

# DIMENSION OF *AUTHORSHIP* IN THE (CO-)CREATION OF INTERACTIVE ART: SOME EXAMPLES

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PhD candidate (2021?) methodology: practice-based  
(thesis title) *Playful voice interfaces*

I program small interactive artworks that are browser-based and available at [terhimarttila.com](http://terhimarttila.com)

Interactive art as *digital* interactive art, where the input from the *participant/recipient/user/player* plays a vital role in *completing* the piece

Because the work is *used* by people, I can actually transgress my role of artist and think like a *designer*.

Inside the designers toolbox I find: *user research*.

Backtrack: my PhD in *digital media* [in the *audiovisual content creation* track] is hosted at the *faculty of engineering*.

So when I defended my research proposal, "*practice-based*" didn't mean much for the jury. They made me include a component of *evaluation*.



According to the PhDs and papers that I've come across, "*evaluation*" in interactive/new media art tends to be interpreted as: *surveys*.

*surveys -> percentages -> conclusions*

Two notions that really resonated with me:



In the context of interactive digital art, what is interesting as a result of user research is: “the *richness and complexity of unique, individual users, cultural contexts, and resulting variety of interpretations and experiences of the system*”

(Höök 2004, 8).

[vs. software design as a service/product and generalizable findings].

Furthermore, Candy suggests that those artists and practitioners who engage in the active evaluation of their interactive artworks, “are inevitably introduced to new ways of thinking about what their *goals* are and how to achieve them“

(Candy 2014, 33).

[user research as co-creation?].

\* Julia Lohman: "an object in an exhibition = you are cut off from the feedback loop"

[I] show your work

and listen to what others have to say about it

## [II] video-cued recall:

- 1) Have the user/participant interact with the piece and record this interaction on video.
- 2) Then, speak with the person about their experience with the artwork while using the video as a way to help remember what they were experiencing.

[see: Costello, Muller, Amitani and Edmonds 2005; Candy, Amitani and Bilda 2006; Edmonds, Bilda and Muller 2009; Candy 2014]

Evaluation / user research: in fact I've found this process to be an incredible impetus in the creative process / feedback loop itself.

\*

**WE-CANNOT-TAKE-THEM-ALL**

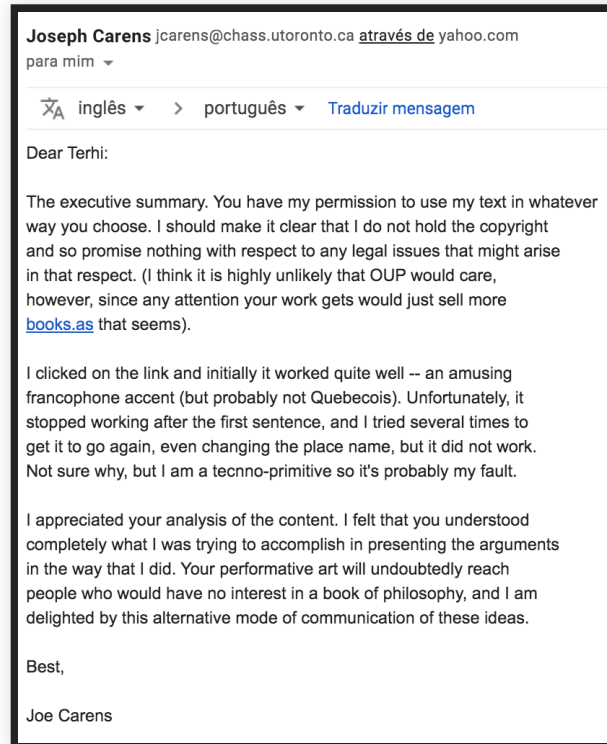
# Joseph Carens - *The Ethics of Immigration* (2015), p. 193

Nazi regime had not yet committed itself to the Final Solution. Everyone knew that Jews were suffering but there were differing perceptions about the extent of their oppression. Some of those opposed to admitting Jewish refugees were overtly anti-Semitic but many people took a view that went more like this:

What is happening to the Jews is too bad, but it's not our fault. We have our own problems. If we take in all the Jews who want to come, we will be overwhelmed. There are simply too many of them. Besides, while Jews may be subject to discrimination and occasional acts of violence, things are not as bad as their advocacy groups say. They exaggerate the problem. Many of the Jews really just want better economic opportunities than they have now at home. In fact, the ones who do manage to make it to North America to seek asylum cannot be among the worst off because they have enough economic resources to cross the Atlantic. Times are tough here. We have an obligation to look out for our own needy first. A large influx of Jews could be a cultural and political threat. They don't share our religious traditions or our democratic values. Some of them are communists and pose a basic security threat, but it's hard to be sure which ones, so it's better to err on the side of caution in restricting entry. Many of them have shown that they don't really respect the law because they have bribed officials abroad for exit permits and travel papers, they have purchased forged documents, they have hired smugglers to transport them illegally, and they have lied to our immigration officials. Finally, admitting Jewish refugees serves the Nazis' own goals and does not help to address the underlying problems that have given rise to the Nazi phenomenon.

In some respects, many of the concerns about Jewish refugees then were as reasonable as the concerns about asylum seekers are today. There was debate and uncertainty about the extent of the risks faced by Jews in Hitler's Germany

# Endorsement from Dr. Joseph Carens:





∞

**POETRY IS/AS FREEDOM**

∞

# >>I INITIALLY TRANSLATED CARENS' IDEA VERY LITERALLY:

*"if we take in all the Afghans who want to come, we will  
be overwhelmed"*

My supervisor observed that such a close reference to  
real world (political) events would polarise my users  
immediately.

This is beyond obvious,

but I had just been focused on translating Carens' proposition into another medium.

The user input gave me a push to evolve the piece in another direction entirely.

Since, I've begun the process of modifying Carens' original text with commentary and poetry of my own.

**SPEAK OUT**

Began with this notion of likening humans to particles,  
and comparing human migratory movement to:

*osmosis*: crossing semi-permeable membrane from  
areas of high concentration of particles to low  
concentration of particles

*diffusion*: in gases: particles move randomly and  
intermingle over time, or in liquids: particles naturally  
disperse within that liquid, again from areas of high  
concentration to areas of low concentration

*movement == natural world seeks balance*



**TO REACH OUR DESTINY IS LIKE  
ARRIVING AT THE DINNER TABLE AND  
TUCKING INTO A PLATE OF FOOD**



**>>MY THEN TWO YEAR OLD DAUGHTER  
OBSERVED THE PARTICLES FLOCKING TO  
THE LARGER CIRCLES.**

*She said: "oh, they are all going to eat. I want to make  
more plates for them to eat."*

I implemented her idea, and it was immediately obvious that it made the piece way more fun and playful. Previously, all the user could do was observe. With this feature, *Speak out* becomes a[n impossible] game, where the user can try to fulfil the insatiable desires of the particles by creating places that attract them.





**THE PULL OF OUR  
DESIRES/DESTINIES/NEEDS/WANTS  
LEADS TO PHYSICAL MOVEMENT**



**>>I ASKED: "CAN YOU THINK OF OTHER THINGS THAT MIGHT ATTRACT SOMEONE TO MOVE ACROSS THE BORDER?"**

A user volunteered: "*IKEA*", adding a hearty laugh, because in the Rovaniemi context, people go across the border to Sweden to shop at IKEA.

... but this was *a very important observation*. Up until now I had focused on serious factors like *freedom* or *peace*, but this comment called my attention to the fact that: the factors that inspire us to *physically move our bodies* are so very different depending on our life circumstances. For some, it is *IKEA* that prompts us to cross.

That's why *IKEA* seems a ridiculous reason to cross a border: because the border between Finland and Sweden is Schengen - it is an open border.

But in fact, there is a border there.

But that user comment inspired me to add IKEA to my list. And as I saw my particles moving to reach IKEA, I realised that my piece was actually about my struggle to articulate and convey migration as *movement*, and about my desire to portray the relationship between individuals and their desires as one that can result in physical movement [or at least a desire for physical movement] irrelevant of whether there are borders, wether physical or psychological, societal, religous, political, etc.

Incidentally, last weekend, I was not able to physically move myself to "*IKEA*", even though it is only 15km away and in a *zone* that I perceive as being part of the Porto metropolitan area, that is, within the zone that I habitually move myself in because of restrictions on movement due to the pandemic.

\* Julia Lohman: "incorporate triggers that will pop up in everyday life / to pull people back into the meanings in the piece"

# ONLINE RESIDENCY AT [RAUM.PT](https://raum.pt)

- o) collaboration with a designer: complementing my skillset to think about how to better present the work visually.
- o) hover over particles to make them stop so that you can spy on what they are looking for
- o) collaboration with the curator: who just renamed the piece to *Speak out* (working title was particles moving // moving particles)

# USER RESEARCH AS CHALLENGING MY ARTISTIC MOTIVES

Above all, this ongoing dialogue with real people, with users, continues to challenge me [as Candy prophesised] to embrace new ways of thinking about what my goals are, what my *work is about* what it is that I am trying to say, and is even challenging me to think about the complex phenomenon of human migratory movement from different angles.

# ***AUTHORSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY***

responsibility: [Dr. Joseph Carens] and myself

authorship: all my ingenious users

BUT: at the end of the day, it is *me* who has

a) decided which input to incorporate in the piece,

b) spent the tens of hours composing the lines of code,  
crafting the piece with my own hands.



## ***SO WHAT IS MY TAKEAWAY?***

To realise that I've come to interpret *evaluation*  
in the context of my written dissertation as an  
opportunity to describe in detail the significant ways in  
which user research bleeds into the creative process  
through the authorship of my users

# ***THANK YOU***

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[ neither piece is complete, so I would love to hear any feedback you might have ;-) ]