

Final Essay

Restoring Astera

Presented to Kevin Jung-Hoo Park (MFA, Film Production)

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SENTIMENTAL OBJECTS AND RESTORATION

Gibson states that as we grow up and transition to another era, we mediate our emotional and bodily differentiation by emotionally attaching ourselves to objects we used to utilize.¹ For instance, as a child transitions into a teenager, they might get more attached to their teddy bears, dolls, blankets, and other comforting objects.² In another instance, Ash illustrates her progress in transitioning to a new life after her husband passes away. Before his death, Ash states she would not even think about the objects his husband had³. Though after her husband passes away, she exemplifies when she looks at his ties, she sees parties, meetings, and the feeling of touching her husband's tie when he was wearing them, and how her husband would remove his tie as soon as he would come home. These sentimental objects offer comfort and protection against danger⁴. We don't necessarily keep them to use them, but we keep them for what they represent. These objects represent holding on and letting go at the same time⁵. They help us keep our memories while transitioning to a new chapter of our lives. Therefore we feel compelled to preserve these objects to the best of our abilities.

Spelman expresses that repairing is something humans engage in every day and in almost every dimension of our lives, from mending our clothes, fixing broken furniture, taking medicine, going to therapy, and saying sorry⁶. The act of healing is human nature. He expresses that things are broken or worn in different ways, and they each have their characteristics⁷. Consequently, he further states that the act of healing comes from a place where people want to recapture an earlier moment in the history of the object rather than make it reusable⁸. Each object carries a unique story that tells how it was used and, perhaps, eventually broken. They have their archives within their existence, and the act of restoring these broken objects helps us engage with its archive.

The notion of engaging with history through an object is further explored by the Japanese art of Kintsugi. The art of Kintsugi uses a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold instead of camouflaged adhesive to repair ceramics⁹. Kintsugi embraces the notion

¹ Gibson, Margaret. "Melancholy Objects." *Mortality* 9, no. 4 (November 1, 2004): 285–99.

² Gibson, Margaret. "Melancholy Objects.", 287

³ Ash, Juliet. "Memory and Objects." In *The gendered object*(UK: Manchester University Press,1996),223

⁴ Gibson,288.

⁵ Gibson,288.

⁶ Spelman, Elizabeth. *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*. Beacon Press, 2003,1.

⁷ Spelman,*Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*,10.

⁸ Spelman,6.

⁹ Ayuda, Tiffany. "How to Use 'Kintsugi' as a Mental Trick to Bounce Back from Hardship," NBC News. April 28, 2018.

that every wear and tear gives the object a distinctive history¹⁰. Therefore instead of hiding the flaws of an object Kintsugi celebrates them. Consequently, Kintsugi is a prime example of how one can engage with an object's history and archive by repairing it, leading them to enhance and hold on to the memories for a little longer before they move to the next chapter.

VIDEO GAMES, OBJECT INTERACTION, AND ENGAGEMENT

This unique, complex, and multi-layered engagement with objects can be visually represented in video games. In most story-based video games, the player has to interact with in-game objects to progress in the story or simply learn about the characters and the world they are playing in. Objects within the operational space of a game can tell a great deal about the history of the story world within a game. For example, in the game *Life is Strange*, when the main character Max searches through her former best friend Chloe's room, she finds drawings they made, and her inner monologue states "We had such a blast drawing these together."¹¹ This inner monologue helps with world-building and progresses the story. Therefore my aim is to make my game center around this mechanic.

Video games are ergodic, meaning they require non-trivial effort from the player to traverse the story¹². Thus, video games are more immersive and personal compared to other mediums like literature or film. Harrer states that even if a game does not exactly represent the player's experience, the player can still relate to the characters and the story metaphorically. Harrer describes this relation as metaphorical projection¹³. Further, she states that metaphorical projection towards video games provides another layer of interpretation cue that helps the player comprehend and fully immerse in the game¹⁴. Accordingly, video games are an exceptional medium for engagement.

Aside from my personal experience with my doll collection, my other inspiration for this project was a game called *Stardew Valley*¹⁵. *Stardew Valley* is a farming role-playing game published by ConcernedApe. The player decides to go to their inherited grandfather's old farm after becoming tired of the fast-paced urban life. The goal of the game is to restore

¹⁰ Ayuda, Tiffany. "How to Use 'Kintsugi' as a Mental Trick to Bounce Back from Hardship,"

¹¹ Dontnod Entertainment & Deck Nine. *Life is Strange*. Square Enix. PC/Mac. 2015.

¹² Espen J. Aarseth "Introduction: Ergodic Literature." In *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, 1-23. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

¹³ Harrer, Sabine. "Games and Bereavement - How Video Games Represent Attachment, Loss, and Grief", 2018, 39

¹⁴ Harrer, Sabine. "Games and Bereavement - How Video Games Represent Attachment, Loss, and Grief", 41

¹⁵ Barone, Eric. *Stardew Valley*. Chucklefish. PC/Mac. 2016.

the farm to its former glory. The game features many different rural life activities, such as farming, foraging, fishing, mining, and crafting. Further, the player can develop relationships with the townsfolk and even get married and have kids. A study found that playing Stardew Valley for a week reduces stress and anxiety¹⁶. One of the participants even claimed that they felt more motivated after playing the game because completing in-game tasks gave them more confidence to move forward in real life¹⁷. Conclusively games are not only an incredible medium for engagement but can have a crucial impact on our lives in a positive light. Accordingly, my project will draw inspiration from the mechanics featured in Stardew Valley, including activities such as mining, artifact collection, restoring the Community Center, and contributing to the museum to create a world where players can relax, explore, and have satisfaction from repairing items.

THE GAMEPLAY



Figure 1 : Tuana Bıçakçı, Leon, 2023, digital art.

My game follows a young professional restorer Leon (Figure1) who left his hometown to study archeology and restoration overseas. After his school life comes to an end, Leon finds himself in an existential crisis. He feels incomplete and insecure about himself and his practice. To find a direction, Leon goes back to his roots, to Astera. He takes over his dad's former repair shop. Upon entering the shop for the first time, Leon finds a box with his name written on it. He sees a pair of silk gloves, the one his dad always used to wear while working. Leon recalls how his dad would get angry if Leon tried to wear them. When Leon puts the

gloves on, he starts to see visions.

His gloves and a broken vase start to glimmer.(Figure 2) As he holds the vase, he transports through time. He sees a young woman painting the vase. Then his

Figure 2 : Tuana Bıçakçı, Gloves, 2023, digital art.



¹⁶ Scott, Shaylee. "Video Games as a Form of Stress Relief and Emotion Regulation." *Master's Thesis*, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2022, 43.

¹⁷ Scott, Shaylee. "Video Games as a Form of Stress Relief and Emotion Regulation." *Master's Thesis*, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2022, 43.

vision changes, and he sees an old lady with a little kid. "Do not touch the vase!" she yells, but her words have no effect. When the vase breaks, Leon's vision goes back to normal. At this point of the game, the player is introduced to the basic mechanics of the game by restoring a vase Leon finds in his workshop. To restore the vase, the player has to find the old lady to learn more about the vase, collect the tools necessary from stores, and craft ingredients. After looking around the town, the player finds the owner, an old lady named Lizzy. Then the player is instructed to go around the town to gather the items. After gathering the items, the player returns to the repair shop to assemble the vase(Figure 3). Lastly, the player returns the vase to Lizzie. Lizzie will give the player 500 Astera Gold, the currency for

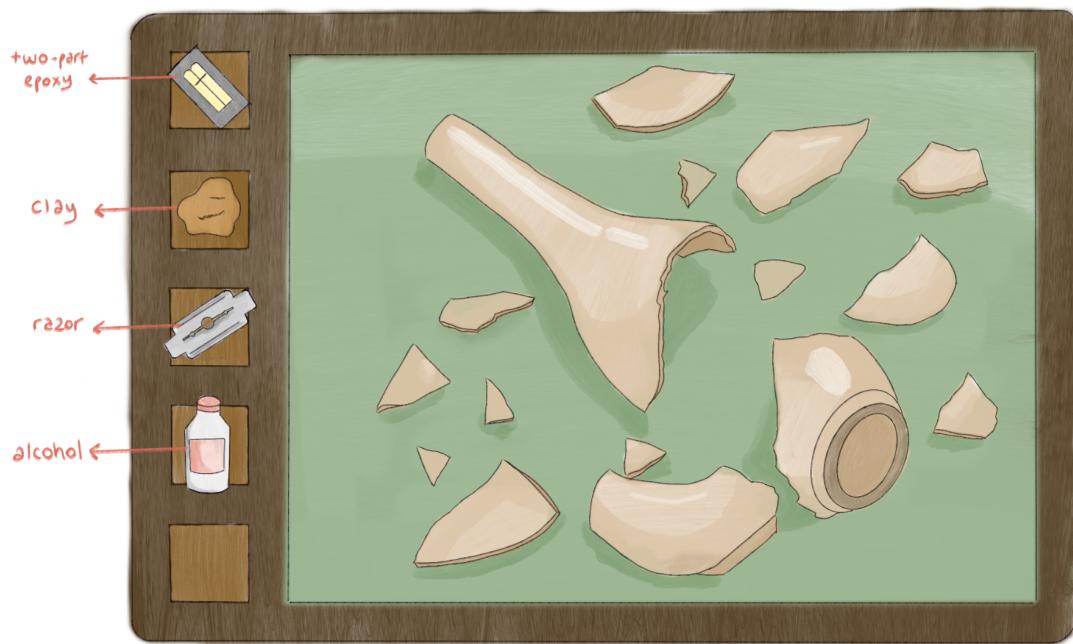


Figure 3 : Tuana Biçakçı,
Restoration UI, 2023, digital art.

Astera. With these mechanics I am aiming to encourage the player to engage with the history of the broken objects in Astera by making them repair it. By repairing the objects the player will learn more about Astera, its history, traditions, and people. The rest of the game will have similar mechanics, each level getting harder. The player will also have the chance to restore and renovate the shop (Figure 4). Additionally, the player will be able to find more artifacts and heirlooms by exploring the mines. If the player finds an artifact, they will be able to give it to Astera's Museum for display and complete the museum. The player can wear magic gloves to locate the artifacts in the mine and find clues on how to fix



Figure 4 : Tuana Bıçakçı, The Repair Shop, 2023, digital art.

and to engage with their sentimental items in real-life, preserve them, look back on their memories and appreciate the history of the object and themselves and its flaws.

the antiques. Wearing the gloves for a long time, however, will cause Leon fatigue, which will lower his energy and eventually result in him passing out. The player will also have the chance to attend traditional festivals and holidays of Astera upon restoring some objects. Consequently, the player will help Leon reconnect to his hometown by restoring artifacts and heirlooms of Astera.

My aim with this video game is to help people who may be going through a transitional period that makes them long for something and grieve over memories and nostalgia. By making the player repair the town, discover restore objects, rekindle with the townsfolk, and learn about the history of Astera, I want to encourage players

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