

EXPERIMENTAL GEOPOLITICS: WAFAA BILAL'S DOMESTIC TENSION

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GEOPOLITICS

- Politics as influenced by geographical factors
- Critical geopolitics: elucidate and explain how political and statehood intellectuals represent geography in the making of politics

CRITICISMS OF CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

- Focus and representation of the big over the little
- Focused on war and conflict rather than creating peace
- Mostly academic discourse and not much applicable action
- Artistic experiments critique critical geopolitics and promote alternative perspectives on geopolitics
 - Focus on transformative possibilities for peace
 - Making connections across distance and differences in people and geography to create peace

WAFAA BILAL

- Grew up in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime
- Studied geography at university
- Arrested and tortured because of his art
- Fled country, continued making art, and eventually resettled in America
- Brother killed by helicopter strike in conflict with US Forces
- Experiences led to art as commentary on remote control warfare and video games

WAFAA BILAL'S DOMESTIC TENSION

- Bilal sat in front of webcam connected to paintball gun
- Participants allowed to 'Shoot an Iraqi' and fire the paintball gun at Bilal
 - Could also choose to decline, observe Bilal, and discuss with Bilal and other participants



ELEMENTS OF EXPERIMENTAL GEOPOLITICS

- Staging: setting up geopolitics with a variety of elements, initial conditions for experiment
- Play: Allowing elements to interact dynamically
- Modulate: manage experiment so it takes a particular course
- Effects: Elicit emerging effects that are novel, interesting, or useful

STAGING

- What motivations did Bilal have for staging his experiment?
 - Separation between comfort and conflict
- What conditions did Bilal stage?
 - Gun, camera, web setup, Bilal
 - Why use paintballs?
- How did he stage these conditions?
- Why did Bilal choose the internet as his medium?

PLAY

- What elements of Bilal's experiment interacted with each other?
 - What do those interactions depict/represent in what Bilal is trying to portray?
- How did the staging of Bilal's experiment impact the play of his experiment?
- What responses did the play of Bilal's experiment elicit?



MODULATION

- How did Bilal and collaborators modulate the experiment?
 - How did this modulation reflect on geopolitics?
- How did the experiment deviate from planned course?
 - Chat room, interactions with and between participants
 - Technology issues
 - Impact on Bilal's body and mental state

EFFECTS

- What effects were elicited?
 - Reality effect
 - Geopolitical exercising of violence
 - Pacific geopolitics, non-violent responses

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

- Impact on alternative geopolitics?
- What made Domestic Tension successful? What parts were unsuccessful?
- “Borrowing from and blurring distinctions between the realm of art and the realm of life – playing upon ambiguity and indistinction between art and politics - allows artistic acts to intervene in the constitution of the political by reshaping what is visible, sayable and doable”