

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

GEEK CHIC | OCTOBER 16, 2010

Beautifully Mindless Apps



The official Lite-Brite app

The cynic calls them time-sucks. The realist, though, sees the ever-growing number of shamelessly brain-numbing smartphone apps for what they are—synaptic downtime, self-hypnosis or even, when they're really good, time travel. Here are three apps meant to be played with in airports, bank lines or anywhere your brain doesn't want to be.

Lite-Brite

Yes, it's nostalgia-baiting, but the official Lite-Brite app resurrects the classic colored-peg game without the aggravating pegs. And in this incarnation, it's an actual game. Race to fill in templates of clown faces, boats, etc. Or kill the clock and toss out the templates to create freestyle images that, unlike Monet's analog dotted "masterpieces," can spring to animated life. 99 cents, ea.com

Bubble Harp

After decades of clumsy museum installations, interactive art has found an unlikely home on the iPhone, and it's oddly fun. All of digital artist Scott Sona Snibbe's apps are worth the low price of admission, but Bubble Harp is the most unique. Each tap creates a new cell-like element—a white dot and white membrane that crowds in among the other cells as they twitch and flow across the black screen. There's music, too, but the real thrill is in creating stark, pulsing little doodles that are weirdly evocative and organic. 99 cents, snibbe.com

Osmos for iPhone

This app is faux mindless. Osmos (which is also available for PC, Mac and iPad) is a meditation on life, death and the price of both, masquerading as a brutally simple game about bubbles in space. Your own bubble grows when you devour others, but shrinks when you move, ejecting matter as you chase or evade various cosmic notes. Throw in a trance-inducing soundtrack and a variety of celestial backdrops, and Osmos becomes the first app that might just show up in a urine test. \$2.99, hemispheregames.com