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Game That Critiques Apple Vanishes From App Store

By [JENNA WORTHAM](#)



Screenshots from Phone Story, a smartphone game following the life cycle of smartphones.

5:46 p.m. | Updated *Adding comments from the developer of Phone Story and Apple.*

5:52 p.m. | Updated *Adding information about the Android version of the game, which is now available.*

Is Apple back on the banning bandwagon?

On Tuesday, Paolo Pedercini, a game designer and professor of art at Carnegie Mellon University, announced the availability of a 99-cent game for the iPhone that, in a cartoony way, critiqued the cost, both to the environment and to humanity, of producing mobile devices like the iPhone. It was not available for very long.

The game, called [Phone Story](#), followed the life cycle of a smartphone, from the mining of metals in Africa that are needed for the chips in the phones, to factories in China, where the devices are manufactured. BLN, a business blog, posted [screenshots from the app](#), one of which indicates that in part of the game the objective was

to catch factory workers who are attempting to commit suicide. Mr. Pedercini planned to donate any revenues generated from the game to organizations dedicated to protecting labor rights and other groups that “are working to stop the horrors represented in the game.”

“The story was meant to generate some discussion about hardware and our socioeconomic impact as consumers of electronics,” he said. “But now it’s becoming more about market censorship.”

The application was released into the App Store on Saturday, but was removed on Tuesday after Mr. Pedercini started promoting it online and through Twitter, he said. Earlier this morning, Mr. Pedercini [posted a celebratory tweet](#) about the release of the application that read: “Announcing Phone Story: the anti-iPhone game for iPhone.” Roughly three hours later, the company posted another message that said the app had been removed .

Mr. Pedercini has released several politically charged games in the past, including ones that targeted the fast food and oil industries. In addition, he’s also made artsier, conceptual games that raise questions about existence and the meaning of life. Most of his prior creations were designed to be played in a browser. He said that he decided to make the Phone Story game an application as a way to remind players of “the social impact of their device.”

He said that the game employed a bit of “dark humor” to get his point across, and he hoped it would help ignite discussions about consumerism and the lust for the latest new gadget. He said he did not expect it to get yanked from the App Store just hours after he began promoting it.

Tom Neumayr, a spokesman for Apple, confirmed that the company pulled the app out of the store on Tuesday.

“We removed the app because it violates our developer guidelines,” he said. He declined to elaborate.

Mr. Pedercini said that a developer relations representative from Apple called him to explain how the app violated the guidelines. He said that Apple had cited stipulations that any apps that depict crude and objectionable content, or the abuse of children, will be rejected. In addition, the rules specify that apps cannot be used to collect donations.

“Although this game can be seen as disturbing on an intellectual level because it links back to a real-world analogy, the game itself wouldn’t scare a kid,” Mr. Pedercini said. “There’s much worse stuff on the Internet and the App store.”

This isn’t the first time that Apple has cracked down on apps that it deems offensive. Last February, the company began [pulling racy applications](#) that featured women in swimsuits and lingerie. Apple said it was responding to complaints from customers who were upset by the sexually suggestive material. The company has also [removed politically themed applications](#).

Mr. Pedercini has released [a version of the application for Android-powered devices](#), which is now available for download.

He said he is more troubled by the broader implications around the rejection of his application.

Apple, he said, “also controls the iTunes stores and distribution of music. What will be the reaction if they decide to remove all the music that is deemed objectionable and crude?” he said. “That is the issue that is really emerging here.”

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