

Residency games and gender

CONCEPT

p a r a p h e r n a l i a

is a self-crafted hardware and software application used in a 30-minute live performance (*Chip-core cabaret*)_ by girl hacker sister0. Logitech 2 wireless gamepads are modified to be sonic emulators.

This project is a playful ode to the history of paraphernalia and its feminine roots. The Artist residency period would allow me to develop more of these objects and the content of the performance itself.



fig 1. glitch maker pic by binary.k0ala

p a r a p h e r n a l i a

<http://sistero.sysx.org/paraphernalia/>

dolls and curiosa embedded with hacked gamepads are played as instruments in a live performance that divine samples from diverse sources; chip glitches, break beats, noise guitars.

concept the focus on games & gender topics:

Since developments in the gaming industry are very much geared towards a male dominated audience, my proposed modification of the typical gaming hardware i.e. my gamepad mods (see fig.1,3,4) draw upon the history of paraphernalia, and its feminine roots. The word paraphernalia is Medieval Latin, as the bride's property apart from her dowry that she can dispose of at will. Personal amulets, menstruation items, talisman type gadgets, a bottle of oil, a doll, things that are usually judged as waste, trash or excessive.

During the residency I'd like to make more actual game-pad characters that are sonic emulators, and a performance event that demonstrates their use. ROCK AND ROLL. This set up is also quite gender specific because as is often the case in contemporary video gaming, a common scenario is a male sitting at a computer staring at a screen . However, in **p a r a p h e r n a l i a** the performance and the hardware and software application, the wireless game-pad mods are sonic emulators, fine-art objects, they are theatrical props and talismen that among other things, modify sound. A woman character operates the small game-mod characters (hacked gamepads), allowing her moving through a

space as if she has come into the realspace from inside a game (see fig 2).

The clue lies there...The symbols of the divine show up
in our world initially at the trash stratum.

-Philip K. Dick

The Paraphernalia set of Human Interface Device/ performance tools:

I want to develop further a set of real-time performance tools with an electro-acoustic design in a new work **p a r a p h e r n a l i a**. The main aim is to amalgamate unusual objects commonly seen as trash. Since gaming is usually about gestural representation and simulation of environments I'd like to see how the rot and beauty of every day life could seep through the cracks of these spaces come back into physical space.

In order to do this transform trash, to act not only as a theatrical props for the character, but as functional tactile sonic emulators I embed dolls and curiosa with 2.4ghz wireless circuit boards from game-pads. Modified with analogue motion sensors, the paraphernalia becomes a sensitive sonic object, a talisman that among other things, controls and triggers sound. In **p a r a p h e r n a l i a** I play a surreal character, sister0 who with her divination gaming tools, (sonic objects) who has the extra sensory ability to pick up signals from people in other times and spaces via these hacked gamepads. Using my interest in ancient communication practices and late 19th-early 20th century manifestations of the paranormal, my performance will only hint at that phenomena. This is simply incorporated into a set of performance tools, a dynamic structure where audio can be modified, moved, and distorted by myself as a performer creating magic, rather than a laptop musician or technician.



fig.2 sister0 performance WORM rotterdam. Pic by binary.k0ala.

The main object of this performance is to amalgamate unusual objects commonly seen as trash. I take paraphernalia and transform it, to act not only as a theatrical prop but as functional tactile sonic emulators. I embed paraphernalia, dolls and *curiosa* with 2.4ghz wireless circuit boards and game-pads, which are modified with analogue motion sensors. This paraphernalia becomes a sensitive sonic object, a talisman that among other things, controls and triggers sound.



Figure. 3 * paraphernalia * voice modifier.

In *figure 1*. we see a doll that I found in a market in Sydney about 10 years ago, despite (or maybe because of) its neglected condition, I was so enchanted I never threw it away. A few years when I came to Europe I stuck it in my suitcase and carried it around with me. It now functions as a voice effects [FX] trigger. I embedded a 2.4ghz game-pad onto its back, and at tip of the right-wing there is a tilt sensor soldered on. This allows the modification of voice when moved from 0 to 1.

'Commercial wireless game-pads or HIDs, are affordable and useful for

musical applications as both gaming and music share one crucial requirement: immediate feedback'[1]. This hardware-software application is built and designed for a live electronic act so that the performer, trained in a traditional sense, is not limited to being stuck behind the computer screen. The HID's masquerade as paraphernalia, allowing a dynamic design where vocals and audio can be modified, moved, and distorted by a performing artist whose gestural action of the objects creates a theatrical illusion as if she is a living game character that has broken through the frame of the screen into real 3D space.



Figure. 4 * paraphernalia * glitch maker.

In Figure. 2 we see the * paraphernalia * glitch maker, where the gradual thumb sensors send values through the x and y scale to shift a signal around, these are programmed to cause a sound sample to bend its pitch repeatedly causing a mutation, break and repetition in the flow of a .wav file.

What I want to develop at the residency

I have so far thought through the basic structure of the hardware and software tools but because this is really time consuming the actual sound, and the performance itself needs working on. I am concerned with liveness and presence of a character in relation to these game characters, that are obscured and exposed, unravelled and assembled and become a part of the dramatic action. I would like to make more of them and because they are wireless I play with a virtual, but physical instruments. These embedded networked objects are spread around the stage and interface (via MIDI and HID's) with Pure Data (Pd) software that allow for a compartment of a digital audio synthesis.

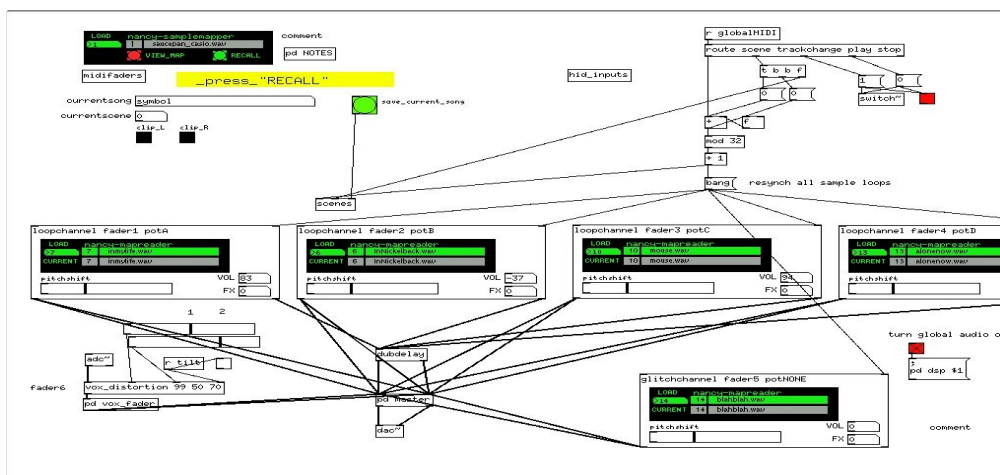


Fig.5 puredata.patch

I believe there is something so much more integrated about programming the software, or at least knowing the nuts and bolts of it. But quite simply I have the desire to develop software and hardware gaming tools according to my own needs and experiences. In my view, game development in combination with electronic performing arts, is the ability to speak for myself, the ability to define myself, and the space to represent myself based on my own needs and experiences that rather than on an externally prescribed idea of me that serves somebody else's needs, dogmas or fears. Obviously this opinion far outstrips gamer hardware and software issues as they also open out prescribed gendered ways of being in the world presented to us if they are 'givens'.

The ramshackle, the liveness and changeability McLaren pinpoints with absolute clarity when he refers to the use of hacked up game-controllers, sensors and electronics in the numerous projects where artists have built their own instruments, soft- and hardware, to better suit their specific project. He proclaims,

Chip music is mutating into a growing taxonomy of styles - post-karaoke, rock-and-roll Game Boy, bastard blues - that represent the most anarchic display of the anti-hero in pop culture. The sound is raw, noisy, and at times poorly played and sung. Still, re purposing defunct devices to end-run a music industry in total decline constitutes a revolution. *Chip music is the final repository of the marvellous, its makers the last possessors of the wand of Cinderella fairy godmother.* [my italics]

I choose to use Pure Data (Pd) primarily because it has many interaction possibilities for me to operate it whilst physically moving through space; namely by its midi and HID (human interface device) objects. This tool as a whole will allow me to: pull sounds from a set of samples, juxtapose these archived recordings with live beats, sound and voice, and apply digital processing FX all at the same time. It is similar to Max/MSP, and it works on Win / Linux / MacOS X. The Operating system I use is Linux wrapped in the Gentoo distribution for optimized hardware performance. The Pd developer community is predominantly Linux users and the software is open source and so gives you many possibilities to create and share tools with and from other developers. In this project I take advantage of Pd's ability to connect to external hardware devices or Human Interface Devices (HID) mainly because I don't want to be staring at the screen but performing in the space as a real life first person player.



Figure 6. *paraphernalia* Voice modifier

And for me and my *paraphernalia* - an image comes to mind- on these desolate shores where the shipwreck of digital media has cast us, I would like to pick up pieces of the wreckage and play with them, at least until I find the *wand of Cinderella fairy godmother...*

History of paraphernalia: The word is Medieval Latin, as the bride's property apart from her dowry that she can dispose of at will. Personal amulets, menstruation items, talisman type gadgets, a bottle of oil, a doll, things

that are usually judged as waste, trash or excessive; divination odds and ends, items that are usually prone to healing, belief in auguries or tokens for predictions. It is undeniable that these objects and their function are positioned as questionable, dubious or taboo topics in the public domain. Instead of being bewildered at this slavish tradition, women began to attest against the subservient position of the term paraphernalia in 1791, attempting to dis-articulate the term from 'odds and ends' for a more functional meaning 'equipment, apparatus'. Making this project, it became more lucid that the current term paraphernalia is vexed, it was just erased from the English Wikipedia, stating it was too insignificant. Thankfully it remains in the dictionary so a trace of its former definition remains.

[1]Anderson, Kristina [online] 'Ensemble':playing with sensors and sound' Last checked June22, 2007

<http://delivery.acm.org/10.1145/990000/986033/p1239-andersen.pdf?key1=986033&key2=2282600021&coll=&dl=&CFID=15151515&CFTOKEN=6184618>

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