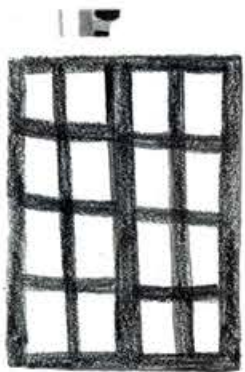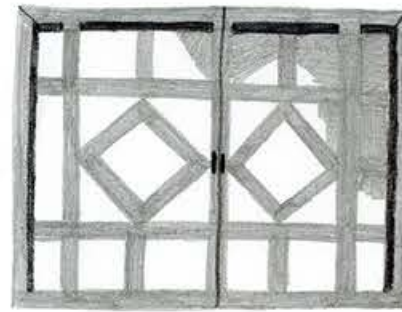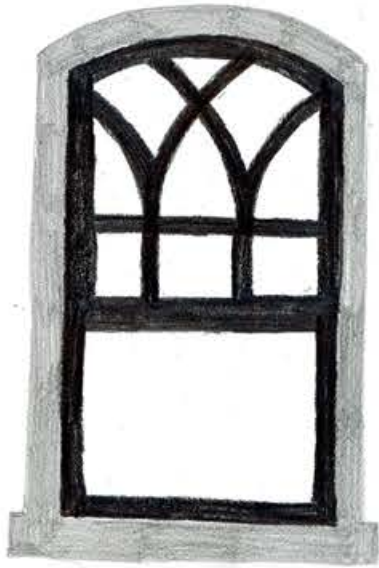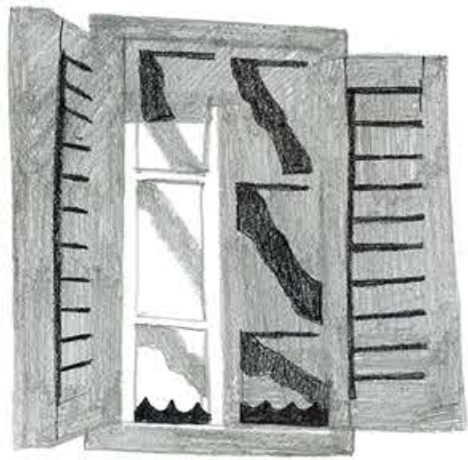KITTY

BY

SAVANNA JUDD

Artist Bio

My name is Savanna Judd, and I'm an illustrator, animator, and coder based in Portland, Oregon. I work in traditional mixed-mediums and a variety of digital approaches, with a focus on immersive environments and experimental interactive narratives using animation and code. I have a background in comics, and am always looking for ways to elevate storytelling through art. Movement, both literal and through shape and composition, are an important part of my illustration. I love drawing gooey shapes.

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Proposal

Can we know a person, just by looking through their apartment? Will it tell us if they're good or evil—compassionate or apathetic? Can a building, a living room, or a kitchen absorb a traumatic event?

My proposed thesis is an interactive web-based narrative experience, retelling the story of Kitty Genovese's murder and its ramifications for urban apathy and the Bystander Effect. Through environmental hidden object games, I will present a non-traditional narrative focusing on lived-in spaces to lend a new approach to the typical true crime parable. Illustrations will be a dreamlike sequence of painted crime scene "models" with animated gif elements through which a viewer uncovers the story of Kitty Genovese as they unpack each room in the building she lived in and was killed in. The storytelling mechanics will rely on environments and the objects within them, with each loose game segment using different mechanics to transform the viewer into a detective, recovering information and the larger story through evidence. At the core of the story is a compassionate look at the Bystander Effect, debunking the cynical view that people generally are selfish and evil.

Kitty Genovese's murder is often cited as evidence of the Bystander Effect. Kitty was murdered in the stairwell of her own apartment on March 13th, 1964, as 38 people, her neighbors, supposedly watched and did nothing. Her family and friends were told by newspapers that she was alone in her final moments, after a series of long drawn-out attacks in which no apartment residents intervened.[1] Since 1964, Genovese's murder has been co-opted by pessimistic (male-driven) stories, dripping with anger, about the depravity of mankind. It's been retold by everything from "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs" by Harlan Ellison to Watchmen vigilante origin stories, each refusing to look beyond the shock value of Kitty Genovese's story and their own preoccupations with the idea of the mob and the soulless city.

These anxieties persevere today, in an era of mass media and faceless crowds, in which we are constantly asking whether or not to take action as individuals. John M. Darley and Bibb Latané staged experiments a few years after Kitty was murdered, and found that the presence of others inhibits helping during staged emergencies.[2] In other words, the individual is sympathetic, but the crowd is apathetic.

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[1] Cook, Kevin. *Kitty Genovese: The Murder, the Bystanders, the Crime That Changed America*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015.

[2] Darley, John M., and Bibb Latané. "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8, no. 4p1 (1968): 377.

However, after years of interviews and access to witness statements, we know that Kitty was not alone but was held and comforted in her final moments by an elderly mother of two, Sophie. Another woman and mother found her and got help. Other residents claimed to have called police, but cops were often not reliable and even hostile, especially when called late at night. Some residents were holocaust survivors or gay people, paralyzed when confronted with the screams outside, or the intervention of cops.[3] Although the Bystander Effect is one of the strongest and most replicable phenomenons in social psychology, there is another version of the story, more complicated and soft-hearted than in news articles or psychology textbooks. It's important to me that my thesis acknowledge the problems with a bystander mentality in society, but also reflect a tone of optimism and faith in people.

In both true crime stories and news media, the focus is on the killer and not the victim or their loved ones. At best, victims are martyrs rather than three-dimensional, complicated people. At worst, they are labelled virgins or whores, and details of their lives are analyzed in order to decide whether or not they deserved to die. Most of the time, their lives are deemed not disturbing or shocking enough to warrant attention. This can sensationalize cruelty and devalue compassion and trust.

In true crime storytelling, experiencing a resurgence in the internet age in the form of podcasts and web-sleuths, the allure of the crime is in its mystery. When the viewer is presented with the events and information surrounding the crime rather than the solution, this information gathering and puzzle solving becomes the story itself. This storytelling device creates a kind of reverence for the mythology of the murder case. The Serial podcast website, for example, pairs episodes of its latest season with visuals of sweeping, animated spaces, scenes related to the crimes, with illustrated "murals" superimposed on 3D-modeled structures, infusing these everyday spaces with a mythology and carefully crafted tone. Forensic model-maker Frances Glessner Lee, in the 1940s, created the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death: intricate, miniature crime scene models that co-opted the feminine tradition of crafting miniatures and dollhouses into both an elegant art and investigative tool. The scene of the crime is the blueprint for the crime itself, forever intertwined with the brutal events that its walls witness. I will use this mechanic, a study of place as emotional impact before and after a devastating event, to move through not just the scene of the crime, but the living spaces of Kitty, her friends, neighbors, and complete strangers.

I want to retell the story of Kitty Genovese through a deeply personal lens rather than through the cold, cynical lens of a true crime parable. Rather than her murder, our investigation is into Kitty herself: Who was she? Who did she love? Who loved her?

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[3] Gallo, Marcia M. *No One Helped: Kitty Genovese, New York City, and the Myth of Urban Apathy.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.

Some examples of rooms and their storytelling mechanics are: Kitty's apartment, where you remove precious objects one by one and pack them into evidence. The staircase, where you uncover love letters to Kitty while traveling through stages of grief, stair by stair. And the backyard, where the environment unfolds into arcade cabinet mini-games that the children of the apartment building use to retell their perspective of the murder, and reconstruct their own childlike crime scenes based on firsthand information from later interviews.

This project would exist on a webpage, coded to be interactive but with limited complexity. Most interactions would involve text and images being revealed or animating when hovered over or clicked. What order the loose narrative is experienced in would be controlled (to an extent) by the reader, and the experience of the story might therefore change from person to person. Web as a medium, especially when framing a non-linear narrative, allows the amount of work created to be fluid: plot points could begin as a broad outline and be expanded on depending on available time. This is significant to me because what I'd like to undertake involves a large volume of work, but leeway to edit down this target amount on the fly. The final work would be presented full-screen, open on a computer for an individual to interact with.

This project would be constructed in three stages: the script, the assets, and the code. The script, which I have a written draft of, is a complex document that must be well-organized, as this project involves many moving parts, sometimes moving in unpredictable sequences. Assets will be constructed with mainly painting and subtle multi-media touches, compiled and animated digitally. The final product will demonstrate my ability to use digital ways of making along with creative uses of code to bring things to life, but the basis of the visual language will be as hand-done as possible. The scope and texture of this subject works well alongside traditional ways of making, giving contemporary life to a timeless medium. Finally, I would code this project using mostly P5.js, a JavaScript library based on the Processing language. P5.js is highly accessible to artists and made with interactive visual projects in mind. Over the last few months and within Make+Think+Code workshops, I feel I've gained enough knowledge to use JavaScript and P5.js, as well as my previous knowledge in HTML and CSS, to accomplish the interactivity this project would require. The narrative would be formatted for a large, 1920x1080p screen, and navigation would involve simply scrolling down as if moving through the floors of an apartment, maximizing immersion into the environment.

Along with Frances Glessner Lee's models and Serial's (Moth Studio's) interactive environments, I'm influenced by Holly Warburton and Benjamin Zimmerman, who incorporate traditional media and the artists hand into often short, looping animations. Rebecca Mock creates atmosphere through quiet, small animations in her illustrated gifs. Out_4_Pizza is an ongoing LiveJournal blog and piece of net art that use pixel-perfect compositions with cryptic names that scroll endlessly in a black void. My Boyfriend Came Back From the War, a net art piece created by Olia Lialina in 1996, uses extremely simple code and graphics to tell a story with branching pathways, creating a unique experience every time the site is visited.

As an illustrator, I have a preoccupation with stories, and how I can take narrative to another level of immersion. I've experimented with both comic formats and movement-based work, and feel that combining the two narrative tools would create an experience greater than the sum of its parts. I am always seeking new ways to combine traditional and digital ways of making, using the authenticity of traditional mediums and the controlled power of digital techniques. The use of simple motion to drive a story is important in my process. Animation is used to infuse illustrations with meaning and activate the environment, literally moving the viewer through the story. Immersion and narrative are two major preoccupations incorporated into this project. In general, one of my goals as an artist is to make environments feel alive and full of human presence without necessarily showing humans. Overall, I want to showcase how my illustration can be used in service of an impactful and unique story above all else.

Home means so many things to us. It can be a safe house, a capsule of past events, or a catalogue of painful memories. In Kitty Genovese's case, her home was a place filled with life, and eventually became her tomb. For the witnesses who didn't save her, home was a wall. People's spaces, as a storytelling device, lend a new kind of empathy to the stories we've told repeatedly. A room becomes a mirror of the person who carefully curated it, infused with their energy. They are revealing, immersive, and universal. I want to use the framework of a building full of stories, Kitty Genovese's apartment building, to lend a new sense of empathy to a story that has always been about apathy. Although the circumstances of Kitty Genovese's murder are classically cited as evidence of the depravity of humanity, I want my project to take a closer look, and demonstrate a softer truth: people are good.

Abstract

My project went from comic to animated comic to interactive narrative to full-on video game in the span of my final year here at PNCA. *Kitty* is a hidden object game. The player moves through the story by finding objects or clues in each of six rooms. Each object initiates a new thread in the narrative, whether through a document, artifact, or sequence of events. As the player progresses, the objects are less and less the focus as the narrative becomes the main mechanic and motivator driving the player forward.

The six environments in *Kitty* are a six room synopsis of Kitty Genovese's apartment building, where she was murdered. Each room represents a witness or set of witnesses who lived there with Kitty. The first room is the apartment Kitty shared with her partner, Mary Ann Zielonko. The second is the stairwell, leading to the backyard where boys from the apartment used to play baseball. Then Karl Ross's apartment, then Sophie Farrar's apartment. Karl and Sophie were both Kitty's friends and witnesses to her murder. The final room, the vestibule, is where Kitty spent her final minutes alive.

Each environment was painted by hand in acrylic. Every item, figure, and element was painted, then animated, then coded to form a game that lives in the browser. This project uses small slivers of historical people's lives and game-ifies them, reinterpreting them as vital pieces of a true crime story. Because each plot point is non-sequential, with branching pathways and multiple interactions, each player has a unique experience of the story.

Kitty Genovese was stabbed outside two populated apartment buildings, then finally killed in the doorway of her own apartment. Thirty-eight people were reported to have witnessed the murder without making any attempt to save her. Underlying the primary narrative of *Kitty* is a critical look at the bystander effect. The bystander effect was coined to explain why, in large groups such as crowded cities, people may be less likely to take action in a crisis.[4] Kitty Genovese's 1964 murder, as well as the increasing perception of American cities as soulless rat cages, was the inciting incident in a series of studies on this newly recognized kind of apathy.

The sixties represent a threshold in U.S. history—a buildup in pressure preceding monumental social change. *Kitty* is also a story about this buildup, as cities grew and the civil rights struggle and gay liberation movement reached a breaking point. Significantly, this story takes place just five years before the Stonewall riots, and just a few miles away from the Stonewall Inn. The anti-gay violence of the fifties and sixties

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[4] Darley and Bibb, "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility."

and the gay underground simultaneously flourishing in Greenwich Village represent an unseen conflict in the lives of Kitty, her partner, and her friends.[5]

This project deals with many dark themes, without explicitly showing violence. The audience ranges from internet-literate young adults to middle-aged adults, similar to the demographic of people generally interested in true crime. This demographic also tends to skew female.[6]

Kitty is accessible to anyone who has a robust browser like Google Chrome, making it a highly interactive, immersive portfolio piece that could be monetized in many ways.

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[5] Cook, *Kitty Genovese: The Murder, the Bystanders, the Crime That Changed America.*

[6] Wilson, Laurnie. "True Crime Viewers Would Kill for More Streaming Content." *CivicScience*, 20 Feb. 2019, https://civicscience.com/true-crime-viewers-would-kill-for-more-streaming-content/.

Areas of Inquiry

Kitty is about one story, told in many ways. These varying accounts of the same murder—accounts from witnesses, historians, and those personally affected—take a critical approach to the bystander effect, and the tendency to glorify clinical research over people's lived experiences. Within the historical context of fifties and sixties America, the paranoia around crime and vice was used to justify oppressive government actions and a culture of discrimination. Kitty Genovese's murder was sensationalized by newspapers as a story of urban apathy. They reported that Kitty was murdered in the stairwell of her own apartment on March 13th, 1964, as 38 people, her neighbors, watched and did nothing. She was alone in her final moments, after a series of long drawn-out attacks in which no apartment residents intervened.[7] She was abandoned by her city, a city full of people, but a city growing more and more cold and unfeeling.

However, after years of interviews and access to witness statements, we know that Kitty was not alone but was held and comforted in her final moments by a mother of two, Sophie. Some residents were holocaust survivors or gay people, paralyzed when confronted with the screams outside, or the intervention of cops. There were only a handful of genuine witnesses, rather than thirty-eight.

In the years after Kitty's death, John M. Darley and Bibb Latané staged experiments and found that the presence of others inhibits helping during staged emergencies.[8] However, more recent studies observing security camera footage found that in non-staged, real-life situations, people are much more likely to intervene, even in crowded areas.[9] At the core of this story is a compassionate look at the bystander effect, debunking the cynical view that people generally are selfish and evil. I was interested in Kitty's life, rather than her murder. My investigation is into Kitty herself: Who was she? Who did she love? Who loved her?

So, how can we use technology and interactivity to increase awareness of others? Studies on interactivity and empathy usually exist in a video game context.

In a study titled "When I Die, I Feel Small: Electronic Game Characters and the Social Self," researchers found that "Interactivity enables players to become a "member" of the game in a manner…different from television, where viewers have no control over ongoing events."

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[7] Pelonero, Catherine. *Kitty Genovese: A True Account of a Public Murder and Its Private Consequences*. New York, NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016.

[8] Darley and Bibb, "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility."

[9] Philpot, Richard, Lasse Suonperä Liebst, Mark Levine, Wim Bernasco, and Marie Rosenkrantz Lindegaard. "Would I Be Helped? Cross-National CCTV Footage Shows That Intervention Is the Norm in Public Conflicts." *The American Psychologist,* June 3, 2019. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/nqscj.

John L. Caughey is quoted, saying, "[N]early all media is a kind of social interaction: television viewing, watching motion pictures, and book reading all require an interaction with characters and people and, by providing additional examples of possible selves, have a major impact on how we perceive ourselves."[10]

In a study on gender and race representation in video games and their ramifications for empathy, researchers found a relation between identification and narrative: Participants who played a game with a strong story line reported a higher level of identification than did players of non story-based games.[11]

In an article titled "Real Behavior in Virtual Environments," researchers explored several high-level social phenomena in a simple, inexpensive computer-game. Experiments were staged in which subjects encountered rooms with and without virtual bystanders. In each room, a virtual person requested assistance. Participants helped significantly less in rooms with large numbers of bystanders compared to rooms with no bystanders. In other words, in virtual situations, the bystander effect is replicated.[12] If apathy can be simulated in a virtual environment, in an incredibly simple interactive game, how could I use those same simple mechanics to do the reverse?

If apathy can be simulated in a virtual environment, in an incredibly simple interactive game, I wondered, how could I use those same simple mechanics to do the reverse?

Education through empathy is a focus in my thesis project. In my investigation into Kitty Genovese's murder, my focus shifted more and more from the events of the night she was killed toward her life before. The case of the woman no one helped is a perfect cross section of the turbulent atmosphere of 1960s America, of crime, apathy, and social change.[13] I found that every thread of her story became part of another person's story, until I had a web of vast and different experiences.

[10] Mcdonald, Daniel G., and Hyeok Kim. "When I Die, I Feel Small: Electronic Game Characters and the Social Self." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 45, no. 2 (2001): 241–58. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem4502_3.

[11] Jansz, Jeroen, and Raynel G. Martis. "The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games." *Sex Roles* 56, no. 3-4 (February 01, 2007): 141-48. doi:10.1007/s11199-006-9158-0.

[12] Kozlov, Michail D., and Mark K. Johansen. "Real Behavior in Virtual Environments: Psychology Experiments in a Simple Virtual-Reality Paradigm Using Video Games." Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking 13, no. 6 (2010): 711-14. doi:10.1089/cyber.2009.0310.

[13] Gallo, *No One Helped: Kitty Genovese, New York City, and the Myth of Urban Apathy.*

Process

The process of creating *Kitty* has been unlike any project I've worked on before. It began as a series of small paintings for a short comic about Kitty Genovese. I began learning techniques for animating these paintings in short, looping gifs. Before last spring, I experimented with coding an interactive comic using these animated panels. The reader would hover over static panels to activate them and play the gif. I have a background in comics, and was interested in extending the narrative power of a panel in simple but effective ways.

In the spring, I did an independent study with Zack, my mentor. I participated in workshops in Make+Think+Code here at PNCA, looking for a way to break the panels and make the story I had been writing into an unfolding interactive narrative. I expected to be able to achieve a very simple level of interaction, made up of images that changed when clicked. Over the course of the semester, I created an ambitious twenty-nine page script detailing each interaction in the complex interactive narrative I wanted to make. I'm happy to say, everything I wanted to achieve in terms of code and mechanics, I was able to eventually learn how to do. As *Kitty* increased in complexity, my interactive narrative became a video game, by virtue of wanting people more and more to participate in this experience. Making participation vital was the perfect way for me to frame this story about one's choice to help.

Here at PNCA, I was introduced to Processing, a programming language for the visual arts. I coded *Kitty* with p5.js, a JavaScript library based on processing. Lauren McCarthy, the creator of p5.js, studies social relationships in the midst of surveillance, automation, and algorithmic living. Her interest in making programming accessible to and compatible with art was a major influence on me choosing p5. Most of the interactions are simple hover and click actions, made up of conditional statements that simply activate or deactivate images and animations. I was able to make creative use of these limitations to form complex storytelling mechanics, such as reading through a picture book, playing an arcade machine, or emptying a crime scene of evidence.

My research process involved sifting through information both personal and mythological, from family history to folk music lyrics. I began with a parable about a woman whose city didn't care about her, who was stabbed and left with a punctured lung to suffocate in her own entryway, and ended up with a web of people who cared deeply about Kitty Genovese. Going back and forth from police interviews to informal interviews with witnesses made clear to me a dissonance between the way police portrayed the events of March 13th and the experiences of Kitty's friends and neighbors.

I began my research into Kitty Genovese about 16 months ago when I saw *The Witness*, a documentary made by Kitty's brother, Bill Genovese. He grew up being told about the 38 witnesses, a story so drilled into him he volunteered for the Vietnam war and lost both his legs. He vowed never to be like the 38. In *The Witness*, he tracks down every surviving witness and speaks with them about his sister.[14]

These meetings began to reveal that most bystanders were mislabeled: that they either didn't see anything the night Kitty was killed, or reacted significantly. Bill met the son of a woman named Sophie Farrar, Kitty's friend and confidant. She was the one who ran down the stairs to hold Kitty in her final moments.

These accounts of the softer truth surrounding Kitty Genovese began to open up the story to me, revealing something multifaceted. I knew my project would need to examine all of these facets. I learned that in 1964, calling the police in New York was difficult. "You dialed either a borough-specific number in your phone book, or the operator, who'd connect you to the borough communication's desk, who'd take a message and then relay it to the nearest precinct house,"[15] if that message even got through. Many locals, for good reason, didn't trust the police, who might be irritated by a 3 a.m. call and badger them for personal details. In part, Kitty's murder provoked the creation of the 911 system as we know it today.

In the documentary, Kitty's brother interviews Kitty's partner, Mary Ann, who lived with Kitty in the apartment building where she was killed. She was sleeping upstairs, and never heard the screams. Mary Ann tells him a story about how Kitty once adopted a dog, a black poodle named Andrew, as a gift to her. After Kitty died, the dog was all she had left of Kitty. Kitty's dad, Vinny, took the dog and brought it home, though Andrew was really Mary Ann's. Kitty's brother remembered the dog, he told Mary Ann. His dad had taken Andrew, hoping he would cheer up his wife. But more and more, the dog reminded her of the hole Kitty left that couldn't be filled. So one day, Andrew disappeared.

It was a touching moment in which two people who cared about Kitty told each other their stories and connected them in the middle. I thought, what if I could do this with every story about Kitty in the years before her death? What if I could connect them in the middle?

The first room in *Kitty* is Kitty's apartment. It's the room where Kitty and Mary Ann sit across from each other, moving their feet to music. There's a window, and a surreal pink sky shining uncanny light onto the floor and walls. This room introduces the basic search and find mechanic present throughout *Kitty*. Throughout the game, you can learn which objects can be activated based on what moves or changes as you hover over it. You acquire information in random order based on what objects you find, until this pooled knowledge forms a more

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[14] *The Witness,* directed by James Solomon, performance by William Genovese. Five More Minutes Productions, 2015.

[15] Bernard, Marie Lyn. "Kitty Genovese's Murder: Everything You Know About The '38 Bystanders' Is Wrong." *Autostraddle*, April 4, 2016.

detailed picture. In this first room, you learn how to navigate the game environments and about the social tension arising in the years before Kitty's death through the lens of her life and experiences.

I wanted to begin *Kitty* with a saccharine scene displaced from reality and suspended in time. There's little hint at the underlying tragedy. One note reads, "During the trial, Mary Ann testified to being nothing more than Kitty's friend." The stack of books on the cupboard discuss lesbian pulp novels, the last of which reads, "The lesbians usually died in the end." The mechanics introduced here recur throughout the game, but Kitty's room is unique in that each clue disappears as you find it.

The player is made to feel responsible for slowly emptying the apartment of sentimental items. They may find a folded paper hidden behind the stack of books—a diagram explaining how to pack up and remove evidence. After the player finds the last of the thirty items, the light in the room changes to all greens, blues, and purples. Without further explanation, Kitty disappears and Mary Ann buckles over, just a little bit. That's when you read the first witness statement, which still doesn't directly reference a murder—just a woman outside the window in a kneeling position. The process of emptying the room item-by-item, until even Kitty is gone, evokes a sense of loss not yet fully explained.

The second room is the stairwell. It's a weighty shift from one of the most tightly packed rooms to a quiet, dimly lit room. The collection of objects scattered on the stairs serve as a makeshift memorial to Kitty. Each item in the memorial—a photo of kitty, a sympathy card, and a pair of roses in a beer can, to name a few—are unfolded or flipped to reveal a love note to Kitty from Mary Ann, though both the writer and the recipient are left unnamed as well as the reason for the bittersweet tone. I felt it was important that the room not include figures. This reflects the quiet anonymity of the love letters, and the way Mary Ann was forced to grieve for Kitty in a private, isolated way—overall a complex tone to represent.

The third room is the backyard, the only outdoor setting. This room takes on a childlike tone, as three boys stand idly in an alley between the apartment and a dumpster. Each boy, when clicked, causes a coin-operated arcade cabinet to unfold from the environment like a pop-up in a picture book. Clicking on these games initiates a story thread representing each child's perspective on Kitty's murder and its impact on the apartment residents. For example, in the first arcade Larry Gross recounts he and his childhood friends following the trail of blood left staining the sidewalk after the murder. For every new section of text, a crane game retrieves a toy. Each toy is added to a childlike reenactment of the murder, becoming more and more explicit until a barbie doll is stabbed with a tinker toy and bleeds knots of red ribbon.

This more cinematic mode of storytelling represents a shift towards an outsider's perspective. The greater impact of a murder on adjacent people, especially children, is shown in a distinct 'interview' style. The real violence of the event is interpreted through childish imagination, both softening and somehow making more brutal the reality of the event.

The fourth room is Karl Ross's apartment. Karl was Kitty's friend, and one of the witnesses most often accused of being apathetic. He was known as a nervous man, afraid of his own shadow. This room is filled with abstract paintings resembling landscapes, or perhaps organs. Each painting can be flipped to reveal either a historic photograph from the gay underground of the 50s and 60s, or a vignette about Kitty. When the lamp is clicked, it flickers to reveal more photos in black and white, portraying police brutality, riots, and photos of people persecuted or in prison.

Every time a photo is clicked, Karl takes a swig from another container of alcohol, until the bottles and glasses form a pile. After the last bottle, the light behind him changes to a sickly pink, and he collapses, drunk, in his chair. This reveals Karl's witness statement. He describes opening the door of his apartment and seeing Kitty, lying on her back, and a man standing over her. The man stops and looks at Karl, who is paralyzed with fear. Then, Karl closes the door and goes back inside.

This room represents one of the most controversial figures in this story. Karl, in many ways, is the representative case of a failure to help someone in need. I wanted to represent a complex human reaction in a sympathetic way. I wanted to portray the fear engulfing him. This was another room with a clear progression as more and more clues are found. The player witnesses the unraveling of someone wrought with guilt, bottle by bottle.

In Karl's room, like Kitty's room, the passage of time is manipulated. Going through the room, it could be assumed that Kitty is still alive. Under the last photograph, it reads, "Karl was gay. If he was found out and convicted, he could be registered as a sex offender." And then Karl collapses, and the viewer realizes with every clue found, Karl has been grieving. The room takes place in the days and months after Kitty's murder.

The fifth room is Sophie Farrar's room. There are photos of Sophie's family, from which the player can deduce that one of the boys in the backyard, Mike Farrar, is Sophie's son. There's a book on the bookshelf, modeled after an early reader book from the 60s. This serves, for the first time, as an exposition of the details of Kitty's murder. As you hover over the illustrations on each page, they animate in some unique way. These images were appropriated from the original comic panels I created almost a year ago.

I chose not to include any figures in this room, as I felt this information dump was more impactful when delivered anonymously, as if the player was the child reading his library book, or the mother looking through old photos. The witness statement, the most intense and personal so far, is revealed after the book is read. Sophie describes trying to help Kitty. She says, "I put my hand behind her head. I said, 'I'm here. I'm here.' I had to make her know she wasn't alone."

The sixth and final room is the vestibule, meaning the antechamber or doorway of the apartment. I chose not to record any gameplay from this room, as its impact depends on the viewer individually experiencing each room before they reach this final segment. This room, the room where Kitty died, is painted all in deep reds and blues. The only active object is an animation of Kitty and Mary Ann, clasping hands as if about to waltz.

This room moves drastically away from explanation, into a surreal scene in which Kitty and Mary Ann move around the room and Mary Ann describes the first time she met Kitty. In the final animations, Kitty lays in shadow on the stairs.

Mary Ann reaches out to her, before her arm slowly falls, as a huge wall of text appears. At one point it reads: "Someone on the radio is saying, 'Last night, in front of a Queens apartment, at the doorstep of her home, a young woman…' She's warm, and gooey like pancake batter. 'Last night, a young woman…'" then trails off. The text here calls back to the surreal-ness of the first room, suspended in time before Kitty's murder. The final witness statement is Mary Ann's, identifying the wallet found at the crime scene as the one she gave Kitty for Christmas. This is where the game ends.

Comparative Media

In the late 19th century, Frances Glessner Lee, known as "the mother of forensic science," grew up wanting to study law or medicine. Her parents believed a lady shouldn't attend higher education, so instead, she was married off to a lawyer. She was taught interior design, sewing, knitting, crocheting, and miniature making. What she was really interested in was crime and the investigation of violent deaths. Murders were going unsolved, and law enforcement didn't know how to handle or even identify pertinent medical evidence. Finally, Frances divorced her husband and in her 60s entered the world of forensic pathology.

Frances began making a series of dollhouse rooms, which she named the "Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death." She co-opted the feminine tradition of crafting miniatures to create intricate crime scene models, each with tiny details such as clothing fibers or a miniature bullet casing, each taking about as much time and effort as a real house to make. The locks on the doors and windows and even a tiny mousetrap all function as they would in real life. Her models are still used to teach police how to observe scenes, collect evidence, and question their assumptions.

Most of the victims are women lying dead in their own homes. My favorite is "The Kitchen." There's bread baking in an open oven, a sink of half-peeled potatoes, newspapers stuffed under the doors, and a dead housewife on the ground. It looks like suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning, but then why did she bother making dinner? Why is the table near the window askew? Could someone have staged the suicide and escaped out the window? It's the kind of case that police would overlook.[16]

There's something special about taking a single person who was hurt in some way, and dedicating a year of your life to studying that single incident, telling and re-telling a story about them, building a house around them. It becomes a study in over-empathy. You start with something tiny, and end up with something monumental, all generated by excessive investment and love.

When Frances was making her models, The field of law enforcement was almost all male. "[T]hey didn't take the cases against women that seriously…She was about championing the cases of people who were overlooked. And as a woman, she felt overlooked by the system."[17] So she made her dollhouses. My intentions when researching the content of my thesis was to take a story on the surface of the American consciousness, and focus on the people whose stories are rarely told.

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[16] Corinne May Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* (New York: Monticelli Press) 2004.

[17] Nora Atkinson, curator of the "The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

"My Boyfriend Came Back from the War" is a net art piece by Olia Lialina that has been online since 1996. It uses extremely simple code to tell a story with branching pathways, creating a unique experience every time the site is visited. The story unfolds to the point where the screen becomes a mosaic of empty black frames.[18]

The early phases of internet-based art are looked upon with a certain nostalgia in an age when the internet is hyper-powerful. The design and code, especially now, is incredibly simple and yet iconic. This age of net art and the minimalism enforced by its restrictions simulates a digital purity, demonstrating to us the ways the internet changes how we think—the hardware, the mathematics, and the network of faceless viewers who bounce against and take ownership of the story you present to them. "My Boyfriend Came Back from the War" uses a platform of accessibility and connectivity as a stage for our innermost isolation, mirroring the lonely crowd of the internet.

This piece influenced many of the simple information-gathering mechanics I coded into *Kitty*. I wanted to keep the 'interface' simple. I learned a lot about guiding the eye to encourage a player to interact with a given element, which required me to draw from my illustration and design knowledge and apply it to the U.I. When I was painting a room, I had to carefully consider how one's eye would be guided through.

[18] "My Boyfriend Came Back from the War," Olia Lialina, 1996.

Audience

It was important to me that as I retold the story of a graphic historical murder, surrounded by dark social-psychological phenomena—basically, a story about the worst in human nature—that I not show violence. For the first eighty percent of the game, it isn't explicitly revealed that Kitty was murdered at all. In one way, this broadens the potential audience for this game. There's educational value to the historical context within *Kitty*, the mechanics are simple, and the game is aesthetically accessible.

However, the lack of hand-holding in the way I've told this story means that for a player to engage fully with the project, they must be able to extrapolate and synthesize information on their own.

All you technically need to play the game is internet access and an understanding of how to use a mouse, but to really participate you need to fully absorb the information, make connections between earlier parts of the game it may be difficult to go back to, and perhaps further research the political climate of sixties America.

The choices I made in this project—in the format, the code, and the art—were all in service of reaching and impacting the widest audience possible. I think the audience that will actually engage with *Kitty* will be part of the learning process, for me. I predict a range of internet-literate young adults to adults in their forties. This audience may overlap with the growing number of true crime fans: people who are willing to participate in a detailed reenactment of a complex story. Based on online survey data, "over half of U.S. respondents are at least somewhat interested in true crime, suggesting that there is a hefty interest base." Viewership of true crime content also tends to skew female, which I expect to be reflected in my audience.[19]

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[19] Wilson, "True Crime Viewers Would Kill for More Streaming Content."

Marketplace Application

I chose not to turn *Kitty* into an iOS or other mobile game, as I felt the story experience required the responsiveness of the hover mechanic, as well as a larger screen to make use of the complex environments and hand-painted elements. However, I think *Kitty* demonstrates my ability to make art for game purposes, as well as the initiative to handle the technology side of things for a range of platforms.

I see *Kitty* as an alpha version of a game I plan to add to and refine, perhaps further game-ifying it with incentives to play and discover, as well as a hint mechanic. I'd like to improve the game's performance, overall. There's potential to create a process book of the dense amount of work I've created for this project and monetize it. I plan on looking for ways to put later iterations of the game behind a paywall, or release it as a full, for-profit game. The experience of creating *Kitty* has been encouraging in my goals to branch out and apply my illustration skills to other types of games and interactive media of increasing complexity and polish. I've been in contact with a local indie game studio, and may do illustration for them as soon as I graduate.

Conclusion

Overall, the use of illustration, animation, game design, and code in *Kitty* is a showcase of my interest in multi-disciplinary projects exploring medium and storytelling. I'm proud of how many of my interests I was able to stuff into one big story about one important woman. Dedicating time to this story rarely got tedious, and I learned so much. I would do it all over again.

This project went through so many stages. Without the constant pep talks and very honest critique from my partner Mackenzie and my roommate Megan, I don't know where it would've ended up. My mentor, Zack, has been guiding me through this project now for a full year and his expertise gave me the confidence to be ambitious. I'd also like to thank my parents, for being so supportive throughout my time here at PNCA. Thank you all for being here to see what my thesis is all about.

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Larry Gross: One of the boys, a kind of wild and crazy kid, was showing them.