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Video Games: More than Entertainment

Click. Click. Click.

"0 messages."

You turn your phone off. You turn it back on once more. You can't go out, or hang out with friends. For months, you have been isolated in your house. A sniffle, a sneeze, then a cough. There is way too much dust in the living room. You walk at a slow, zombified pace towards your bedroom.

Click. Click. Click.

You load up an old game. It's not that old, but you haven't touched it in a year. You close your eyes as nostalgic music fills your ears. Virtual birds chirp and soar from one side of the screen to the other. On the screen, you see your character and other players near it. They run around, they 'sing', they 'call'. You see a familiar name hovering over a player's head.

"Why are you still here?"

"I could ask you the same thing."

Whether it's warmth or nostalgia, some people may feel a familiar fondness in the section above. Specifically for me, this familiar fondness came from *Sky: Children Of The Light (*affectionately known by its players as *Sky)*. Playing video games is one of my hobbies whenever I have a day to myself. *Sky* is different from the usual action-packed games. I would feel relaxed as I listened to its background music or a sense of safety when I danced alongside other players. The game's gameplay gives the impression that this is more than just some activity to cure boredom; it is a form of art. Although some may say that video games are simply a means of entertainment, *Sky: Children Of The Light* is a form of art because of its creative storytelling, therapeutic elements, and its purposeful way of bringing people together as well as allowing them the freedom to express themselves.



Ex. 1: You Are My Sunshine (Part 1)

Firstly, the game *Sky* shines brightly in storytelling. This is told in the form of wall paintings and through "ghostly" recreations of memories originating from past civilizations. Similar to art, *Sky* creates sites of activity, usually inside caves or plastered on monumental walls which correlate to the surrounding area. In *Art makes society: an introductory visual essay*, the authors state that "Art establishes settings for action... [in addition to] memorials, [which] create

sites for the reenactment of shared memories" (DeMarrais, Elizabeth and John Robb). Therefore, art can be parts of locations that give some context to its history. An example in *Sky* is allowing the players to illuminate wall carvings by walking near them, which results in revealing what occurred in those areas. Additionally, *Sky* contains social activities to express its plotline through interacting with 'star spirits' and participating in their dances, or 'rituals'. As said by Chris Bell, the lead designer of the game, "each star spirit you restore with your light will share a memory of its past, teaching you new expressions" (*Let Light Be the Guide*). Here, the quote indicates that art is participatory, and it is seen through these 'star spirits'. In essence, a player discovers these by exploring the virtual world around them, independently or with other players. Once restored, the apparitions start to "reenact" a memory through "dances" and implore the player(s) to join them as well to complete the activity. The game designers for *Sky* chose to use this style of storytelling to let players interpret the meaning in their own words instead of reading huge blocks of text. As a result, *Sky* becomes a form of art through wall paintings and lingering past memories.



Ex. 1 Cont.: You Are My Sunshine (Part 2)

In addition to storytelling, *Sky* features therapeutic elements to immerse the players into its vast realms. To put it simply, the game is a form of art for the reason that it reduces stress and anxiety through cosmetics, background music, color themes, and much more. Color themes are one of the most impactful elements for *Sky* players to de-stress. As explained in the article, *Art makes society: an introductory visual essay,* "the choice of content, style, and placement for such imagery may have helped create appropriate spaces for particular activities or social relationships." Plainly, this quote means that art cannot be just aesthetically pleasing, but also have a purpose for its pleasing nature. For example, *Sky* uses many color palettes that emphasize a certain realm's ambiance such as "Daylight Prairie" or "Valley of Triumph". One is a calm soothing grass field with a hint of curiosity, and the next seems to be huge prideful mountains alongside feelings of euphoria. The Daylight Prairie realm uses a cloudy motif that combines many types of blues, whites, and sparks of yellows into its landscapes. Whereas the Valley of Triumph applies more intense colors of yellows, reds, and oranges to maintain its energetic atmosphere. Another therapeutic feature of *Sky* is enabling players to customize their character. In the game, cosmetics do not stray away from its main theme at all. In fact, *Sky* uses its conceptualized in-game history to "transform the body temporarily" much like art (*Art makes society: an introductory visual essay*). Specifically, events can give you masks, clothing, instruments, etc. that represent the people, or 'spirits' of the game. However, cosmetics and color themes are just a few relaxing activities in the game. Hence, *Sky* provides multitudes of therapeutic activities away from the stresses of quarantine and overall life.



Ex. 1 Cont.: You Are My Sunshine (Part 3)

Apart from pleasing visuals, *Sky* is art because the game connects people together in two ways. The main goal of most games is to get to the end, However, in *Sky*, creating social experiences with other players is also part of its main goal. One method is through game activities that encourage you to bring friends to complete them. Regardless of whether the task is to race against each other, or trudge through difficult trials together; the game wants to see players bond in these experiences. For instance, the article *Art makes society: an introductory visual essay* describes how "Art often invites participation [including] the making or using of art objects or images [which] may involve multiple participants, who forge bonds of solidarity through shared activities"(DeMarrais, Elizabeth and John Robb). In the quote above, the article points out that art is participatory shown through shared activities, which results in forming bonds with those people. A particular example of this style of art in *Sky* is its ninth seasonal event called "Season of Assembly". The goal of this event was to build a treehouse together by encouraging the players to gather up friends to help them scavenge materials. In another method of uniting people, *Sky* builds meaningful and emotional bonds. According to ThatGameCompany's official video "Let Light Be the Guide," Eileen Hollinger emphasizes that "*Sky* encourages bringing out the best and brightest parts of humanity and [that is] through

encouraging authentic and genuine relationships, and positive behaviors." In other words, *Sky* is more than just mindless fun and genuinely engages players to make friends along their journey. The game invites both gamers and non-gamers to participate in its vast virtual world whilst connecting with other players. A personal example is when I downloaded the game again when quarantine began. I was devoid of any face-to-face interaction for months and naturally, I felt miserable. The next best thing was to play multiplayer games, including *Sky,* as a distraction. I began finding old friends playing it, met new ones, and suddenly I have a circle of people to talk to again. In summary, friendships are the heart of *Sky,* it outshines all other games in that aspect.

Works Cited

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