

Gamers ♥ Performance

Perform or Else: A Workshop on Extroverted Gameplay Digital Games Research Association 2005 (Vancouver)

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Vectors of High Performance Gameplay

All gameplay is performance, and all gamers are performers. But some gamers adopt unexpected strategies to make their gameplay more extroverted, more attention-generating, more compulsively watchable, more theatrical—in other words, more *high performance*.

Here are six vectors for transforming ordinary digital gameplay into high performance gameplay:

- ♥ *Embodied performance*: testing the physical limits of your body
- ♥ *Cybernetic performance*: showing off your mastery of an interactive system
- ♥ *Spectacular performance*: generating attention and attracting an audience by any means necessary
- ♥ *Expressive performance*: broadcasting your personal identity
- ♥ *Talent-based performance*: using your body as an artistic instrument
- ♥ *Dramatic performance*: visibly making-believe, acting “as if” the game stakes are real

What kind of high performance gamer are you?

The following performance gameplay inventory system is based on actual high performance gameplay strategies currently at play in digital games culture.

EMBODIED PERFORMANCE

Have you ever:

- Played *Super Mario* on the Nintendo DS while skydiving at terminal velocity?
- Competed at a *Counter-Strike* LAN party with one arm tied behind your back?
- Juggled three bowling pins while completing a master level *DDR* song?
- Tried your best not to fall over during the standing *Katamari Damacy* drinking game?

In other words: **Have you ever made a digital game MORE physical than it was meant to be?**

CYBERNETIC PERFORMANCE

Have you ever:

- Placed *Tetris* blocks so fluidly and intuitively that someone looking over your shoulder said, “Wow, how on earth are you doing that?”

- Made your *Soul Calibur* avatar dance like Usher, using combo moves so complicated that only someone who knows the game inside out could dream them up and execute them so smoothly?
- Completed a 2:14:58 speed run of *Half Life 2* using collaboratively compiled tricks, shortcuts and optimization methods?
- Staged a *World of Warcraft* naked gnome protest in the one spot that could cut off all economic transactions *and* hit the MMORPG server at its weakest point?

In other words: **Have you ever shown off your complete mastery of an interactive system? Have you become “one” with the machine?**

SPECTACULAR PERFORMANCE

Have you ever:

- Played *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* following all the traffic laws, making your roommates bust out laughing when they noticed what you were up to?
- Trashed talked your *CounterStrike* opponents at the top of your lungs at a LAN party, so that everyone would pay attention to *your* game?
- Publicly rocked *Ms. Pac Man* in your underwear at a No Pants Retro VideoGame Tournament, so that photographs of your scandalous gameplay became a blogging meme of the week?
- Flash mobbed a city bus with PSPs to create a public, mobile *Lumines* LAN party?

In other words: **Have you ever used unusual or subversive gameplay to attract and engage an audience?**

TALENT-BASED PERFORMANCE

Have you ever:

- Invited a friend to bring his own guitar to the arcade, to jam with you while you play *Drum Mania*?
- Harmonized with a beat boxer, an opera singer, a gospel vocalist, and a tuvan throat singer, at a *Karaoke Revolution* LAN party?
- Figured out how to throw some completely unexpected bhangra, breakdancing or ballet moves into *AntiGrav* for Eyetoy?
- Added dramatic tension to *Halo 2* by broadcasting your rendition of revenge soliloquies from Macbeth and Hamlet, orating through your XBox Live headset?

In other words: **Have you ever used a game to unleash your traditional performing arts talent?**

EXPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE

Have you ever:

- Simulated and created photo albums of your own real-life friends, families and roommates in *The Sims*?
- Made a political t-shirt for your avatar in *Second Life*, in order to inject some of your personal beliefs into the game world?
- Spent hours brainstorming possible *World of Warcraft* gamertags, trying to come up with one that would really say something about you as a person and as a player?

- Spoken your thoughts into the tiny microphone on the *Donkey Konga* bongo drums, instead of just clapping?

In other words: **Have you ever used a game space as an opportunity to broadcast your real-world identity?**

DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE

Have you ever:

- Looked over the shoulder of someone playing *Wario Ware Twisted* and cheered as if the weight of the world rested on a successful outcome?
- Given your *City of Heroes* allies an in-game pep talk about the life or death importance of your next collaborative superhero mission?
- Geeked out with the *Pikmin* manual so you could understand and explain the fiction to your friends inside out?

In other words: **Have you ever emphasized the make-believe aspects of a game to create greater social immersion?**