

02/24/2011

## **Interview: "and-or" and the Swiss Game Art Scene**

GameScenes is conducting a series of interviews (<https://www.gamescenes.org/feature-game-art-worlds-contemporary-practitioners-interviews.html>) with artists, critics, curators, gallery owners operating in the field of Game Art, as part of our ongoing investigation of the social history of this fascinating artworld. Our goal is to illustrate the genesis and evolution of a phenomenon that changed the way game-based art is being created, experienced, and discussed today. The conversation between Mathias Jansson and the "and-or" collective took place via email in February 2011.

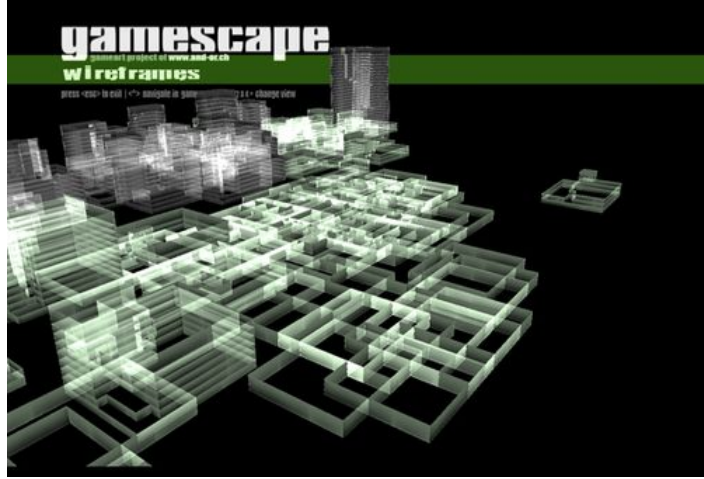
### **GameScenes: What is "and-or", exactly? Who are the members of this collective?**

and-or: "and-or" is a Swiss artgroup specializing in media art and Game Art. The group consists of René Bauer, Beat Suter and Mirjam Weder. The group operates since 2001 from Zurich, Switzerland. and-or explores new modes of interactivity and concreativity (\*) between machines and their human users. Simple but distinct concepts become game prototypes or playful media art. Digital data is everywhere these days but its impact often is not considered. We make this data and its impact visible to everyone, we question it and open up a discourse on digital boundaries.

For this purpose we often use feeds of constant ideas and thoughts (digital ready-mades) as found in search engines, feeds of publicly available pictures and sounds and various behaviour-patterns of gameplay. Put in a playful perspective, these can easily show you what lies beneath the digital surface and beyond the common limits of communication.

And-or's origin is the media art scene. Some of our projects like Wardive, Sniff\_jazzbox and AndOrDada are media art projects created for mobile devices. They capture and transpose communication waves between humans and machines into adaptive and locative games, music or poetry. AndOrDada creates a poem that adapts itself to the area of town you walk through and weaves your friend's names into the poem. Sniff\_jazzbox transposes areas of town via names of hotspots in music and generally creates an audible city. Wardive finally is the game version. While walking or driving through town hotspots become enemies and need to be fended off quickly before they destroy your crystal.

(\*) Concreativity is a concept of cooperating on a work of art or literature or music etc. whereby each cooperator or partner has a creative input. The word is not used very much. It was an academic term used by sociologists. We started using it a few years ago to make a distinction to the simpler concepts of collaboration and cooperation (Beat Suter, and-or)



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and-or, gamescape, 2010 "Gamescape is an extension to the retro-game «[lineum](http://www.la1n.ch/lineum/)» by «la1n». It is visualizing all playing movements of a player as a 3D-sculpture. While as the movements of one player make up a sculpture, all sculptures of all played games of all players are collected on a server and form an entire city: A city consisting of structures which are created by all the gamers' movements"

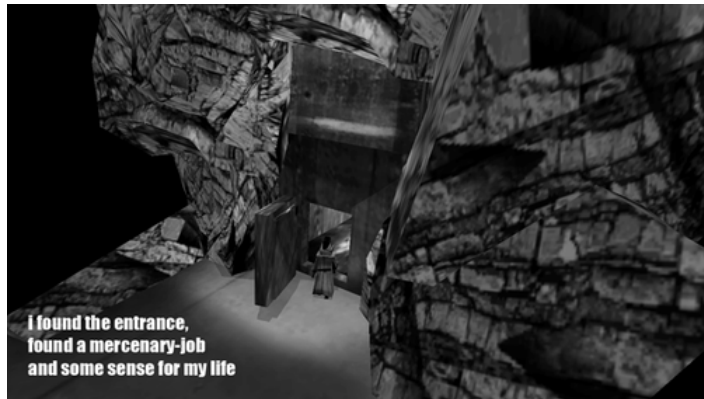
**GameScenes: [Gamescape](http://www.and-or.ch/gamescape/) is one of your most discussed works. How did you develop this artwork?**

and-or: Gamescape is based on the 80s game [Qix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qix), respectively its successor [Volfied](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volfied). The player has to conquer the opponent's dominion. Piece by piece he cuts off territory and diminishes the opponent's freedom of movement. With each cut he adds another floor to a building that may develop into a skyscraper. The basic idea of Gamescape is to make a game's processes visible. Usually a player is not able to backtrack his or her activities in a game. He just gets a result, respectively sees his score. In Gamescape all games of all players grow into cities. Over the last few years more than 25'000 cities with more than 20 skyscrapers each developed - all of them individually played game levels as 3D-cut-outs or 3D-sculptures. This 3D-sculptures by the way can be further used in 3D-software for modelling or cresting new urban scapes in Google Earth. The game shows what hides in games: One day we will play games and while doing this, we will work for others. This is only a matter of time.

and-or, laichenberg, 2009 "laichenberg is an firstperson shooter with a defect. frags are corpses; and they do not disappear in this game. the corpses of the enemies you kill, remain where they died and fell to the ground. if you kill more enemies, their remains start blocking your way and the narrow tunnels of the bunker system become insurmountable."

**GameScenes: [And Laichenberg](http://www.and-or.ch/laichenberg/)? What is the idea behind this project and how was it made?**

and-or: Laichenberg was developed as an answer to the eternal and pubertal question: "What game is the most realistic of all?" We made a game that is more realistic in only one but very important point: The corpses of the killed enemies (frags) do not disappear. It means that this game has a "realistic" defect. This of course leads to problems: After 10 minutes you can hardly move anymore among all the corpses. In the game you slip into the role of a soldier after a nuclear war that can't help but continue his fight as a mercenary in a Tibetan bunker. The game follows a literary text by the famous Swiss writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich\\_D%C3%BCrrenmatt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_D%C3%BCrrenmatt)) (Winter war in Tibet). Deep down in the bunker system soldier 23 discovers his sense of life: Killing! In this respect this soldier is a classic First Person Shooter. Laichenberg's graphic design adapts Swiss military uniforms from mid 20th century, a time when the Swiss army prepared to retreat to its alpine bunker system. Interestingly enough the elaborate bunker system in Switzerland that even included some production facilities was not prepared to deal with lots of dead soldiers and civilians. There would have been lots of problems, once the killing started.



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and-or: First we wanted to develop a multiplayer level for Laichenberg, but after some experimenting with Torque and Mods of Unreal we realized that a single player first person shooter suits setting and idea much better. The idea is layed out much clearer in a singleplayer, and more people are drawn to play the game. In fact the game has lots of downloads and people still play it. So far there are 365'345 corpses amassed into a "Leichenberg". Laichenberg is a play of words: mountain of spawns instead of mountain of corpses. The game counts all frags and registers all their locations on a world map. Laichenberg therefore also shows who plays this game and how people play it. At present the USA is in the lead with 136'515 deads, followed by Germany with 29'110 deads and Canada with 18'918 deads. The final scene of the game by the way shows you the disposal of the latest frags or corpses in a refuse incineration plant.

**GameScenes: With your latest work, "Discrimination Pong" (<http://discriminationpong.and-or.ch/>) you subverted a classic arcade game to comment on racism. How can videogames change society or, at least, make us aware of inequality and abuse?**

and-or Videogames are modern fairy-tales. They allow the player to feel important and provide her or him with the idea to live a successful life. This way they may help a person through his everyday life and doing so they help to preserve our society. If you include discrimination into a two player rivalry game like Pong, you might realize how unfair discrimination is in our world. Games make the world experiencable, comprehensible and replicable. But at the same time there are more and more games that make the player pay money in order to reach next levels or receive powerful in-game artefacts. Games are door openers for all sorts of ideas we don't like in games, but at the same time we try adopt them in a playful mode and point them out.

### **GameScenes: How do you think videogames will change our culture and how we experience culture in the future?**

and-or: Videogames are like any other modern mass media: You can use them positively or abuse them. You can use them to be critical with society and media, but you can also use them as a tranquilizer or sleep inducing drug. Games are ideal as sleep inducing drugs, they calm you down and at the same time they propel you. This is how many videogames (even first person shooter) transport the most important values of the western world like competition, rivalry, labour, consumption and career. More and more the world itself seems to become a videogame (not just at the stock exchanges) and we have to ask ourselves: "If everyone is playing - who does actually play?"

### **GameScenes: How would you describe the Game Art scene in Switzerland?**

and-or: Actually there are not too many Game Art groups in Switzerland. There is the native artgroup "Mobiles Kino" that develops analogue game machines with movie projectors and "NotSONoisy" that re-enacts Space Invaders and Pac Man with human beings in movie theatres. And some years ago the game artists Margarete Jahrman and Max Moswitzer moved from Vienna to Switzerland. They are known for their projects "Nybble Engine" and "Ludic Society". We hope that besides all of them there is an unknown quantity of yet silent game artists that produces Game Art.

link: "[and-Or](http://www.and-or.ch/) (<http://www.and-or.ch/>)"


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**previously on GameScenes: Discrimination Pong**

**(<https://www.gamescenes.org/2010/12/game-art-and-ors-discrimination-pong-2010.html>), Laichenberg (<https://www.gamescenes.org/2010/09/art-game-and-or-laichenberg-defect3-2010.html>)**

Text by Mathias Jansson

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