UP UP UP DOWN DOWN DOWN LEFT RIGHT LEFT LEFT RIGHT B A START

Video Games as Performance Art

May 17 – July 19, 2013

R&D

Parental Advisory: Some content may not be suitable for children.

PERFORMANCE ENHANCED

Performance art is often thought to center around the artist's body—improvising within parameters or working through a set of directions. What happens when the physical is eliminated or intentionally ignored in favor of a virtual experience. Does the physicality of a performance translate? Does it need to?

Video games manage to straddle the line between the physical and the virtual—set the stage for a dual performance of the player's subtle physical dance of fingers across a controller and the pixelated movements of digital bodies.

Following similar avenues as traditional performance art, video games set up a framework for acting and improvising. Players can work within these programmed parameters or some have elected to hack games and gaming platforms to set their own rules

Up Up Down Down Left Right Left Right B A Start highlights the actions of artists, programmers and players who choreograph their own performances—including you! From classic console games, to artist created worlds, these works invite viewers to see virtual and real worlds in a new light and hopefully with a little more performance.

Up Up Down Down Left Right Left Right B A Start, also known as the "Konami Code," is a cheat code for some video games that allows players to immediately gain hundreds of lives or unlock "Easter eggs"-special surprises or hidden game modes.
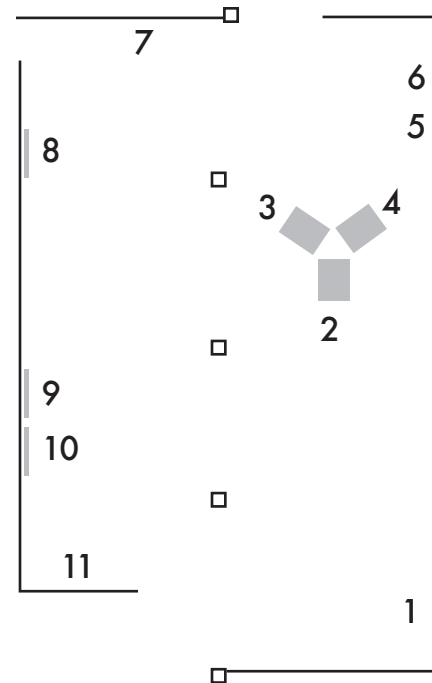
1. Paolo Pedercini
Welcome to the Desert of the Real, 2011
Machinima
This reverse propaganda video is a Machinima (video produced by documenting video game play) filmed with America's Army, the recruiting game produced by the United States Department of Defense. The text is from the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder checklist. Music by Pan Sonic.

2. SPACES Arcade
Contents:
Molleindustria (a.k.a. Paolo Pedercini)
*Faith Fighter*, 2008
Video game
Based upon the popular Street Fighter games of the 1980s and 90s, Faith Fighter pits prophets and dieties against one another in a bare-knuckle street brawl.

Molleindustria
Every Day the Same Dream, 2009
Video game
This game is about alienation and refusal of labor in middle-class America. The player has the option to continue to tread the well-worn paths, or wander off and see what happens.
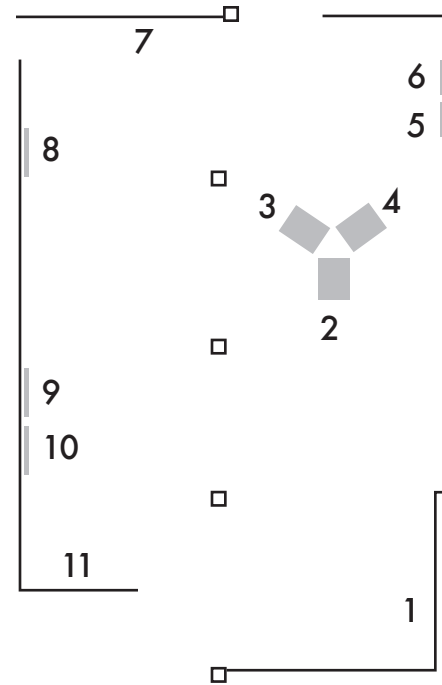
Pippin Barr
The Artist is Present, 2012
Video game
Based on the noted Marina Abramović at the Museum of Modern Art (2010), the player arrives at MoMA to attend the exhibition. After waiting in line for a ticket, the player then joins an interminable queue to get the opportunity to sit with the pixilated Abramović. Rather than a game of action, it is a game of patience that points toward the performances and frameworks that surround the "art."

Pippin Barr
Art Game, 2012
Video game
The game reenacts the situation of many studio artists who create and rely upon a curatorial system to provide value and commerce to their craft. Players create works and hope the curator's mercurial tastes lean their direction.

3. SPACES Arcade
Contents:
Pippin Barr
Mumble Indie Bungle, 2013
Video game package
Play the games your grandma might have bought you at a mall in Singapore by mistake! Experience the highs and lows of spying, gardening, dying, loathing, and gluing! These games were made to thwart traditional narrative game play.

The Mumble Indie Bungle was created in GameMaker for Mac and GameMaker: Studio. The font is Commodore 64 by Devin Cook.

Game package includes:
30 Flights of Loathing
Gurney
Proteas
World of Glue
Spy Parity

4. SPACES Arcade
Contents:
Knut Hybinette
Viking Series, 2013
Video game package
Live the chaotic life of a Viking in a magical world that is barely explicable. The rules of the game change with each level, and the game play is less about a narrative, and more about figuring out the game's internal logic.

Knut Hybinette + Troy Richards
Ripon, 2013
Video game
This is a series of installations integrating an original video game with large-scale digital prints that uses the setting of a violent dystopic society to upset the conventions of gaming culture. Named after and located in Ripon, Wisconsin a small town founded on the writings of the French Utopian writer Charles Fourier that would later become the birthplace for the Republican party, *Ripon* is meant as something more akin to "happenings" or events with the different iterations of the game played only once. Each is designed for multiple monitors and projections that allow up to ten people to simultaneously "play" the game. The digital prints depict the world of the game and surround the projections to flesh out the installation and provide an immersive experience.

The project's intent is to undermine the expectations of video games and engage the viewer/player in new and innovative ways. From the design perspective this is accomplished in three ways: you become less adept as the game progresses, you are de-centered, and you are mortal. With this design we hope to question the violence so often used as entertainment in video games and challenge the conventions of gaming utilizing a critical perspective that is possible in the context of art installation.

Wafaa Bilal
Virtual Jihadi, 2008
Video game
In the widely marketed video game *Quest for Saddam*, players fight stereotypical Iraqi foes and try to kill Saddam. Al Qaeda did its own take, creating an online video game using the structure of *Quest for Saddam* but adding a new "skin" to turn the game into a hunt for Bush: *The Night of Bush Capturing*. Now artist Wafaa Bilal has hacked the Al Qaeda version of the game to put his own more nuanced spin on this epic conflict.

In *The Night of Bush Capturing: A Virtual Jihadi*, Bilal casts himself as a suicide-bomber in the game. After learning of the real-life death of his brother in the war, he is recruited by Al Qaeda to join the hunt for Bush. This work is meant to bring attention to the vulnerability of Iraqi civilians to the travesties of the current war and racist generalizations and stereotypes as exhibited in games such as *Quest for Saddam*, along with vulnerability to recruitment by violent groups like Al Qaeda because of the U.S.'s failed strategy in securing Iraq. The work also aims to shed light on groups that traffic in crass and hateful stereotypes of Arab culture with games like *Quest for Saddam* and other media.

5. Wafaa Bilal
Domestic Tension: Day 30, 2007
Documentation of interactive performance

Iraqi-born Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension* took place in Chicago's FlatFile Galleries in 2007. The framework allowed viewers to log onto the internet to contact or "shoot" Bilal with paintball guns. Bilal's objective was to raise awareness of virtual war and privacy, or lack thereof, in the digital age. During the course of the exhibition, Bilal confined himself to the gallery space. Over the duration, people had 24-hour virtual access to the space via the Internet. They had the ability to watch Bilal and interact with him through a live web-cam and chat room. Viewers also had the option to shoot Bilal with a paintball gun, transforming the virtual experience into a very physical one. Bilal's self imposed confinement was designed to raise awareness about the life of the Iraqi people and the home confinement they face due to the both the violent and the virtual war they face on a daily basis. This sensational approach to the war is meant to engage people who may not be willing to engage in political dialogue through conventional means. *Domestic Tension* depicted the suffering of war not through human displays of dramatic emotion, but rather through engaging people in the sort of playful interactive video game with which they are familiar.

6. Wafaa Bilal
Domestic Tension: Days 1 and 15, 2007
Documentation of interactive performance

7. Dana Sperry
First Person Shooter or New Rider of the Apocalypse, 2006
video
This video documents the micro-performances conducted by video game players as they negotiate their virtual environments. Facial ticks, leans, and darting eyes betray the action on the screen that illuminates the player's face as she plays a first person shooter game.

8. Eva and Franco Mattes a.k.a. 0100101110101101.org
Synthetic Performances, 2009-10
Video documentation of performances
These works are being shown under a Creative Commons license and their inclusion does not indicate their endorsement of this exhibition.

The duo known as 0100101110101101.org worked extensively in the online gaming platform Second Life. Performed through their avatars constructed from their bodies and faces, these works invited others to join in the game performances from all over the world.

Videos include:
I can't find myself either, 2010
Performance in Second Life and Plymouth Art Centre, January 23, 2010.

I know that it's all a state of mind, 2010
Performance in Second Life and Plymouth Art Centre.

Medication Valse, 2009
Presented by PERFORMA09 (New York) and Odyssey (Second Life).

9-10. Eva and Franco Mattes a.k.a. 0100101110101101.org
Reenactments, 2009-10
Video documentation of performances
Eva and Franco Mattes employed Second Life to recreate seminal performance art pieces. By domesticating these once "wild" actions, are removing the physicality of performances that depend upon gut reactions—Chris Burden being shot in the art, or Vito Acconci masturbating beneath a wooden ramp—the works become something else while acknowledging the theater and facades of re-creation or historical documentation. Can these works be experienced vicariously, and have they primarily been experienced vicariously through performance documentation?

Videos include:
Reenactment of Marina Abramović *and Ulay's Imponderabilia*, 2007-10

Reenactment of Gilbert&George's The Singing Sculpture, 2007-10

Reenactment of Vito Acconci's Seedbed, 2007-10

Reenactment of Chris Burden's Shoot, 2007-10

Reenactment of Valie Export and Weibel's Tapp und Tastkino, 2007-10

11. Mary Flanagan
[borders: chichen itza], 2010
American writer Henry David Thoreau promoted forays into the world to experience its bounty and characteristics through the simple act of walking. Thoreau avoided highways, choosing instead to wander with indirectness in order to understand the spiritual possibilities of the landscape: "Two or three hours' walking will carry me to as strange a country as I expect…"

[borders] is video documentation of a series of such walks, conducted virtually in popular, shared online multi-user worlds. The rendered landscape is beautiful and hypnotic where visitors are transported directly into Thoreau's walking shoes, "glimps(ing) Elysium, but only as he walked along, surveying the boundaries and divisions…"

In *[borders]*, walking the periphery of programmed landscapes exposes inherent glitches of the virtual by testing its edges. The walker may become trapped in stones, forced underwater or pushed teetering at the edge of the world—exposing the algorithmic nature of landscape rendering and its cut-off points. Thus, this border-walk dwells on the limitations of virtual property and the way in which behavior and point of view are affected when intersecting with these invisible disruptions in the seamless world, exposing its constructed nature.

Mary Flanagan
[borders: la rocca], 2010

ARTIST BIOS

Pippin Barr is currently affiliated with the Institute of Digital Games at the University of Malta. He holds a PhD and an MSc in Computer Science from Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand) and he has taught courses in experimental interaction and programming for game designers at ITU Copenhagen. Barr's games have been featured in many online forums including Gamasutra, Rock, Paper, Shotgun, Buzzfeed, The Verge, Killscreen, and Edge and he has exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Iraqi-born artist **Wafaa Bilal**, an Assistant Arts Professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, is known internationally for his on-line performative and interactive works provoking dialogue about international politics and internal dynamics. For his most recent project, the *3rdi*, Bilal had a camera surgically implanted on the back of his head to spontaneously transmit images to the web 24 hours a day – a statement on surveillance, the mundane and the things we leave behind. Bilal's 2010 work *…And Counting* similarly used his own body as a medium. His back was tattooed with a map of Iraq and dots representing Iraqi and US casualties – the Iraqis in invisible ink seen only under a black light. Bilal's 2007 installation, *Domestic Tension*, also addressed the Iraq war. Bilal spent a month in a Chicago gallery with a paintball gun that people could shoot at him over the internet. The Chicago Tribune called it "one of the sharpest works of political art to be seen in a long time" and named him 2008 Artist of the Year. Bilal's work is constantly informed by the experience of fleeing his homeland and existing simultaneously in two worlds – his home in the "comfort zone" of the U.S. and his consciousness of the "conflict zone" in Iraq. Bilal suffered repression under Saddam Hussein's regime and fled Iraq in 1991 during the first Gulf War. After two years in refugee camps in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, he came to the U.S. where he graduated from the University of New Mexico and then obtained an MFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 2008 City Lights published *Shoot an Iraqi: Art, Life and Resistance Under the Gun* about Bilal's life and the Domestic Tension project.

Mary Flanagan's collection of over 20 major works range from game-inspired systems to computer viruses, embodied interfaces to interactive texts; these works are exhibited internationally. As a scholar interested in how human values are in play across technologies and systems, Flanagan has written more than 20 critical essays and chapters on games, empathy, gender and digital representation, art and technology, and responsible design. Her three books in English include Critical Play (2009) with MIT Press. Flanagan founded the Tiltfactor game research laboratory in 2003, where researchers study and make social games, urban games, and software in a rigorous theory/practice environment. Flanagan's work has been supported by grants and commissions including The British Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the ACLS, and the National Science Foundation. Flanagan is the Sherman Fairchild Distinguished Professor in Digital Humanities at Dartmouth College.

Knut LSG Hybinette was born in Enkoping, Sweden and is an Assistant Professor at The Cleveland Institute of Art where he teaches game design and digital foundations. He works in multiple mediums including game design, photography, animation, video and sound. Knut has exhibited his work at galleries in Sweden, Portugal, Germany and the United Sates. Additionally, Knut has been published in the American publication Oculus and others. In 2003, he was sponsored/commissioned by January to create a portfolio of the Night Chicago. Knut has shown a series of photographs that tell us of the process of aging through examining each individual story at Arts Atrium Gallery in New York and at Jet Artworks Gallery. He received his Master of Fine Art in Photography/Animation from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL and his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from the University of Georgia, Athens.

Paolo Pedercini is a Pittsburgh-based artist who teaches experimental game design and media production courses at Cernegie Mellon University's School of Art. He is well-known for his radical video-gaming project Molleindustria. He received his M.F.A. in Integrated Electronic Arts from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and his B.A. in Visual Arts and Multimedia Communications from Libera Accademia di Belle Arti, Brescia Italy (LABA).

Troy Richards is an Associate Professor of Art at the University of Delaware. He has had solo exhibitions at Thomas Robertello Gallery in Chicago, Grand Arts in Kansas City, Duncan and Miller Gallery in Washington D.C., and a long-term installation at Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia, PA. His work has been included in group exhibits in New York City at P.S.1, White Columns, Socrates Sculpture Park, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, LFL Gallery and Gallery 67 among others. His work is included in the collections of the Cranbrook Art Museum and the Queens Museum of Art. He has participated in a number of residencies including the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Program and the Artists in the Marketplace Program at the Bronx Museum of Art.

Dana Sperry is an Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Digital Media at Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio. His work has been featured at Gallery 1708, Richmond, Virginia; the Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, New York; Gardenfresh Gallery, Chicago, Illinois; North Harris College, Houston, Texas; Southeastern Contemporary Art Gallery, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana; Houston Community College, Houston, Texas; Society for Contemporary Photography, Kansas City, Missouri; and Front Room Gallery, Bloomington, Indiana.

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