Puppetmasters and Performance

Jane McGonigal
Performance Studies @ UC Berkeley
Pervasive game design @ 42 Entertainment
“If you’re the puppetmasters, then what does that make the players?”
– alternate reality gaming Q & A @ E3 2005
The official puppetmaster seal

The Beast
alternate reality game (2001)
Confessions of a puppetmaster

The Go Game
pervasive urban superhero gaming for cell phones (January 2002)
Confessions of a puppetmaster

“Hey all you urban superheroes! Drop your pants and dance, ‘cause it’s time to play the Go Game. When you’re ready for your first mission, press GO.”
Confessions of a puppetmaster

“Drop your pants and dance!”
The puppetmaster-player dynamic

PMs create scripts for performance...

A game system delivers the script to players...

Players wield ultimate interpretive power over those scripts...

…and live action gameplay allows for maximum interpretive freedom.
3 High Performance Games

The Organum Playtest (2005)
(multiplayer)

Twister Cage Match (2004)
(moderately multiplayer)

I Love Bees (2004)
(massively multiplayer)
High Performance Gaming

Super Mario 64
for the Nintendo DS mobile handheld networked gaming device (April 2005)
High Performance Gaming

[VIDEO]
High Performance Gaming

“The challenge of ‘perform — or else’ defines our age of global performance. [...] the whole world’s been framed as a high performance test site.”

- Jon McKenzie’s Perform or Else
High Performance Gaming

World of Warcraft
Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (January 2005)
High Performance Gaming

[IMAGES]
High Performance Gaming

“I love a good protest: it’s the kind of roleplaying that almost anyone can pull off … angry.” – WoW gamer
High Performance Gaming

“...There’s also the very entertaining sideshow that a good protest leaves in its wake ... the spin, the bannings, the spin on the bannings, the protest against the bannings, the spin on the protest against the bannings, ad infinitum.”
Producing high performance play

- technological performance
- physical challenge
- mobility
- networking and co-conspiracy
- spectacle and the desire to be seen
- player-generated media
Producing high performance play

- persistent world
- collaborative environment
- spatial and material affordances
- massively multiplayer
- live designer feedback and presence (GM = PM)
- pervasive performance
- built-in visibility, audience
Performance meets Gameplay

#1 Performance is scary, games are safe... and gameplay makes performance feel safer.
The ORGANUM Playtest (2005)
The ORGANUM Playtest (2005)
5 **Kinds** of Gameplay Performance

1. Talent-based performance (art)
2. Master performance (interaction)
3. Expressive performance (identity)
4. Spectacular performance (attention)
5. Theatrical performance ("as if")
#2 All gameplay is performance, all gameplay is theatrical... and theatrical “as if” improves player performance.
Performance *meets* Gameplay

#2 All gameplay is performance, all gameplay is theatrical... *and theatrical “as if” improves player performance.*

#3 Performance makes game systems legible... *and games that are legible are more social and audience-generating.*
Twister Cage Match (2004)
Twister Cage Match (2004)
Twister Cage Match (2004)

[IMAGE GALLERY]
I Love Bees (2004)

9,000 real-world players + 600,000 online players collaborated to:
- investigate the mystery: “Who hacked www.ilovebees.com, and why?”
- use GPS data and technology to locate and answer 40,000 payphone calls in 50 states & 8 countries
- compile, reconstruct and interpret a distributed 6 hour radio drama divided into 15-second fragments
HALT - MODULE CORE HEMORRHAGE

Control has been yielded to the SYSTEM PERIL DISTRIBUTED REFLEX.

This medium is classified, and has a STRONG INTRUSIVE INCLINATION.

In 4 days, network throttling will erode.

In 18 days this medium will metastasize.

COUNTDOWN TO WIDE AWAKE AND PHYSICAL:

31:11:00:54:544

Make your decisions accordingly.

FAQ

Q: What happened to this site?
A: No idea. Help me out here.

[VIEW HACKED WEB PAGES]
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I Love Bees (2004)

[RADIO DRAMA AUDIO]
[LIVE PHONE CALLS AND MISSION GALLERY]
...for more confessions of a puppetmaster:

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