Interacting for Peace: Rethinking Peace Through Interactive Digital Platforms

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Abstract

Peace is often studied as a lull in war or as a way to make war inconceivable. In this study, I explore the ability of digital culture to promote a new understanding of peace as a communication concept. Specifically, I analyze small digital platforms devoted to making people care about peace by encouraging them to play, explore, listen, or participate in a variety of activities. Since war is centered around the occupation of spaces and places, I use time and temporality as a theoretical framework for understanding how these interactive digital platforms construct peace in a way that is meaningful to people. In this investigation of a popular meaning of peace, I argue that the epistemology of peace offers a promise for a better future while its ethics is a commitment to remembering the past. The ontology of peace is a lived experience found in daily practices in the present.

Keywords

care structures, digital platforms, everyday life, peace, play, time, walkthrough method

Peace as a Conceptual Problem

Peace is elusive. It is one of the most revisited concepts in the study of international politics; scholars have provided various definitions of what peace is and what it does. “Negative peace” is defined as a lull in violence between states achieved through a fragile balance of power (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1988). “Democratic peace” sees it as an extension of the political regime of states, hypothesizing that two democracies will never wage war against each other (Russett, 1993). “Positive” peace describes a process by which former enemies develop profound ties to the point where war is no longer conceivable (Kacowicz & Bar-Siman-Tov, 2000). Phenomenologically, war is much easier to explore than peace. It has a beginning and an end, a number of casualties and operation orders. All of the aforementioned approaches, describing peace as either positive, negative, or democratic, define the concept as a negation of war; it is what happens when war stops or what needs to be done to make it impossible.

Yet what is peace? Unlike war, which is a highly organized undertaking requiring the allocation of many state resources, peace is found in the everyday lives of people. Anthropologists have already emphasized the need to consider peace as a popular practice (Bräuchler, 2015; Nordstrom, 1997). Yet how do these practices become known? What is the role of media in spreading the word of peace? There are two approaches used in the study of mass media that focus on peace. One is peace journalism, which provides a set of practical guidelines designed to encourage journalists to cover violent conflicts in a way that highlights the importance of building bridges between the belligerent sides and encouraging readers to believe in peace (Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Lynch, 2013). However, sustaining this type of coverage is more difficult than reporting on conflicts, which are considered newsworthy because they are eventful, dramatic, and easy to understand (Wolfsfeld, 2004). In addition, scholars have argued that journalists cannot and should not try to promote peace in their work and that they should stick to reporting as objectively as possible on the world rather than attempting to change it (Hanitzsch, 2007; Loyn, 2007).

A second perspective reflects on the role of media events in promoting peace. These are grand, rare events covered live by many media outlets, whose goal is to unite society around a shared core of values. Peace can benefit highly from such events. Dayan and Katz (1992), who wrote the inaugural work about these events, were inspired to think about them after seeing how the media covered the visit of the Egyptian President Sadat to Israel. This visit ultimately led to a historic peace agreement between the two nations. The media

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coverage of other events, such as the fall of the Berlin wall (Sonnewend, 2016) or a rugby game South Africa played against New Zealand in the post-apartheid era (Steenveld & Strelitz, 1998), were important for establishing and sustaining peace in these nations. However, media events are few and far between; moreover, scholarship in the post 9/11 era shows that contemporary media events are more prone to spread horror and fear than unite people around them (Katz & Liebes, 2007; Mortensen, 2015; Nossek, 2008).

There is no coherent body of work devoted to studying peace in digital culture, although the idea of connecting people through computer-mediated communication has been foundational to early conceptions of the internet and cyberspace (Turner, 2006). It is particularly salient in social media whose great promise is to facilitate new relationships (Baym, 2015; boyd, 2006). Moreover, digital culture is seen as an important space for promoting social justice and resisting oppression. It allows activists to form communities, learn about their shared cause, coordinate their activities, and spread their ideas (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Howard et al., 2011; Kligler-Vilenchik, 2018).

However, a grounded analysis of social media also shows that these platforms do not always promote social change; in fact, they often help maintain the existing social order (Loader & Merceea, 2011). Speech on social media tends to focus on the self, which limits one’s ability to adopt radically new ideas (Papacharissi, 2009). Indeed, in the Israeli–Palestinian context, a recent study on Facebook indicates that Israelis often unfriend people who express different opinions about the conflict at times of war (John & Dvir-Givirsman, 2015). Dissident actors trying to get their voices heard using big social media platforms are often silenced by the powerful corporations operating them (Tufekci, 2017).

Given the limitations of social media in functioning as a breeding ground for new and subversive political ideas, I focus on different digital spaces in this study—small platforms, built by companies and individuals whose main interest is promoting peace. I am also less interested in seeing how these platforms lead people to act for peace. Instead, the purpose of this study is to investigate how they try to make peace important for the people who visit them and how they promote new conceptualizations of peace. I use the theoretical framework of time and temporality to answer these questions. The connection between spatiality and war is almost self-evident; in war, territories are being gained or lost and the people who live in them can be dislocated. For example, one of the intractable problems of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is what should happen with the land; how much and which portion of it should constitute the future Palestinian state? What will happen to settlements and settlers living in Palestinian territories? Where should future borders be drawn? (Tessler, 2009). Contrarily, I will argue that peace at its core is a temporal concept. It encompasses a promise for a better future; it required people to process the past and it is experienced as a state of mind in the present.

As mentioned earlier, my goal is to understand peace as an independent concept and not as a negation of war. Specifically, I will explore how the design of small digital platforms offers opportunities to assess the temporality of peace by creating a care structure about it. In his investigation of unscripted radio talk in the United Kingdom, Scannell (1996, 2014) explains that care structures are a practice of encountering the world and making things in it available for use. For Scannell, spontaneous radio talk made the ordinary life of the working class more accessible to listeners. For me, digital platforms can help make peace more approachable and comprehensible for the people who visit them. In the following section, I will explore the temporality of peace through media. My discussion about the connection between temporality and peace will be threefold; I will argue that the epistemology of peace is a promise for a better future, that its ontology is the ability to find refuge in the present, and that its ethics is remembering but also moving past the traumas of the past.

**Peace, Time, and Mediated Everyday Life**

In his reflection on the meaning of time, physicist Carlo Rovelli (2018) contends that time is not about the cosmos (p. 5). He explains that recent studies have shown that the passage of time is relative and depends on the place where measurements are taken; time moves slower close to the earth in the plains than in the mountains. Therefore, time is not a universal, objective quality that exists in nature. Instead, it is a way to conceptualize a human experience in which a transition from one state to another has taken place. Efforts to make time tangible by counting it using a clock have long political and technological histories (Mumford, 1934). Standardized, synchronized time was an important engine of early modernity as it helped coordinate the movement of trains and prevent accidents (Carey, 1983). More abstractly, time generates a feeling of universality among citizens of nation states because the sense of experiencing the same thing at the same time, such as reading the daily news, is foundational to the creation of an imagined community (Anderson, 1983).

These two examples illustrate two distinct ways for conceptualizing time. One is called Chronos, which refers to an objective duration that can be quantified, for instance, the amount of time it takes a train to cross a certain distance. The second type, called Kairos, refers to the qualitative nature of time. It points to opportune moments when something special happens, such as a major event that brings a nation together (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Smith, 1969). This type of time is inherently subjective; one person’s special moment can be completely meaningless to another person, yet Kairos is also much closer than Chronos to human experience. A person locked in solitary confinement can completely lose track of measurable time yet would probably experience a conversation with another person as a special moment.
Arguably, both Chronos and Kairos are transformed dramatically in digital culture. The ability to transmit information instantaneously using digital technologies creates a sense of constant speeding up. Indeed, new understandings of modernity emphasize the feeling of being rushed, the requirement to always be available, and the relentless sense of lack of time (Keightley, 2012). However, speedup is not the natural outcome of the current technological environment; instead, it should be examined as a political discourse that often erases the microtemporalities found in the everyday lives of people, where time and speed become meaningful in various ways (Sharma, 2014). Therefore, my investigation of digital culture focuses on how time is experienced by people – on time as Kairos. I argue that this experience of time in digital culture can be harnessed to promote peace.

Peace delivers a promise for a better future. Emanuel Kant (1795) wrote an essay about achieving “perpetual peace” by means of building trust in future encounters between nations. Peace is often a central theme in utopian visions. The prophet Isaiah said that in the end of time, predator and prey will be able to live peacefully together: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid” (Isiah 11:6). In both cases, peace does not happen at a defined time; instead, there are certain conditions that need to be met to make the special moment of peace possible.

Peace is similar to queerness, as it is explored by Muñoz (2009), who asserts that queerness is “a mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (p. 1). Muñoz argues for an epistemology of hope, alluding to ideas that emerge in society, not yet ripe enough to become a political movement but still found in inklings of everyday life. As much as they are fleeting, these ideas prove that something can be different in the depressing present, like small moments of queer love. Muñoz developed this idea as a critique of Lee Edelman’s (2004) polemic book No Future, where he argues that society is based on the notion of “reproductive futurism” (p. 117), so that people who wish to gain a hold in the future must have children and bring them up in heteronormative families. Edelman calls for an antisocial queerness, based on a future-negating drive. This deterministic refusal to engage with society and have any stakes in its future is similar to war, which is the refusal to engage in a conversation with the other while resorting to the destruction of human life; those who die in war have no future. Muñoz (2009) opposes these “romances of the negative” (p. 11). By offering an epistemology of hope, he gives queer individuals tools that help them survive in the present.

Digital media is an important space where a better future can be imagined and rendered possible because it helps build and sustain communities of support for people in precarious situations. Responding to the rise in queer youth suicides, Dan Savage founded the “It Gets Better” project through YouTube videos in which he tried to convince adolescents suffering from bullying that life will get better once they graduate from high school (Gal et al., 2016). Even if this proposed future has homonormative foundations, in which “better” means urban life, socio-economic mobility, and a monogamous relationship, at least it helps queer individuals survive their hardships. Peace is very similar in its logic, for it offers a possibility for a hopeful life in face of continuous violence, even if this life is far from ideal.

Epistemologically, peace needs to provide hope, a way of seeing the world embedded in the promise that things will get better. However, moving forward does not mean that the past is forgotten; therefore, peace is also a demand to remember. The ethics of peace are ingrained in media witnessing. According to Ellis (2000), the rise of electronic media made witnessing a central form of communication. Witnessing is by no means a new communicational phenomenon—it became important in the 13th century, as testimonies provided by witnesses were considered more reliable than confessions extorted through torture (Peters, 2009). In other words, judiciary systems realized that truth is to be found not only in the experiencing individual but among objective external observers. In the age of mass audiences, the circle of those who have been there, who witness an event in real-time, expands exponentially. The mass mediatization of traumatic events means that even those who watch them at home are responsible for remembering and responding to what had happened (Ellis, 2000). Witnessing the suffering of the other through media should be an unnerving moment. Viewers can no longer claim that they did not know about the horrors caused by war in faraway lands (Chouliaraki, 2006).

There is a constant tension between future-oriented epistemology of peace and its past-oriented ethics. The former cannot be accomplished without providing a space for forgiveness, which might be seen as an erasure of the latter. Peace must be a commitment to remembering how physical and mental wounds have been inflicted on people, while providing an opportunity to heal them (Janzen, 2016; Leah, 2011). Media witnessing not only presents painful realities but documents and stores them in an archive; given the seemingly infinite storage space available on digital media, they become the ultimate archive where everything can be documented (Chun, 2008). They create a space where accurate evidence of what happened can be stored and reside outside the unreliable human memory (Peters, 2009). Beyond storing memories, social media make memories public. A timeline on Facebook is essentially a personal history that is shared with the world. Sharing painful memories often becomes social capital on social media, reaffirming the veracity of the traumatic experience while often reassuring survivors that they are not alone (John, 2017; van Dijck, 2017).

So far, I have argued that the promise for a better future that peace provides must emerge from a reconciliation with a painful past. Yet the experience of peace, its ontology, is
found in the present. It is focused on what people do as a part of their daily routines. Media is central to people’s sense of self and how they situate their lives in relation to other people. In the United Kingdom, radio talk during the 1930s and 1940s helped build an imagined English working class by providing programs centered around casual and relatable conversations (Scannell, 1996). In India, the rise of the middle class in the 1980s was fueled by the rise of “television time.” Television taught people what it means to be a part of that class while structuring their daily routines around its programs (Punathambekar & Sundar, 2017). Both cases exemplify special moments of socialization into English and Indian societies; listening to the radio or watching television are immersive experiences in which audiences can lose track of the measurable time of their daily routines that await outside the media experience.

Yet if in India of the 1980s, the man from the morning show was practicing yoga (p. 406), in Israel, a nation immersed in war paranoia, the Chronos of television, its regular schedule, is dramatically different. Most of the Israeli primetime broadcasting hours are designated for news, accompanied by two or three hours of entertainment (“Keshet TV Schedule,” n.d.). This is the Israeli viewer’s daily television diet when everything is calm. At times of war, major Israeli channels break their normal scheduling, broadcasting only news, 24/7, providing audiences a continuous flow of horrors, which Liebes (1998) described as disaster marathons. Television in Israel creates a sense of constant hurriedness, with no option for mental rest or sleep (Crary, 2013), as something dramatic is always about to happen.

Yet the helplessness embedded in this constant sense of emergency can be resisted through daily practices. Looking specifically into this question, Scannell (2014) argues that, for the most part, things in the world are good because they work; they serve a purpose (p. 16). Life is built on a hermeneutic of trust which we often take for granted because nothing goes wrong. However, Scannell also explains that people are their concerns (p. 24); they structure their world around their care structures. This can create varying degrees of distrust among individuals who live in areas of conflict; for the most part, they can assume that their daily routines will unfold as usual, although worrying that something terrible might happen is always in the back of their minds (e.g., Ochs, 2011).

Indeed, peace is a mental state as much as it is a political undertaking; it depends on a delicate pendulum swing between trust and suspicion. An everyday experience of political peace requires peace of mind. It requires specific moments that ensure that the world is a good and safe place. However, people must first act in a way that makes this ontology possible. Media is an important site for exploring life devoted to peace, which can be pursued through media activism. Digital media becomes a space where different communities can coordinate and synchronize actions intended to make the world a better place and “decrease world suck” (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2018). For example, the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), drawing inspiration from the famous wizard to pursue social justice, uses a myriad of digital tools such as podcasts, online fan fiction, and social networks to sustain a community of fans. The HPA has worked diligently to promote world peace when it funded and sent five cargo planes to Haiti after the devastating earthquake in 2010 or by promoting a massive boycott on products manufactured through child labor (Jenkins, 2012).

Digital media have unique affordances that can help promote peace as a popular concept. These are all embedded in their ability to bring people together. They can help facilitate communities of support for people in distress, thus promoting an epistemology of hope; they can allow people to share their painful experiences, upholding to the ethical demand to remember the past; they can sustain an ontology of peace in the present, by enabling activists to coordinate and synchronize their activities. However, as pointed earlier, big social media platforms are not an ideal space for nurturing peace. Therefore, this project focuses on small interactive digital platforms. These platforms are committed to generating care structures for peace by playing, exploring, listening, or participating in an activity.

**Methods**

This study focuses on interactive platforms for peace. I base my understanding of this term on Gillespie’s (2010) broad definition of platforms, describing them as “online services of content intermediaries” (p. 2). According to Schultz (2000), “interactive” means that there is an immediate feedback loop between the sender and the receiver of information. However, I use a much broader definition of these terms, which is less concerned with the actual reciprocity of the communication process and focuses on its mode of address. For me, interactivity is achieved through an engaging experience offered to visitors by the affordances of the platform (Hutchby, 2014). This means that I was looking for platforms making an explicit effort to invite its visitors to participate in an activity or teach them something new by presenting information in a creative way that goes beyond a unidirectional form of communication like reading a paper or listening to a lecture. Specifically, I am interested in technical features of each platform and the different social experiences they facilitate. However, interactivity is not constrained to the platform itself, as platforms often invite visitors to engage in activities that happen offline.

The platforms I analyze were collected using the search term “interactive peace” on Google’s search engine. I used an intentionally limited search query that only names the objective of the platform (“peace”) and its episteme (“interactive”). Other specifiers, such as the word “platform” itself, might exclude projects that decide to name themselves differently. I also avoided words such as “politics” or
“war,” although I am interested in peace as a political concept. I did not want to miss innovative approaches to understanding peace interactively that go beyond the traditional realm of global politics. When looking for these platforms, I remained conscientious of Google’s Pagerank algorithm (Rogers, n.d.), which favors powerful organizations that enjoy high exposure through incoming links. Therefore, I looked over all search pages until notified that going any further will lead me to duplicates and irrelevant results. Overall, I explored 189 results spreading over 19 Google search pages.

While my search term was very inclusive, there are certain interactive platforms that were excluded through manual selection, following two principles: first, the platform must focus primarily on peace. Therefore, an interactive timeline of WWI built by The National WWI Museum and Memorial (“Interactive WWI Timeline,” 2013) was not included in my corpus, even if peace was the ultimate outcome of the war. Similarly, platforms discussing peace as a metaphor for something else were excluded. For example, an interactive display of a painting of Jesus, who is presented as a symbol of peace (McNaughton, n.d.).

My analysis of these platforms is an adaptation of the walkthrough method developed by Light et al (2018). Originally designed for apps, using this method means that the researcher needs to first look at the visual aspects of the app and then record how it is being used. A similar approach is useful for understanding an interactive platform with few modifications. First, since an interactive platform is designed to be experienced once rather than multiple times, the first visit is crucial and needs to create a unique experience for it will most likely be the only one (Weltevrede et al., 2014). Second, it is important to find out who the organizations are behind each platform to assess their motivation for building it. Third, interactive platforms exemplify a philosophy similar to the one employed in contemporary museums that seek to make knowledge accessible through various somatic stimuli (van den Akker & Legène, 2016). Therefore, my analysis emphasizes the experience of visiting these platforms.

### Four Ways to Evoke a Care Structure for Peace

#### Play

The first category of interactive platforms for peace encourages visitors to engage in a game to learn more about peace. One example is the World Peace Game (World Peace Game Foundation, n.d.). Invented by educator John Hunter, the game offers a simulation of world politics for children ranging from the 4th to the 7th grade. Played on a multilayered three-dimensional board, each child is given a specific role, such as being a commander of an army or a president of a nation. Participants are asked to interact with each other and solve together a series of 13 interlocking crises. In a TED talk, Hunter (2011) argues that the spontaneous and imaginative engagement of children with the game helps them develop complex thinking about grave issues such as climate change or ethnic tensions (Figure 1). The World Peace Game is an example of a platform in which interactivity is not digital but happens face to face between the children and their instructor. The website provides information about the game and about Hunter, while offering opportunities for children and teachers to learn more about it.

While the World Peace Game creates an imaginary world in which central issues that pose a threat to peace are being dissected, Socent Studios (n.d.) is developing a video game designed to engage gamers with the story of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Therefore, the interactive element in this case is the videogame, whereas the website is used to promote it. The website contains many promotional materials encouraging visitors to purchase the game. Most of them focus on the vision behind it. One example is a video featuring Justin Bastian, the CEO of Socent Studio. Being a white man from Cleveland, it follows his journey to DRC, where he meets with local activists, observes gorillas in the jungle, and watches local miners quarrying minerals. Bastian explains to the visitor that the conflict in DRC is the worst the world has seen since World War II and that it stems from a battle over the extraction of precious minerals essential for the global electronics industry.

A self-proclaimed gamer, Bastian says that “when I found out that the industry I love so much was directly financing this horrific tragedy, I was crushed. But then I realized that we can do something about this.” Facing the camera, a Congolese lake in the background, Bastian delivers a pitch presentation, arguing that by playing his game gamers will be able to “affect the issue that the game is about” and “become heroes in the real world.” The website underscores the authentic connection between the game developers and Congolese culture; one page explains how Bastian came across Akongo, an ancient solar god, in his research about Africa. Bastian has since included Akongo in the mission statement of Socent Studios. The website also indicates that the game received the “Lumumba Blessing” from leaders of
North and South Kivu (a province in eastern DRC). Despite the enthusiastic talk about the game, there is no information on the website on when it is expected to be released.

Both platforms advance the idea that a firsthand simulation is the ultimate way to engage with peace. By having to make difficult decisions in a fantasy world or by thinking about neo-colonialism in DRC, western players are expected to step outside of their comfortable daily routines (Punathambekar & Sundar, 2017). Games and video games in particular can be used for prosocial learning. By posing difficult dilemmas to players that compel them to choose between right and wrong in the simulated world, these games can help teach them how to become better people in the real world (Koo & Seider, 2010). Video games can be used to tackle real historic events such as wars and encourage players to reflect on their meaning. For example, the game Czechoslovakia 38-89: Assassination critically examines the Czech memory of World War II (Sisler, 2016).

However, many of these games, including Czechoslovakia 38-89, are either designed for classroom use, are found in museums, or have a very limited distribution (e.g., Ben Khelifa, 2017; InterFUEL, 2006; PeaceMaker: Play the News, n.d.). They lack a connection to digital culture and its communities of online gaming (Pearce, 2009) that can transform the interaction that happens between player and computer to an interaction among people. The World Peace Game is an example of what an interactive game for peace could look like because playing this game is fundamentally based on the interaction among players. The game developed by Socent Studio reveals another important facet of developing games for peace—the need to show genuine interest in the real-life situation the game explores.

Unfortunately, these games fall short of delivering the promise of interactive playing for peace through a digital platform. The World Peace Game is currently only designed as a physical board game. However, it seems to be relatively easy to transform it into an online multiplayer game. Similarly, it is hard to assess the potential of Socent Studio’s game to make players care about peace in DRC because it has not been released yet. In both cases, the digital platform I explored was only used to promote and provide information about the games. Nevertheless, since the purpose of this study is to investigate new ways for conceptualizing peace through digital platforms, I believe that these examples reveal key features such platforms should have.

**Explore**

Platforms in this category offer visitors an opportunity to explore complex political problems, mostly through interactive maps. Unlike the previous category, the interactive component here is embedded in the website itself. One example is the Global Peace Index (2019) produced by the thinktank Vision of Humanity, which is based in Sydney.

The map covers 163 countries, all painted according to their performance; green indicates a high rank and red denotes a low rank. Ranks are determined through the aggregation of 26 metrics, which cover an array of diverse ways to operationally define and measure peace, pertaining to different levels of analysis. Some focus on personal safety and wellbeing, such as rates of homicide and incarceration, while others refer to the societal level, such as violent demonstrations. A few metrics shed light on the state level, such as military expenditure and number of nuclear weapons. Alongside the spatial illustration on a map, the Global Peace Index offers a timeline beginning in 2008. A visitor can explore changes in the levels of peace around the world within this timeframe. When moving across the different years, colors are clearly changing, yet no profound change is taking place; western Europe remains a stronghold of peace, while areas such as sub-Saharan Africa stay very violent.

A different example of an interactive map trying to convey a message about peace is a project called A Threat to Peace (Social Design Notes, 2005). It shows the United States dotted with icons indicating problematic locations that pose a threat to peace. It invites visitors to explore a plethora of enterprises that demonstrate how political leaders promote war under the nose of the American people. California, for example, has many such locations; one of them, represented by a black lightbulb, is the Hoover Institution hosted by Stanford University, which is a “leading proponent of genetically modified organisms, central to the US efforts to control the world.” Another spot in California is Rancho Mirage, denoted by a skeleton, which represents President Gerald Ford who used to live there. Ford appears on the map since he “approved Indonesia’s use of US arms to attack East Timor.”

Both platforms encourage visitors to learn something new. It is an informative type of learning that invites visitors to discover facts about peace levels around the world or recognize the disruptors of peace in the United States. In this sense, exploration platforms use time as a form pertaining to change (Rovelli, 2018). They show visitors how peace can become possible or how it can be curtailed. In some cases, these platforms prove that nothing changes (Chun, 2016), as global or local power structures dictate whether peace can happen. While maps are usually designed to represent space, these interactive platforms provide a snapshot of space; they are a way to tell a story about what is happening at a given time (Barthes, 1981). Unlike other maps, which are relatively stagnant, these interactive maps are dynamic. The multiple versions of the Global Peace Index, moving across time, galvanize the visitor to find out which indicators underlie peace, thus making peace a form of intellectual exploration. Similarly, maps such as A Threat to Peace provide a more critical perspective on forces that prevent peace from materializing.
Listen

The purpose of platforms in this category is to educate visitors on interesting peace initiatives or new approaches to thinking about peace. Thus, visitors are invited to listen to stories and ideas rather than explore data or play a game. These platforms present a clear narrative about peace as opposed to previous platforms that are more ambiguous in their proposition on how peace can be achieved.

One example is a platform developed by Away and Peace Direct (n.d.). The former is a business selling suitcases, while the latter is a London-based charity supporting “local people in some of the most challenging conflict environments worldwide.” Upon entering the platform, visitors are provided with horrific data, presented in big white fonts on a black background: 27 people killed by a suicide attack in Congo and additional 17 people dead in Nigeria following a roadside bomb, in what simulates an incoming newsfeed. Then the platform provokes visitors to think about how they would react if similar information was sent to them about their hometown, planting the visitor’s location based on an IP address. Following this narrative, the platform emphasizes that people care about their local communities, urging visitors to appreciate the stories of such communities striving for peace.

One example presented by this platform is the civil war in Sri Lanka. It tells the story of families whose loved ones disappeared during the war but are still holding on to hope that they will return one day. It shows one community center where pictures of the disappeared are presented and allows local women to deal with the trauma of loss together. Another page tells the story of boys in Nigeria forcefully enlisted as child soldiers into the ranks of Boko Haram, a radical Islamist organization. Through boxing, these boys manage to escape their lives for a few hours every day.

A similar platform looks into the involvement of women in advancing peace around the world. It was created by the Council on Foreign Relations (2019), a nonprofit thinktank based in New York and Washington DC. The platform itself includes a combination of different elements. It has statistical data demonstrating that peace negotiations that include women are less likely to fail and more likely to last over time. The data also indicates that women have more access to some communities that are closed to men, thus allowing them to gather important information that otherwise would not be accessible. Nevertheless, women are only marginally involved in peace negotiations. Visitors can also delve into more detailed case studies that illustrate this problem. One of them is Afghanistan, where women have been subjugated to the oppressive Taliban regime which denied them education and punished disobedient women using public beatings and executions. So far, women have been only 6% of the negotiators in the Afghan peace process. They fear that men will sacrifice their rights, so they could strike a deal with the Taliban.

Platforms encouraging visitors to listen are designed to facilitate learning, but in a very different way from exploratory platforms. It is an affective type of learning; these platforms do not try to provide every possible detail about destroyed lives and communities, for some of the atrocities of war are beyond description and cognition (Daniel, 1996). They echo the phrase “never forget!” that is not only the inescapable lived reality of the traumatized survivor but also reflects an ethical commitment of those who witness the atrocities through the media, even if the original experience can never be fully reconstructed in its mediated form (Frosh, 2009).

Participate

The last type of platform I have found encourages its visitors to participate in an activity for peace. One facilitator of such activities is an organization called UNIFY (n.d.). Based in California, it tries to engage people in synchronized meditations, happening at the same time in different locations around the world. In its promotion video, the platform explains that the way to counteract bloody wars in places such as Syria is by connecting individuals with their inner peace. These individuals then become “one unified with many,” resulting in a “synchronized force of nature.” The platform urges its visitors to become members of this movement. It facilitates interactivity through a world map presenting the events that took place during its last synchronized meditation. Visitors can find local events or start new ones. The platform also offers three types of events that are not meditations: marches, parties, and different sorts of gatherings.

In this care structure, participating means becoming a part of a synchronized imagined community (Anderson, 1983). External peace, in this sense, begins by finding inner peace through a connection with other people. Here, synchronization does not only happen between devices and platforms but also between minds and spirits (Turner, 2006). The hurriedness associated with the constant flow of tragedies stops (Crary, 2013) as meditation and other activities become a way of slowing down and looking internally for a new potential from which hope can emerge (Muñoz, 2009).

Toward an Interactive Temporal Understanding of Peace

Peace is interactive by definition. It is an interaction between people seeking a common ground. Stabilizing peace means that the interaction takes place at a deep level, as it leads to the establishment of shared norms and values (Kacowicz & Bar-Siman-Tov, 2000). Peace is also an interaction between local initiatives and exogenous players functioning as mediators, facilitators, or promoters of the local activity, thus making it a hybrid (Ginty, 2011).
All the platforms examined in this study encompass this type of hybridity. The organizations behind these interactive digital platforms for peace come from the Global North—United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Some try to introduce their visitors to peace efforts happening in the Global South, while others do not focus on a particular nation. Therefore, the different scenarios offered to children playing the World Peace Game can happen anywhere; the information provided by the Global Peace Index can teach its visitors about the Global North as much as it teaches them about the Global South. For example, I found out that United States is ranked very low on this index (121 out of 163 countries). Finally, even when the platform focuses on a particular place, it blurs its locality. When Justin Bastian of Socent Studio appropriates the Congolese solar god as a spiritual guide, it is no longer Congolese. When Away and Peace Direct present communities from Sri Lanka and Nigeria through similar frameworks of hardship and misery, the specificities of each community are subsumed by a general stereotypical image of a violent Global South.

Instead, what matters is the moments when Sri Lankan women look at photos of their disappeared loved ones together, photos that function as a proof that they were once a part of their families (Barthes, 1981), resonating the ethics of peace in remembering the past. It is when Nigerian boys spend time practicing boxing rather than being forced to fight as soldiers. It is this break from their violent daily routines and these short durations (Kember & Zylinska, 2012) that allow them to experience fleeting moments of peace. These moments reflect the ontology of peace in the present. The Chronos of remembering loved ones that are gone has little meaning; it does not matter how long these people engage in such activities as long as special moments exist and provide them with comfort. Digital culture in the context of these platforms challenges the speedup rationale (Sharma, 2014) by urging visitors to slow down, leave their daily routines aside, and imagine the memories of others as a way to empathize with them (Keightley & Pickering, 2012).

Such interventions into the regular course of things, this undermining of norms, are essential for promoting a just peace. As illustrated by the Council on Foreign Relations, women are a community that is particularly vulnerable to violent conflicts and whose concerns are being systematically ignored at the negotiating table. Indeed, women’s time is often considered unimportant; similar to what Hilmes (1997) argued about radio’s treatment of women’s time, such marginalization allows entrepreneurs to come up with radical new ideas and offer hope for women that their voices and concerns can be completely developed but can be used to create a more peaceful world. Visitors to these platforms are interpellated to care about peace because these platforms promise them that they can become members of a movement that might ameliorate some of the direst situations in the world.

Peace as a popular concept is directly tied to the everyday lives of people and to the meaning of living within time (Scannell, 1996, 2014). It is connected to their routines in the present and their ability to embrace hermeneutics of trust in their everyday lives. It is the bond created between women who lost family members; it is a shared moment of meditation that can help connect people. Engagement between children through a board game is not only meaningful at the moment of playing but has a power mainly afterwards for it provides hope that these children will one day become tolerant adults. Therefore, these interactive platforms are meant to show their visitors a potential, which is often not yet completely developed but can be used to create a more peaceful world. Visitors to these platforms are interpellated to care about peace because these platforms promise them that they can become members of a movement that might ameliorate some of the direst situations in the world.

Yet not all interactive platforms that discuss peace necessarily promote it. Interactive maps, a form of data visualization designed to make large quantity of information accessible (Drucker, 2014), is entrenched in the past and lacks the sense of hope and opportunity to make a change. The Threat for Peace platform presents the destructive power of the US military–industrial complex to its visitors and asks them to resist it. However, the platform does not provide its visitors with any useful tools for challenging this power. The World Peace Index offers visitors a timeline, showcasing that change has come to different places around the world in the past decade. While scrolling through the different years does shift colors on the map, there is no profound change; it is an update for remaining the same (Chun, 2016); the Global North stays peaceful, while the Global South is torn by war. It fails to reach the essence of time, which is to provide an indication for change between different states (Rovelli, 2018).

Other platforms undermine their declared efforts to promote peace due to their positionality. Here, place matters. The white savior narrative embraced by Justin Bastian and
his colleagues at Socent Studio make the platform more about them than about the people of DRC. After finishing his passionate speech, Bastian enjoys the privilege of going back home to the United States, while many Congolese continue to quarry minerals. This game, alongside Away’s line of designed suitcases, suggest that buying might be an important care structure just as much as playing, exploring, listening, or participating. It remains unclear to what extent these platforms are genuinely trying to help communities reach peace or if they are using them for self-promotion.

Still, even if these companies are mainly motivated by commercial interests, they raise awareness of violent conflicts mostly neglected by the news media. Alongside other platforms, they come up with creative ways to make visitors care about peace and make it a part of their concerns (Scannell, 2014) through special moments of engagement with unfamiliar stories or data. They construct peace as an act of communication. Although these are, for the most part, very small platforms with very little traffic, I believe that in these forgotten corners of digital culture, researchers and practitioners can find new ways to think about how peace can be made relevant to the everyday lives of people.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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