

Blek

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Developed for iOS and Android devices by Kunabi Brother—a company based in Vienna—Blek is, as one user states on the developer’s website, “an open-ended experience with singular game mechanics and deep Bauhaus-informed design.”



Kunabi Brother received the Apple Design Award in 2014 in recognition of the game’s “...minimalist design and...perfect representation of touch-screen play.” The overview in the App Store asserts that “the goal is simple: shape a line that collects all colored circles avoiding black holes on its route.”

The developers of the game, Denis and Davor Mikan, in a recent Wired article talked about the multiple artistic influences that went into the design of the game: from Kandinsky’s book *Point and Line to Plane*, to the broad, flowing brush line of Japanese calligraphy, to the tech art of Golan Levin who developed *Yellowtail*, an app that allows for gestural creation and real-time abstract animation. Much like chess or the Rubik’s Cube, this game requires the ability to foresee the result of multiple permutations of a single gesture that will result in the desired solution.

The use of gestural interfaces in game design has become a popular topic in academia, since gestural input/interaction is thought to support cognition (see David McNeill’s *Gesture and Thought*). Blek could have applicability in institutions offering neuropsychology, computer graphics, and game design curricula.

Blek's graphics are very clean and enticing. The player is presented with a pure white background on which black holes and colored dots float in multifarious patterns. Utilizing one's finger as a stylus, the player draws lines that loop and curve around the menacing black holes while slicing through the colored dots to eliminate them. A singularly soothing "whoosh" sound is emitted as the player's line curls and swoops and additional sound cues are produced when the player's line sinks into a black hole. The sound effects are an



integral part of the game. In an interview with John Polson discussion turns to the musical influences on Davor who also "creates software algorithms for composition and sound transformation" and who states that the musical composition methods and thinking of the German composer, Helmut Lachenmann was one of the other outside influences on the game. The sounds that the player hears in the game, though, are from the non-semantic (no words) musical work "Yamamuchi Mouthpiece I" by Erin Gee, a professor of composition theory.

For this player, the meditative calm produced by the game's aural components was displaced by frustration when vainly attempting to move through the game's levels. While the goal may be simple, playing the game is a challenge since it is hard to avoid the black holes. The player has to predict how her gesture will react and carefully gauge the distance between the black holes. With multiple dots and patterns, this is no easy task. Sometimes creating a seemingly-randomly placed swirling line was successful, but usually that was not the case. The creators assert that there are "countless solutions" to each of the sixty levels, but one is hard pressed to find them and getting stuck at a certain level is not uncommon since one must complete each level sequentially.

The inability to play at various levels without necessarily succeeding at them is a definite drawback and resulted in this reviewer experiencing boredom with the game.

Blek is compatible with the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch, and it allows for iCloud sync so your progress can be saved on all your devices. The game also permits you to move through a number of "Achievements" levels and make "Challenges" in order to play with friends. The Android version of Blek is available on the Google Play Store and the Amazon Appstore and requires Android 3.0 or later.