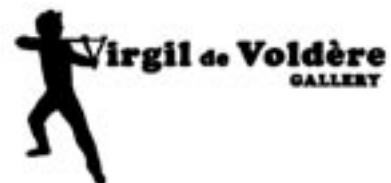my life is a vast ghetto littered with neotolkien elves, eight-barrel rocket launchers, endless hordes of faceless muscle-bound goons, armor-cum-lingerie, the seven artifacts of the evil overlord, a billion overacted cut scenes, terrorists-du-jour, neogeiger aliens, hovertanks, troglodytes, vampires, and +7 potions of healing; all set in a neo-post-industrial steam-cyberpunk castle with teleportals and elevators and platform puzzles in every room. there i am an undercover half-ogre sorcerer carrying a vorpal six-barrel chain gun while riding a harley into the roman coliseum to battle a cyborg lion controlled by a ghost emperor, which is actually a time traveling nanobot AI, battling for domination over a fictional kingdom that exists only in the minds of mutant siamese twins.

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Brody Condon
Born Mexico 1974, American

Education:

2002	M.F.A. University of California at San Diego
1997	B.F.A. Sculpture, University of Florida, Gainesville

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

2006	*Children of the Apocalypse*, Museum Het Domain, Netherlands (Nov 2006)
	Worship, Virgil de Voldere Gallery, NY
2004	*Untitled War*, Machine Projects, Los Angeles
2003	*Waco Resurrection*, (with C-level), The Kitchen, NY
2002	*Adam Killer*, Electronic Orphanage and C-Level, Los Angeles

Selected Group Exhibitions:

2006	*Next Level*, Stedelijk Museum CS, Amsterdam (Mar 2006)
2005	*Breaking and Entering*, Pace Wildenstein Gallery, NY
	Artbase 101, New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY
	Dump, Bergen Kunsthall, Norway
	Just Do It, (with A. M. Schleiner and Joane Leandre) Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz, Austria
	Alt+Ctrl, Bealle Center for the Arts, Irvine, CA
	Artists on Military Spots, Galerie Husstege, den' Bosch, Netherlands
	Living Apart Together, OdaPark Museum, Netherlands
	Ars Electronica: Honorary Mention (with C-level), Linz, Austria
	Bienal de Video y Nuevos Medios, Santiago, Chile
	Self Defense, Sweeney Gallery, University of California, Riverside
	State of Play, (with c-level) Australian Center for the Moving Image, Melbourne
	Living Apart Together, OdaPark Museum, Netherlands
	Gamescenes, Torino, Italy
	Brussells Art Fair, represented by Virgil de Voldere, Brussells
	ARCO Art Fair, represented by Virgil de Voldere, Mexico City
2004	*Whitney Biennial 2004*, (with A.M. Schliener and Joane Leandre), Whitney Museum of American Art, NY
	Bang the Machine, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco
	FIAC Art Fair, Represented by Virgil de Voldere, Paris
	Media City Seoul 2004, (with A.M. Schliener and Joane Leandre), Seoul
	Rotterdam Film Festival, (with C-level), Rotterdam, Netherlands
	Cult Classic, (with C-level), Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, Australia
	PEAM 2004, Pescara, Italy
	Join Us (with C-level), Grand Arts, Kansas City, KS
2003	*Killer Instinct*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY
	Whitney Artport, http://www.artport.whitney.org, November
	Method, Bank, Los Angeles
	Version>03 Technotopia vs. Technopocolypse, Chicago Cultural Center/MCA Chicago
	<ALT> DigitalMedia, American Museum of the Moving Image, Astoria, NY
	While You Were Playing, Flux Factory, Queens, NY
	Exhibit4:play, (with Anne-Marie Schliener and Joane Leandre), The Digital Hub, Dublin
	Computerspiele von Kunstlerinnen, Hartware-Projekte, Dortmund, Germany
	Fragged, John Paynter Gallery, Newcastle, Australia
	Get Rid of Yourself,(with A.M. Schliener and Joane Leandre), ACC Galerie, Weimar, Germany
	Get Rid of Yourself,(with Anne-Marie Schliener and Joane Leandre), Halle 14, Liepzig, Germany
	L'oading, Gallerio d'Arte Contemporaneo di Siracusa, Italy
	Machinista, Permian Media Art Festival, West Ural, Russia and www.machinista.ru
2002	*Select Parks,* www.selectparks.net
	New Fangle, (with Anne-Marie Schliener) Herbst Exhibition Hall, San Francisco
	Flauma: Series for Non-Architecture, Space Untitled, NY

Selected Residencies and Grants:

2006   Creative Capital Grant
2005   Interpolis N.V. Grant
                  Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten Residency, Amsterdam
2003   Franklin Furnace Future of the Present Grant
2002   CAA Grant
                  Visiting Artist, Central Nationality University, Beijing
2001   Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture Residency

Selected Bibliography:

2006   *GAMING — Essays on Algorithmic Culture,* Alex Galloway, University of Minnesota Press (May 2006)
                  Turning Games Into a New Kind of Art, Roberta Smith, New York Times, Jan 21
                  Catalog: *Breaking and Entering*, Pace Wildenstein Gallery
2005   *At the Edge of Art*, Jon Ippolito and Joline Blais, Thames and Hudson
                  New Media Art, Mark Tribe and Reena Jana, Taschen
                  Arte Digitale, Sergio Messina, Rolling Stone magazine Italy, May
                  Catalog: *Living Apart Together*, OdaPark Museum, Netherlands
                  Catalog: *Just Do It*, Lentos Kunstmuseum, Austria
                  Catalog: *Ars Electronica*, Austria
                  Art and Games, John Rossignol, Edge Magazine UK, 143
                  The Xbox Auteurs, Clive Thompson, New York Times Magazine
                  Making Sense of a Mod World, Jesse Ashlock, Res Magazine, May/June
                  Game Art, GEE Magazine (Germany), Danny Kringiel, March
2004   *Internet Art,* Rachel Greene, Thames and Hudson World of Art Series
                  Frag or Be Fragged, Joshua Bearman, LA Weekly, July
                  Ha Visto Pac-Man?, Warren St. John, Artnet magazine, Anno 10, No. 7
                  Brody Condon: Static Myths, Futures in Play, Rebecca Cannon, Artphoto magazine, July
                  arts numeriques a New York, Dominique Moulon, Images magazine France, No. 5
                  The "Velvet Strike" Underground, Jennifer Buckendorff, Salon.com, May 4
                  Game Resurrects Waco Tragedy, Jeff Douglas, AP newswire, July 3
                  Ha Visto Pac-Man?, Warren St. John, Artnet magazine, Anno 10, No. 7
                  Brody Condon: Static Myths Futures in Play, Rebecca Cannon, Artphoto magazine, July
                  Review: Bang the Machine, Adam Chapman, Intelligent Agent 4
                  Digitial art finds more than joy in joysticks, James Sullivan, San Francisco Chronicle, Jan 22
                  Play Time for Grown Ups, Sean Dodson, The Guardian (UK), Feb 19
                  Un tissu de vérité pour mailler le virtuel, Liberation France, Maria Lechner, Jan 30
2003   *Digital Art*, Christiane Paul, Thames and Hudson World of Art Series
                  Playing for Respect, Alex Galloway, Artforum, December
                  Video Game Art, The 3rd Year in Ideas Issue, Deborah Solomon, NY Times Magazine
                  Online Games Grab Grim Reality, Matt Mirapaul, New York Times, September 17th
                  Out of the Box, Ethan LaCroix, Time Out New York, Issue 41
                  Interview with Brody Condon, Jonah Brucker Cohen, www.rhizome.org
                  C-level Remebers Waco, Film Maker Magazine, Fall
                  L'OADING - videogiochi geneticamente modificati, NOEMA arts, www.noemlab.com
                  L'OADING, (review) Random: novita dal mondo della net.art, Jan 13th, www.random.exibart.com
                  L'oading, genetically modified videogames, (review) nueral.it, Jan 21st, www.nueral.it
2002   *Machinimamania!*, Wired Magazine, November
                  Replay 2002 - A Games Odyssey, ZDF television documentary, Berlin
                  Make Love, Not War Games, Brad King, Wired News, June 8th www.wired.com
                  Adam Killer, Lo-Fi Net Art, Update 6, low-fi.org.uk
                  Videogiochi d'arte, Alessandro Ludovico, Neural Online, November www.neural.it
                  Adam Killer, Select Parks, Julian Oliver, December, www.selectparks.net

DeResFX.Kill(KarmaPhysics < Ram Dass); 2005
Self playing computer game modification (Unreal 2003), custom computer

Karma Physics < Ram Dass is a modification of the bloody science fiction first person shooter computer game Unreal 2003. When plugged into a projector/moniter and power, a small custom pearl computer automatically starts and displays the work.

Karma Physics < Ram Dass consists of a stable viewer camera focused on several twitching and burning 3D game portraits of the 1960's and 70's new age spiritual figure and LSD guru Ram Dass (AKA Richard Alpert). The convulsions of Ram Dass are controlled by the original game's Karma Ragdoll real-time physics system, generally used to simulate the physical dynamics of game character death.

DeResFX.Kill(KarmaPhysics < Elvis); 2004
Self playing computer game modification (Unreal 2003), custom computer

Karma Physics < Elvis is a modification of the bloody science fiction first person shooter computer game Unreal 2003. When plugged into a projector/moniter and power, a small custom pink computer automatically starts and displays the work. The viewer is pulled slowly through an infinite pink fog filled with floating, twitching bodies of Elvis Presley. The convulsions of Elvis are controlled by the original game's Karma Ragdoll real-time physics system - generally used to simulate the physical dynamics of game character death.

NEED FOR SPEED (CARGO CULT), 2005
Cast Polyurethane
2' wide x 6' high x 11' long

Need for Speed is a Lamborghini Countach from 1985 made in cast urethane branches. The original 3D model for the car was extracted from the popular racing simulation Need for Speed. The term "cargo cult" refers to the history of low tech, ritualized simulation of military aircraft by indigenous South Pacific tribes in the mid 20th century.

650 POLYGON JOHN CARMACK, 2004
Version 2.0
CNC Milled Polyurethane, Archival Inkjet Prints
108cm x 56cm x 65cm

650 Polygon John Carmack (Version 2.0) is a low polygon likeness of the famous game engine programmer John Carmack of ID Software. The sculpture is an appropriated portrait of Carmack from the game Quake III, CNC milled in polyurethane, and textured with hundreds of hand placed inket decals.

UNTITLED WAR, 2004
Performance (6 Deathmatch Rounds, 2 hours)

Untitled War was a performative event where fantasy role-playing, historical reinactment, extreme sports, and computer games collided within the confines of the fortress that is the Los Angeles gallery Machine Project. 12 warriors from various historical periods from the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) endured fighting in a round based First Person Shooter Game style for 2 hours. Live camera views similar to the spectator camera views found in online FPS games were projected next door at the Echo Park Film Center, creating a game-like viewing experience for those outside the space. Music was provided at the event by the experimental pop band The Winks.

WACO RESURRECTION, 2003
A C-level project
Digital sound and images, 3D models, C++ code, Torque engine, custom electronics
http://waco.c-level.org/

As predicted by his Branch Davidian followers, Vernon Howell (aka David Koresh) has returned to Mt. Carmel for final battle. Revisiting the 1993 Waco, Texas episode, gamers enter the mind and form of a resurrected David Koresh through custom headgear, a voice-activated, hard-plastic 3D skin. Each player enters the network as a Koresh and must defend the Branch Davidian compound against internal intrigue, skeptical civilians, rival Koresh and the inexorable advance of government agents. Ensnared in the custom "Koresh skin", players are bombarded with a soundstream of government "psy-ops", FBI negotiators, the voice of God and the persistent clamor of battle. Players voice messianic texts drawn from the book of revelation, wield a variety of weapons from the Mount Carmel cache and influence the behavior of both followers and opponents by radiating a charismatic aura.

Waco incorporates elements of subjective documentary and speculative fiction with new interactive technologies to create a visceral gaming experience focused on extreme psycho-social phenomena. The series hopes to present both player and viewer with immersive apocalyptic experiences that prompt reconsideration of the phenomenal possibilities inherent in ideological conflict.

VELVET-STRIKE, 2002
Anne-Marie Schliener, Joane Leandre, Brody Condon
Online Intervention/Performance (Counter-Strike), Website

Velvet-Strike is a collection of images used as a graffiti "sprays" in the violent multiplayer spaces of the popular counter-terrorism game Counter-Strike. Velvet-Strike was conceptualized during the beginning of Bush's "War on Terrorism". We invited individuals to submit their own "sprays" relating to this theme. Velvet-Strike is exhibited as a website and DVD documentation, and has been exhibited recently at the 2004 Whitney Biennial, as well as at numerous exhibitions internationally.

Website:
http://www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike/

SUICIDE SOLUTION, 2004
DVD Documentation of In-Game Performance, 19 min.

Suicide Solution is DVD documentation collected over the last year of committing suicide in over 50 first and third person shooter games.

installation view (with need for speed)

WORSHIP, 2001
Online game performance (Anarchy Online)
Edition of 10 + 1AP DVD documentation. 1 hour.

Worship is ritualistic worship performed within the confines of the 3D massively multiplayer online game Anarchy Online. The player character, now facing outside the screen towards the viewer, repetatively prostrates itself while other online game players continue their attempts to operate normally within the set of rules defined by the game. Worship is shown publicly as a live online game performance that is later documented on DVD for collection.

ADAM KILLER, 1999-2001
game modification (Half-Life)
DVD documentation of play (10 min), Edition of 10 + 1AP

"A gibbed dissent on a Calvin Klein billboard, Brody seeds his prolific practice of game data refurbishments at the very ramp of the first-person shooter's most popular taboo - wanton and hapless representative killing. His post-punk operation on the first person camera leaves us without a stable ground for mournful debate on the genre's dubious preoccupations, rather positions the first-person shooter as a laboratory for experimenting with dying, and even laughing about it." -Julian Oliver, www.selectparks.net, 2000

An iconic example of early computer game modification art, Adam Killer is a series of modifications of the popular first person shooter game Half-Life. The player/performer navigates through a game level filled with multiple copies of the same character being "idle" on a white plane. As the characters are mutilated with different weapons, an exploited glitch in creates a harsh trailing effect. This turns the environment into a chaotic mess of bloody, fractured textures. Adam Killer is disseminated as DVD documention of game play.

ARTFORUM

Playing for respect: Alexander Galloway on video games in 2003
ArtForum, Dec, 2003 by Alexander Galloway

FORMS OF MEDIA that have originated in the past one hundred years have appeared to abide by a kind of "thirty-year rule" of development, starting with the invention of a medium and ending with its effective operation and widespread appearance in culture at large. Film, for instance, was born at the turn of the last century and blossomed into its classic form in the '30s; the Internet, after a long period of relatively hidden growth during the '70s and '80s, erupted into popular use in the mid-'90s. Today, one can certainly say that video games have followed this arc: The primitive pastime of the '70s, after acquiring a geek-boy stereotype in the '80s, became fully mainstream in 2003. Even though no major new consoles were released, and only a dozen or so A-list games, one might go so far as to point to the past year as the beginning of a golden age for video games.

An infusion of creative developers is stretching the boundaries of gaming: Auteurs in the field, such as Hideo Kojima, creator of the Metal Gear series, and Civilization's Sid Meier, have helped define new modes of expression within the medium. In Meier's work, the gamer is not simply playing this or that historical simulation but is instead learning, internalizing, and becoming intimate with a massive, multipart algorithm. To play the game means to play the code of the machine. In the realm of narrative games, buzz surrounding the forthcoming Half-Life 2 indicates that it may be as groundbreakingly sophisticated as its predecessor, already winning Best of Show at this year's E3 gaming conference. At the same time, games in 2003 mapped themselves onto real-world situations in unprecedented ways. For example, American shooter games were challenged on the world scene by foreign-made ones like Special Force, a first-person shooter published by the so called Central Internet Bureau of Hizbullah and based on the armed Islamic movement in south Lebanon. This jihad game is a rather literal role reversal of the sort of military scenarios depicted in last year's US government-issued game, America's Army. When it comes to propaganda, it appears that turnabout is fair play.

Of course, gaming still resides in a distinctly lowbrow corner of contemporary culture, not yet deemed--or scrutinized as--an art form. The benefit of this neglect is that one may approach video games today as a type of beautifully undisturbed processing of contemporary life, as yet unmarred by overwrought analyses. That age of innocence may be ending, however, as more rigorous consideration emerges; this fall marked the full induction of video games into traditional academic discourse with three new weighty books on the subject: an unparalleled textbook on game design called Rules of Play (MIT Press), a collection of dialogues called Re:Play--Game Design and Game Culture (Peter Lang Publishing), and the helpful but perhaps too presumptively titled Video Game Theory Reader (Routledge). The critical attention is still fresh enough to yield insights instead of cliches, and one hopes these serious treatments will usher out the current dominant literary form: dot-com-era memoirs.

Due respect for gaming and its aesthetic potential is also burgeoning in exhibitions. If digital art in the late '90s was concerned mostly with networks on the one hand and software applications on the other, then the past year signaled the ascent of games as an artist's medium. This past spring, gaming got its second great New York show (the first being etoy's game Toywar, which went up at Postmasters in 2000). "INSTALL.EXE," the first American show from the Barcelona-based duo JODI, arrived at Eyebeam after stops in Basel and Berlin. JODI works with computers in the same way that Dan Sandin works with video or Raymond Queneau worked with words--irreverently manipulating a medium at its most fundamental level. The centerpiece of the Eyebeam show was % My Desktop, 2002, a large four-channel projection with a simple pretext: Screw with the icons on a typical computer desktop so violently that they become interesting to watch. The chaotic desktop-as-medium engendered half repulsion, half rapt fascination. JODI'S survey also featured a series of games from the last several years. With SOD, 1999, JODI established the standard for what is known today as the artist's "game mod" (short for "modification," but in JODI'S case, destruction is more like it). They continue to make their own games as well, crafting the ultraretro JET SET WILLY Variations [C] 1984, 2002, and the ultramodern UNTITLED GAME, 1996-2001. Topping off the year in gaming, this month the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York presents "Killer Instinct," which includes game artists Brody Condon and Paul Johnson, among others. The show aims to bring games to life, taking them off the screen and into more painterly and sculptural iterations.

The New Wave was new once, and so was new media, but as Jean-Luc Godard wrote in 1965, after having made a half dozen of his best films, "I await the end of Cinema with optimism." Many of those artists who awaited the end of the Internet with optimism are now finding inspiration in the medium of the video game.

Alexander Galloway is assistant professor of media ecology at New York University,

September 17, 2003

Online Games Grab Grim Reality
By MATTHEW MIRAPAUL

NEW YORK As flames crackled and the wind howled through a gash in the skyscraper's wall, a gray-suited businessman wandered in a daze through the smoke. Unable to find an escape route, he suddenly strode toward the sky and leaped. This appalling scene appears neither in print nor on film but in a computer game, "9-11 Survivor," that was briefly available this summer on the Internet. Using a mouse, players could move through an animated, three-dimensional rendering of a burning World Trade Center office. Ultimately one might perish in the fire, opt to jump like the businessman or, if concealed stairs were discovered, flee to safety. "9-11 Survivor" provoked an immediate outcry on the Internet. Infuriated e-mail correspondents accused the game's makers of lacking taste and decency and exploiting a tragedy. The game depicts only one scene, and although an online description made it seem as if a full product were still coming, "9-11 Survivor" was never planned for commercial release. It was created as an art-class project by three students at the University of California at San Diego, John Brennan, Mike Caloud and Jeff Cole. They said their goal was to reinterpret a historic moment by transplanting it to the medium with which they were most familiar: computer games. Inured to the distant televised images of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, they hoped that an immersive, interactive version would restore an immediacy to the day's horrors. Cole, who examined photographs to reconstruct the scene, said, "The more I delved into it, the more personal it became." Computer and video games once mostly featured futuristic gladiators and soldiers of olden days. But as better graphics technology has made games more realistic-looking, digital artists have been using 3-D game environments to recreate real places and simulate recent events. In the process they are turning what has been a platform for pure fantasy into a medium for social realism. At the very least, the violent action at the heart of many games accurately reflects the world that game players confront when they step away from their screens. Digital games appeal to artists for several reasons. Their mass appeal makes them a target for tweaking in much the same manner that a soup can was a subject for Andy Warhol's paintbrush. The opportunity to imagine and build an entire virtual universe can be compelling. And game play generates a live performance with a bonus: Audience participation is required. Some artists construct games from scratch, while others develop modifications to existing commercial releases. "Survivor 9-11," for instance, is like a skin slipped over the computerized skeleton of "Unreal Tournament 2003," a top-selling combat title. Brody Condon, an artist in Los Angeles and the teacher of the experimental game-design class that spawned "9-11 Survivor," said game modifications were rapidly evolving into a new populist art form. He said artists and game enthusiasts were naturally inclined to use them to depict the world, including culturally significant places and events. People who make such modifications "probably don't go to museums," Condon said. "They're not going to paint." But he added: "They have this immediately accessible tool for cultural criticism, and it has an immediate method of dissemination, which is the Internet. That's enticing." High-tech recreations of archaeological landmarks like Stonehenge and the Colosseum in Rome are no longer news at this stage of digital history. But for many artists, adding game-play elements to a virtual reconstruction can convert a preservationist exercise into an involving aesthetic experience. Rachel Greene, co-curator of "Killer Instinct," a game-art exhibition that will open on Dec. 12 at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in Manhattan, said: "Games allow you to move through space and assume a personality, whether it's heroic or one of a victim. Those are powerful psychological tools, especially when artists want to connect them to real-world events."

The New York Times

2003: THE 3rd ANNUAL YEAR IN IDEAS
Video-Game Art
December 14, 2003, Sunday

By Deborah Solomon (NYT)

You may not think of video games as art, at least not in the same way that a painting by Picasso is art. Yet high-brows have always nursed a secret passion for low forms, if only to keep their taste from going stale, and video games are the latest pop phenomenon to be upgraded from economy to museum class. This year, several games were created expressly as objets d'art, rather than as commercial ventures, and academics published books with suitably dense thoughts on ''gaming.'' In much the same way that Warhol swiped imagery from cartoons and advertisements, many young artists today see video games as the definitive pop experience, a form to cannibalize and critique.

Artists who favor the game mode are a curiously solemn bunch. Tellingly, three students at the University of California at San Diego courted controversy last summer with their ''9-11 Survivor,'' a mock computer game set amid the crumbling twin towers. Players assume the role of victim, running through burning hallways and even leaping from windows. If that sounds like an exercise in underdeveloped undergraduate thinking, the project's creators concede a taste for theory. Their goal, they say, is to counter the deadening repetition of televised images of 9/11 mainly by adding the format of interactivity and (why deny it?) a dollop of sensationalism.

The students' teacher, **Brody Condon**, put it as well as anyone when he once described video games as an ''im-mediately accessible tool for cultural criticism.'' He, along with the Los Angeles artists' collective C-level, recently simulated another woeful American locale in their work ''Waco Resurrection.'' It asks players to take on the iden-tity of the cult leader David Koresh and muse on the perils of political ideology.

Condon's work, along with that of fellow artists Cory Arcangel and Anne-Marie Schleiner, has been tapped for the coming Whitney Biennial, as well as for ''Killer Instinct,'' which opened last week at the New Museum of Contemporary Art and claims the distinction of being the first museum exhibition to share its name with a Nintendo game. True, you don't need to visit a museum to see Schleiner's ''Velvet-Strike,'' a downloadable work of art. It requires the player to participate in a digital peace protest, spraying hearts instead of bullets into scenes from the hit combat game ''Counter-Strike.'' That may sound a little complicated for a game premise, but these days, play is hard work. Deborah Solomon

CAPTIONS: Photos: From top to bottom, stills from ''Waco Resurrection,'' ''9-11 Survivor'' and ''Velvet-Strike.''

Turning Games Into a New Kind of Art

By ROBERTA SMITH
Published: January 21, 2006

The collage technique that helped ignite 20th-century modernism has mutated through photomontage, found objects, assemblage and appropriation. A recent manifestation, endemic to the expanding field of digital art, is hacking, and video games and their offshoots are ripe for the picking.

That, at least, is the feeling conveyed by "Breaking and Entering: Art and the Video Game" at PaceWildenstein in Chelsea, a sampling of work by four artists and three collectives organized by Patricia K. Hughes, an assistant curator at the gallery. The diversity of their efforts is impressive; less impressive, and unsurprising, is the frequent focus on violence.
There are exceptions, like Paper Rad's psychedelic music video loop, which manipulates video-game figures, called sprites, and other bits of animation, called gifs, that can easily be downloaded from online catalogs to gaudy, immersive effect. Also relatively peaceful is Brody Condon's "KarmaPhysics".

Jodi, a veteran digital art team consisting of Joan Heemskerk, a Dutch artist, and Dirk Paesmans, who is Belgian, has conflated the cheats - hidden moments of static or extreme distortion that players can't see in normal play - from the popular game Max Payne. Their four-channel DVD installation further distorts the images by projecting them into the corners of intersecting walls, creating scarily careering blends of abstraction, horror and spatial confusion.

Eddo Stern's "Deathstar" recycles online cartoon fantasies of torturing Osama bin Laden into blurry close-ups that start out weirdly sacred, like a Gothic Crucifixion, and end up antic and profane. In a sweeping multiscreen work, Cory Arcangel juxtaposes a Russian MIG in steep climb with the peacefulness of his well-known Super Mario clouds. He also includes a ready-made: Bomb Iraq, a simple homemade game that he found on a secondhand computer.

Violence is even more specific in Jon Haddock's digital prints. Most of them reimagine emblematic moments - the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.; the murder of Matthew Shepard - as scenes in a video game, suggesting the possibility of a different outcome.
"How to Play Warcraft," by the open collective Radical Software Group, is a series of small, flat-footed projections reminiscent of old-school Conceptual Art. They show a mundane close-up of a hand operating a mouse, accompanied by the spelled-out commands activated by the clicks: "Kill Defias Pirate," for example. You could say the work portrays the banality of digital evil.

The exhibition could have been less stereotypically masculine, but it still provides a heady view of art moving into new territory on several fronts at once.

"Breaking and Entering: Art and the Video Game" continues through Jan. 28 at PaceWildenstein, 545 West 22nd Street, Chelsea; (212) 989-4263.

Frag or Be Fragged

Eleven men and one woman faced each other, armored from head to toe in steel and leather. They gripped swords, maces, axes and shields. The sun was setting, and the west-facing room, still steamy from a burning afternoon, had cooled off just enough to begin the battle. Behind protective hay bales, a phalanx of spectators crouched, stood and spilled out onto the street, straining to hear as Aaron Darkhelm, clad in a tunic (but no dark helm), officiated at the opening of the battle. "If you are killed, acknowledge the kill, go off the field, and wait to re-enter," he announced. "Each melee continues for 10 minutes solid. There will be nine melees. You're going for the most kills. Pace yourself; it's gonna be brutal."

These were the basic rules for Untitled War, a performance presented at the Machine Project gallery on Alvarado at Sunset and organized by Brody Condon, an artist whose work is rooted in video games and their culture. Condon invited fighters from the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), a group that seeks to live and fight according to the technology and values of the Middle Ages, to do battle in the manner of online first-person shooter competition. When you log onto such games, there may be 10 players already "fighting"; whoever gets the most kills, or "frags," wins. If you are killed online, a few seconds pass before you re-spawn. Likewise, at Machine Project, a fragged fighter would re-spawn — in this case, behind the hay bales — before rejoining the fray.

As technicians tweaked the ceiling cameras sending a video game–like composite view of the action to a screen at the Echo Park Film Center next door, scorekeepers got ready to count frags, the "populace" cheered, and combat commenced. Dr. Tom Davidson, a maiden frolicking in a somewhat medieval-looking costume replete with diaphanous veil and who is also a practicing M.D., leaned over to whisper, "I'm a little worried about the safety precautions."

Swordplay is loud in a small space. Despite the fact that the fighters wielded rattan mockup weapons cushioned with duct tape, they took genuine swings. Which were deflected by genuine shields, or absorbed by genuine armor and helmets. Of those, Philippe de Tournay's pig-nose Bascimet was particularly striking. It was fashioned, he had told me while suiting up, after a genuine 15th-century helmet style that was contemporaneous with the era of his SCA character, a courtier to the schismatic pope of Avignon circa 1460. On the field, Philippe cut a nice figure in a red coatehardie, bearing a Vanguard of Honor, a colored ribbon that waved with each parry and thrust.

And yet Phillippe was not as seasoned as some of the other fighters. The SCA is not the Renaissance Faire, Condon had told me; nor is it a medieval version of Civil War re-enactment. These battles are not choreographed, and the hierarchy within the SCA is based on battle skills. In the Machine Project arena, a few of the 12 combatants quickly distinguished themselves as superior warriors. Lord Johannes the Southerner racked up four kills in just the first round, and that was with an already-broken kneecap. Sir Eronric of Devon and Sir Gavin of MacDomhnuill were close behind.

Beneath the clatter of the medieval mano a mano, I got commentary from Julia Rupkalvis, a Marine veteran and military adviser to Hollywood with a degree in hoplology. (That's the study of representing military action theatrically.) Rupkalvis, who owns more than 150 swords herself and recently trained Colin Farrell in the bladed martial arts of antiquity for his title role in Oliver Stone's Alexander, noted that the successful fighters in the gallery employed better defensive strategy. (She also told me that Brad Pitt's leaping sidewinder stab in Troy was an art of combat known as "total B.S.," but nevertheless "looked pretty cool.") As Untitled War unfolded, Rupkalvis liked one burly fellow in a cloak who made nice use of his shield, and frowned when an opponent aced him with a quick flat snap to the head. "That would never have happened in real combat," she said. "That guy's sword would be way too heavy to move that fast."

Meanwhile, the one skirmishing woman, Condessa Battista de Kie del Goya da Lagos, was having trouble fighting Florentine style — wielding two weapons and no shield. Battista was getting battered by a hulking knight with a broad sword and a round shield. "Two swords wasn't a good idea. She would have had an advantage in maneuverability because of her size and speed," Rupkalvis explained as one of Battista's flailing swords, in a moment of medieval friendly fire, accidentally disabled an ally. "But that was negated by the confines of the gallery."

By the final round, the action had slowed significantly. Most of the fighters, sweating profusely, ate platters of pickles for their salt and water. The spectators drank Coors and Bud Lights out on the sidewalk, paying only loose attention to the battle through a TV mounted above the doorway. Mark Allen, the owner of Machine Projects, was nonetheless pleased. "The crowd is losing interest," he said. "But that's kind of a perfect development — like in today's world, where there's a war going on in the distance, up there on a television. And we all pay close attention at first, but then start to relax and watch with a few beers." Inside the gallery, Johannes the Southerner, heaving with exhaustion, managed to raise his sword for yet another kill.

War Games

Gamer-artist Brody Condon stages an all-out battle royale at the Machine Project Gallery.

BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

At 6 p.m. on July 17, metal will ring on metal, helmets will glint in the light, and lances will crack upon shields. Mongols, crusaders, and knights will vie for victory. Only one brave hero will take the prize, but don't give up on your favorite Roman centurion if it looks like he's down for the count — just wait a minute, and he'll be "resurrected" to continue the fight. And the whole thing will be caught on camera from almost any angle you could desire.

No, this isn't a new "Lord of the Rings" game for Xbox — it's Brody Condon's "Untitled War," the newest cutting-edge "art" at Echo Park's free-wheeling Machine Project gallery. Condon's upcoming "performative event," as he calls it, will pit more than a dozen retro-Medieval warriors from the Society for Creative Anachronism, or SCA, against each other in the claustrophobic space of an art gallery. The best seats in the house won't be in the front row, though; they'll be down the street at the Echo Park Film Center, where multiple streaming video feeds will be projected to complete that online-gaming feel.

Condon's event takes elements of first-person shooter computer games like Half-Life and Quake — resurrections, counting "frags" (kills) for points, and streaming video — and inject them into the martial arts and monarchy characteristic of an official SCA event. The event, Condon says, "is a Petri dish for examining [these people's] behavior in a controlled environment while at the same time shifting their normal activities to approach issues that come out of this incredible mix of extreme sports, fabricated history, fantasy role-playing, and 3D games."

"Untitled War" is by no means the first work of Condon's to break down the increasingly fragile boundary between gaming fantasy and gritty reality. His 2001 project "Adam Killer" (image on previous page) modified the popular first-person shooter "Half Life" into a bloodbath filled with endless copies of one of his best friends, highlighting the eerie way games separate images from their meanings.

Games were always somewhat of a presence in Condon's life, but traumatic elements of his family life are what made them truly memorable. As he admits almost cheerily, "I think my relationship

> "I think my relationship with games became more intense the day my mom smashed my Atari 2600 with a hammer. She was screaming, 'My children don't love me!' Give her a break; it was the mid-'80s and there was a lot of coke around."
>
> — Brody Condon

with games became more intense the day my mom smashed my Atari 2600 with a hammer. Little bits of the Atari console and my 'Yar's Revenge' cartridge were flying all over the living room while she was screaming, 'My children don't love me!' Give her a break; it was the mid-'80s and there was a lot of coke around."

In this post-9/11 world, Condon's studies of violence have taken on new meaning. The true eye-opener was when he collaborated with fellow gaming artist Anne-Marie Schleiner on "Velvet-Strike," which put visual war protests into the online gaming environment of "Counte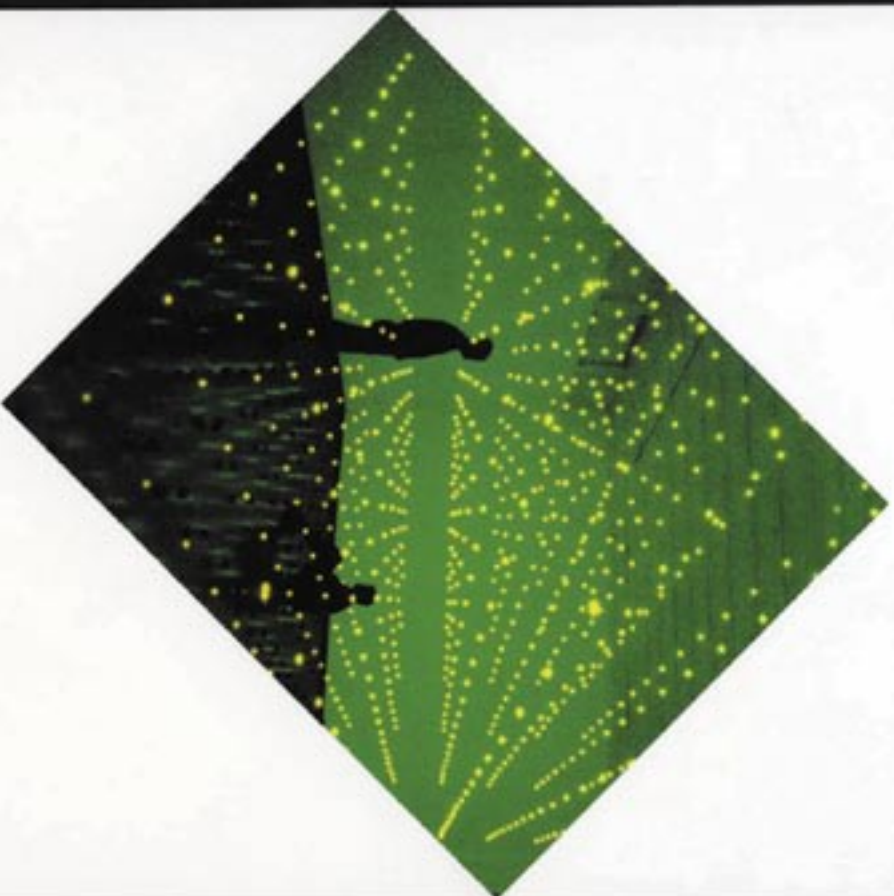rstrike," a popular game with a counterterrorist theme. "Suddenly after this," Condon says, "we are receiving hate mail and death threats from the game community, and it all gets very serious."

"Adam Killer"

Christiane Paul **DIGITAL ART**

178. **Feng Mengbo**, *Q4U*, 2002

culture, such as video games and Hong Kong action cinema. Feng used the software of *Quake III Arena* (known in as Q3A) to create visual representations of himself equipped with a weapon and camcorder – into the game and made himself the main character. Seemingly reappropriating the prefabricated environment, Feng populates it with an army of his clones that can be played by the audience (or the artist himself). *Q4U*, which was shown at Documenta XI in 2002, questions concepts of online identity in the context of role-playing but directly implements the artist in the commercial environment and violence of the game. A more critical intervention in an existing game is the project *Velvet-Strike* by Anne-Marie Schleiner, Joan Leandre, and Brody Condon, which was conceptualized as a direct response to President Bush's so-called 'War on Terrorism'. *Velvet-Strike* is a collection of graffiti that can be 'sprayed' on the walls and rooms of the shooter game *Counter-Strike*, a multi-user game that allows participants to play either as members of a terrorist group or as counterterrorist commandos. Putting the 'weapon' of public opinion back into the hands of the players, *Velvet-Strike* enables users to spray their anti-war graffiti (one of them reads 'Hostages of Military Fantasy') onto the walls of the game environment. *Velvet-Strike* directly intervenes in and 'rewrites' a commercial product, a strategy often used in activism and in the creation of tactical media.

Rachel Greene

Internet Art

Thames & Hudson *world of art*

Per anni la digital art è stata obbligata a sperimentare e ad essere all'avanguardia. Ma finalmente la tecnologia non è più una novità per nessuno. Ora anche l'arte può rilassarsi e diventare perfino concettuale, restando però piacevole e attraente

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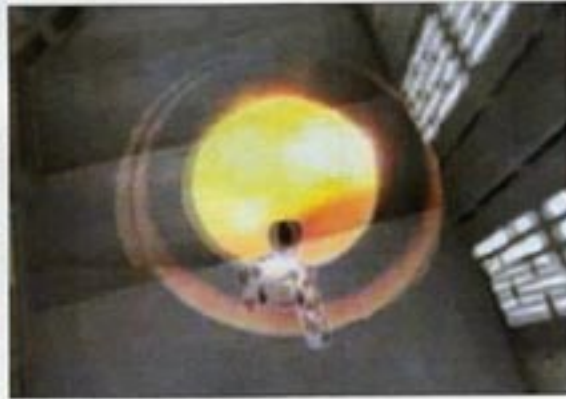
Arte digitale: l'età adulta

UNO DEI VERI PROBLEMI dell'arte digitale, nata di fatto all'inizio degli anni 80, è stata la sua novità. Questo fattore ha implicato anni di tentativi, anche molto nobili ma sempre fatti utilizzando categorie antiche, come il romanzo interattivo o la web tv. Ibridi destinati a non funzionare per diverse ragioni, tra cui ne spiccano due. L'interattività applicata al cinema, al romanzo e più in generale alla narrazione, ha una grande contraddizione di fondo. Se leggo un romanzo e arrivo alla fine, non voglio essere io a sceglierne il finale, mi guasterebbe tutto il piacere. Preferisco di gran lunga trovarne uno che non mi piace (e chiedermi come mai) piuttosto che sceglierlo io o, peggio ancora, che sia scelto dalla maggioranza degli spettatori (com'era in un esperimento di film interattivo): una svolta generalista impensabile nella personalizzazione totale della tecnologia.

L'altra ragione ha riguardato l'oppressione a volte anche fisica, ma non solo, delle tecnologie. Chiunque abbia provato un casco per la realtà virtuale sa che non è un bel posto in cui trovarsi, e che dopo mezz'ora il fastidio diventa disagio. Per anni poi la tecnologia ha oppresso l'arte con l'eccesso di opzioni, e qui si entra in quella zona di confine tra la dimostrazione di nuovi software e la pirotecnia, dove l'effetto meraviglia prende il soprav-vento e l'arte, se c'è, muore soffocata. C'è voluto quasi un ventennio, ma ormai le nuove tecnologie sono diventate familiari e l'arte digitale, finalmente più libera dalle forme antiche e svincolata dal concetto di effetto speciale, può smettere di essere sperimentazione e iniziare finalmente a essere anche arte e basta. Naturalmente questa arte è in relazione con l'arte che c'è stata in passato, come è sempre stato da che mondo è mondo; semplicemente usa degli strumenti nuovi, a volte inaspettati, per esprimersi.

Un buon esempio sono i giochi. È noto che i giochi di ruolo hanno le loro radici nella letteratura; sappiamo anche che il *Signore degli anelli*, prima di essere un gran bel libro e una serie di film di successo, è stato il ten-tativo di creare un mondo, completo di mappe e di suoi folclori, che è esattamente la direzione in cui alcuni dei giochi più interessanti degli ultimi anni stanno andando.

L'enormità geografica di *GTA San Andreas* (e anche dei precedenti) ha molto di letterario e la combinazione dei vari generi (sparatutto, guida, ecc.) rende l'esperienza di gioco davvero unica per ognuno. Qui l'interattività (spintissima: posso entrare nel gioco anche solo per guidare un po', o guardare l'alba sulla baia) non è fonte di sorpresa, ma è il linguaggio normale con cui l'utente/spettatore/giocatore dialoga col gioco/film/software. Voglio dire che GTA è arte? No, ma il congegno, il plot, la visione forse sì. E siamo solo all'inizio.

Curiosamente è proprio un'opera d'arte sui videogiochi che mi ha colpito di recente; una semplice idea concettuale (ma anche visiva e filmica), un geniale ready made davvero post-tecnologico. Si intitola Suicide Solutions ed è «la documenta-zione in dvd, raccolta nello scor-so anno, di suicidi commessi in oltre 50 giochi sparatutto in prima e terza persona». L'effetto è pazzesco: oltretutto quando si muore (buttandosi da una rupe, sparandosi o saltando su una mina) di solito i giochi fanno una musica triste, e la lunga sequenza di suicidi e suoni di circostanza è davvero potente. L'autore di *Suicide Solutions* si chiama Brody Condon.

Ecco un buon esempio di arte digitale meno preoccupata dalla forma (peraltro splendida: i giochi hanno sempre immagini stupefacenti) che dal contenuto, e che riflette su un tema difficile (quello del suicidio) usando gli strumenti di una generazione considerata a rischio (i teena-ger). Un'arte sorprendente e nuova ma profonda e concettuale: finalmente. ●

Suicide Solutions è «la documentazione in dvd di suicidi commessi in oltre 50 videogiochi»

In alto, alcune immagini tratte da Suicide Solutions. A sinistra, 650 Polygon John Carmack (Version 2.0), statua in poliuretano dell'inventore di Doom e Quake. Le opere sono del digital artist Brody Condon.

pixel di emozioni

Se gli anni '80 e '90 sono stati il periodo della teledipendenza, il decennio in corso sembra caratterizzato da un altro tipo di assuefazione. Quella per i videogiochi. Un fatto intuito da parecchi artisti, che hanno cominciato a trattare il videogame come materia prima per le proprie innovative creazioni. Sono così nati una serie di progetti artistici tesi ad analizzare il significato e l'importanza del videogioco, ma anche a metterne in rilievo i rischi, le ideologie sottostanti, le conseguenze più discutibili. Anche se non mancano creazioni ex novo, la maggior parte dei videogiochi artistici si presentano come rielaborazioni di videogame commerciali.

In realtà l'aggiornamento dei programmi non è una prerogativa degli artisti. I produttori di software revisionano costantemente i propri giochi mettendo in vendita le cosiddette patch, programmi che eliminano i difetti del gioco originale e offrono al giocatore la possibilità di personalizzare i propri beniamini virtuali. Le rielaborazioni artistiche però non si limitano a intervenire sugli elementi decorativi del gioco. Vanno in profondità, ne alterano la struttura, l'assetto generale. L'artista americano Brody Condon, per esempio, ha presentato nel 2001 *Adam Killer*, una copia "sui generis" del celebre sparatutto *Half-life*. Nella sua versione modificata il gioco implode su se stesso come se fosse stato infettato da un virus. Gli oggetti e gli individui presenti sullo schermo si moltiplicano all'infinito e il tentativo disperato di eliminarli con la pistola ottiene l'effetto contrario, in quanto i corpi martoriati si frantumano in mille pezzi, trasformando la scenografia in un marasma di colore, simile a un dipinto di Jackson Pollock.

Spesso gli artisti mettono in discussione le regole basilari dei videogiochi, per mostrare le ideologie su cui poggiano, gli elementi normalmente nascosti allo sguardo del giocatore. *NostalG* (2002) dello spagnolo Retroyou è un simulatore di volo che risponde in modo casuale alle azioni del giocatore, come se fosse dotato di una volontà propria, autonoma e irrispettosa di quella altrui. Da macchina accomodante, il sistema si trasforma in una creatura capricciosa, ma proprio per questo ci permette di vedere l'arbitrarietà delle regole impostate dal programmatore. Arbitrarietà che vale ovviamente anche per gli altri videogiochi. Una riflessione sull'influenza dei videogiochi nella percezione della realtà è, invece, presente nel ciclo *Isometric Screenshots* di John Haddock (2001) che ricostruisce fatti di cronaca ed eventi immaginari attraverso i colori cartoon e la classica inquadratura isometrica utilizzata per videogiochi come i *Sims*. Visti attraverso questo filtro momenti drammatici, come il ragazzo davanti al carro armato in piazza Tienanmen, e fatti del tutto immaginari diventano indistinguibili, interscambiabili. Allo spettatore non è più dato sapere dove finisce la realtà e inizia la finzione, dove i pixel si tramutano in sofferenze reali.

Più ironico è, invece, il lavoro di Mauro Ceolin che utilizza il videogioco come mezzo espressivo per raccontare tematiche attuali, legate al mondo dei nuovi brand. Il suo ultimo lavoro *Google Battle* (2004) è una rielaborazione di *Space Invaders*, ma al posto della guerra spaziale mette in scena la feroce lotta tra i motori di ricerca per il predominio di Internet. A dispetto dell'apparenza, i videogiochi di Ceolin descrivono situazioni reali. Non è un caso che l'autore li consideri nuove forme di linguaggio. *(Pierluigi Casolari)*

palmari. Steve Benford, docente presso il Mixed Reality Laboratory della University of Nottingham in Inghilterra, che ha collaborato all'ideazione di *Savannah* e *Uncle Roy*, spiega che i giochi hanno entusiasmato i giocatori perché, a differenza dei normali videogiochi per computer, prevedono un'attività fisica e un'interazione sociale, con una certa analogia con i reality show televisivi. I giochi, aggiunge, incoraggiano anche le persone ad andare oltre i limiti del comportamento accettato.

In *Uncle Roy*, i giocatori on-line possono ordinare ai giocatori sul campo di guardare, per esempio, nella borsa di una bicicletta qualsiasi o di entrare nella macchina di uno sconosciuto, il tutto senza sapere se l'indizio sia vero o se sia uno scherzo. «Si ha veramente l'impressione di una reale esperienza cospiratoria» spiega Benford. In Pac-Manhattan, i giocatori per le strade riferiscono la loro posizione mediante il cellulare ai capisquadra del centro studentesco Kimmel. Le posizioni, che vengono costantemente aggiornate, sono riportate su una schermata simile a quella del Pac-Man di un tempo, e il risultato è una sorta di versione al rallentatore dell'originale.

Le squadre che si trovano nel centro studentesco dirigono i giocatori all'esterno, aiutandoli a orientarsi attraverso le vie e a evitare il pericolo. Il risultato è una scatenata baraonda, in stile Keystone Kops. Nella recente serie di test effettuati presso la N.Y.U., Megan Phelines, studentessa del secondo anno del corso di big-game, era al telefono nel centro studentesco con il suo compagno di squadra Crowley, che interpretava il ruolo di Pac-Man. Nella versione classica del videogioco, Pac-Man accumula punti ingoiando i pallini che incontra sul percorso. Il compito di Crowley era quello di correre su e giù per le vie del Greenwich Village e, strada facendo, guadagnare pallini e punti sul monitor del computer del Kimmel Center. E proprio come nel videogioco, doveva evitare i fantasmi che volevano catturarlo. «C'è un fantasma in Fifth Avenue e uno in Washington Square Park

Making Sense of a Mod World

Words: Jesse Ashlock

breaking out: stills from 9-11 survivor (top) and escape from woomera. opposite page: vladimir todorovic performs game music on the beach in santa barbara.

Even if you have only have the most passing acquaintance with online gaming, you probably know what a mod is. Maybe you've even played one – you just might not have known what you were looking at. The concept took hold during the '90s after id Software, maker of the first-person shooters *Doom* and *Quake*, cleverly realized it could extend the lives of its products by making sections of its code available to amateur tinkerers, essentially spawning a free labor force that introduced new maps, sounds, rules, physics and other variables that endlessly expanded the game worlds players could explore. By decade's end, game companies were even recruiting young modders into their ranks, and the most popular online FPS of the early 21st century, *Counter-Strike*, was itself a mod.

Meanwhile, the electronic arts community kept pace with this evolution, as creative developers noticed that mods offered opportunities to adapt games for purposes other than pure entertainment. In the late '90s, Julian Oliver, an Australian software developer and theorist then working in virtual reality, became frustrated with game technology's inaccessibility to independent developers and artists. "New media lacked an interface to popular culture," he recalls. "I came to feel, 'there's got to be some way this technology can be domesticated.'" That led him to early experimental mods of *Quake 2*, often focused on sound and performance. Seeking similarly minded artists, in 1998 he also founded Selectparks, a media laboratory, Web archive and game art community. One person he soon discovered was LA-based Brody Condon, who was working with mods as well as original game design, machinima and performance. Condon's 2001 mod, *Adam Killer*, exploited a bug in *Half-Life* that produced dramatic trailing effects by inserting endless multiples of a benign new character called Adam into the game. This forced players to shoot Adam, transforming the screen into a sea of fractured, kaleidoscopic carnage. Begun soon after the Columbine massacre (in which the shooters, as Condon noted, were ardent *Doom* enthusiasts – who even had their own *Doom* mods), *Adam Killer* was one of the first projects to explicitly investigate the socially critical potential of art-modding, bluntly calling attention to the first-person shooter's role as murder simulator.

Not long after Condon released *Adam Killer*, the World Trade Center fell, the War on Terrorism began and Osama Bin Laden characters began popping up in mods across the gaming universe. These developments spawned *Velvet-Strike*, one of the first and best known of an emerging species of overtly political mods. Conceived by California-based artist and critic Anne-Marie Schleiner and developed with Condon and Joan Leandre, *Velvet-Strike* critiqued what its creators saw as a chauvinistic, ethnocentric military-industrial complex in overdrive by turning *Counter-Strike*'s soldiers-versus-terrorists setup on its head. Now shooters sprayed antiwar graffiti instead of bullets, a ham-handed but unmistakable commentary on the value system of shoot-and-kill FPSs. Such critiques inevitably raise the ire of game enthusiasts, many of whom interpret art-mods like *Velvet-Strike* as part of a larger censorship effort – of a piece with the media's constant harping on the Columbine killers' *Doom* habit – whose ultimate goal is to ruin their fun. This misses the point. Art-modders are by definition gamers themselves (Schleiner has expressed a fondness for shooter games). As Jeff Cole, one of the designers of the topical mod *9-11 Survivor*, says, "using the medium of games as canvas is just as natural for us as a painter using paints." If, as is now commonly accepted, games reflect the broader culture, then they offer a powerful opportunity for cultural critique. Oliver calls this gadfly ethos "a necessary antagonism," noting that players themselves have long used game spaces as forums for expressing stances on real world events, recently organizing mass online protests in opposition to the Iraq War. "Games are a public space – at least any multiplayer game," Oliver says. By extension, he suggests, we should value freedom of expression in the game world as much as in our real world public spaces.

Oliver has his own history of antagonism. "I always reserve the right to make unpopular games," he comments wryly. Perhaps his most notoriously unpopular, at least with Australian immigration minister Philip Ruddock, was the 2003 *Half-Life* mod *Escape from Woomera*, co-designed with collaborators Stephen Honnegger, Kate Wild and a small Australian team. Oliver is fascinated with the ways videogames address questions of agency and thresholds; *Woomera* used the *Half-Life*'s existing game logic to make those themes unmistakable, casting the player as a prisoner breaking out of Woomera, an actual refugee detention facility that is a sort of desert Alcatraz in the Australian consciousness. Because the prison was so inaccessible to the public, the group had to generate its maps by sneaking disposable cameras into and out of Woomera in containers of laundry detergent and drawings through barbed-wire fences (three other Australian facilities were also used in modelling). For Oliver, *Woomera* represented a "symbolic breakout," penetrating the double wall that kept detainees (and detainee abuses) inside Woomera and Australian society out. But the symbolism was quite real for Ruddock, who publicly blasted the game and its government funder. "[It] turned out to be far more significant than we had intended," says Oliver. "And it illustrated to us the power of games."

Perhaps even more willfully antagonistic than *Woomera* was *9-11 Survivor*, developed by Kinematic Collective, a trio of UCSD art students working under the tutelage of Condon. The concept was simple: using the *Unreal* game engine, Kinematic recreated the upper stories of the World Trade Center just after the planes hit, using blueprints, photos, video footage and their own media-filtered impressions of the event. The player simply traverses the wreckage – as a spectator, without a typical game objective – while a lone businessman passes by and leaps from the burning building. Though the game is politically agnostic – simply a 3-D construction of the event – Kinematic was roundly accused of exploiting the tragedy after releasing the game in mid-2003, a response it encouraged with a bogus claim that *9-11 Survivor* was an actual in-development title. But the question of exploitation was part of the group's point. "If a game about 9/11 is sensational, why do games about World War II or Pearl Harbor, which actually exist, not elicit this sort of outcry?" asks Kinematic's John Brennon. "Is there a statute of limitations whereby, once met, a tragic piece of history is deemed exploitable? Just where does good taste place this imaginary line in the sand?"

This question goes beyond *9-11 Survivor*, extending to virtually any mod that uses a commercial game engine to deliver something more than the game industry's violence-as-fun. "It is hard for people to see beyond the B-rated horror games often deliver and think that the medium could be used to deliver more thought-provoking or culturally aware content," Cole acknowledges. Yet the field keeps expanding, as young artists continue finding novel applications for game engines. Last year, Serbian-born, California-based artist Vladimir Todorovic released an *Unreal* mod called *Game Music*, which, he explains, "follows a hippie idea where people cannot kill each other in the game and can only produce music." Weapons are harmless, their aggressive sounds exchanged for classic videogame tunes of yesteryear, thus "undermining the ideologies of the military-entertainment industries." In a sort of "make music, not war" reversal, the game transforms the virtual battlefield into a site of creative production. One can see how *Game Music* consolidates the gains of Oliver's early sound-based mods and *Velvet-Strike*'s oppositional utopianism. As more artists enter the fray and talk to one another, we can expect culturally provocative modding to continue growing in scope and influence.

And while Oliver is one person exploring standalone, open-source systems that would free artists from commercial game engines, such technologies can be dizzyingly complex, both to develop and to use. "For artists, modding is often the only solution they have," says Cole. There's also a tremendous built-in advantage to using such familiar, broad-based technologies. "We're talking on the level of widely disseminated culture," says Oliver. That's a kind of power many artists can only dream of. – **RES.COM**

Modell in 'Wearable Computer'

Si tratta di un intreccio indistinguibile tra pixel e materia, finzione e verità

sviluppati in quello reale. Facendo circolare grandi quantità di denaro, più vero che mai.

Il virtuale insomma non è più separato dal mondo vero. Sta confluendo al suo interno, per formare un'unica iper-realtà che i teorici chiamano "realtà aumentata" e che in pratica consiste in un intreccio inestricabile di finzione e verità, pixel e materia. Secondo il giornalista ed esperto di mondi virtuali Wagner James Au (*http://secondlife.blogs.com*): «Tutto è cominciato quando alcune *software house* hanno riconosciuto agli abitanti virtuali il diritto di proprietà sulle proprie creazioni». Questo ha trasformato gli scambi di beni sul video tra giocatori in un vero e proprio mercato miliardario e ha stimolato i giocatori a dare maggiore concretezza alle proprie esperienze virtuali. Se gli abitanti di *Second Life* sono diventati geniali inventori, quelli del mondo *Project Entropia* (*www.project.entropia.com*) si sono trasformati in audaci speculatori immobiliari. Alcuni hanno comprato enormi appezzamenti di terreni, che affittano ad altri giocatori o che rivendono a prezzi gonfiati, guadagnando montagne di dollari. Anche le nuove tecnologie stanno giocando un ruolo molto importante in questo processo. I navigatori satellitari portatili e i cellulari di ultima generazione consentono di collegare in ogni istante la rete e il mondo reale e di trasformare quest'ultimo in un grande ambiente videoludico. Frank Lantz, docente di telecomunicazioni alla New York University, è uno dei massimi esperti in Big Games. Nel 2004 ha realizzato Pac Manhattan, ora invece sta lavorando a Conqwest (*http://homepages.nyu.edu/~dc788 /conqwest*). Il suo chiodo fisso è trasportare il mondo virtuale all'interno di quello reale, trasformando le strade delle città in enormi ambienti interattivi, simili a quelli dei videogiochi.

A progetti simili lavorano gli artisti londinesi del gruppo *Blast Theory* (*http://www.blasttheory.co.uk*), oppure il creativo californiano Brody Condon (*www.tmpspace.com*) che ha ricreato materialmente all'interno della *Machine Project Gallery* gli scontri tra gilde che avvengono all'interno dei giochi di ruolo online. Alla National University di Singapore i docenti del Mixed Reality Lab hanno, invece, realizzato Human Pac-Man, nel quale il giocatore munito di appositi occhiali cammina e opera nel mondo reale ma percepisce lo spazio come se fosse all'interno dei labirinti di Pac Man. Provare per credere.

Incontrarsi
NELLA RETE

I mondi virtuali sono anche luoghi di lavoro. La fondazione Acceleration Studies (*http://www.accelerating.org*) ha organizzato la serie di conferenze "Future Salon" all'interno di *Second Life*. Nonostante l'ambientazione ludica, agli incontri hanno partecipato importanti studiosi di new media. Come la scrittrice Betsy Book e il teorico di e-learning Clark Aldrich. Gli atti del convegno sono consultabili sul sito *http://sifuture salon.blogs.com*. È un ponte tra realtà e finzione digitale anche il sito *www.mmodating.com*, nato con lo scopo di far incontrare per davvero i giocatori dei mondi virtuali, tracciando i profili dei loro avatar.

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Art and Games
Jim Rossignol

In the pub and on the internet forums an age-old argument is being played out: Are games Art? The question is as old as the games themselves and the discussion is bone dry, worthless and exhausted. Thankfully there are a few people out there who are just skipping the argument stage and are getting on with turning games into art, whether the pub-bound pontificators like it or not. But this isn't some cerebral exercise in talking up the aesthetics of Tomb Raider, rather it is a movement in which the raw materials of games, and the images associ☐   .

In the last year there have been numerous game-inspired art exhibitions. From Los Angeles to New York to Rotterdam, the galleries are filled with the sounds of bleeping and the sight of unusual polygons. One of the most successful of these was the Bang The Machine exhibition at the Yerba Buena Centre in San Francisco. Typical of this new wave of Game Art shows, the exhibtion included exhibits such as a lemon tree that used acid battery-power to run a selection of Gameboys, a replica of the Arts Centre that could be explored virtually in The Sims Online, a booth in which gallery-walkers could (bizarrely) sit down and play the military PR tool America's Army, and a five foot scuplture of Doom programmer John Carmack, based on his avatar from Quake III Arena.

Hero Worship

The sculptor of Carmack's peculiar efigy was the Amsterdam and LA-based artist Brody Condon. Condon has had a prolific and pioneering relationship with Game Art in the last few years. We talked to him about his experience with gallery based installations. First up, what was that Carmack statue all about? 'Put simply, Carmack's passion for engine coding has influenced our culture in profound ways,' says Condon. 'Beyond a simple kind of hero worship it's the form that thing has taken that is more important. It seemed perfect that th☐
phenomenon of 3D likenesses of actual people started to show up. Strangely, the evolution of realistic game spaces and individuals is loosely following the evolution of portraiture and landscape painting from the late Middle Ages into the Renaissance, could get into this more, but probably too art historical.'

Staying with the Quake theme, Condon points us in the direction of a UK-based Game Artist, Tom Betts, one of Condon's favourite artists currently exhibiting Game Art and multimedia work. Betts is astonishingly creative, producing works such as a 3D web browser th☐
a☐
accomplish: 'I took about ten arenas from Quake 3 and modified lots of shader scripts and pak files until each level was a unique psychedelic environment. The actual map files are unchanged so you can still log onto a server and join standard deathmatches. The resulting imagery is quite painterly and hypnotic with translucent architecture and ghostly players. When the piece gets shown in an art gallery it is linked to an internet server and you can camera-follow (spectate) the online players as they play. They don't actually know that they are part of the work but they do get a free quake server!' The success of these pieces has seen Betts exhibiting around the world and he was, as this piece went to press, returning from exhibiting his work at the Read Me/Run Me Software Festival in Denmark.

Like Betts, Brody Condon takes inspiration directly from his gaming activities. The Carmack piece was just another example of his attitude towards appropriating game culture for artistic ends: 'I took the 3D model from the game and altered it, which is how I generally work. I don't usually make new things, but operate on the level of creative consumption. Think about it: game mods, Legos, sampling and mixing, etc. We don't really create anything anymore, we just consume creatively. It's a perfect example of how our culture has changed in the era of late capitalism.'

Art has always been about expressing something about the world around us. Artists appropriate aspects of their culture and transform them. Condon feels that games are the sphere in which he moves and so his art has to express that fact: 'These days whenever I meet actual game developers, or speak at game conferences, I feel like a kind of Frankenstein,' explains Condon. 'I've been playing their games my whole life, you know? And here I am, like the monster returning to the master that created it, arms outstretched, mumbling "Give my life meaning…".'

Condon's efforts to merge games with art have recently reached epic proportions. His live-action installation 'Untitled War' saw a Californian battle re-enactment society, the Society for Creative Anachronism, duke it out in the manner of a first person shooter. They fought in full armour and stuck to the rules that define deathmatch shooter. A blow was taken as a frag, at which point a participant would walk from the field of this ten-minute deathmatch to later 'respawn' and rejoin the fight. The field of battle for this strange war was the Machine Project gallery in Echo Park, Los Angeles.

Condon mused on where the concept for a live-action battle in a gallery had come from: 'I was at an SCA war in the desert outside Pheonix and I realized how completely crazy it was that we were fighting a fake medieval war in the desert, at the same time we were in a war in the desert in Afghanistan,' said Condon, by way of explanation. 'Also, their pseudo "resurrection" and "capture the flag" battles were very much like FPS games. The mixture of extreme sports, role playing, computer games, and medieval reinactment was

interesting. I □

for me to have an exhibition of the SCA warriors fighting in a deathmatch style battle, complete with spectator camera views projected in the space next door. I didn't know how it was supposed to be greeted, but at the very least it was a great battle and a good party.'

Getting Political

Condon's mention of Afghanistan leads to another line of thought: art is often subversive and actively political. Game developers who see themselves as artists are likely to also see themselves as counter-cultural or at least making some kind of politicised commentary. This is the flip side of the relationship between games and art: rather than being mere gallery artifacts, games are being used to subvert their normal commercial ends and make radical political statements.

One example of the actions of politically motivated gamers came about in the anti-war protest movement Velvet-Strike, in which Counter-Strike players were encouraged to disrupt games in anti-war protest or, less annoyingly, to use the spray can graphic in-game to graffiti anti-war messages across the map. The manifesto is intelligently outlined by artist and gamer Anne-Marie Schleiner, on the website, www.opensorcery.net/velvet-strike. The site also plays host to the best of the anti-war decals and a selection of angry letters from pro-war gamers.

But Velvet-Strike was more political than artistic, despite its installation in a New York-based exhibition centre for the Killer Instinct Exhibition in 2003. A more balanced mix of the two forms can be found in Escape from Woomera, a Half-Life modification that attempts to put gaming at the same level as mainstream art in making an important political comment about Australian politics and their treatment of refugees in the Woomera detention camp. The mod, in which players take the role of refugees escaping fromt he detention camp, can be downloaded from the website www.escapefromwoomera.org.

The head of this modding project works under the pseudonym 'Kipper' for contractual reasons. Such a controversial subject has meant that the team would to risk their livelihoods in commercial games development if they were to reveal their identities. We asked Kipper why Escape from Woomera was so important.

'Firstly, there are many artists using game technologies and game cultural material in their art. This is not where we're coming from. Most of us are not artists - we work as professional developers in the game industry, and we care about the state of games as an art form. Secondly, as Australian developers we're often forced to make games we based on contemporary real-world events on the other side of the world, filled with pro-imperialist ideological content. We wanted to create a scenario that was significant to Australians, and give a voice to the kind of views that are almost totally unrepresented in gaming.'

We wondered what sort of reactions the team had received to their work. 'Everything from the immigration minister making vague threats about our project inciting people to criminal activity, to refugees in detention seeing us on the TV and cheering. But in between there have been elements who've said a game would trivialise the issue, just by virtue of being a game. The best reactions and we □   "it's about time".'

Being both a game and a sensitive issue for the Australian government the team looked unlikely to get funding, but as Kipper explained, this didn't stop them trying. 'We spent about two years talking to funding bodies and the Australia Council for the Arts were brave enough in the end to help us. The major stumbling block for arts and industry funding agencies were: a) but it's not commercially viable. b) but it's not art. c) but it's political.' Nevertheless the Australian Arts Council was brave enough to take that step, a move that might well set an example for arts funding bodies in other countries. The Arts Council of Britain has so far dismissed tentative queries about mo□

need to learn the lessons that Escape from Woomera taught Kipper and her team. 'The federal government was so pissed about the funding they had an inquiry and threatened to strip the Australia Council of arts funding,' she explained. Luckily for both the Arts Council and the mod team, there were no legal grounds for the government action and they were forced to back down.

Painting the future

As examples such Escape from Woomera and Condon's pitched-battles demonstrate, art doesn't have to be a pickled cow on a plinth. Condon argues that this meeting of forms, of gamer and artist, gives us a number of reasons to be cheerful about the future of our pastime and occupation: 'One, it provides gamers, a group not usually interested in the art world, a reason to pay attention to art. Most importantly in my eyes, it offers interesting alternatives and strategies for using game dev materials for personal expression. Two, it gives games and games culture a kind of respect and legitimacy that they desire from the general public. Three, at a time in the industry when suddenly advancing the technology is not the problem, but the creation of powerful game "content", artists are the force that have the educat□

escapist pulp narratives.'

Of course there's still a lot of work to be done before mainstream games really begin to feel the impact of these more experimental developments. Neither the artists nor commercial developers have yet to find a suitable middle ground, but with the emerging Game Art scene now starting to find its legs we can perhaps expect an bright future for cross-discipline development, with its produce filling both art galleries and gamestore shelves. Equally, serious critical art using game media suggests that games are mature enough to be taken seriously. They are no longer, and perhaps never have been, just a flickering-screen novelty with nothing to say.