] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 13* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=dUvwoTUTozE&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

Bilal puts on his goggles, and says he had 4 or five hours of sleep that night, so was going to slip out of bed, have a cup of tea and then return to bed and try to read. He then says good bye. Through out this video, the crack of the paintball gun firing can be heard.

DAY14

The video post begins with a breathless Bilal declaring the day had been "insane".[86] He said the previous two or three hours had been a constant bombardment. The rate of fire had been so great it had trouble keeping the hopper of the gun filled. Bilal points the camera at the paintball gun showing an almost empty hopper. As counter point to his narration, the snap of the paintball gun firing comes every few seconds. It seemed to be the most frequent that I had heard it while listening to the blogs.

He repeats the situation is insane and seems to struggle for words. He points out how the room has been "trashed" and how the shots have been directed at him. I suspect he did not expect such a concentrated onslaught, especially after he noticed people had been aiming the gun away from him. He said "I don't know why people have all this hate in them" pointing out this barrage is due to many people logging into the site, not just one person.

The gun has run out of paintballs, but its trigger continues to click although the gun is empty. Bilal attempts to refill it but it is clear that it is expending ammunition as fast a he can reload it. He swears and gasps as the gun fires near him. He shows the splatter as he ducks behind a clear, plexiglas shield. He mentions that his site had been listed on DIGG, driving many more people to visit his site and performance.

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[86] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 14* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=D3M95kfbhlY&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

What are the limits of this performance? How to characterise the venue? Is it the room, the gallery, the gallery space and the site? Does it leak out into social media sites such as DIGG and Paintball nation? Is YouTube a space of this performance? Are Bilal's video blogs part of the performance, or they documentation. In so far as Bilal intended that these would be viewed during the performance, and they encouraged comments from those that saw them, they seem to advance Bilal's goal of encouraging a dialogue about the issues that concern him.

Bilal said he had to run back and forth between the gun and shield and couldn't keep the gun filled and his camera operating at the same time . He admitted that he set up the situation even though it was disturbing and he wouldn't give up. He ends the video saying "It's empty, it's empty". Through out this video is a sense of frantic movement and extreme tension.

DAY 15

Bilal's video begins at about six o'clock in the evening, with him expressing a certain enjoyment in the silence due to another server crash.[87] As he mentioned in previous posts, large volumes of visitors to the site overloaded it. In this case, the increased traffic was due to a large number of people finding the project via DIGG. He describes his mood as upbeat, despite the current obstacles he discusses.

He said that the previous day, the volume of fire expended almost twenty thousand paint balls in less than 24hrs. This quote is interesting as he says elsewhere that about 60 000 paint balls were expended in total over the thirty one days of the performance. This caused two obstacles. The first obstacle of which Bilal describes as essentially a physical

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[87] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 15* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=EQ6XbZZIyVk

pool of paint, spreading across the gallery floor. The second obstacle he describes as financial- he had maxed out his credit card and had to borrow money from friends to continue buying paint balls and gas cylinders. My quick check of prices for paintballs and the CO_2 gas required to power the gun suggests that one day's operation cost between 1700 and 2500 USD.

Bilal said there were conflicting reports as to why the server was down. On one hand, he said the increased strain of increased traffic contributed to the systems failure. On the other hand, he heard that members of the DIGG community were actively trying to crash the server to prevent people shooting at Bilal. He describes this second hypothesis as "heart warming". He thanks those watching as it "fills him with hope".

He ends by saying he is now counting down to the end of the project and looks forward to completing it, although he is concerned about the psychological and financial costs of pursuing it. He observes the frequency of shots, up to or 5 a second "gives him no rest". Despite this he said he "looks forward to reporting more good news".

DAY 16

The video begins in what Bilal calls a "quiet time- like the evening".[88] He stumbles over his words as he mentions that they have over 250 people logged on to the site at that moment but he suspects the server has crashed. He suggests this may have been a deliberate attempt at creating a denial-of-service attack by overwhelming the server or just due to an increasing awareness of the performance which was drawing traffic to the site.

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[88] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 16* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ne61ysFx57s&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

He mentions two personal health concerns- a "heaviness" in the chest that he thought might be due to either paint fumes or stress. The other problem is a feeling of physical weakness that he describes as growing day by day. As Bilal says that he "felt better yesterday" his monologue is interrupted by a spasm of coughing. Bilal says it is probably due to stress and a lack of sleep.

Bilal continues on to say that he is "beginning to hate yellow" as he looks back towards the walls which were covered with yellow paint spatters from the thousands of paint balls. He says he now hates the sound of the paintballs. He says he knows it is day sixteen and he is counting down towards the completion of the performance but expresses the "Hope that he can continue" and so complete the work.

Bilal then uses the camera to present the damage to the room and its contents. The irregular horizontal band of yellow paint is clearly visible, and the floor seems strewn with spent paint balls. As Bilal gets down on his knees to show the audience under the bed he mentions that even though the server is down, sometimes it will randomly function, allowing a paintball to be fired. The large quantity of paintballs has created a pool of paint across the floor beneath the walls where the paint balls have burst.

The walls show significant damage from repeated paintball hits and the bed is splattered by paint balls rupturing on the walls and other targets. Bilal says again he doesn't mind the quiet but points the camera towards the gun showing it is still moving slightly. He then says he will go down in the basement so he will avoid both colour and the paintball gun. Saying he will go and try and get some rest, Bilal notes he doesn't need the safety goggles as he leaves the performance piece, which suggests to me he then considered it normal to wear them.

We follow Bilal as he descends into the gallery basement and finds a place to lie down, which he then does with a groan, and signs off. He returns saying he can hear the gun. He says he hates the unpredictable nature of the gun "not knowing when it is going to go off". As he is saying this, we hear the distant crack of the paintball gun. Bilal rubs his face with his hand and turns off the camera, ending the day without a sign-off.

<u>DAY 17</u>

Bilal begins this video by saying it is quiet- "except for the gun going off, every few seconds".[89] He goes on to say he is having difficulty reaching people and that his support system may be falling, so he is trying to ask people he hasn't made requests to before. he says it makes him sad but he understands that his project has pulled his friends away from work and life. Bilal makes a request to anybody watching who has time to visit to come to the gallery. He mentions he has a few friends who are supposed to be coming by that day, but Bilal's knit brow suggests that he is very doubtful."It is slower when the gallery is closed" he says, refering to the firing and then the video cuts...

"It is so good to be clean" Bilal says having taken a shower. He shows the clothes he had been wearing as being fairly dirty, having not changed them for several days. He says Jason[90] had come by with site statistics. They had received 6 million hits and transmitted 250 Gb of data, not counting the data from their earlier server. This volume of traffic pleased Bilal as it meant more and more people were "engaging in the

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[89] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 17* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=K-t_otw-ang

[90] Jason Potlanski appeared in the gallery on Day 10 and volunteered his time and expertise to keep the internet server running. Day 17 is the first day he is mentioned in the video blogs. Bilal Wafaa & Kari Lydersen. *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco, CA. City Lights, 2008 p. 46

conversation". He mentions that he is chatting less as he is afraid that he is affecting the discourse in the chat room. Bilal said he didn't want to be an authority figure but rather to "keep that narrative open" as people communicated with each other. Bilal says he does not seek a particular narrative, and wants a dynamic outcome that is not determined by himself or anyone else. Bilal is aware that he has set parameters, but doesn't want to guide the outcome.

As the blog winds down for the day Bilal says his energy is good, and that he is used to the sound of the gun. His demeanour is markedly more upbeat from the previous segment. With his having been living in the same clothing for days it is easy to conjecture that cleaning oneself and changing into fresh clothes might create a euphoric feeling. Bilal does mention that reloading the gun "got to him" as it involved him having to get up frequently in the night in order to load more paint balls into the hopper, sometimes every ten minutes.

Bilal says that he had five hours of sleep. He assures people that his health is sound and he will complete the project. He says "The project is doing what it is supposed to be doing, engaging people in conversation" and asks that "people continue giving him emotional support". He then says good bye but returns with a brief video post-script.He explains that some friends had emailed him asking why he is placing himself in physical and mental jeopardy. He simply says that "desperate time call for desperate measures".

DAY 18

The first a two part blog post begins with Bilal explaining his post was taking place at the end of the day, near midnight[91]. He describes the day as quiet. A paintball shot rings

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[91]Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 18 part 1* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=DmrhucSu9Zk

out at this point. He continues, saying the day had "no particular dramas". Bilal mentions that he has brought a new tree to decorate the room. The video then cuts to earlier footage.

We see Bilal walking through the gallery space, carrying the video camera in his hand and recording himself. He says he hopes people will "respect the tree" rather than shooting it. He then turns the camera onto the tree, a small one and picks it up. The footage then cuts to inside the actually performance space. He considers how he will get past the paintball gun. The footage is quite jerky. Bilal decides to forego the shield in favour of dragging the tree. He comments on how nice the tree smells. He then waits to see if anyone will shoot the tree. The paintball gun is almost spasmodically moving. Bilal says this is due to multiple users trying to control the gun simultaneously. He remarks it would be sad if someone deliberately tried to shoot the tree. The video then returns to the day's introductory scene.

He said it didn't take long for someone to shoot the tree. It was "about 11 or so in the morning" and the video cuts off abruptly.

The second part resumes a second before the break.[92] I suspect this is due to the ten minute limit YouTube places on video. Bilal he says he feels a little bit sorry for the tree and that it animates the room. Bilal expresses bewilderment that anyone would want to shoot the tree, although he shows the extensive damage to the wall due to the increased volume of fire aimed at the tree. The dripping paint is thicker near the tree, and many gouges are visible in the drywall.

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[92] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 18 part 2* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=qh4U6pujjC4

Bilal goes on to talk about an interview he had done earlier with someone active in the performance's chat room. He suggests we might know them on that basis. This porousness of the performance is such that at this point we can begin to question where the performance begin s an ends- is the video part of the performance, or documentation? Is there a spacial component that differentiates the two? How does this work when both performance and documentation are experienced primarily through the internet, with most interaction by chat room?

"Hey everyone it's day 18. I'am here with a visitor" Says Bilal. He has her introduce herself. "Hi I'm Laura. Some of you may know me as 149." She goes onto explain she came to know Wafaa through the chat room of the performance and since she lives in Chicago she brought muffins to him when she visited the performance space(And again, I ask myself, what is the performance space here?) She also brought him socks at his request. She unpacks the bag of gifts and . Bilal thanks Laura and says how much the support of the community makes the performance more bearable for him. He then signs off from the interview.

He again cuts back to the opening setting. He agains thanks Laura and says that this is a "heart warming example of a community that is being built". He goes on to say this complements the ongoing discussion that he has repeatedly said is the goal of his performance. As he often does he returns with a post script. He shows again the extension damage to the wall. He says he will cover the wall to protect so the shots do not "burn a hole" through it. He then signs off.

DAY 19

The video begins with a close up on Bilal's face, illuminated by a camera light in a seemingly dark space[93]. He said he "was afraid to go to sleep because he started getting up without realising the gun was above his head". As a result he decided to tie himself to the bed with some rope so that he can not get up and unconsciously get in the gun's line of fire.

He rubs his eyes as he descends into the basement to retrieve some rope. As he searches the basement the camera points at his chest and shoulder and we can see the black paintball armour vest that he always wears. He holds up lengths of blue and yellow nylon straps. He ascends the stairs, with the camera gyrating as he reenters the room with the paintball gun.

He says "This is what I miss the most, just the simple act of going to bed. It becomes very hard when someone is always aiming at you". Bilal then tries to go to bed by tying himself to his bed to prevent himself from straying into the line of fire above his head. The room Bilal is still illuminated, unlike the rest of the gallery. The camera again gyrates as he puts in down.

A paintball shot cracks and Bilal jumps with a gasp. He explains he has tied the first strap, and is now tying the second one. The camera comes to rest on the floor, showing a pool of paint collecting across the floor, underneath the bed. Bilal picks up the camera and says "this is the rope- it is not perfect" but goes on to say it will keep him from arising unawares into the sights of the gun. He lies back, adjusts his armour and goggles then says good night. The video ends.

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[93] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 19* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=e0dIk0sfZXw&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

I find it difficult the describe it as the performance space, as it is a simulation of his living room, a gallery space, and this is merely part of where the performance takes place, as it effectively includes(or could be considered to include) homes offices and where ever there is an internet connection that has connected to his server. His technician, for example, describes shooting at him via a mobile phone(and feeling badly about it immediately afterwards) while chatting about the project in a bar.[94]

<u>DAY 20</u>

"Day 20 Not feeling very good" says Bilal.[95] He goes onto describe a pain in his chest which has grown bigger and feels "heavy". Expressing that it could be any number of things, he mentions remaining just in that space and never leaving, a lack of fresh air as possible causes for a difficulty breathing. He goes on to describe the morning as having a steady rate of fire with Switzerland contributing heavily– "bombing everything" he says.

Bilal describes how the sheet of cardboard he had stuck on the wall the previous day to protect it required replacement. When he turns the camera onto it we see it is in tatters, with holes penetrating through it and into the wall beneath. Bilal explains he will use new material to protect the wall.

As he proceeds Bilal describes how he has changed the space by moving the computer into the middle of the space, eliminating the need for shield while working with it. The absence of shields now necessitates him walking low to avoid being hit.

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[94] Bilal, Wafaa and Kari Lydersen. *Shoot An Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco. City Lights. 2008 p. 49

[95] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 20* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=RtrCqQ-W3KE&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

A this point Bilal smiles as Cathleen McGraff and Meghan Stirling enter the gallery, bringing him food. They brought him smoothies, tapioca and sushi. He says "Great, let's have lunch" having said he would postpone repairs as the two visitors entered the space. His expression, often rather drawn, becomes extremely happy with a broad grin. Bilal says he will "update us later after lunch" and the segment ends.

When Bilal continues the day's video blog his expression is again tense. He attaches some light plywood sheets to the wall. He decides to use a rolling plexiglass sheet to protect himself while doing the repairs. The damage is visibly worse than in previous days. He expresses sorrow that the tree has been damaged. Bilal cuts the video briefly as he screws the panel to the wall.

He notes that at this point people seem to be either respecting the sheet and the repair process, or are holding their fire waiting for an opportunity to shoot him. When the final panel is in place an the shield is moved, firing commences immediately. Bilal records the growing number of splatters where the paint balls hit the newly installed cladding. He seems to chuckle as he says goodbye.

DAY 21

Day twenty one begins with Bilal in protective goggles, his black and white Keffiyeh around his neck.[96] As with most of his videos, his face is in closeup, with the the usual paint spatter yellow of the gallery wall behind him.

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[96] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 21* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=iTNTPBc5jVs&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

Bilal's video blog for that day begins without his usual greeting. His appears to have started recording in the middle of his address. He stumbles for words which emerge as a jumble "ahh...post-traumatic syndrome...ahhh starts showing that.."

He then swears with a sudden an unusual vehemence, as if he were spitting. he pauses again, then there is a brief jump as he cuts and sways back and forth from the camera, then starts to speak again with the familiar "Hi Everybody... it is almost 11:30 in the evening on Day 21. Things are going good and bad. The good is I see the end of it- only 9 days to go. But the bad things is I am beginning to see a lot of health problems." he reaches behind his neck to scratch as he lists skins rashes, difficulty breathing, which he describes as "heavy", and alludes to symptoms of "post-traumatic syndrome".

He explains the shooting has intensified. In the background, the sounds of paint balls being fired constantly punctuates his monologue. He notes in the chat room people were doubting whether the performance was real.

Bilal quotes someone at "IP address 195 as doubting whether this performance is real". Bilal says"It doesn't really matter if the performance is real or not....I wanted to illustrate the point that we are disconnected from reality sometimes." He differentiates being in "a comfort zone and a conflict zone". He expresses the view that the difficult decision whether or not to shoot must be left up to others than himself. His goal was to share the predicament of his family in Iraq. Perhaps, he notes the fact he has created the environment and set some of the parameters means he has a much better situation than his family in Iraq."I can step out of it any minute I want, they cannot step out at all" Bilal says.

Again Bilal refers to the anxiety, the filth and the health problems. His attempts at improving the air with a fan, and cleaning the room have little effect on his immediate environment. Bilal carefully moves across the room to avoid paintball fire, and shows the protective wood he had placed the previous day was completely painted with yellow, as was the tree. The floor has a pool of yellow paint with empty paint ball shells suggesting festering on the floor and lower parts of the walls where these would occasionally stick.

Bilal turns the camera back to look at the gun. It tracks, and fires and he sees it needs to be reloaded. He notes that he has to reload it almost every twenty minutes. This suggests a rate of fire of approximately one shot every six seconds. The camera tracks violently around the space as we hear bilal pouring paintballs into the hopper. The camera finally comes to rest on the hopper of the gun. He notes that 4000 paint balls had been fired that day.

Bilal then holds the camera low to the ground, showing more of the filthy, paint covered conditions of the space, as he makes his way to his computer station. From there, he turns his camera back towards the gun. He says "this is for IP address 195. I ran out of ammo... it is a healing process " that would help himself, Bilal, deal with things he had not previously dealt with. He expressed hope but "wasn't sure if the performance would end the way he wanted to". I hope to be able to finish up, and in nine days to be out of here and this place will be in the history(sic)... My goal is to survive." Saying he will do what he can to preserve his physical and mental health, Bilal signs off.

DAY 22

The video begins with Bilal saying we are probably wondering what the noise in the background.[97] We can hear a noisy crowd, and Bilal's face fills the camera frame but the camera is facing out of the immediate area into the greater gallery space. Waiters and wedding guests appear and disappear as they pass by the portal. Bilal explains the wedding is causing him to have tremendous swings of emotion. He is perplexed by by his motion and says "the reality is blurred, now". The gun was turned off for the wedding, at the request of its organisers. Bilal recalls the same emotional experience when the gun was turned off during day ten. Tears are visibly running down his cheeks and he seems to be staring off into space as he speaks.

He says that this time as he can let down his guard , he doesn't know if he could continue. He describes his emotions as uncontainable, crying then laughing and smiling. He says "I know it is only eight days to go, but I am so worried about my mind... I hope, I hope, I hope I am going to finish the next eight days. He feels that his turmoil is exacerbated by having "the wedding on one side and destruction on the other". He pans the camera to the wedding then quickly to the paint covered area then back onto himself, again. He says he does not resent the wedding as it is "a celebration of something beautiful".

However Bilal says this painful emotion results from his particular situation. Recalling the support he received from some one in the chat room during his previous experience he hopes he will find a "new point of strength". The video breaks at his point.

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[97] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 22* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=HCBji8pQ-nM

When the video resumes, Bilal is back in goggles and armoured vest and in the yellow room, with the latest room lamp in the background over his shoulder. He says his friend Alicia had just called him and was waiting in the alley with dinner for him. He had apparently turned the gun on again, and as he left the yellow room, he bent low to avoid paintball fire, then stood up and replaced his goggles with spectacles, again commenting on the strange juxtaposition of the paint ball gun with the wedding and it's audible sound of people in social hubbub. As Bilal makes his way to the side entrance of the gallery, music can be heard in the background and we can make out the last melisma of the chorus of The BeeGees' *Stayin' Alive*. He says "Hey!" and waves to his friend.

Bilal explains to her that he can't step out of the gallery and asks her to come in. She goes to find parking and Bilal says to the camera that they will return. He comments the air smells so good it is torture. The video cannot convey the smell and texture of living in a filthy dangerous space. Then Bilal's friends arrive from out of the darkness.

"Hi, who are you?" asks Bilal. Michael introduces himself then Bilal points the camera at Alicia and introduces her, and Michael as her boyfriend. She says "You got a really bright light on that thing" referring to the camera light that makes them both flinch. Alicia says she got him extra spicy curry and chicken and he pans down to the bag she is carrying. He jokes that a lot of girls bring him food but this time Alicia has brought her boyfriend. They enter the gallery and the conversation is buried by the wedding sounds, then the video cuts.

Bilal is back in the yellow room when the video resumes. His typical introduction of "Hey, Everybody it's Day 22" has been moved to this last section. His voice is more up beat than in the beginning and he seems more composed in his armour and goggles. He

says that with the gun active and the wedding over his emotional "swing" has ended. "All the emotion disappears. I don't know how to explain it" Bilal says. He shifts his position and sits on his bed and there is the familiar crack of the paintball gun. "I hope this concludes the day. Eight more days." He stares intently into the camera. Music is audible and it seems to be pop from perhaps Iraq. Then video ends with Bilal still staring into the camera.

DAY 23

Bilal addresses the camera with the street behind him, visible through the gallery window.[98] He says he has a new energy thanks to the people watching the blogs posted on YouTube, those participating through the online chat room , and visitors that spent time with him in front of the gun bringing "care, love and food". But he says his emotions are going up and down and he has trouble composing himself. He warns that the footage he was about to share might be a bit disturbing but "reflected reality". The video cuts away to previous footage.

"Hi everybody it is day 23 and I have two of my best friends here." Bilal is again in the yellow room, the wooden panels protecting the wall from paintball rounds visible behind him. He pans the camera to Ben Chang and Sylvia Ruzanka who are both wearing full head paint ball helmets. Bilal mentions they have just returned from vacation and that both took part in the project with Ben writing [computer] code and Sylvia writing the Html. Sylvia says it is very intense being in the space with the gun, and she and Ben giggle nervously then she jumps as the crack of a paintball round resounds through the room. A second before she had responded with a "yes" to Bilal's question of whether she

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[98] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 23* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=DciV2znsGpo

felt "she was in a war zone". She says the the sound is very intense, causing her heart rate to elevate and "creating a constant state of anxiety". Bilal goes on to say that is probably what is causing the symptoms of heavy breathing and chest pains that he described in his previous blog posts. He says he will update later and that segment of the blog ends.

When the video resumes he is walking towards the front doors of the gallery. He says" They are here, let's say hi to them and he pans his camera to a trio of smiling people, visible through the window, approaching the doors. He greets them warmly and they introduce themselves as Lori Talley, Lori Hemsley and Nick Muller. Bilal explains they are bringing him lunch and describes his appreciation for how the community are taking care of him since he is "totally isolated".

This made me think of how shamanic characters would have been supported by the people around them in the earliest human communities. These feats of endurance as a way of acquiring wisdom for a community required supporting the artist/religious figure/diviner as a conduit.

They enter the gallery, going up the stairs. The segment ends as they stop for lunch.The video repeats the interview with Ben and Sylvia.

At the conclusion of the video, Bilal says he has decided not to include the disturbing video, because it had upset him too much. He says he is feeling good and it is about two o'clock in the morning. things have been stable- the gun never stopped. I am up for it so pleased don' t be worried, I'm going to be fine. Bye!" The video ends as the camera pans in a blur then cuts.

<u>DAY 24</u>

This blog post was made in two parts on Memorial day- the day the United states honours its veterans.[99] Bilal said that he felt good and that the steady volume of fire required loading the gun every twenty minutes. He recalled how the previous day had been very difficult emotionally. Bilal said he was feeling much better than yesterday and this had restored his confidence in his ability to finish his project. He mentions that he had chosen to not show disturbing footage from yesterday. He looks down as he says this. Bilal was concerned that he would upset those that cared about him.

He searches for his words then says that he felt he could share that footage now. Bilal stammers a little as he warns the video shot after his friends left the previous day was very disturbing. He says the rate of fire in the background was much lighter than in the footage he was about to show from the previous day.

As watched this segment I counted 9 rounds fired in the first thirty seconds. "Hi everybody, (2:15) it's Monday, memorial day....it is the heaviest day we have had... all the available slots have been filled" said Bilal. Bilal goes on to say "I honestly thought it would be much quieter because it was memorial day." He says that it is not only the US, but also Denmark, Ireland, the UK, France and Canada contributing people operating the paint ball gun. Bilal is perplexed that such a global presence would appear on a Monday, even if it was a holiday for the US.

Bilal says it was the first time he had seen this. Saying he will provide an update later, he turns his camera toward the gun which is traversing rapidly from side to side. He

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[99] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 24 part 1* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=OWUfROO6-34

then turns the camera back at the opposite wall. Bilal again emphasises the damage done and high volume of constant fire. He says he expects the server to crash, then signs off.

When he returns, he says it is memorial day.   Bilal's brow is knit beneath the protective goggles and his movement is abrupt and jerky. He stammers a little, as he says they are "still under heavy bombardment". He notes that his personal computer has crashed due to too much chat traffic, but the gun is still firing. He says that he has to reload the gun's hopper every ten minutes and he swings the camera towards the gun, whose hopper is almost empty. He says "gotta go and fill it" as the camera swings abruptly and the video cuts.

The second video of day twenty four begins by repeating the last 20 second of the previous video[100]. The camera now points bat the ceiling as Bilal moves, then he places it where it can view him loading the gun. As he places handfuls of paint bails in the hopper, the gun jerks violently from side to side. He returns to address the camera, with the paintball gun visible over his shoulder. He notes that the server is full, with 60 or seventy other trying to log on. The majority were from the US but he notes many were from Denmark, UK, France and Thailand. The video cuts away.

When it resumes, Bilal appears without his goggles and says it is 5o'clock. The shoot continues, with refills every fifteen minutes and people from around the world. Bilal describes this as a hard day. The video abruptly cuts to the day 23 footage that Bilal had described earlier.

In this clip, we can hear Bilal suck in his breath and sob. "People don't mind giving me so much hope- everybody' is in Tears" says Bilal. "Can you imagine an entire nation

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[100] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 24 part 2* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=maaZ7fiyQhA

living like this?" And his voice cracks as he begins to weep. He looks away from the camera and flinches with the crack of a paintball round. He is silent for a few minutes then the video cuts and returns to the opening sequence from day 24.

Bilal says "I hope this will give you an idea of how hard it is to be in this place. It's no longer a physical game but a mental one" because he no longer fears the gun, which he describes as "scary". It is mental because the act of shooting at him has become mechanical. The taunts of some people online in the projects chat room create a mental challenge to sustain his performance. He describes his unease with his ability to continue and the frustration of the other participants with the projects continuation.

Bilal says "My intent is to raise awareness of my family in Iraq... That is my first intent and I'm going to continue doing until next Monday. Thank you very much for your support, you have been great. I look forward to talk to you all at some point. Bye for now". His demeanor seems more determined or perhaps rigid as this last brief clip plays.

DAY 25

Bilal greets his audience saying the volume of fire has been very heavy, and again, from global visitors.[101] The biggest problem of the day was that the rapid rate of fire, with shots being fired sometimes less than a second apart, had almost exhausted the supply of paint balls. Bilal had sent a friend to a paintball store to try and obtain more, his usual supplier having run out of stock.

Following up on the previous days report, he notes that thousands of rounds had been expended the previous day. He walks through the gallery space behind the camera and pans over the stacked boxes now empty of paintballs. Due to the supply problem he

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[101] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 25 part 1* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=jGXLOkBSNDQ&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

considered switching to rubber or plastic balls. As he pans and moves we have a more complete sense of the gallery space, with the gun, the doorway into the yellow room and the computer monitor where he works. He notes that people(presumably online) mentioned that the camera on the gun had shifted so that the barrel was no longer centered. He demonstrates how he has turned the computer monitor so that he can see how the gun camera is aligned on the barrel. He then pans up and to the right so we can see his hand adjusting the gun camera. The gun is still moving and firing as he attempts the adjustment.

"There are people dedicated to moving the gun away to the left" says Bilal. "That is very heart touching" he says. he goes on to say that many people are participating with the chat room, and many are simply panning the gun but not firing. He says bye for now and the segment ends.

When the video resumes Bilal says it is lunch time and he pans the camera over to a friend who introduces himself as Mann Bartlett. Bartlett has brought him a lunch of a peanut butter chocolate shake and a Cobb salad. Bilal is noticeably brighter in mien when he has visitors in the gallery space. Bilal pauses the video to have lunch.

When the video resumes, Bilal again has a more tense expression on his face. He is again framed against the gallery windows looking out onto the street. Due to the shortage of paint balls he says he had switched to rubber rounds. However, he had found a company in Illinois who had stepped in and would provide paintballs for the duration of the project. He thanks PMI for their donation of paintballs and CO_2 for remaining 6 (in fact it would be seven) days of the project. He thanks the community for this and he says he thinks the community thanks them (PMI) for this. With that he says good bye.

The second video for day twenty five begins with Bilal talking on a mobile phone.[102] he says that he had been talking to the paint ball store and that they had no more yellow paint balls. He said they were down to a single case, but more would be coming the next day. Saying he would update us later, the brief segment ends.

When the video resumes Bilal said PMI "did not come through". He said now he had to call another supplier now for the next day's supply. He related that PMI had called back and said "they could not support the project". They said it was not broader politics but internal policies due to a recent merger. Bilal has walked out of the yellow room, into the front area of the gallery and lifts his goggles, and shakes his head. The furrows of his brow and the squint of his eyes suggest great concern. Bilal says he is both disappointed and appreciative of PMI's position. He groans as he rises from a sitting position. The sound of voices and the crack of paintballs being fired can be heard as he dials the other supplier. Bilal is silent for a moment then says he is calling discount paint ball. However, it seems to take a long time to connect, and he apparently adjusts his phone volume. Finally, Bilal announces himself into the phone. The conversation seems to have long pauses where Bilal seems to be on hold. Bilal says to the camera, as he waits, that he doesn't want to use the rubber balls because they are more painful and"bounce back". "yes! ok, ok, yeah, ok oh great!" Bilal asks if they will be able to ship the standard paint balls, as otherwise he will need volunteers to collect them. Bilal offers this synopsis "They located 20 cases of yellow 'paint'[balls] and Mark talked to PMI who weren't going to donate it but would negotiate a better price."

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[102] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 25 part2* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=lklAAwy1dUQ&feature=related

Bilal zooms into his face as he says he hopes this will be sufficient paint to finish the project, and signs off.

Day 26

Bilal greets his audience at about one o'clock in the afternoon with about 125 people logged on[103]. He says about 36 people are doing "left action"– turning the gun into the left corner of the space. He says that this action had come to be called "Virtual human shield" in the chat room. This prevents people from shooting at him. It had frustrated many people. Bilal says he will not interfere with the gun, whether it is pointed towards him or away. If it is just pressing the button, then it is part of the performance vs a coding trick, like the early days on the project when MIT students hacked the server and fired the paintball gun like a machine gun. The action had reduced the rate of fire. The additional chat room activity Bilal describes as pleasant.

When Bilal returns, he mentions it is about three in the afternoon. He notes he has gained a lot of weight. He found he was eating constantly perhaps from depression, as well as gaining weight from lack of exercise. Bilal also mentions that additional paint balls would be delivered, replacing his rapidly dwindling supply.

When he returns he said that there is less firing and more chat and more of the virtual human shield or "turning left". He introduces a visitor, Beverly Nelson who found the performance online on Memorial day and said she entered a chat room for the first time where she discovered she could turn the gun away from Bilal. She compliments him for his passion and endurance as he uses performance art "to make a statement". She thanks Wafaa and those "clicking to the left." Bilal thanks her then chokes up. He clears

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[103] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 26* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=xr9Y9suPyOc

his throat as he says "it is another act of the community" that warms his heart. "It gives me hope" Bilal says then signs off until later in the day.

In the next segment, Bilal; continues interviewing Nelson. She brings him clean socks, M&M's and hot sauce. Nelson chuckles as she says she noticed he had one white sock and one black sock when she watched him via the internet. He says he hadn't noticed that he was wearing mis-matched socks. He notes how privacy has gone and he wants to call attention to that. As he signs off for the day, Bilal notes how happy he is "to be part of this community".

Day 27

This video begins oddly, with Bilal apparently signing off after saying the day had been very quiet, and he liked that.The then video cuts to him now in goggles in the yellow room welcoming viewers to day 27 of the project.[104] He mentions they have received a box and inside it is a potted plant. Bilal smiles broadly as it is carried into frame. then appears to get choked up. He then says"I am overwhelmed". He pans the camera away from his face towards his helper who is unwrapping the plant. She smiles towards the camera as she holds up the plant, which appears to be about 30cm tall.

Bilal pans the camera back towards his face. "Wow, what a great gift! Who ever you are...this gives me so much hope" Said Bilal. He is again smiling broadly, even as a paintball round rings out in the background. He pans the camera wildly, as he meant to turn it off or hadn't turned off. We over hear him say the plant will go on his desk where"they can see it but not shoot it". he then turns back towards his face. We can see

[104] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 27* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ak3DenESr9E&feature=YouTube_gdata_player

the leaves of the plant at the edge of the frame as Bilal holds it. He holds back sobs as he says"I am extremely touched... I am not gonna let any one shoot it". Morgan returns saying there is a card in the box. Bilal asks her to read it. Morgan reads

"Dear Wafaa, We are saddened by the assault on your plant and on you. So may this peace Lily be some sort of comfort for you in your project. Be well and wishing you and all of us peace, "Milane and Jason". "Wow, very touching" Bilal says again. He had noted the previous plant had been killed by the constant paintball fire. He then makes his way through the firing zone, crouched down and carrying the plant. he adjusts his goggles and says "this is extremely touching" again. His breath is laboured as moves crouched over. Bilal stops to address the camera again and heaves a heavy sigh. Behind his goggles we can see he is blinking back tears. He says "I am so happy to see...the goodness in humanity. He glances away from the camera and is silent for a few seconds then sighs again and returns his gaze to the camera. The camera pans away then cuts. In the last 5 seconds of the day's video, we see Bilal rubbing his eyes and crying.

DAY 28

Bilal greets us noting he is feeling well mentally, after getting four and a half hours sleep.[105] He mentions that he had not slept for 48 hours prior to that except for a couple of hours. Physically, he described having strong pains in his abdomen. He demonstrates how he must crawl to avoid the gun. He explains he is going to lie down and hopes he feels better. As he moves through the gallery space, he says that he is bothered by the lack of physical activity due to his restriction to the gallery space. He lies down on the floor beside a sunny window. He lifts his goggles then says he normally exercises at least an

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[105] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 28* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=fAi5Agm_idM

hour a day. But he reflects that he hasn't the freedom to do this. This freedom is so important, he continues, and he has learned to "cherish it" and the small comforts as a result of this project. He then signs off.

Day 29

Day 29 is a silent 4minutes and seven second photo montage from the previous 28 days of the performance.[106] It shows Bilal cleaning and maintaining the gun. and the objects within the space. In some respects, this video is more revealing as it reveals the material experience more than Bilal's words which belie the talking head image of most of the documentary video's.

The immediate sense is how virtually everything is covered with wet paint. This doesn't come through in most of the videos, but it is obvious the yellow room must be virtually impossible to clean. The effect of living in that environment was very wearing. Also striking is the care Bilal had to lavish on the gun which is emphasised in the photographs which show him stripping and cleaning it, leaving it gleaming, while the environment around it is filthy.

The final image is a smiling caricature of Bilal waving.

Day 30

Day thirty of the paintball project begins with a close up of the gun cycling through firing several paint balls.[107] The video then cuts to Bilal, he notes the server is very busy, perhaps because it is the last day of the project. However, Bilal announces he will extend

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[106] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 29* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=J0NR_pITj0c

[107] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 30* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=PtvvVbeaSHk&feature=related

the project one more day. He says this extra day is dedicated to those who said he could not complete the project. Bilal then thanks his supporters. He says the project has had both "highs and low" and had both united and divided people. He goes on to say that art is supposed to "inform, agitate and be part of life". He says he has no resentment towards the people who shot. "It is an encounter, and open narrative- it is not a didactic piece." said Bilal.

He says he is in great spirits although the project has had an impact on his physical and mental health. He says good bye, saying" it has been a great journey". The camera cuts from him to the little figure of him, and the words " K TNX bye" scroll across the screen.

Day 31

The final day of the project, and the video begins with the steady rhythm of the gun firing like a clock.[108] Bilal is typing at his computer, and we can see the gun in the mid ground and a photographer in the fore ground. This video is unusual because Bilal is not holding the camera. He says "17 seconds" then leaves the computer and crouches under the guns arc of fire and makes his way to the back of the gun. Others count down with him. The gun fires a few more round, then Bilal pulls the plug, and declares "the gun is silent!".

Bilal stands up right to receive applause, and thanks those there and others. he asks if anyone is outside. He says the project was a tribute to all the Iraqi citizens and all the American soldiers who lost their lives. "We have silenced one gun today, and in the

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[108] Bilal, Wafaa (mewafaa), *The Paintball Project Day 31* http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=lDZM4AooEv0 accessed 2010-11-23 16:48:43

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future we hope to silence all the guns" The camera pans across a small crowd of supporters and journalists who applaud him.

The video cuts to Bilal with his usual greeting of "Hey everybody this is Wafaa". In the background their are sounds of a party. Behind him is the yellow wall with he paint covered plywood panels. Bilal says' The confinement is over" and thanks his audience for "keeping the hope alive" and talking and interacting with him. He walks outside. He passes through party goers. Bilal says grandly"hey it's a great crowd" then "wow, I promise you I wont cry" as he steps outside the gallery after thirty one days inside. "It's great to be alive. It's fantastic to think and reflect."

Bilal addresses the camera: "Please keep the conversation going" saying the piece was an open narrative. He thanks the virtual human shield, all the participants and standing in the gallery parking lot, he signs off the last video.

Chapter 4
Section 4.1- Thinking About Producing An Artistic Space

Bilal's enunciated goal for *Domestic Tension* was to create a space of conversation. The production of space is much the focus of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre's thought contends that social spaces are specific to the society that produce them. Thus in Bilal's case, his space of conversation, in so far as he creates it, is much a product of the society out of which it is created. This apparent tautology in Lefebvre's case indicates some of the limitations of using his philosophies of spaciality to describe *Domestic Tension*. In Bilal's case, his performance approaches space that includes and transcends virtual versus embodied space. This porosity between screen space and embodied space occurs through boundary objects. The discussion of boundary objects, a concept originally developed by sociologist Susan "Leigh" Star and philosopher James R. Griesemer, posits objects (which can include items such as the paintball gun robot of Bilal's performance, ideas and people) that can have multiple and varied significances. These objects none-the-less allow different groups of people to interact. This concept has bearing on the actor-network Theory of Bruno Latour and John Law, amongst others, as their theories grant agency to objects commonly thought of as being inanimate. A significance of this concept is that it can create a particular critical aesthetics, especially for interactive performances.

Some criticisms of boundary objects have been raised by Charlotte P. Lee, who argues that the boundary object concept inadequately describes the relationships between groups. Lee writes "Theories are needed to explain how collaborators from different communities of practice, that lack pre-existing standards, use material artifacts to

collaborate."[109] As part of Bilals artistic intentions were to bridge gaps between groups, we can look at how his performance used both himself and the paintball gun to create spaces where disparate communities could collaborate across boundaries of identity and ideology. These negotiated boundaries, boundaries which in this case are present in virtual spaces in the case of Bilal's performance, provide a theoretical hinge for discussing performance art, including those performative arenas we can refer to as digital games. The specific implications for *Domestic Tensions* I will discuss in the final, concluding chapter of this thesis. Some more general questions raised by this discussion I will elaborate here.

Section 4.2 Local Responses to Global Power: At the Cusp of Boundaries

Chris Salter argues in his paper "THE KULTURSTAAT IN THE TIME OF EMPIRE Notes on Germany Thirteen Years After" that "capitalism "produces producers". [110] In short, in bioproduction, capitalism is the ultimate autopoietic machine. It not only produces commodities, it produces new forms of subjectivities and social relations to consume and reproduce these commodities, constructing and catalyzing economic, social, and cultural life in an endless self- reproducing cycle.[111] Salter's discussion centers on the decline of state support for culture— he focuses on both 'prestige' institutions and more challenging organisations in the realm of performance, such as the Deutsche Opera and the Frankfurt Ballet—and how this is an aesthetic response to global capitalism. While

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[109] Lee, Charlotte P. "Boundary Negotiating Artifacts: Unbinding the Routine of Boundary Objects and Embracing Chaos in Collaborative Work" in *Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (2007) p.314

[110] Salter, Chris. "The Kulturstaat in the Time of Empire: Notes on Germany Thirteen Years After" in PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art, PAJ 77 (Volume 26, Number 2), May 2004, pp. 1-15

[111] ibid p.2

allowing that this has challenged German cultural practices, heavily dependent on state sponsorship, Salter argues that a new generation of german artist is now embracing "DIY" artistic practices.[112] To be sure, he also presents resistances from the kulturstat which both rejects 21st century artistic practice and defends a 19th century sensibility that suggests these new practices and the economic milieu out of which it arises as "American".[113]

This critique of new artistic practices is not essentially supported by Salter's analysis. He suggests that these resistances are both restrictive, as they ignore the current social environment, and counterproductive to artistic goals that challenge and supersede the concept of Empire as a monolithic structure that endlessly encompasses what various discussions, including his, Hart and Negri's, and seminally, Michel Foucault's, as biopower. Salter asserts that biopower can indeed turn and rupture the apparently all-encompassing force of Empire and that examples of biopower demonstrate how. The scope of his paper, however, does not give detailed analysis of how such ruptures are achieved.

His specific examples include works by German director/artist Christoph Schlingensief, such as *Church of Fear,* presented at the Venice Biennale of 2003. Functioning both in experimental theatre, political theater (Schlingensief ran for Chancellor in 2000) and experimenting with 'low culture' (could that include mass market video games?) this German artist presents a specific example of art work that moves beyond early modern models of artistic production into more contemporary situations.

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[112] ibid p.13

[113] ibid p.9-10

As Salter puts it, "Schlingensief's blend of political/aesthetic action combined with popular entertainment and trash culture embodies much of what is common across the Berlin performance and visual art worlds. Soap operas, TV talk shows and the like provide the content and context for many "off theatre" and performance troupes who exist outside of the *stadttheater* scene as well as for the less established visual arts scene".[114]

Looking closely at Schlingensief's body of work, we see similarities in his concerns between regional interpretations of state power, with Schlingensief's work rooted in German concerns, as Bilal's are in Iraq, but both addressing American expressions of power in an age of global capital.

Section 4.3- Art as Agent

If space is constructed by the means of production of a given society, then what means of production enters into that of a gallery or an artist's given practice? One means to answering this question is found in the thought of Alfred Gell, a British anthropologist. His provocative thesis considers art objects as actors in the same sense as Bruno Latour, John Law and others who advocate Actor-Network Theory. Gell's argument, briefly put, is that agency is a perceptual category in the audience, rather than an expression of intentionality from within the actor. Some authors have debated whether a distinction should be drawn between actors (human agents) and actants (non human agents).

My position is that this is an ontic or mundane response to a ontological or theoretical argument that is based on distaste for being considered as an unintentional being by others. The argument that an object (human objects?) has agency helps us examine the notion of the boundary object and how scholars such as Star and Greisemer

[114] ibid p.12

have conceptualised this idea. In turn this will help us to consider art works as boundary objects, and how they reflect the origins of the space in which they occur.

Alfred Gell, writing in his book, *Art and Agency* argues for granting agency to art objects. His argument for this stems from his desire to create an anthropological theory of art which can avoid referring to specific aesthetics as the basis for considering social relationships.[115] Instead he introduces the idea that "persons or 'social agents' are, in certain contexts, substituted for by art objects".[116] Gell embraces the theoretical position that the art object is defined within the milieu in which it was created.[117] In keeping with other anthropological theories, such as apply to kinship, economics and the like, Gell defines the anthropology of art as the theoretical study of 'social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency'.[118] Rather than looking for aesthetic principles, Gell looks for actions which belie agency; he considers art objects as being an index of agency and contemporary western art practices as being a subset of the totality of those indexes[119].

Gell defines an agent as "one who has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her vicinity".[120] His definition of agency leads him to argue that we identify an agent when "they act like an agent".[121] He allows for the commonsense objection that objects

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[115] Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency:An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford ; New York : Clarendon Press, 1998 p. 3

[116] ibid p.5

[117] ibid p.7

[118] ibid

[119] ibid p.15

[120] ibid p.19

[121] ibid p.20

such as children's dolls, works of art and so on are not human by distinguishing between

primary agents as having intentionality, such as human beings, and secondary agents, that

we do not attribute with intentionality.[122] However, while he caveats these secondary

agents as being channels of agency, he attributes both agency and our attribution of

intentionality to the observer, rather than the observed. He describes the actor as "the

agent" and what, or who, receives the action as "the patient" but characterises this as a

contextual and fleeting relationship that must be considered in the broad social context in

which it occurs[123]. Intentionality, with its history of a philosophical appeal to metaphysics

and theories of mind, is not required for Gell's examination of objects as agents. Indeed,

his argument seems more geared to disarm criticisms that his anthropology of art

removes the 'anthro' from his object of study; that he eliminates the human. His argument

does not draw an operational distinction between "primary"(human) and

"secondary"(non-human) agents. However Gell's reflections do respect our lack of

conclusive experience regarding intentionality beyond our own personal anecdotal

experience, and the inconclusive ruminations of luminary thinkers such as Berkley,

Hume, Descartes through Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty who sought to explore,

identify and define the nature of intentionality.

"Too often sociology remains without an object. Like many

human sciences, it has constructed itself so as to resist attachment to

objects, which it calls fetishes. It has taken the ancient admonition of

the prophets against gods, merchandise, consumer goods and objets

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[122] ibid

[123] ibid p.22

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d'art to heart: "Idols have eyes and yet do not see, mouths and yet do

not speak, ears and yet do not hear."[124]

Latour's argument stems from a desire to rupture the dichotomy of interactionist

sociologists, who see society arising from interactions from individuals and structuralists

who see individual interactions as indexes of underlying social structures.[125] Latour gives

the example of how all the elements of a post office, with its counters, screens and so

forth allow the interaction of architects, ergonomic specialists and so on who are present

via the the design and construction of the post office with himself and the postal clerk that

works there.[126] He goes as far as arguing that social structures permit society to exist, as

they permit the agency of actors/actants to exhibit itself beyond the immediate place and

time that an actor/actant inhabits.[127]

Section 4.4- Art Objects at the Boundary
The boundary object is in its original formulation an object that can act as a point of

communication between two groups. In the previous section I argued, following from the

work of Actor-Network theorists and the work of Alfred Gell, that art objects have

agency. Here I will discuss how this agency is expressed when disparate groups gather

and communicate through such an agent. I will also consider the physical and

metaphorical sense of the boundary as a spatial term, which will lead to the next section's

discussion of spatiality.

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[124] Latour, Bruno. "On Interobjectivity" in *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, Volume3, No. 4, 1996 p.236

[125] ibid p.230

[126] ibid p.238

[127] ibid p.239

The origin of the concept of the boundary object arises in a 1989 paper by Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer where they discussed the interactions of amateur and professional zoologists at the Berkley Museum of Zoology during the early half of the 20th Century.[128] Their work extends its analysis from the concept of *interressement* developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. As Star and Griesemer describe *interessement* as that which entails different groups, for example scientists and non-scientists 'translating' their concerns so that these can be shared by other groups, thus retaining them as 'allies'.[129] In contrast to their characterization of Latour, Callon, and Law's work with it's emphasis on how one group "funnels" the interests of others to support it's particular concerns, Star and Griesemer allow for multiple negotiations between networks of interested groups.[130] This negotiation was called translation, as in the meaning and message conveyed from one group in a network to another were shifted sufficiently to be understood and embraced by another group without betraying the original concerns expressed the group seeking to 'funnel' the exchanges in the network towards a goal or objective.

The role of the boundary objects in achieving those goals is to be "objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds...and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them".[131] Star and Griesemer explicitly critique Latour et al's concept as failing to address the multiple interests at play in a museum setting- they point

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128 Star, Susan Leigh & James R. Griesemer. "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39" in *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Aug., 1989), pp. 387-420

129 ibid p.389

130 ibid p.390

131 ibid p.393

point out that "There, several groups of actors - amateurs, professionals, animals, bureaucrats and 'mercenaries'- succeeded in crafting a coherent problem-solving enterprise, surviving multiple translations."[132]

The application of boundary object theory to contemporary art history becomes more apparent when we consider it was initially deployed to try "to understand the historical development of a particular type of institution: natural history research museums".[133] In this case, the natural history museum they were examining originated as a research museum, unlike many others which Star and Griesemer describe as originating as a popular attraction that subsequently reflected a growing professionalization in the museology of natural history.[134]

Section 5 Art breaking bounds: Spaces of Agency

If we imagine a Venn diagram we start with a category, for example all artists, and draw a circle representing the space of that group. We can then draw another circle representing another group, for example, all visitors to art galleries. By overlapping the two circles we can imagine a group that comprises all artists who visit art galleries– surely many of those– and a presumably small sliver of the circle that comprise those artists who don't visit art galleries. A larger segment of non-artists would comprise part of the area representing gallery-going individuals. Subsequent elaborations could be added-additional circles for art historians and sociologists, for example, that fall into these groups. As the model becomes more complex, we can deform the circles to accommodate hybrids, such as art historian/ sociologists who make art but don't visit art galleries. With

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[132] ibid p. 392

[133] ibid p. 391

[134] ibid

modern technology, we can elaborate these models in 3 (or more) dimensions to better

represent the state of affairs. However, that representation remains just that, a

representation or model of a state of affairs we can only know imperfectly, at least

partially, because it is constantly shifting. For example, a group of young artists might

abandon their "no gallery visits" manifesto, thus shifting the diagram I previously

mentioned. Indeed, the interesting thing, and the frustrating thing, is that such

representations attempt to achieve a static representation of a dynamic situation. How do

these overlaps occur? And what causes these overlaps to shift? Moreover, how do these

models of space abstract much more complex and obscure phenomena?

"Representational spaces...need obey no rules of consistency or cohesiveness" asserts

Henri Lefebvre,[135] referring to one leg of his triad of perceived space- conceived space -

lived space. In this case, his specific term for lived space is *representational spaces*.[136]

The other two legs are conceived spaces(*representations of space*),[137] which are produced

by intellectual workers i.e engineers, artists and so on, and perceived spaces(*spatial

practice*)[138] which "occur by way of architecture... as a project embedded in a spatial

context and a texture which call for 'representations' that will not vanish into the

symbolic or imaginary realms".[139]

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[135] Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. Malden, Mass, Oxford, Carlton, Victoria. Blackwell 1991 p.41

[136] ibid p.39

[137] ibid p.38

[138] ibid

[139] ibid p.42

Lefebvre's analysis concludes that space is not truly a secure commodity. In that respect, Roy Roger's advice "Buy land- they aren't making anymore of it" seems to reveal a failure of Lefebvre's analysis. More space is being made in the virtual world.[140] None-the-less that space is not seized or migrated to, as when humans expanded into pre-digital spaces in pre-digital times. These spaces are produced via computers, galleries and privately-owned servers. Yet this failure has more to do with the era, prior to the presence of digital virtuality. Lefebvre notes "the elements themselves are produced and reproduced... the relationship of production action to space is modified".[141]

In the case of *Domestic Tension*, Lefebvre's work suggests a relationship when he writes "Productive (industrial) labour... gives rise to moral and artistic values".[142] Thus Bilal's work could only easily arise in the particular environment of the developed West, where the economy can support its critics using the same systems that form the backbone of the military system he critiques. A telling moment of this is when we see him using a mobile phone to order more paintballs, a moment captured on digital video and transmitted via the internet.

"The benefits of nature" had no exchange value, in Marx's view, as nobody produced those benefits.[143] But space as a physical phenomena has become commodified because it can now be produced not just in the phenomenological sense that Lefebvre

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[140] Development schemes, such as the artificial archipelago residences in the Gulf states of the UAE are beyond the scope of this thesis but offer another expression of expanding spaces that reflect the particular economic system that produces them, as luxurious gated residences necessary as proof of wealth and status requiring elevated security.

[141] ibid p.330

[142] ibid p.322

[143] ibid

theorises, but more radically in that in the lived sense: "The elements lose their natural determinations and assume value as it is no longer possible to draw them directly from an everlasting source of nature".[144]

This folds back on original premise of Empire that. Capitalism now produces ever expanding spaces, from it's point of view, creating new markets. However, these spaces are problematic because they are both created by capitalist methods to further capitalist expansion, yet they must find unexploited space to exploit. This leaves these spaces to be deployed by those that Hardt & Negri call the Multitude. In the next chapter, I will discuss how *Domestic Tension* provides an example of a space created by a performance of boundary objects in an ambiguously capitalist virtual space.

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[144] ibid p.329

Chapter 5

In his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, sociologist Bruno Latour notes how the

AIDS virus "Takes you from sex to the unconscious, then to Africa, tissue cultures, DNA

and San Francisco" but argues that experts from a variety of fields discuss the virus

within vary narrowly delineated disciplinary categories without acknowledging, or indeed

explicitly asserting, these categories[145]. Within these delineations we can see two of Henri

Lefebvre's three spatial domains; conceived space and a specific type of lived space[146]. In

this case, Latour's experts create a conceived space that derogates the common sense

lived space, and ultimately serves to neutralise the imaginary space of the lived[147]. Latour

argues that "retying the Gordian Knot" severed by expert knowledge restores the

complexity hidden by such expert arguments[148]. It is here that Bilal's *Domestic Tension*

succeeds. By exploiting the agency of art objects- the robotic paintball gun, the gallery

and the artist himself- he creates boundary objects that work together in a particular

fashion to cross disciplinary walls that differentiate nations, citizens and disciplines. His

use of virtuality within and without a gallery setting allowed his work to engage an

audience otherwise unlikely to explore a gallery space or engage in a dialogue with

contemporary performance art. If Lefebvre wrote that space was a production of the

society, then Latour theoretically breaks down the walls that define that space and leaves

it open for the particular agency of art works that Gell asserts and describes. Bilal's work

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[145] Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Catherine Porter, trs. Harvard. Cambridge, Mass. 1993. p.2

[146] Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space

[147] Latour, Bruno ibid p.3

[148] ibid p.3

embodies that theoretical model as it redefines perceptions of galleries, art objects and performances and the audiences and artists that result in a new possibilities of lived spatiality. By using the perceived space of the FPS digital game and the conceived space of the art gallery and the internet, Bilal has connected people through the agency of the performance as boundary object.

In the earliest moments of his performance, Bilal describes himself as both a host and an art object.[149] This occurred in the opening night celebrations as people milled about the gallery. However, Bilal describes a sense of awkwardness in both himself and his guests. Unlike most other vernissages, the artist was not a constant target of a paintball gun. Even here he describes himself as being in a zone of conflict while those around him were in a zone of comfort. They were on the other side of the gun, enjoying a glass of wine while Bilal abstained lest he become careless and be shot by a paintball[150].

For the visitors to the gallery Bilal was a human being and an artist much as anyone could be perceived as such. However he was already an index between these zones of conflict and comfort. Spectators in the gallery could watch him and presumably empathise with his plight.The term "boundary object" implies a border between zones. Without having collected questionnaires, we can reflect the majority of visitors to that vernissage were generally in sympathy with Bilal's sentiments; to end the conflict in Iraq, to raise the awareness of the human costs of the conflict, especially to those who engaged with it by virtual means. There was little in way of a boundary between Bilal and his

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[149] Bilal Wafaa & Kari Lydersen. *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun*. San Francisco, CA. City Lights, 2008 p. 29

[150] ibid p.30

guests. His project was more ambitious, however, and it required meeting much more challenging boundaries.

How did Bilal fulfill the role of boundary object? In Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer's original formulation it was a object that bridged different groups by having significance to both and a shared significance between groups, as I noted previously. In her 2010 paper, Star characterises the term boundary as "a shared space" and "object as something people act towards and with".[151] Star asserts that her formulation was for a way that groups could cooperate without consensus.[152] She also emphasises the object resides between social worlds.[153] Star reflects on her original formulation that much discussion emphasised the "interpretative flexibility" of boundary objects without addressing the material/organisational structure of boundary objects or their scale and granularity.[154] It is here that Star's reflections emphasise the significance of *Domestic Tension* and Bilal's place in it. Star notes that scale and scope frame when something becomes a boundary object.[155] Within a small group and the relatively confined area of the gallery, Bilal's role does not allow for collaboration with such a disparate range of groups. However, when the performance is disseminated via the internet, its scope expands to the point where Bilal can now become a focal point for

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[151] Star, Susan Leigh "This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept" in Science Technology Human Values p. 603

[152] ibid p. 605

[153] ibid p.

[154] Star, Susan Leigh "This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept" in Science Technology Human Values p. 602

[155] ibid. p. 612-613

those that wish primarily to shoot an Iraqi, and those that wish to converse about the Iraq conflict and its human cost.

The paint ball gun can likewise be seen as a boundary object. For many, especially in North America, it is a toy, or at least an object for sport and leisure. However, its role is similar to that of Bilal as I just outlined. Those that regard it as an object of fun and leisure now share a relationship with others of differing viewpoints through its potential for menace and its identity as a weapon. This gives it strong potential meaning to different groups, but also draws members of each of them into the virtual space of the chat room where discussions can begin.

Within the context of modern geopolitics, *Domestic Tension* explores a particular response of one artistic to a moment, a tragic moment in a greater conflict. With the death of his brother, and that death leading to his father's death a few months later, Bilal offers a subjective response but it is a response that leads to much broader implications. In one direction, it explores and catalyses a "hi-art" response to a "low-culture" phenomena-performance art and how it deals with digital games, especially as an online social sphere. At the same time, Bilal's performance allows people from a broad range of social backgrounds to experience the possibility of physically harming another via remote control. In this respect, *Domestic Tension* begins to offer an experience that is already common for many in the technologically advanced militaries of North America, Europe and Asia– the experience of committing a violent act from a place of comfort.

Some chat room messages expressed doubt as to whether the performance was 'real' as I noted in the review of video footage in Chapter 3 of this thesis. During the video blog of Day 21 Bilal mentions that a particular spectator participant doubts that

Bilal is really being shot at. Bilal identifies the participant with the last three digits of the

participant's IP address: 195. It is in this exchange that we can see Bilal's artistic

concerns being played out and Galloway's criteria for radical or counter-gaming. People

in their homes fired the paintball gun, then questioned whether it was loaded, or whether

Bilal was actually the only person playing Bilal. His response was that it was not

important to the success of the performance whether or not the scenario he portrayed was

real. His gauge was the responses of those viewing the performance, especially via the

internet. Contrast this response, of those questioning the reality of the performance with

U.S.A.F drone operators expressing faith in their orders to strike at people 15 000

kilometers away, confident that what they see is what they are told it is. Both these

experiences an potentially be seen as taking place in a real space or a simulated space.

The relationship to the experience in online games is striking, both in similarities and

differences. There are real stakes involved in the experience of playing online games, as I

presented in the discussion of Frostling-Henningsson's study of swedish online gamers.

Their stake was perhaps less potentially calamitous than that faced by Bilal in *Domestic

Tension* or by the young drone jockey's controlling Reaper and Predator UAV's from air

force bases in Nevada, but my point is that there are stakes involved. This range of

emotional commitment is not based essentially on the physical effects of the actions

taken, but rather on the perception of the player/spectator/pilot. This commitment can be

leveraged by the implications of the significance of involvement. In the case of digital

games and performance art such as produced by Bilal, the situation is shared across broad

swathes of people, and many describe feeling a sense of what I describe as fellowship.

Frostling-Henningson's gamers shared that fellowship. Many of those who came to

Domestic Tension came to a emotional connection with Bilal. Such a relationship is not obviously obtained between the pilots, and officer's of the U.S.A.F drone squadrons and the people on the ground in Iraq. It is this emotional disconnection that marks the point at which a boundary object fails– it cannot bridge the gap of significance when it launches a missile on orders of a young soldier carefully insulated in a zone of comfort.

This creation of zones so disparate as to prevent the connection afforded by boundary objects points to the significance of interactive performances. These create spaces, as I have argued over the course of this thesis. A similar creation of space results from digital games as games theorist Seth Giddings discusses.[156] He presents the view that simulations are real but not tangible. Put more simply this implies what might commonly be called a poetic truth. If the affective dimension achieves this crossing of boundaries then the work has achieved an effective political turn. This does not guarantee a particular political outcome. Goya's paintings from the peninsular war paintings served to celebrate the flight of foreign despots, but also to anchor the relationship of native spanish despots to the people of Spain. Still, the possibility of a fluid relationship joined by boundary objects suggest how resistances may play out in performative art works. The type of agency exhibited , the play of virtual spaces and the significance of digital games as a popular and increasingly, valorised cultural medium point to new avenues for artistic expression.

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[156] Giddings Seth "Dionysiac Machines : Videogames and the Triumph of the Simulacra" in *Convergence* 2007 13: 417

Figures

Fig 1 Wafaa Bilal *Domestic Tension* **2007 Webcam image from the view of the paintball gun** *image from* **http://wafaabilal.com/images/webcam/12.jpg**
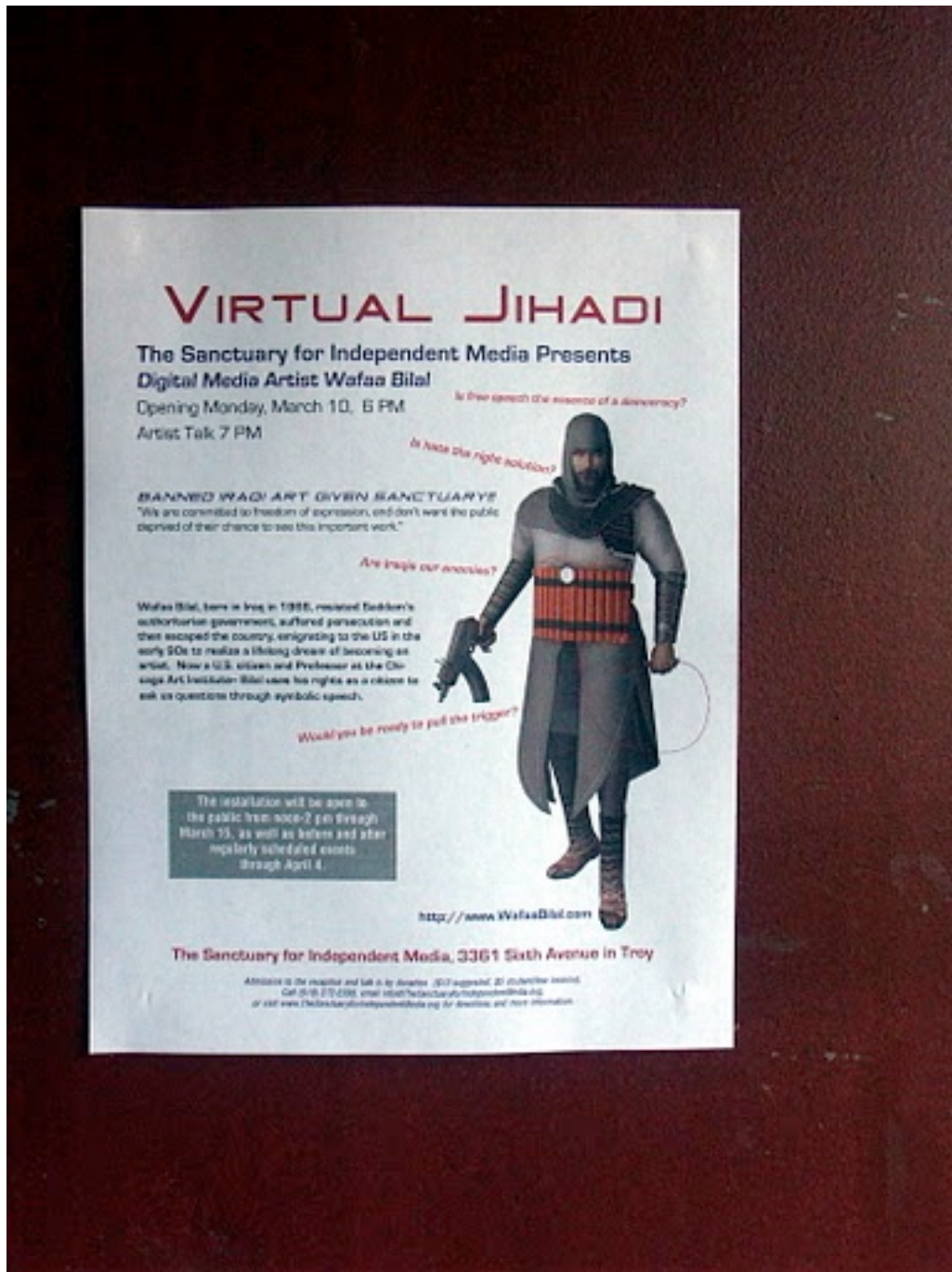
Fig 2 Wafaa Bilal *Virtual Jihadi* (2008) Digital game re skinned . The presentation of this virtual performance piece was censured repeatedly.*image from* https:// picasaweb.google.com/jonflan/TroyCensorsVirtualJihadi#5176582820855913106

Fig 3 Wafaa Bilal *Sorrow of Baghdad* **this installation show the faces of iraqis with a confined space - the only exit through an apparent battlefield.** *image from* **http:// wafaabilal.com/images/figure4.jpg**

Fig 4 Wafaa Bilal *A Bar at the Folies Bergeres* **(2007), Electronic Installation. When a member of the audience attempts to interact with the figure within the painting, she becomes annoyed and leaves**

Fig 5 Image of archers from the cave paintings at Valtorta Gorge, Spain approximately 5000 to 10000 years old *image from* **http://astronomy.nmsu.edu/ tharriso/ast110/cavepaint.jpg**

Fig 6 Francisco Goya*, The Third of May 1808,* **1814, Oil on canvas, 268 × 347 cm**
image source **http://www.abcgallery.com/G/goya/goya70.html**

Fig 7 Fransico Goya *Allegory of the City of Madrid*. (1810). Oil on canvas, 260 x 195 cm . Notice the lozenge that was repeatedly repainted to address the political needs of any given regime in Madrid *image from* http://www.abcgallery.com/G/goya/ goya59.JPG

Fig. 8 *Wolfenstein 3D* **(ID Software 1992) image source: http://guestcontroller.wordpress.com/2010/09/06/wolfenstein-3d-micro-review/**

Fig 9 Airport level, *Modern Warfare 2* **(Infinity Ward 2009) image source: http://freeandopenencounter.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/modern-warfare-no-russian.jpg Unlike most FPS games, nobody shoots back during this sequence**

Fig 10 Anne-Marie Schleiner,Joan Leandre,Brody Condon *Velvet Strike* image from http://www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike/screenshots.html The artists describe this mod of the popular FPS as "Counter-military grafitti for CS" and utilises grafitti submitted by other artists.

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