

# The Practice of Everyday (Virtual) Life

*A participatory and performative artistic enquiry*



Rebecca Gamble

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**I, Rebecca Gamble, declare that this submission is my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award. The use of all materials from sources other than my own work has been properly and fully acknowledged.**

# ABSTRACT

## **The Practice of Everyday (Virtual) Life: A participatory and performative artistic enquiry**

In contemporary culture, human-to-human communication is becoming mediated through digital screens and virtual communication<sup>1</sup>. Our everyday lives are now lived in and between physical and virtual spaces, in a 'hybrid space', augmented with technologies, in which individuals increasingly perform online as digital versions of themselves: avatars. As a result, 'everyday life' has become 'everyday virtual life' in which new communication practices and social behaviours emerge.

This research is a critique of everyday (virtual) life. As with Michel de Certeau's analysis of the practice of everyday life in the 1980's, in which the day-to-day practices of human behaviour were critiqued, the increased familiarity of 'everyday virtual life' necessitates new critical questioning: How do we live online? What are the common virtual communication practices? And how can this emergent 'hybrid space' be critically questioned through a participatory performance enquiry?

This is an embodied practice, in which the contributions to knowledge are gained through the action and reflection of participatory performance; each raising new critical questioning and an embodied understanding of the critique of everyday (virtual) life: specifically the communication practices and human behaviours present in the digital, which are brought to the foreground through their re-framing and re-performance in a physical space.

The research is presented as a textual-visual thesis and online platform, which together reveal the context, methodology, documentation and critical analysis of a body of practice-led research carried out by the author. The reader is invited to view both alongside each other: [www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com)

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<sup>1</sup> 46.4% of the world's population uses the Internet, with 73.5% of the population of Europe as active Internet users. Source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

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# INTRODUCTION

## Research enquiry

How do we live online? How can 'hybrid space' be critically questioned through participatory performance enquiry? And how can we understand the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist and participant in this methodology?

The overarching research question in this thesis to 'how do we live' originates from the theoretical groundings of 'the everyday', in particular to Henri Lefebvre's *Critique de la vie quotidienne I* (1947). In this research, however, the question becomes specific to a contemporary everyday, that is, life online. This critical investigation takes place through the examination of the virtual space of *Second Life*, which acts as catalyst to the new spaces in which we now reside as digital avatars. This enquiry is informed and refined through a cyclical process of action and reflection in four pieces of participatory performance practice, which each gain critical insight and raise new questions in the understanding of how we live online, through and between physical and virtual space: in a hybrid space.

## Proposition

The thesis title refers to Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), in which he examines the everyday practices of ordinary people, and the individual and tactical 'ways of operating' in the everyday. For the theorists of 'the everyday', there is an insisted necessity to create strategies (Lefebvre 1947); construct situations (Debord 1957); or design tactics (de Certeau 1984) to critically reflect on what might otherwise go unnoticed. This research proposes that everyday life is now also lived online, in virtual spaces, through digital screens and mobile technologies. This becomes an everyday in which we inhabit both physical and virtual space simultaneously, thus affecting our everyday practices of communication. Our everyday is, therefore, now lived between physical and virtual space, in a 'hybrid space', augmented with

technologies, where we increasingly perform online as digital versions of ourselves: avatars. The increasing familiarity of inhabiting and interacting online creates a new necessity to design 'tactics' to critically reflect on the practice of everyday (virtual) life, in particular how we communicate. The 'hybrid space' between the physical and virtual can be understood as "a space in motion and an interaction between perceived, conceived, lived and virtual space. This space is formed not only by materiality and social and political actions, but also by digital technology" (Kraan, 2006, p.39). This research examines how the blurring between the physical and virtual space can be achieved conceptually, through the tactic of participatory performance, rather than technologically with augmented technology. This conceptual blurring of spaces is examined, in particular, in the practice-led enquiry through attempts to embody the digital avatar, Mariela, in performative actions in both virtual and physical space.

The thesis investigates hybrid space through the interaction between virtual and physical space and the cyclical action and reflection of participatory performance in four pieces of practice-led enquiry. These pieces develop and test out new tactics, including blurring the boundaries between the physical-virtual space, choreographing physical movement using digital rules as performance scores, re-performing the everyday, virtual communication practices observed in *Second Life*, and performing as digital avatar.

In this research, *Second Life*<sup>2</sup> becomes the location for site-specific investigation in the same way artists approach sites for investigation to uncover social and political problematics that exist, which require questioning from a new perspective. In considering Ben Highmore's analysis of the concept of 'the everyday' as "those most repeated actions, those most travelled journeys, those most inhabited spaces that make up, literally, the day to day" (1974, p. 1), this can not necessarily be related to the virtual world of *Second Life*. As an online virtual space it is not the most inhabited, instead, this virtual space acts as the departure point and catalyst for this practice-led enquiry: to examine the relationship between physical and virtual space and the

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<sup>2</sup> *Second Life* is an online virtual world, created by American company Linden Lab in 2003, in which users inhabit the virtual space as a digital avatar and encounter one another predominantly through text and gestural forms of communication.

possibilities for achieving and questioning the notion of a 'hybrid space'. *Second Life* offers a heightened example of the virtual practices that can be accounted for across all other online social platforms. In this research it is considered a performance space due to its performative nature; the awareness of ones avatars body through the different viewing points 'in world' (Rackam 2006), the perceived anonymity, the awareness of a live audience and the observed behaviours of the avatars that inhabit this space. It is the social behaviours and communication practices that we perform in our lives, in both online and offline spaces that I examine in this research. In a similar method to a Situationist<sup>3</sup> mode of intervening in the everyday, changing the context or 'framing' and re-framing (Goffman 1974), this research intends to draw attention to "the most repeated actions" (Highmore 1974) of virtual space, to highlight the problematics that exist and therefore necessitate critical questioning through new tactics.

In this research it is through performative and participatory action and reflection that the enquiry takes place. The performative tactics employed in the practice, of interventions, events and encounters with spaces and people, are a significant and a considered component of the work. These include the written instruction or invitation, the context and the duration, which are applied to structure the activation and facilitation of participatory performances. Similarly to the Fluxus<sup>4</sup> 'event scores' of the 1960s (Brecht 1959), observations of virtual communication practices and the digital rule-based interaction become scores for performance scripts "to frame everyday actions as minimalistic performances" (Higgins 2002, p. 2).

Participatory performance celebrates and activates an audience, encouraging them to participate and perform in response to an invitation, instruction or structured situation. By accepting the invitation or choosing to respond the participant becomes entrusted with an active role to shape, develop or determine the piece, resulting occasionally in participant agency and occasionally in artist vulnerability. The reflection

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<sup>3</sup> Situationist modes engage in the construction of situations as "moments of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambience and a game of events" (*Internationale Situationniste* #1 June 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Fluxus is a movement born of the 1960s in which an international network of artists blurred the boundaries between art and life. One of the ways in which they did so was through the 'event score', to structure experimental performance works, which could be carried out by the artist or another.

and analysis of the participatory performance enquiry, from the position of the artist and/or the participant, examines and challenges the roles, relationships and responsibilities present in this methodology. And it is through the action and reflection of this methodology that new knowledge is generated and in which “performance as knowing takes us beyond the quotidian” (Salter, 2010, p.349).

## **Thesis structure**

The thesis structure is based on the cyclical methodology developed in the practice-led enquiry as an iterative process of action and reflection, adapting David Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (1984) to; observe; plan; action; facilitation; observation; reflection. The core stages of this cyclical process are used to structure the four main chapters of practice-led enquiry that exist as a textual-visual thesis submission and a documentary film, which draws together the critical analysis of the research. This is presented within the thesis and online platform:

[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com)

In order to appropriately set the context for how the research is approached and to outline the methodological and theoretical grounding which informs the practice-led enquiry, the methodology and context chapters are presented in the beginning of the thesis. In particular, these chapters position the framework for the language and critical analysis of hospitality, participation, the everyday and hybrid space, before their examination through practice in the subsequent chapters.

The subsequent, four core chapters within the thesis are each accompanied by photographic images and an online visual chapter, of further photographic and video documentation, which is intended for the reader to view before and alongside each written chapter, as an integral part of the thesis submission. The written-visual thesis, together with the culminating documentary film, reveal the action, reflection and critical analysis of the enquiry through the cyclical methodology, as visualised in the methodological diagrams developed to demonstrate the six-part process for each piece.

The thesis reveals the research process and refines the research questioning through the four pieces of participatory performance as practice-led enquiry. These include: *The Romantic Encounter*, a public participatory event that took place simultaneously in Lee Rosy's Tea Café and a virtual replica café in Second Life; "*Let's Dance Sugar Lips*", a participatory workshop choreographing movement using the gestures menu of *Second Life*; *Mariela: [cmd], control, click*, a public performance intervention as digital avatar Mariela, and *Mariela Hosomaki*, a gastronomic one-to-one participatory performance as digital avatar Mariela.

The written submission of the thesis is structured in the following chapters

- **Critical Enquiry**
- **Methodology**
- **Context**
- **The Romantic Encounter**
- **"Let's Dance Sugar Lips"**
- **Mariela: cmd, click, control**
- **Mariela Hosomaki**
- **Thesis Review**

The visual submission of the thesis online ([www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com)) is structured in the following website pages, as accompanying chapters to the four core practice-led enquiry chapters. This includes a documentary film and interview with the author to outline the critical enquiry, methodology, documentation and outcomes of the practice-led enquiry.

- **Research Enquiry: Documentary film and interview with the author**
- [www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com)
- **The Romantic Encounter:**  
[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/the-romantic-encounter](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/the-romantic-encounter)
- **"Let's Dance Sugar Lips":**  
[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/lets-dance-sugar-lips](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/lets-dance-sugar-lips)



- **Mariela: cmd, click, control:**  
[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-cmd-click-control](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-cmd-click-control)
- **Mariela Hosomaki:**  
[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-hosomaki](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-hosomaki)

## **Chapter Summaries**

### **Critical Enquiry**

This chapter establishes the critical enquiry of the research through revealing the origins of the previous participatory performance practice of the author. This is a reflective account which maps the development and emergence of the practice-led research, the investigation of public space, the encounters with people who inhabit these spaces and the everyday technologies which begin to structure modes of human-to-human communication. This chapter includes visual documentation and analysis of early work, which is also discussed in the interview with the author, in the documentary film, published in the online submission.

### **Methodology**

This chapter reveals the methodology for this practice-led research as enquiring *through* practice (Frayling 1993) and reflecting *in* and *on* action (Schön 1983). A hybrid methodology of Action Research and Hospitality is formed; action research providing the systematic and cyclical process of action and reflection and hospitality offering an artistic approach to the facilitation of participatory performance as investigation. An intimate relationship between practice and theory is therefore developed in this reflexive methodology. The chapter identifies the origins and development of the methodology and gives detail in the participation research, which has informed the understanding and terminology of the roles, relationships and responsibilities between the artist and audience. This details initial reflections from participation in 'performing as host' and 'performing as guest', which develops the understanding of the concept of hospitality in participatory performance.

## Context

This chapter details the contextual framework for the research. This includes the theoretical and artistic questioning of *the everyday*, informed by Lefebvre, de Certeau, Debord, Perec, Manovic, Kluitenberg, Bourriaud and Bishop; the interest in the investigation of the virtual space of *Second Life*; the grounding for the research as an on-going artistic practice to explore technology and human interaction participation and performance; and the political position for critically questioning the familiarity of new technologies and the ways we communicate online, towards the development of a 'hybrid space'.

## The Romantic Encounter

Accompanied by the visual chapter:

[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/the-romantic-encounter](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/the-romantic-encounter)

This chapter reveals the cyclical process of the first piece of practice-led enquiry of the live, public participatory performance *The Romantic Encounter*, through its origins and observations, planning, action and facilitation through the 'reflections as host', analysis and summary. This piece questions: How do everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in **physical** space alter when transferred to a **virtual** space? And how are the boundaries between the physical and virtual blurred in the live participatory performance event between the two spaces?

## "Let's Dance Sugar Lips"

Accompanied by the visual chapter:

[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/lets-dance-sugar-lips](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/lets-dance-sugar-lips)

This chapter reveals the cyclical process of the second piece of practice-led enquiry of the participatory performance workshop "*Let's Dance Sugar Lips*", through its observations, planning, action and facilitation through the 'reflections as host' and 'reflections as guest', analysis and summary. This piece questions: How do everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in **virtual** space alter when transferred to a **physical** space? Specifically investigating the gestures menu to

choreograph movement of digital avatars to be re-performed in a physical space. And how are the differences between the virtual and physical examined in the participatory performance to camera and in the subsequent video documentation of this performance?

### **Mariela: cmd, click, control**

Accompanied by the visual chapter:

[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-cmd-click-control](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-cmd-click-control)

This chapter reveals the cyclical process of the third piece of practice-led enquiry of the live performance intervention of *Mariela, cmd, click, control*, through its observations, planning, action and facilitation through the 'reflections as host', analysis and summary. This piece questions: How can the everyday virtual practices of Second Life become tactics for participatory performance to critically question hybrid space?

### **Mariela Hosomaki:**

Accompanied by the visual chapter:

[www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-hosomaki](http://www.thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-hosomaki)

This chapter reveals the cyclical process of the fourth and culminating piece of practice-led enquiry of the one-to-one participatory performance of *Mariela Hosomaki*, through its observations, planning, action and facilitation through the 'reflections as host' and 'reflections as guest', analysis and summary. This piece questions: How can tactics of participatory performance critically question hybrid space? And what are the potential roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist-host and the participant-guest in this process?

### **Thesis Review**

The thesis concludes with a review of the practice-led enquiry. This chapter summarises the outcomes of the research questioning: How do we live online? How can hybrid space be critically questioned through participatory performance enquiry? And how can we define the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist and participant in this process?

## **Contributions to knowledge**

This chapter concludes by identifying the contributions generated through the embodied practice, in which the contributions to knowledge are gained through the action and reflection of participatory performance; each raising new critical questioning and an embodied understanding of the critique of everyday (virtual) life. This includes the new critical questioning that this research raises and the ongoing practice-led research, post-PhD.

## CRITICAL ENQUIRY

### Revealing the origins of the research: a reflective account



Thomas.

"Smoked kippers and two boiled eggs."

Bullring outdoor market, Birmingham city centre

2003

Figure 1. *The Bullring Project: Thomas*. Photographic print and text. 2003

Every time I look at this image of Thomas it makes me smile. This image captures my first artistic investigation into a social and public space; the Bullring Market in Birmingham in 2003, during the early renovation of what is now the Bullring Shopping Centre and Selfridges store. During this investigation I spoke with the people living and working around the development site, we talked about the changes to this space and how this affected their everyday. In creating a photographic series of these encounters for my BA degree at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design, I presented their portrait with an insight to each person, through the simple statement of what they ate for breakfast.

This offers a visualisation to the core concepts of an ongoing practice and enquiry into social space, interactivity and encounters, framed by the everyday. A fascination with people drives the artistic practice, through a captivation with the interactivities and encounters that unfold in social spaces. Observations and accounts of these can offer insights into individual personalities, characteristics and relationships, but also into a wider social and cultural context of contemporary society. While there is always something emotive about the individual and relational aspects of the everyday, these observations can also raise socio-political questions.

I feel a strong necessity for us to be playful and creative in response to our environment: to draw attention to the overlooked, to feel like an individual and to reclaim ownership of the spaces we inhabit. The city becomes my playground: it is the stage for playful interventions, durational games and staged performances. I am driven by the live and unpredictable nature of encounters in the city and the human interactivity in these private and public social spaces.

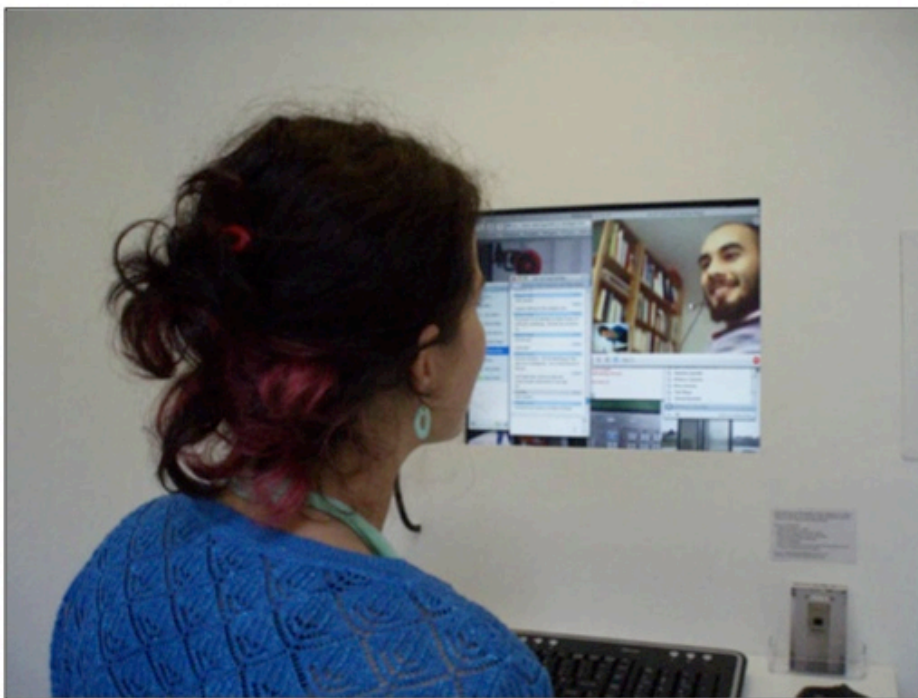


Figure 2. Participants using *Chat Box*, interactive networked installation, 2007

The emergence of online social spaces, in my early twenties, became a new playground for this practice. This began with the exploration of Skype as platform for a series of remote encounters during my MA at University College Falmouth. It was, however, through this early experimentation that I started to question the need for these online spaces and communications (through screens) to maintain a grounding relationship to the physical world. On reflection, it is not the digital context or the technology that drives these investigations, but instead a fascination with how encounters and communications differ between online and offline spaces.

These are not purely self-reflective enquiries, but also participatory ones. I do not wish to play these games alone. Through often-playful interventions and staged performances, we make the familiar unfamiliar, uncovering new insights, new questions.

Although drawing attention to and framing something seemingly small and insignificant, such as what one man eats for his breakfast, or in an online context, how two avatars introduce themselves to each other, these can offer specific insights to the continually shifting site of the everyday. It is these origins and interests that ground the critical enquiry in this PhD, to the critique of everyday (virtual) life.

# METHODOLOGY

## Artistic research

In this PhD the terminology of *artistic research* is used to articulate the intimate relationship between theory and practice through a reflexive methodology.

[Artistic research] concerns research that does not assume the separation of subject and object, and does not observe a distance between the researcher and the practice of art. Instead, the artistic practice itself is an essential component of both the research process and the research results.

(Borgdorff 2006, pp. 6-7)

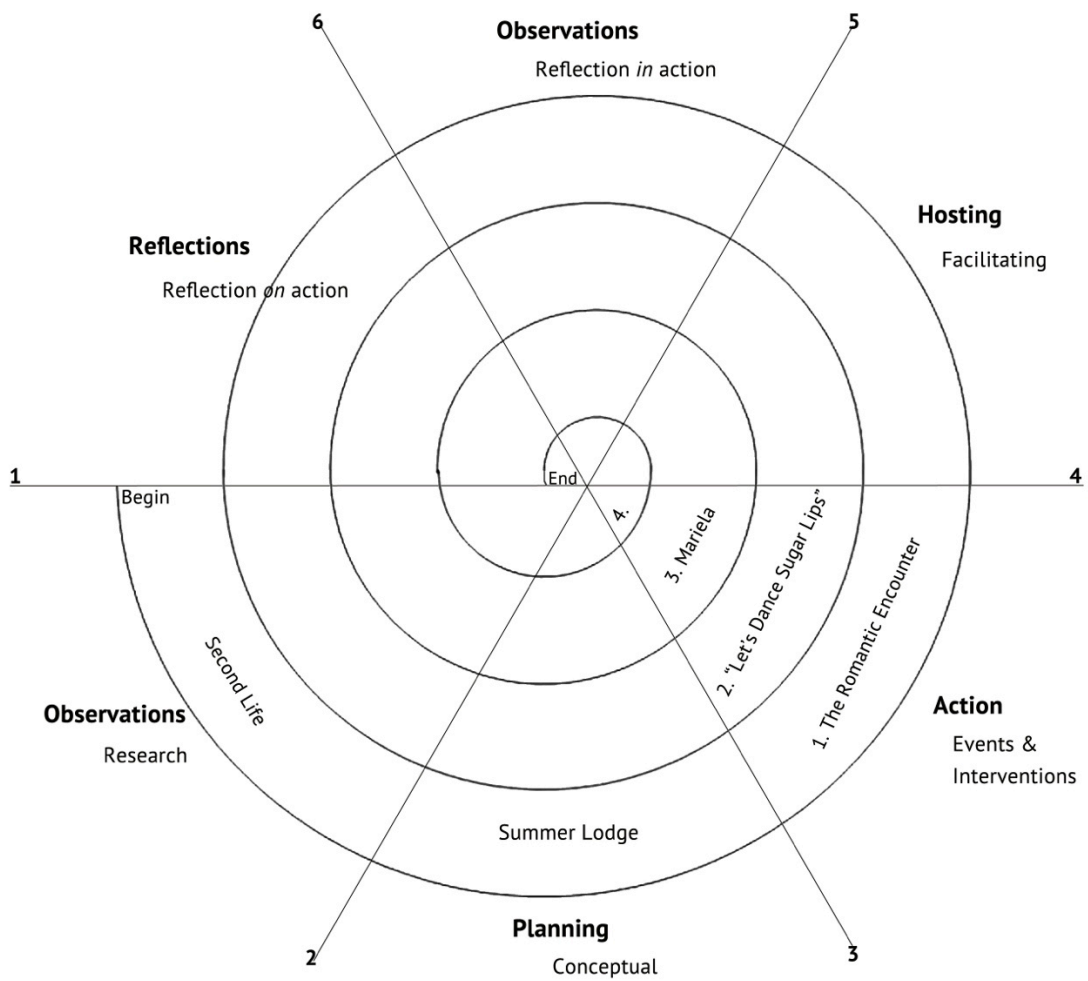
This participatory and performative artistic research enquires *through* practice (Frayling 1993) and reflects *in* and *on* action (Schön 1983), individually and with participants. This research intends to intertwine practice, theory, contextualization and reflection, in a cyclical and reflexive research process, to generate new knowledge.

## Action Research: Action and Reflection

This research is grounded in an action research methodology, which, according to McNiff and Whitehead (2009), must meet the three core conditions of politics, principles and process of the research. In this practice-led enquiry, the *politics* are the increasing familiarity of inhabiting and interacting in virtual space and how this effects human communication. To draw attention to these new everyday (virtual) practices, a participatory and performative enquiry is conducted through the re-framing and re-performing of online behaviours observed in the virtual world of *Second Life*. The *principle* of participation is integral, which seeks to activate and facilitate participants in active participation, in which the roles and responsibilities of artist and participant are questioned. Finally, the *process* of action and reflection is followed systematically to enable analysis and to generate new knowledge.



The detailed systematic process of this artistic research, as visualised in the methodological diagram, involves an adaptation of David Kolb's four-part cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect (1984) to a six-part cycle of observe; plan; action; facilitate; observe; reflect.



The six-part cyclical process of action and reflection.  
Rebecca Gamble, June 2012

Figure 3. Methodological diagram, June 2012

This cycle begins with (1) *observations* in the virtual world Second Life, (2) this (and the previous cycle) informs the strategic *planning* of actions and the concepts for performances, tested out in activities such as Summer Lodge<sup>5</sup>; (3) the *action* is the performative art practice of live events, interventions and workshops as participatory performance; (4) the invitation and facilitation of participants in these actions involves *hosting*; (5) *observations* and evaluation 'in action' is achieved through live observation, reflected in the 'reflections as host' live writing; (6) finally, *reflection* 'on action' is achieved through viewing the documentation of photographs, video, conversations, dissemination of the practice, and contextual and theoretical analysis. In the first cycle of this artistic research for example, *The Romantic Encounter*, *observations* of the playful and flirtatious nature of communication between avatars and the testing out of ideas during Summer Lodge 2010 informed the concept and *planning* for a speed-dating event between avatars and humans. The *action* was a participatory performance event between a virtual and physical café, in which participants were *hosted* and facilitated to perform as assigned avatars. *Observations* of the participants' performance and *reflections* through conversations and review of documentation informed further questioning for the next cycle. The practice and the theory inform one another through the action and reflection within this research. As McNiff and Whitehead (2009) suggest, as the practice evolves, so too does the theory.

### **Reflection *in* and *on* action**

In *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), Donald Schön provides an epistemology of art and design practice to observe how professionals reflect *in* action (during), and *on* action (following) their practice. As emphasized above, this artistic research reflection takes place both *in* action and *on* action. The 'action', here, is the live event or intervention of participatory performance, often taking place with groups of participants or in public to

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<sup>5</sup> Summer Lodge is an annual event at Nottingham Trent University in which current staff, research students and external artists initiate new dialogues and critical exchange through engaging together in a period of sustained studio practice.

an audience of potential participants. In this artistic research, observation and facilitation of participants takes place using reflection in action, while conversations, and time spent with the document-materials collected (including photographs and videos) takes place following the live action, using reflection *on* action. The combination of reflection *in* action and reflection *on* action results in detailed reflection and analysis. This generates new knowledge and also new questioning, thus informing the next cycle.

The reflection *on* action brings the research process to an interim conclusion, and is disseminated at this point to the participants and to a public audience, through performance, screenings, websites, exhibitions, talks and conference papers. The outcomes from this public dissemination further inform the reflection process, through the conversation and feedback from audiences. The reflection, analysis and dissemination to the research community and the wider public to generate debate and new knowledge is, according to Borgdorff (2006, p. 18), “imperative to the distinction between practice-as-research and practice-in-itself”.

### **Hospitality: Participation and Facilitation**



Figure 4. *Recipes for Participation*, Show & Listen seminar, Nottingham Trent University, 2011

According to Swann (2002, p. 56) “Participation and collaboration in action research requires that all participants share in the developmental process in an emancipatory role”. While this is widely acknowledged as an integral component of action research, there is little evidence of how researchers achieve the engagement and empowerment of participants in a collaborative and reflexive research process. The consideration of the participant in my own participatory art practice is an ethical one. I consider my role that of inviting and facilitating participants in a creative and collaborative process. This differs to interactive work where participants are only able to “trigger a predetermined narrative through an input–output device and who can then observe passively the programmed results of his or her action” (Broeckmann 2007, p. 200). In this research, I have experimented with a number of methods-as-tactics to invite, engage and facilitate participants, to question the roles, relationships and responsibilities within participation. Through action and reflection on the roles and responsibilities of artist and participant, I have found the language and concept of hospitality, to be useful in understanding the convivial and reciprocal relationship that takes place between artist (host) and participant (guest).

The term hospitality has not widely been used in the discussions of participatory practice, instead the terms relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002), participation (Bishop 2010), collaboration and conversation (Kester 2004) have been articulated and contested. However, the language of hospitality is increasingly being celebrated within contemporary art, for example, the 2012 exhibition *Feast: Radical Hospitality in Contemporary Art*, at the Smart Museum in Chicago, presenting “a retrospective of international artists whose participatory practices involve the production, sharing, or performance of cooking, eating and drinking together” (Smart Museum 2012). The 2012 Liverpool Biennial, entitled *The Unexpected Guest*, the curatorial programme explored the themes of hospitality “as an attitude, code of conduct and metaphor” (Liverpool Biennial 2012), and the 2012 World Event Young Artists (WEYA) exhibition presented an art category for ‘gastronomy’.

“The social acts of sharing food, drinking beer, dancing samba, discussing politics, and running a café”, are examples of artworks, provided by Claire Bishop in the text *Participation*, (2006, p. 10) to describe artworks “which appropriate social forms as a way to bring art and life closer together”. While food is not the focus of this research, it is acknowledged as a method artists use to invite participants, to begin an exchange and create a feeling of conviviality, through the act of sharing food and drink. It also indicates to the element of trust involved in the relationship between artist-host and participant-guest, which becomes evident in the exchange of food and drink. Other social activities, such as dancing, chatting, dating, become common methods for exchanges with participants, due to the shared understanding involved in these actions. Within this research, the social aspect is part of the methodology as well as the study. The observations within *Second Life* are often related to the social behaviours in these spaces, and an interest in how social activities, such as those mentioned above, are translated in virtual worlds, and visa versa. The social space of the café is used as a site to intervene and perform in, due to the implicit etiquettes inherent in these spaces, making them rich sites to use for this artistic research.

### **Roles, relationships, responsibilities**

I began to use the language of hospitality, following reading Jacques Derrida’s text *Of Hospitality* (2000), which informed the artistic research paper *The Artist as Host: convivial acts in participatory art practice*, presented at *Transmission: Hospitality Conference* at Sheffield Hallam University (2010), in which I proposed, for the first time, that artists host audiences in convivial exchanges in participatory practice. This developed to a more detailed analysis of the roles, relationships and responsibilities between the artist (host) and the participant (guest), present in the practical chapters of the thesis.

### **Participatory performance as enquiry**

According to Michael Oakeshott (1933) there becomes a necessity for researchers to un-familiarise themselves with the space or object that they are studying to be able to offer an insight and critical analysis of it. He describes the research process of stepping

outside our everyday experience of people, objects and places, and subjecting them to different sorts of examination as an “arrest of experience” (Oakeshott 1933 in Clough and Nutbrown 2007, p. 23). Clough and Nutbrown suggest that this “arrest of experience” can be characterised by four forms of radical enquiry. These are radical looking, radical listening, radical reading and radical questioning (Clough and Nutbrown 2007, p. 23). Their use of the term ‘radical’ as enquiry, implies a further critical and political approach to make the familiar strange, to identify gaps in knowledge and to make an informed position. In the field of performance art, the term ‘radical prototypes’ was used by Allan Kaprow (1954) to describe the experiential and experimental performance art of happenings. Judith Rodenbeck (2011) argues that these happenings offered “a strong and canny critique of contemporary society”. In this research, the ‘radical enquiry’ takes place through the tactics of participatory performance to critique the everyday practices of virtual space.

## CONTEXT

*“In one sense there is nothing more simple and more obvious than everyday life. How do people live? The question may be difficult to answer, but that does not make it any the less clear. In another sense nothing could be more superficial: it is banality, triviality, repetitiveness. And in yet another sense nothing could be more profound. It is existence and the ‘lived’, revealed as they are before speculative thought has transcribed them: what must be changed and what is the hardest of all to change” (Lefebvre, 1967).*

This research proposes that everyday life is now also lived online: we work, play, communicate and socialise online, in virtual spaces, through digital screens and mobile technologies. As interaction in virtual space becomes increasingly familiar and ordinary, this creates new practices of everyday (virtual) life and thus, as with the theorists of ‘the everyday’, new ‘tactics’ become necessary to draw attention to critically question the ‘hybrid space’ which emerges through the dual inhabiting of physical-virtual space simultaneously.

### **The Everyday**

The concept of *the everyday*, which is also referred to as the quotidian, the habitual, the ordinary and the banal is used as an appropriate theoretical framework for the theories and practices that I observe in this research. The phrase ‘the everyday’ is a now a recognised concept in contemporary art practice, and the title to one of the *Whitechapel: Documents in Contemporary Art* (Johnstone, 2008). In my use of the term ‘the everyday’ I consider this in two-parts: the practices of the everyday and the spaces of the everyday. The practices of the everyday refer to the repeated actions and practices that most individuals have in common, this includes cooking, eating, washing, travelling and sleeping, for example. The spaces of the everyday are considered those inhabited most frequently, this includes the home, the street, the city and the workplace, for instance. However, when referring to the ‘online’ practices and spaces of the everyday, these differ. Online everyday practices also refer to the repeated actions and practices of individuals except their context is online; these practices include

posting, tagging, commenting and surfing, for example. The online spaces of the everyday are the most frequently inhabited, including email portals, social networking sites, online games or virtual environments.

Theoretical studies of *the everyday*, including that of Steven Johnstone (2008), map the activities of cultural theorists and artists since the early 1960s. While this is the study of what Georges Perec (1974, p. 210) describes as ‘the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, and the habitual’, it is the critical questioning through tactics, actions, interventions and events that this has been achieved. The theoretical framework of *the everyday* analyses the practices, actions, experiences and spaces of everyday life. The theories of Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, Georges Perec and Michel de Certeau map a historical and theoretical landscape for the analysis of the everyday. Of particular significance for this research, are the methods and ‘tactics’ these theorists offer to the reader, encouraging playful and creative responses to everyday spaces, in order to challenge the rules of spaces and radically investigate what could otherwise go unnoticed.

As Steven Johnstone (2008) discusses there are a number of positions towards the personal, aesthetic and political desires of artists to investigate the everyday in contemporary art. These include the view that there is value in ordinary behaviour; a desire to uncover the extraordinary; to make the familiar unfamiliar; to use ethnographic tactics to record interesting encounters and happenings or to question what happens when nothing happens; a wish to celebrate ordinary people and the individual voice; and a responsibility to socially engage communities. He explains that: “the rise of the everyday in contemporary art is usually understood in terms of a desire to bring the uneventful and overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility” and the “implicit notion that a turn to the everyday will bring art and life closer together” (Johnstone 2008, pp. 12-13). Individual and collective actions that are political, playful, creative, or thought provoking offer critical investigations into the everyday, and can draw attention to the overlooked and offer insights into contemporary society. This is what artists working with the everyday can offer. Their role becomes that of an observer, documenter, interpreter, activist, host or facilitator, negotiating participatory investigations into everyday practices, actions, experiences and spaces.



## Social Geography

The everyday spaces under investigation in this research share similarities with the methods of social geography, in their examination of relationships between societies and the spaces they occupy and use. Space/place has an important role in actively constituting society. As Susan Smith argues in *Situating Social Geographies* (1999), there are three relationships between space and society within social geography, the 'third space' being the one of most significance here. While 'first space' reflects social activity and 'second space' constructs social activity, 'third space' is a means of resistance and celebration: "Rather than accepting these social constructions of space, we might challenge them through our use of space. Spaces can be used to resist oppression and redefine social identity" (Smith 1999, cited in Pain et al. 2001 p. 4).

There is a close relationship here to how psychogeography challenges the use of spaces and explores "the behavioural impact of urban space" on society (Coverley 2010, p. 10). In this research the consideration of the spaces investigated are 'social spaces'. Through the investigation of encounters and interactions between people, the social space becomes the site of investigation and intervention. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1991, p. 73) offers a critical view point of 'social space':

*"(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and similarity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations..."*

Whether offline or online, social spaces are accessible and mostly public sites in which people gather and interact, such as cafés and bars or social platforms like Facebook or virtual cafés in environments like *Second Life*. Claire Docherty (2004, p. 9) argues that:

*"Our understanding of site has shifted from a fixed, physical location to somewhere or something constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes".*

## Second Life



Figure 5. Encounter in Second Life as digital avatar Mariela Eyre, April 2010

*Second Life* (SL) is an online virtual world created in 2003 by the American Company Linden Lab. Users of Second Life, called 'residents', inhabit this world for free as digital avatars, and communicate with one another through instant messaging, gestures, and voice chat. SL is a virtual world, made up of islands and digital structures built and paid for by its users. An economy exists through the selling of land, clothing and objects through the internal currency of 'Linden dollars'. The creative possibilities within this virtual space are vast. According to Cory Ondrejka, Linden Lab's vice president of product development:

*"You can be a woman some of the time and a man the rest of the time, and you don't even have to look human... there are hundreds of controls, which allow for effectively infinite possibilities for how you can look in-world. You can look like a realistic version of yourself – or you can look as outlandish as you want."*

(cited in Rackham, 2006)

However, as Melinda Rackham (2006, p. 54) points out, despite the myriad of possibilities and freedom of choice in the representations of avatars as 'online selves', it appears that the opposite is true; with many selecting an 'off the peg avatar' offered by Linden Lab. Despite offering 'infinite possibilities for how to look' and opportunities for extraordinary experiences and social encounters the rules, inventories and menu's provided seem to lead interaction. Maria Backe (2009, p. 109) proposes that "rules of these social spaces function as a foundation and guidance for identity formation, and in fact almost seem to prescribe a certain way of acting or behaving". This becomes evident in this artistic research, through reflection on the use of the 'gestures menu' provided in *Second Life*. While much research and artistic practice about *Second Life* focuses on behaviour, identity, interaction and performance in the virtual, digital space<sup>6</sup> my research uses observations from the virtual and the blurring between the virtual and physical to investigate a potential hybrid space that exists between the everyday; which is now also lived online. As outlined within the introduction, *Second Life* is not considered an everyday space, as the extraordinary possibilities and encounters it presents, such as flying, transforming your identity or gender in seconds, or teleporting between locations, are not transferable to the physical world. However, in Georges Perec's (1974) definition of the everyday as "the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, and the habitual", it is possible for these attributes to be said of a virtual space frequently encountered in which there become 'common' languages and etiquette, 'ordinary' behaviours and 'habitual' practices.

Within *Second Life*, gestures and dancing are key forms of communication, in the social and public spaces; occupied by avatars strutting as if on a catwalk, moving their hips, flicking their hair and twirling their hybrid bodies. Each of these public spaces in *Second Life* is similar; the same behaviour is repeated by different avatars and appears to become an everyday virtual practice of this space. Groups of avatars share the space as a performance platform; strutting, dancing, changing their appearance, and occasionally shouting or announcing something obscure or rude. In *From Ritual to Theatre: The human seriousness of play*, Victor Turner (1982) defines ritual as

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<sup>6</sup> Such as Paul Sermon, *Second Front* and Eva and Franco Mattes

essentially '*performance, enactment*', which can be related to the performance of movement and gestures in *Second Life*, which appear to be a social event and ritual. As Marvin Carlson (1996) points out in *Performance: a critical introduction*:

*"For Goffman, the "frame" is an organizing principle for setting apart social events, especially those that, like play or performance, take on a different relationship to normal life and normal responsibilities than the same or similar events would have as "untransformed reality" outside the confines of the frame."* (Goffman 1974, p157, cited in Carlson 1996, p35-36)

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) defines performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (Goffman 1959, p2). What are the differences then to performance in a digital context, where you can't be sure who is observing you and when and what influence you may have on them? I would argue that, to an extent, you are an observer of your own performance, as Melinda Rackam (2006, p. 54) suggests through 'simultaneously occupying the three positions of user, viewer, and avatar', and through the separation of yourself from your digital self. However, this may be different for those who live their life through their avatar, and therefore may not have such a distance to their actual identity. This shares similarities to how we perform in other networked online communities, such as Facebook, where one remains a digital self, although not through a material presence of an avatar character, instead in the written profile, statements about oneself in the third person or in the careful selection of what images to share to project a considered identity. Or in YouTube where one uploads, publishes and watches videos of often banal acts; sharing private lives to a public and worldwide audience.

This research therefore questions how *Second Life* can act as a framework to investigate the everyday practices of virtual space through a participatory and performative artistic practice. This involves the interaction between the virtual and the physical, blurring these boundaries and creating a hybrid space through the re-performance of the digital gestures of avatars.

## Hybrid Space

Erik Kluitenberg (2006, p. 8) argues that “we are living in an environment in which the public is reconfigured by a multitude of media and communication networks interwoven into the social and political functions of space to form a ‘hybrid space’”. He outlines the importance of designing “free spaces and activist strategies to encourage public and private action within this hybrid space” (Kluitenberg, 2006, p.8). Dutch artist Gordon Savicic, achieves this in his work *Constraint City – The pain of everyday life*, performed as part of *Tracing Mobility* in Nottingham, May 2010, in which he, and willing participants, walked through the city wearing a corset that tightened dependent on the number of “wireless signal strength of enclosed encrypted networks: The piece of work is a digital art performance and a city-intervention that addresses both public and private space within the realm of everyday ‘constraints’” (Savicic 2010).

As outlined in the introduction, hybrid space can be understood as “a space in motion and an interaction between perceived, conceived, lived and virtual space. This space is formed not only by materiality and social and political actions, but also by digital technology” (Kraan, 2006, p.39). Lev Manovic (2005, p. 4) considers this interaction, through the “overlapping layers of data on the physical space as creating an ‘augmented space’”. Unlike the experience of virtual space, augmented space maintains an awareness of the physical environment when interacting with data and mobile screens; “the display adds to your overall phenomenological experience but it does not take over” (Manovic, 2005 p. 5). Most crucially, Manovic considers augmented space as not only interaction achieved technologically, but also conceptually. He uses Canadian artist, Janet Cardiff’s “audio walks” as an example to illustrate “the aesthetic potential of overlaying a new information space over a physical space [...] The power of this interaction lies in the interaction between these two spaces – between vision and hearing and between past and present” (Manovic, 2005 p. 6).

Another artist that achieves a powerful interaction between virtual and physical space is Canadian artist Michelle Teran. This explores the interaction between technologies or online social media networks in urban environments. She stages interventions in the city such as guided tours, walks and open-air projections, participatory installations

and happenings. In *Buscando al Sr. Goodbar* (2009) participants joined a bus tour to explore the Spanish town of Murcia. The landmarks for this tour were not historic; instead they were locations of geotagged YouTube videos. At each location the tour guide (an actor) would lead the tour group to the original location of the geotagged video, where the originator(s) of the video would be encouraged (with prior invitation) to re-perform their original video to the group and to camera. This included a piano recital in a young mans home, skateboarding tricks by a group under a bridge and singing a song in the street, originally performed with friends when drunk. The surprise attention to them and the awkwardness of their live re-performance drew attention to the increasing familiarity and comfortableness in performing to web-camera and potentially the world, when publishing online. Most interestingly, those who decline, seemingly due to feeling embarrassed, are more embarrassed to perform live to a small group of people than in uploading a video to a public online site. This becomes a critical questioning of the practice of everyday (virtual) life, in which, through YouTube, one can now engage in the online broadcasting of ones mundane activities through videos, status updates and profile pictures. This work offers insights into how, with the increasing familiarity of broadcasting oneself online and the perceived anonymity of virtual space, there perhaps becomes a removal from whom they are interacting with.

In another example, UK artist Paul Sermon's work *They Live in Second Life* (2008), "prompts a social and collective experience between strangers and between realities". Performed between the virtual world of Second Life and a gallery in Manchester as part of *Futuresonic Festival*, it questioned:

*"Is Second Life a platform for potential social and cultural change? Does Second Life influence first lives? And could our first life existence start to reflect our Second Life conscience as this community continues to grow and develop into the future?"*

This *Second Life* performance is of particular interest to my research as it goes beyond the boundaries of *Second Life* as a screen-based interaction between digital avatars through the use of a computer mouse and keyboard. It connected remote online users at home using Second Life to those in the 'first life' environment in Manchester. It achieved this through live music and projection played simultaneously in both the

virtual and physical space – where digital avatars and gallery goers could dance together through life-size projections.

The artist group Second Front who have been performing in *Second Life* since 2006 create digital performances with historic influences from *Theatre of the Absurd* and *Fluxus*. The piece I witnessed in their performance at the *Remote Encounters: Connecting bodies, collapsing spaces and temporal ubiquity in networked performance* conference (Cardiff University 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> April 2013), was a live re-enactment of a Fluxus work by Al Hansen “Yoko One Piano Drop” and was used as an ‘event score’ by the group in *Second Life*. This shares some similarities between the artistic tactics employed in this research to extract and create performance instructions for live events, within a historical trajectory of Fluxus events. However, Second Front’s performance extracted a physical work with evident impossibilities and performed it in a virtual space to play with the limitless possibilities of dropping multiple pianos from a height. This is different to the approach within this practice-led enquiry, as the critical questioning and tactics employed in the research are to extract observations from a virtual space and re-perform them in the physical space.

In this relationship between the physical and virtual one is always physically located in a body and in a site when interacting in a virtual space. Often bodily interaction may be very inactive – sitting at a computer, sometimes unaware of the body (Salter, 2010) whilst ‘flying’ through a virtual world and engaging in avatar-avatar or text-text communication. Whilst physically inactive, one is instructing an avatar to move, gesture and speak to others in a virtual space, as observed in *Second Life*.

## **Participation**

This contextualises the research within participatory art practice, introduces the historical lineage, and questions the roles and reciprocal relationships of tactics, invitations, instructions and audience as participant-guest and artist as facilitator-host. This also introduces the practice and reflection of participatory performance from experiences of the artist and the participant in order to draw connections, demonstrate the methodology and reveal the research.

According to Boris Groys (2009, p. 5) “a tendency towards a collaborative, participatory practice is undeniably one of the main characteristics of contemporary art”. The heritage of participation in art is rooted in the 1950s, from John Cage’s experimental musical compositions, to Guy Debord and the Situationist International, Allan Kaprow’s Happenings and Neo-Dada and Fluxus Art. In *Neo-Dada in Music, Theatre, Poetry, Art*, George Maciunas (1962) described this practice as ‘anti-art’ forms:

*“The anti-art forms are directed primarily against art as a profession, against the artificial separation of a performer from its audience, or creator and spectator, or life and art”.*

In the Whitechapel: Documents on Contemporary Art series on *Participation*, editor Claire Bishop (2006) maps the historical lineage of participation in theoretical and artistic practices to the present day. In her own contribution *Viewers as Producers* (2006, p.10), she explains how “the practice of participation appropriates social forms as a way of bringing art closer to everyday life [and in this process] strives to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception”. In *Conversation Pieces*, Grant Kester (2004) uses the term ‘dialogical practice’ to describe the concept of community and collaboration in modern art. This concept is cited to have been derived from Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, “who argued that the work of art can be viewed as a ‘conversation’ – with a locus of different meanings, interpretations and points of view” (Kester 2004, p.10). Nicolas Bourriaud (2002, p.113), the French curator and art critic, coined the term ‘relational aesthetics’ to describe “...a set of artistic practices [of the 1990s] which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure, the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than a single independent and private space”. In the works identified as ‘relational’ by Bourriaud, the gallery visitors are the central focus; they encounter one another through the artworks of social structures, interactive sculptures, events and games offered by the artists. In many of the examples cited in these texts, the works often offer a structure within which a community can be formed through a shared experience. While the formation of such a community has been challenged by Bishop as ‘only temporary and utopian’, it can be justifiably be regarded



as a socially political response to the increasing virtual relationships made possible by the World Wide Web. In Bourriaud's opinion (2001, cited in Docherty 2004, p. 43), these works respond to "the desire to prompt physical and face-to-face interaction between individuals or to create an immersive environment and 'micro-utopias' within the everyday". However, the artworks Bourriaud considers to be relational are from a selected cohort of artists whose work is predominantly presented in a gallery context to a gallery-going public, rather than in city and online spaces where other publics exist. These 'relational' works have a distinct function, in that they are intended to be *used* rather than merely to be contemplated by the audience. According to Bourriaud (2002, p. 113) "...the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist". He adds argues that "...a work may operate like a relational device containing a certain degree of randomness, or a machine provoking and managing individual and group encounters" (Bourriaud, 2002, p 113). The openness of the work in this context is integral to artworks that unfold through a process of performative audience participation.

In his text *The Open Work*, Umberto Eco (1989, p.4) discusses the open work in the context of both the 'completed' artwork and the 'open' artwork:

*"Every reception of a work of art is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself"*.

According to Eco, the artist produces an unfinished piece of work and then invites active participation for the work to become complete. It can be argued that all artworks produced are necessarily open to reception and interpretation, and are brought to their ultimate conclusions by the audience. However, the traditional distinction between artist and audience can only begin to be re-defined through work that invites active participation, performative interaction and collaboration, in which it becomes, truly 'open'. In this context, it is the audiences' choice to define their role: as passive participant, active participant or collaborator. In this research participatory performance celebrates and activates an audience, encouraging them to participate and perform in response to an invitation, instruction or structured situation. By accepting

the invitation or choosing to respond they become entrusted with an active role to shape, develop or determine the piece, resulting occasionally in participant agency and occasionally in artist vulnerability.

With the first historical and theoretical overview of socially engaged participatory art, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (Claire Bishop 2012), a new critical perspective to this field is provided. This raises potent questions regarding artists working with participants, particularly in performative works that employ participants to enact a specific role, which she refers to as ‘delegated performance’. She suggests that the inclusion of “other peoples bodies as the medium of his or her work” raises questions and ethical issues and “can often prompt accusations of exploitation or manipulation” (Bishop 2012, p. 220). This has informed my critical reflection, particularly on ‘active participation: reflections on performing as ‘guest’’, in which my active role as participant in other artists works has varied with subsequent experiences from joy to manipulation. Furthermore this text provokes useful questioning on the reasoning behind artists’ desires to work with others, activate audiences or offer agency through participatory models of working together. In this research I have included the action and reflection on both my roles as artist-host and participant-guest. Therefore offering a first hand perspective on a specific set of UK practices, that moves the largely theoretical approach to the ‘ethics and aesthetics of contemporary labour’ that Bishop offers, to one of direct experience as critical questioning, in particular to the roles, relationships and responsibilities between the artist and participant.

In this artistic research, critical questioning of the everyday is achieved through a tactic of re-framing; taking the rules, behaviour and language in the virtual space, and re-framing these in physical space, to draw attention to human interaction in a hybrid space. These are reflections on lived experiences and phenomena in contemporary society, as Philip Glahn (2007, p. 169) suggests:

*“Digital media have provided new spaces for communication and social organization—the opportunity for new utopian raptures as well as new forms of deliberation and action. Increasingly, artists, hackers, and activists understand themselves as facilitators of emancipatory processes and providers of tools, seeking*

*to turn spectators into the agents of new publics, into participants in a new techno-collective future based on the production of surplus knowledge, shared intellect, and community”.*

In each piece of work careful consideration is given to the role of the participant and how they can be activated and encouraged through invitation or instruction. In my practice the participant is invaluable, without their active and creative participation I would not be able to make the work. The invitation or instruction and consideration for how to work with participants is part of the planning stage for the pieces of work, offering open opportunities for interpretation, participation and collaboration. This relates to personal values in working with others in a participatory manner.. The increased numbers of active participants online (sharing, contributing, collaborating, mash-ups) creates a culture of active producers of content as well as everyday practices of producing and contributing to online content. However, how critical are we? How are we using these spaces to draw attention to important meaningful content? If we are now living our lives through these online spaces, what are the implications?

As Benezra (2008, p. 10) points out in his forward to *The Art of Participation: 1950 – Now*;

*“[...] it is now generally accepted that these social networking sites have begun to radically transform the ways in which we relate to each other – not only online, but also as a society”*

In this book, which accompanied an exhibition at the San Francisco MOMA of the same title (2008-2009), a trajectory is bridged between the historical lineage of participatory art and, how artists working with audiences as participants began to adopt and contribute to the collaborative strategies of the Web 2.0 movement. While this text draws attention to this important bridge and posits a theoretical text by Lev Manovic, it references few artists and diverse works. Instead it focuses predominately on the gallery space or the re-enactment of performances in online galleries. In addition, there is less of a focus on the artists using interventionist strategies working with digital technology to question online spaces. These works also have a clear trajectory from Allan Kaprow’s Fluxus events, which share very similar performative concepts to the

works which are predominantly not working in a gallery or museum context, instead in the city, on the street or through online social media platforms.

The activation and empowerment of the audience is mirrored in participatory culture (Jenkins 2006), which in the spirit of web 2.0 intends to encourage 'audiences' to participate and contribute creatively. Irwin et al (2009, p. 64) argue that:

*"Rather than simply receiving and interpreting art, audience members become analysers or interlocutors, even active participants in the artworks. Art is no longer just about visual style but social purpose. Education is no longer just about individual achievement but social understanding and contribution".*

In the text, *Outsourcing Authenticity? Delegated Performance in Contemporary Art*, Claire Bishop (2009, p. 111) cites artists Phil Collins, Dora Garcia and Jeremy Deller as artists whom mark a shift in the notion of 'participation', in particular the performance of the participants, in works in the 1990s:

*"All of the works raise questions of performance and authorship, and in particular the issues of ethics and representation that ensue when the artist is no longer the central agent in his or her own work, but operates through a range of individuals, communities and surrogates. In the works of these artists, performance is delegated – or, to use more managerial language, 'outsourced' – to other performers. These people may be specialists or nonprofessionals, paid or unpaid, but they undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time in a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following their instructions."*

While there are some similarities to the approach of practice-led enquiry in this research, this differs significantly, as the works attempt to create participatory performance which can move beyond an instruction to perform a specific role, to an invitation to creatively participate and respond, within a framework set by the artist. These do, however, have an increasing relationship to the 'performance re-enactment' of the live performative intervention. However, it is less considered as 'intense' and

more of a fleeting encounter as it takes place in a city, publicly, or in an online space which does not have the conventions of a gallery or performance space in staging performative interventions. For example, while *Mariela: cmd, click, control* could be considered a live one-off performance as it shared similarities to a performance with a seated audience and specific duration, it took place in a café on a Sunday afternoon. It was part of an artist festival and other performances took place the same day, however, half of the audience were un-expectant café-goers. The participation in this piece was much more structured with less actual 'performance' by the audience, however in this piece, they instructed me 'as artist-performer' to move and/or to dance at their table. The power between the artist and the audience shifted and as performer I became more vulnerable.

## **Documentation**

In most cases what remains following a participatory performance is an image - an image that gets widely distributed, later to be recognised and interpreted by an audience who weren't present for the live participation. In this image there will generally be a number of participants who are caught "live" in action, responding to the artists' invitation or instruction to participate through physical interaction with the work presented or directly with the artist or other participants through action or exchange. These images capture the 'completed' piece of 'open work' (Eco 1989); a work that successfully engaged an audience in participation and fulfils the cycle of artist-audience-artwork. However, these images capture more than this, they present a complex relationship between the artist and the audience. Here, again, the audience not only become active participants, but also performers in the work. They are photographed and viewed accordingly by a live or remote audience who view the documentation at a later date.



Figure 6. Documentary Interview with Rebecca Gamble, published online, 2016

In this PhD, documentation of the practice-led research is presented through still and moving image in the written-visual thesis and online submission. The addition of a documentary film ties together the analysis through interview with the author-performer-researcher and the documentation of live practice. The documentary film reveals the critical position, origins of the research and the embodied knowledge; also becoming a piece of work itself, through new film footage and performance-to-camera from both the artist and participants in this practice.

## THE ROMANTIC ENCOUNTER

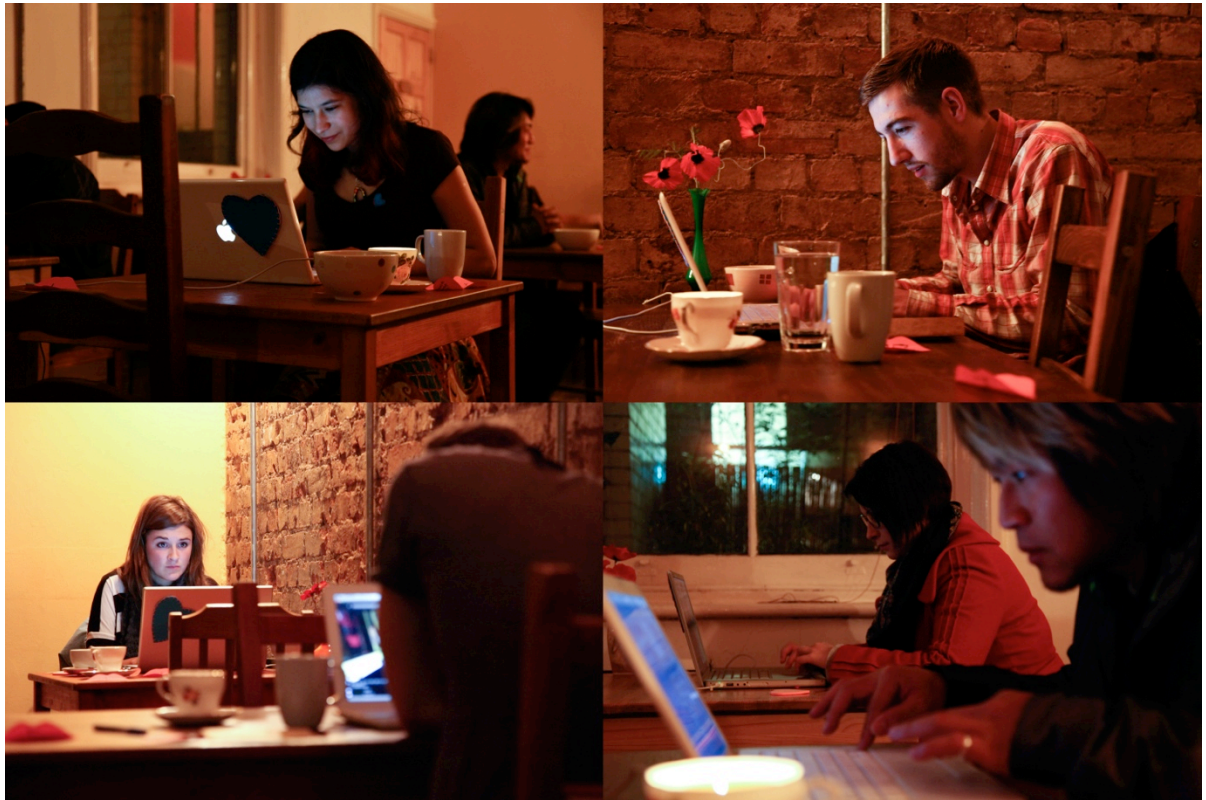


Figure 7. *The Romantic Encounter*, 2010

The reader is invited to view the accompanying visual chapter before and alongside this written chapter. The visual chapter can be found online, here:

<http://thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/the-romantic-encounter>.

The chapter presents selected documentation of the practice-led enquiry, including the methodology diagram. The chapter is structured using the core stages of the developed methodological cycle of observe; plan; action/facilitation (live writing: 'reflections as host'); reflection/analysis; and summary.

## Introduction

*The Romantic Encounter* was a live, public participatory performance that took place simultaneously between the social settings of a physical café in Nottingham and replica virtual café in Second Life. It took place for the duration of two hours as a scheduled public evening event as part of Nottingham's Game City festival and also Sideshow, the official fringe to The British Art Show 7. The virtual café in Second Life became the stage for chance romantic encounters between avatars performed by thirty-six different participants in the physical café, who alternated in sets of six every twenty minutes – similar to a speed-dating event. As the first piece of work in the practice-led enquiry, this followed a period of observations and reflections in physical and virtual cafés and was shaped by artistic and theoretical research, particularly addressing the concept of the everyday. This chapter (visual and written) reveals the process, action and reflection of *The Romantic Encounter* and identifies significant insights from this work and how this informed the next piece in the practice-led enquiry.



Figure 8. *The Romantic Encounter*, methodology diagram 2010



## Origins and Observations: social spaces, online and offline

*The Romantic Encounter* originated from knowledge of artistic practices that create situations for encounters between people, often achieved by transforming galleries into social settings or creating events in public spaces. For example, in Rirkrit Tiravanija's culinary performances in galleries (1992–1995), in Neil Cummings social cinema events in the car park of a tower block (2006) and in my own functional installations in galleries (2005–2009). The artworks, particularly in gallery settings in the 1990s, which attempted to set up social contexts for audience participation, activated Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of 'relational aesthetics' (1998, p. 113) in which he proposed that "artworks should be judged aesthetically on the human relationships that they prompt or produce". In *Conversation Pieces* (2004, p.1) Grant Kester further argued, "artists have adopted a performative, process-based approach [becoming] ...'context providers' rather than 'content providers'. These artworks, such as the example he gives to Peter Dunn's work, involve "the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations, well beyond the institutional confines of the gallery or museum".

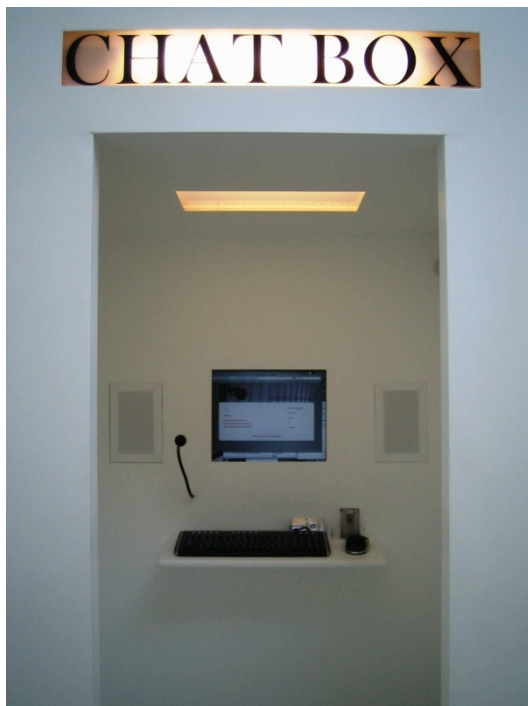


Figure 9. *Chat Box*, networked interactive installation, 2007

In my previous work within the series 'Events for a Conversation' (2006-2007), I investigated accessible, everyday modes and spaces for conversation between people. Using telecommunication and the internet, I experimented with different modes of communication, networking public spaces to peoples homes in participatory events. This culminated in *Chat Box* (2007), a functional and futuristic public telecommunication booth using Skype software for voice calls and video chats via the internet globally. This was a relational participatory piece of work, physically situated in a gallery in Falmouth where participants met strangers, reconnected with family and friends and had dinner dates with their spouse virtually, through the screen, web-camera and microphone. It was through the grounding of relational practice and research that I became interested in networked performance between two or more remote spaces, and the possibilities for live relational events between people who are not physically co-present. The collaboration between artists Patrick Simons and Kate Southworth (Glorious Ninth) and Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett (Furtherfield) in their piece *November* (2006) is a suitable example of networked performance. The artists linked their four locations online via video camera and voice using Apple's iChat software. In this piece they shared 'an everyday performance/ritual' of eating raw garlic together while reading improvised texts. This live event achieved a shared sensory experience between performers while connected remotely through digital screen and sound from four physical locations.

The interest in everyday telecommunication and the internet as networked spaces for everyday practices of meeting, socialising and sharing social acts such as eating and drinking led me to the virtual world of Second Life. As with other online social media platforms, Second Life creates a space for virtual interaction. However, this digitally constructed space is experienced through the creation of a digital self as avatar, inhabiting a virtual world of social spaces including cafés, bars, shops and restaurants and also educational spaces such as universities and museums. First encounters of this virtual space as my digital avatar Mariela Eyre were surprising. I was struck by the vastness and complexities of the virtually constructed world; with its own world map of locations to teleport to, options to buy land to build your own residence, and seemingly infinite possibilities of creation of your digital avatar through their gender, hair, eye and skin colour, body shape and clothing. This became the site for my artistic

investigations due to the virtual world being a confined digital space, encountered as a digitally constructed avatar body with very specific and interesting parallels and differences to the physical world.

Through a series of observations and encounters in Second Life, in different spaces and with other avatars, I found there to be common behaviours, partly dependent on ones familiarity of Second Life and the maturity of ones avatar; dependent on how long one had been a Second Life 'resident' for. New residents like myself stumbled through the space, unfamiliar with the movement controls (of walk, run or fly) and with undeveloped clone avatars, only slightly adapted from the template avatar appearances offered when first entering the virtual world.

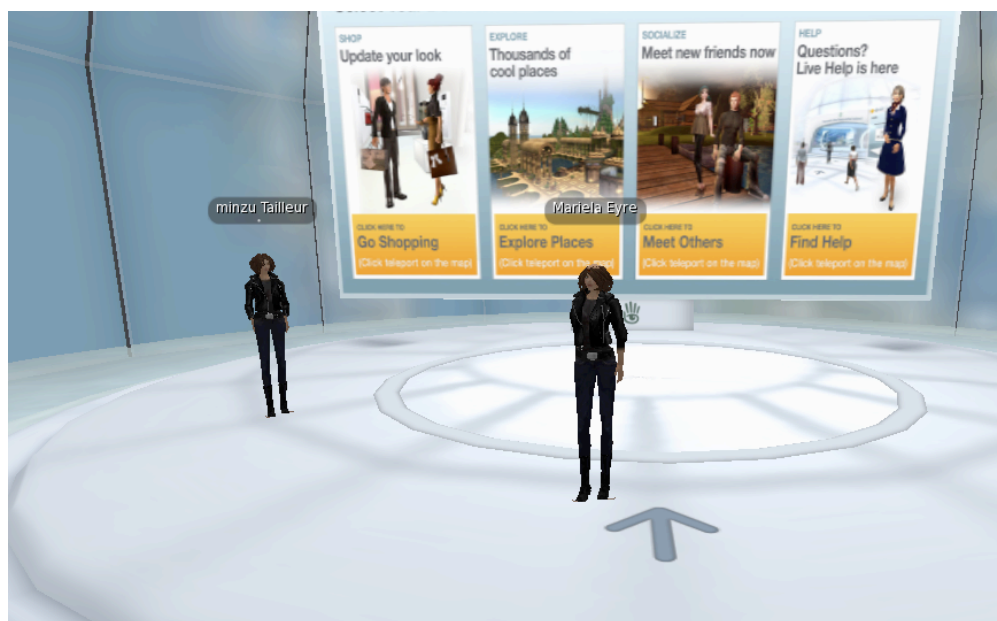


Figure. 10. First encounter in Second Life, 2009

As new avatars, we collectively observed the long-term residents confidently glide through the space, theatrically presenting their avatars through extravagant clothing and provocative movements. The modes of communication in this virtual world include group messaging, through public text available to everyone in the same virtual location; and instant messaging (im), through text or direct voice conversation between specific avatars if agreed by one another. In addition to this, and seemingly the most

frequently used mode of communication, was the custom 'gestures menu' of animations for movement, provided by creators Linden Lab.

This gestures menu contains largely flirtatious or theatrical gestures, including blowing kisses, twirling, dancing, clapping and bowing. In these initial avatar encounters in Second Life, I observed and experienced highly flirtatious behaviour through performed gestures between provocatively dressed avatars. It appeared that the majority of 'public spaces' in Second Life - in comparison to the closed password protected spaces of universities and other private 'landmarks' - were meeting spaces for chance, playful and perhaps 'romantic' encounters between anonymous avatars. The perceived anonymity within this space, as with other online spaces, seemed to authorise and encourage behaviours that would be less common in physical public spaces.

These initial observations initiated interest in the potential similarities and differences between physical and virtual social spaces - in particular, cafés - as meeting spaces. This raised new questions to investigate through participatory performance in the practice-led enquiry:

How do everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in *physical* space alter when transferred to a *virtual* space? And how are the boundaries between the physical and virtual blurred in the live participatory performance event between the two spaces?

### **Planning: Summer Lodge residency**

During the *Summer Lodge* residency in July 2010 at Nottingham Trent University I encountered and observed both physical and virtual café locations. I closely examined and recorded the etiquettes and methodical steps taken in the practices of entering a physical café: sitting at a table; ordering from the menu; interaction with the waiter and other customers; and picking up and drinking a cup of tea.

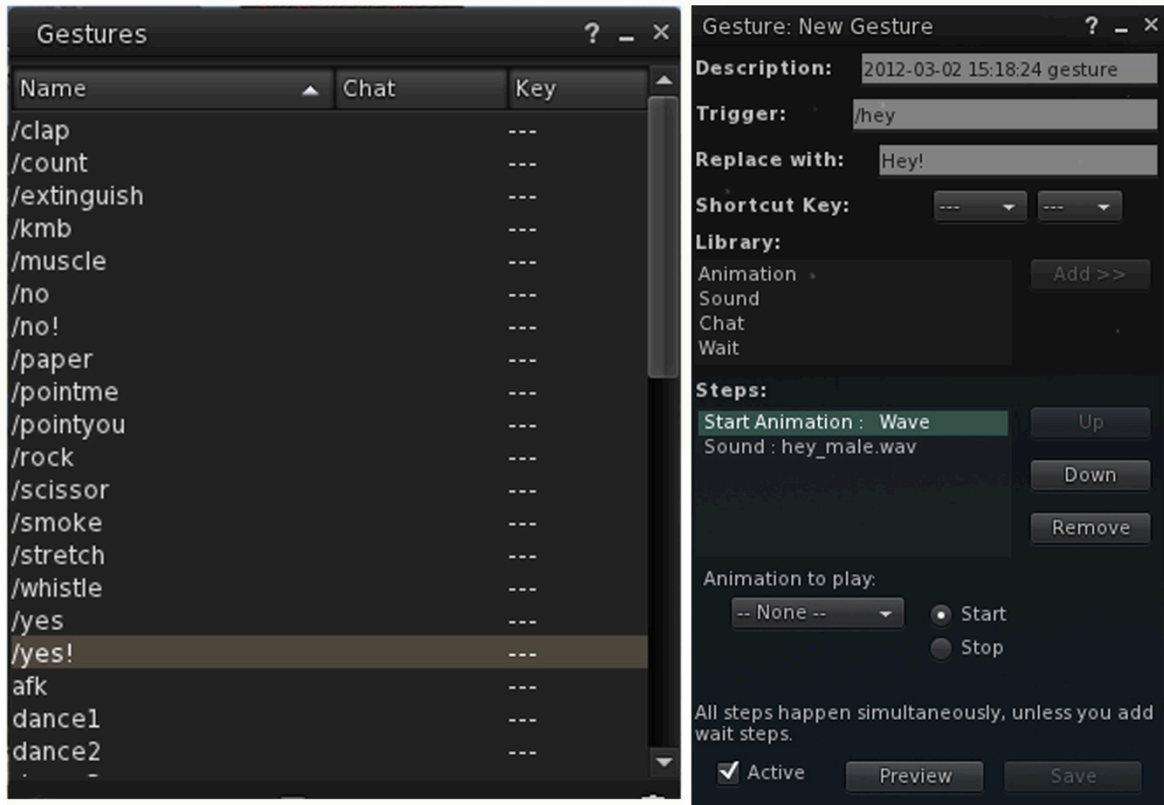


Figure. 11. Gestures Menu in Second Life, 2010

In Second Life, while I found virtual cafés occasionally inhabited by other avatars and with similar options (e.g. to use command keys; to sit at a table and pick up a hot drink), these spaces were not hosted as a working café. Towards the end of the Summer Lodge residency I transformed my studio into a café: an installation for one day, serving tea and cake on four tables for two. The intentions for this relational event were to test methods of invitation, facilitation and reflection by successfully creating a temporary convivial environment within the enclosed studio. In this space, participants could read and discuss the outcomes of the action-research generated during the residency, presented as a menu on a large blackboard covering one wall of the studio.

The convivial environment was achieved through a combination of the shared open invitation in the Fine Art building of the University to “join for tea & cake and a peruse of the menu”; the welcome and facilitation from myself and a studio assistant, which mirrored observations of language used in welcoming customers to a café; and the offer of seating, free food and hot drinks. The café–installation and event initiated a

reciprocal encounter, facilitating collective reflection and feedback in exchange for refreshments. The use of food, drink or social situation in participatory artworks is acknowledged by Claire Bishop (2006) to have been ‘appropriated’ by artists as method to gather and engage people with the intention to initiate conversation or reciprocal exchange through a shared act. This informed the planning of *The Romantic Encounter* in the decision to use an existing café space in the city and in the methods for activating participation, including the written invitation; the pre-booking of timed encounters; the setting of the environment; and the structured instruction and facilitation once participants entered the physical café and were first introduced to the virtual café.

The existing café space selected was Lee Rosy’s Tea café, situated on Broad Street in the city centre of Nottingham. This was the most appropriate in the city due to its location, interior and broadband speed. The interior naturally divided the entrance and welcome space from the seating area, creating two spaces that allowed for an off-stage observation and an on-stage participatory performance.



Figure. 12. The virtual café, 2010

To digitally construct the virtual replica of Lee Rosy’s café I worked with Second Life developers linked to the University, using over 200 images taken of the interior. Accurately replicating details of the physical space, including the décor, signage,



floorboards, tables, appliances, flowers, candles and cups felt essential in attempting a potential 'blurring' of physical and virtual space. Participants being situated in both the physical and the virtual café simultaneously for the event was important to offer a collective sensual experience between environments, including the temperature, smells, music and background sound of the café, or the taste of the tea and coffee which could trigger a conversation.



Figure 13. Assigned avatars in *The Romanic Encounter*, 2010

The Second Life developers provided six digital avatars to assign to participants in the physical café for their performance in the virtual café, including three female and three male avatars. This decision was made following time constraints for participants to create their own avatar identity ahead of the event. Gestures from the Second Life gestures menu were extracted and printed on a physical menu card to clearly guide participants in instructing their avatar to move in the virtual café. I enlisted 'co-hosts'

within the physical café to facilitate the fast-paced turn around of six sets of twenty-minute encounters, and one virtual 'host' to remotely facilitate avatars in the virtual café. The co-hosts in the physical café were asked to create an avatar name to use in their introductory welcome and to follow a script in their initial facilitation of the 'participant-guests'.

### **The invitation**

The importance of being a supported and scheduled event within the programme of Game City and Sideshow was to ensure the open invitation to participate could be publically disseminated and the event situated within the context of both a gaming and contemporary art festival. A website link was given with the invitation to an online event-booking page, where participants could book their scheduled 'romantic encounter'. The public invitation was intentionally brief and provocative, intending to intrigue the audience to what might occur and to prompt them to consider their interaction and potential 'performance' before arriving at the event. The invitation read:

*"You are invited to The Romantic Encounter, taking place at Lee Rosy's Tea Café in Nottingham on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October, between 6.30pm–8.30pm... For one night only the real and the virtual will mingle as Lee Rosy's becomes the stage for your chance romantic encounter with an avatar. Make yourself up, dress to impress or come in disguise – arriving between 6.30pm and 8.15pm – and remember, press F3 to blow a kiss... RSVP to book your encounter."*

The original written invitation to participate, an image of each avatar, the printed gestures menu and a blue heart-shaped felt badge were presented in thirty-six individual envelopes to be given to each participant at the beginning of their encounter.



## **Action and Facilitation:**

### **Reflections as Host**

On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October, Lee Rosy's café, an independent café in Nottingham and a replica café in Second Life, become the site and stage for encounters and performances in the physical and virtual. My co-hosts Moses, Minny and Hector and I, Mariela, work tirelessly to prepare the physical and virtual site for performance; six tables for two, each with a candle, flower, milk jug, sugar bowl and laptop. The café counter, till, shelves, floor, walls and ceilings are replicated in the virtual space while the six avatars receive a makeover in preparation for their performance. Profile photos of each avatar are printed and placed in envelopes with an invitation to perform. On the afternoon before the performance I meet to confer with my fellow café hosts, who will welcome and wait on our guests during their encounter. The physical café and the virtual café meet, the avatars are woken up, the hosts tie their aprons. It's 6.25pm and the guests begin to arrive. *"Hello and welcome to Lee Rosy's Café, I will be your host, Mariela, please take a seat here. In this envelope your avatar identity will be revealed, this identity is anonymous. To walk use the arrow keys, to speak type into the dialogue box and to gesture use the gestures menu. Please let me know if you have any questions. When the bell sounds, it is the end of your encounter. Can I get you a hot drink?"* All six participants are seated at a table alone with a laptop running Second Life. The event begins and the physical and the virtual begin to mingle while the participants inhabit and perform in the physical and virtual café simultaneously. As the bell sounds to mark the end of the twenty-minutes and the first set of encounters, we begin to welcome and seat new guests. Once seated people seem intensely immersed in their interaction with the screen in front of them, some occasionally looking up and over the screen, as if to speculate whose avatar they are speaking to in the virtual café. As their encounter ends, participants remain in the physical café, perhaps continuing conversations started in the virtual café, or to try to observe others in their new encounters. My co-hosts and I welcome and seat six sets of six participants at twenty-minute intervals. As the event comes to a close we thank our final participants, our co-host in the virtual café and each other. We blow out the candles, clear the tables and close the laptops and the event is finished.

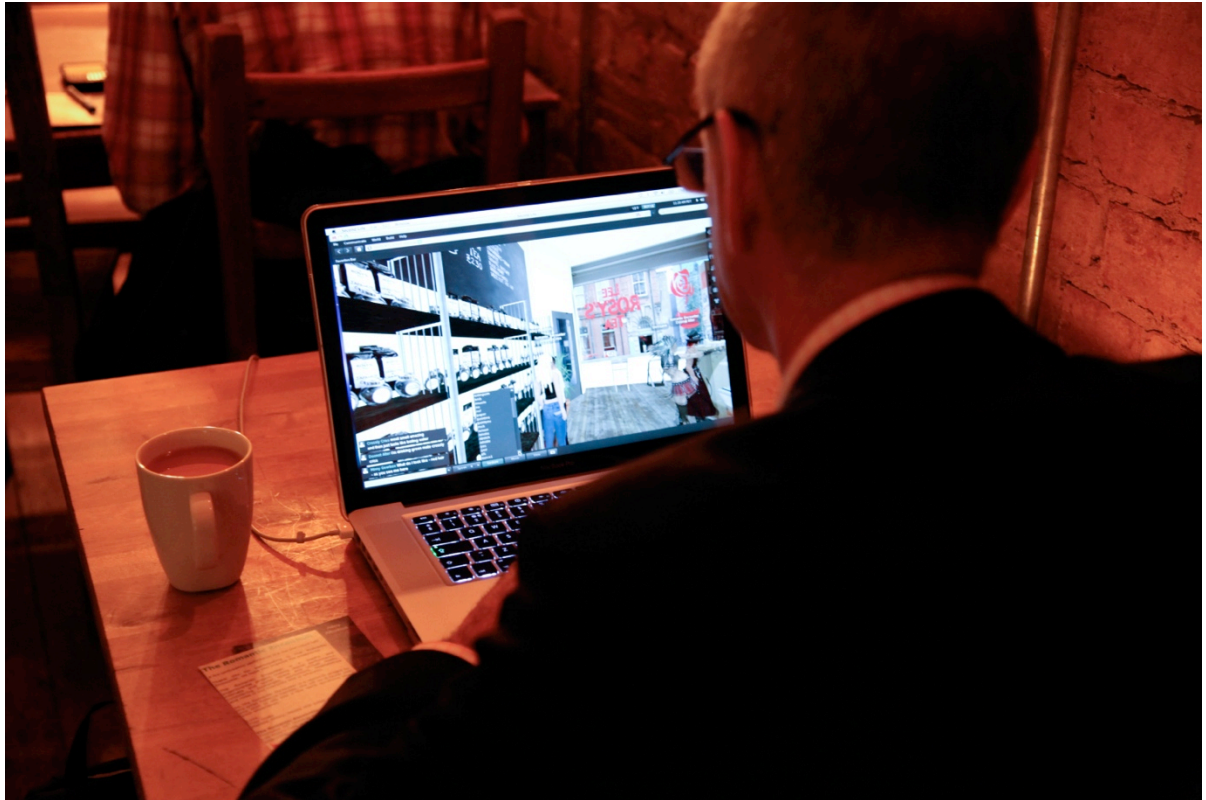


Figure 14. *The Romantic Encounter*, 2010

### **Reflections and analysis**

Following the live event of *The Romantic Encounter*, reflection *on* action took place through observation of photographic documentation, reading of the digital transcript of text-based conversation within Second Life as generated by the participants during the event, and through conversations with co-hosts and some participants following the event.

*The Romantic Encounter* was the result of action and reflection on a series of encounters and observations made in Second Life, and grew from fascination with how avatars met and interacted with one-another in public and social spaces. This questioned the seemingly infinite possibilities that Linden Lab boast is present: the perceived anonymity of performance as digital avatar; the structured rule-based interaction through the gestures menu; and the duration of live performative event as assigned avatar.

It became clear through the investigation that the theatrical and provocative actions included in the gestures menu pre-determined the flirtatious behaviour of the avatars, many of whom wore revealing clothing and displayed sexualised movements. The gestures menu includes blowing kisses, twirling, clapping and bowing and a number of pre-animated and highly provocative dances. Whitty and Carr suggest that “cyberspace is a unique space. It is a space where one can be playful with presentations of self. It is also a space where one can ‘play at love” (2006, p. 1). This notion of ‘playing’ at love, in a virtual world of anonymous avatars, became the line of enquiry for this first piece of artistic research. This intended to question how social space and social activities are translated and performed online, in Second Life.



Figure 15. *The Romantic Encounter*, 2010

The scenario of a live speed-date between avatars was used to invite participants to consider this event as a playful and participatory performance. The title and invitation of this piece of work intended to be provocative, and to activate participants in considering how they might dress or perform. The physical co-presence within the café challenged the anonymity of virtual communication online, by creating a probability game of encountering one of five others in the room. While some participants seemed unaware of their physical presence in the café, some occasionally glanced up from their screen to view whom they might be speaking to, which subsequently affected behaviours in performing to each other or being more conscious of appropriate social behaviour. This differed to on-going observations of encounters in Second Life in which at times the behaviours between avatars seems challenging, dismissive or aggressive.

Over the two-hour event, thirty-six people participated of different ages and genders, predominately from backgrounds in research, gaming and art, most with little or no previous interaction with Second Life. Participants performed in the virtual space as assigned avatars, through movement and written, textual conversations, publicly displayed on each screen. In these conversations, mostly short sentences consisting of ten words or less, participants discussed their movement, the music being played in the real cafe, and the clothes they were wearing. Mostly these were introductory or enquired into how to function and manoeuvre the space, including how to sit down, jump, fly and dance. Their individual exploration of the virtual site became their collective experience, and due to the unfamiliarity and to the group chat conversations, rather than one-to-one conversations, their performances as avatars rarely developed further before the end of their 20-minute encounter. I also noted in the performances of assigned avatars that there were differences in approach, which from conversations with participants following the event, were connected to how much they related to their avatar. In particular, for example, those whom were performing as an avatar they didn't relate to, due to their appearance, were more playful in their performance as they considered how that avatar might behave, move and talk to others differently to themselves. This involved largely stereotyping dependent on their clothing, hairstyle and tattoos. There were also situations where the performance of their avatar led to dancing on the counter, the removal of clothing and leaving the virtual café to explore the immediate surroundings.

The social situation was set for participants in a public café, with its implicit etiquettes in arrival to an invited time, being welcomed, seated and served a drink by a waitress-host. The added situation of a speed-date event was introduced as a method to structure the duration of encounters and to mirror the observations I first made in the virtual world of Second Life, in which the communication between avatars seemed predominantly flirtatious. The participants were welcomed to the virtual café through the screen at their table, by their virtual waitress-host as the avatar assigned to them on arrival. The initial intention in the virtual space was to mirror that of an encounter between two avatars, seated at a table for two in the virtual café, however this did not occur. While it was possible to be seated in the virtual café at a table for two and to be

served a virtual drink, few chose to sit down together. Instead the avatars in the virtual café spent their time exploring the virtual space and its immediate surroundings, their avatars movement and the gestures menu. Instead of one-to-one instant message (im) conversations they all joined in a group conversation that became a digital transcript in Second Life. Most interestingly this transcript mapped a pattern between each of the six sets of encounters over the two-hour event. It highlighted that the conversations between each other were dominated by discussion on each other's appearance and movements. It demonstrated that most of their communication was in fact non-verbal, and instead gestural, through the use of the Second Life gestures menu, in particular through dancing together.

### **Summary: contributions to knowledge**

The first question raised in the planning stages of this practice-led enquiry referred to the ways in which everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in *physical* space alter when transferred to a *virtual* space. This piece of work identified that this is effected by the structure and possibilities provided by Linden Lab, creators of Second Life. Most notably, this revealed the dominant form of communication, particularly between new avatars, as the gestures menu provided in Second Life. This, as previously observed in initial observations of the virtual space, significantly affects the type of interaction possible between avatars, becoming highly theatrical and mostly flirtatious through the gestures made available in the prescribed menu. This subsequently structures the interaction between avatars, making it challenging to practice different kinds of behaviour than flirting or Whitty and Carr's notion of 'playing at love' (2006, p. 1).

Interestingly, in June 2010, creators Linden Lab moved all 'adult content' to a separate island for over 18's, essentially creating a virtual red light district within Second Life where behaviours such as 'cybersex' are permitted. However, in my encounters and actions in Second Life since June 2010, I have not observed any difference in the common interactions between avatars or in the gestures menu provided for interaction - these behaviours seem embedded in this virtual space. Maria Backe (2009) highlighted the advertised slogans published by Linden Lab, such as "Your World. Your

Imagination". She proposed, that "the rules of these social spaces [within Second Life] function as a foundation and guidance for identity formation, and in fact almost seem to prescribe a way of acting or behaving" (2009, p. 109). This is illustrated in the findings of *The Romantic Encounter*, particularly in how the gestures menu acts as a structure or rule to encounter the virtual space and other avatars, thus prescribing their theatrical and flirtatious behaviour. This therefore raised necessity to further investigate the gestures menu from Second Life through participatory performance in the new cycle of practice-led enquiry.

The second question raised in the planning stages of this practice-led enquiry referred to the possibilities of blurring the boundaries between the physical and virtual space through the live participatory performance event between the two spaces. This work only partially achieved a blurring between spaces in its attempt to create a potential hybrid space through participatory performance. This was limited to the aesthetic of the networked cafés and to the introduction of the hosts, using their avatar name. While participants 'blurred' the two spaces, as intended, through their action of participatory performance, inhabiting the physical and virtual café simultaneously, their observation of this was minimal. This was due to an unawareness of their bodily presence in the physical space as most were immersed in the virtual space through the digital screen. This was affected by their unfamiliarity of the virtual space of Second Life, their newly assigned avatar and the limited time of twenty minutes for their encounter. This highlighted the importance for the next cycle of participatory performance to be structured as a longer, more in-depth duration with facilitation of a smaller group.



## “LET’S DANCE SUGAR LIPS”



The reader is invited to view the accompanying visual chapter before and alongside this written chapter. The visual chapter can be found online, here:

<http://thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/lets-dance-sugar-lips>.

The chapter presents selected documentation of the practice-led enquiry, including the methodology diagram. The chapter is structured using the core stages of the developed methodological cycle of observe; plan; action/facilitation (live reflections as host and guest); reflection/analysis; and summary.

## Introduction

*“Let’s Dance Sugar Lips”* was a participatory performance to camera between myself and six participants, which began as a choreographed dance in a virtual space within Second Life using the gestures menu and was re-performed, in attempt to embody our avatar through movement, in a physical space within the University as part of the *Summer Lodge* residency 2011 in the Fine Art department. Shaped as a six-hour workshop with a small group of invited participants, including artists and art students, this intended to further investigate the hybrid space between virtual and physical space through the performance of digital avatars. As the second piece of work in the practice-led enquiry, this was informed by the observations and outcomes of *The Romantic Encounter* and the questioning that this first piece raised. This chapter (visual and written) reveals the process, action and reflection of *“Let’s Dance Sugar Lips”* and identifies significant insights from this work and how this informed the next piece in the practice-led enquiry.

### Observations: blurring the physical-virtual

In *The Romantic Encounter* the intention was to blur the boundary between the physical and virtual through the creation of a public participatory performance event, which took place simultaneously in the physical and virtual setting of a café. This work questioned how the everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in **physical** space altered when transferred to a **virtual** space. On reflection, this intention to blur the boundaries between the physical and virtual, through the participatory performance event between the two spaces, was limited. This was due to participants being new to the virtual space and having little time to become familiar with the space or their assigned avatar for performance. This affected the awareness of their bodily presence in the physical café as attention was focused on the screen in their virtual interaction.

The notion of the gestures menu within second life acting as rule ‘to prescribe a way of acting or behaving’ (Backe, 2009, p. 109) shares similarities to that of the ‘Event Score’



present in early Fluxus works of the 1960s. Initiated by American artist George Brecht in 1959, this method was adopted widely by Fluxus artists as a performance script for events and exercises. In *Fluxus Experience* (2002, p. 2) Hannah Higgins states that “in the Event, everyday actions are framed as minimalistic performances, or, occasionally, as imaginary and impossible experiments with everyday situations”. The seemingly simple instructions, presented as event scores by Brecht, achieved much more than an offer of a performance script. These became methods to frame experiences of the everyday and involve audience members, using the playful elements of a game-like structure. In this work a similar approach is made in the use of the gestures menu as a rule based structure or ‘score’ for the choreographing of avatars movement in the virtual space. The intention of this framed performance is to raise critical questioning of the everyday virtual practice present in Second Life of communicating through a prescribed gestures menu.

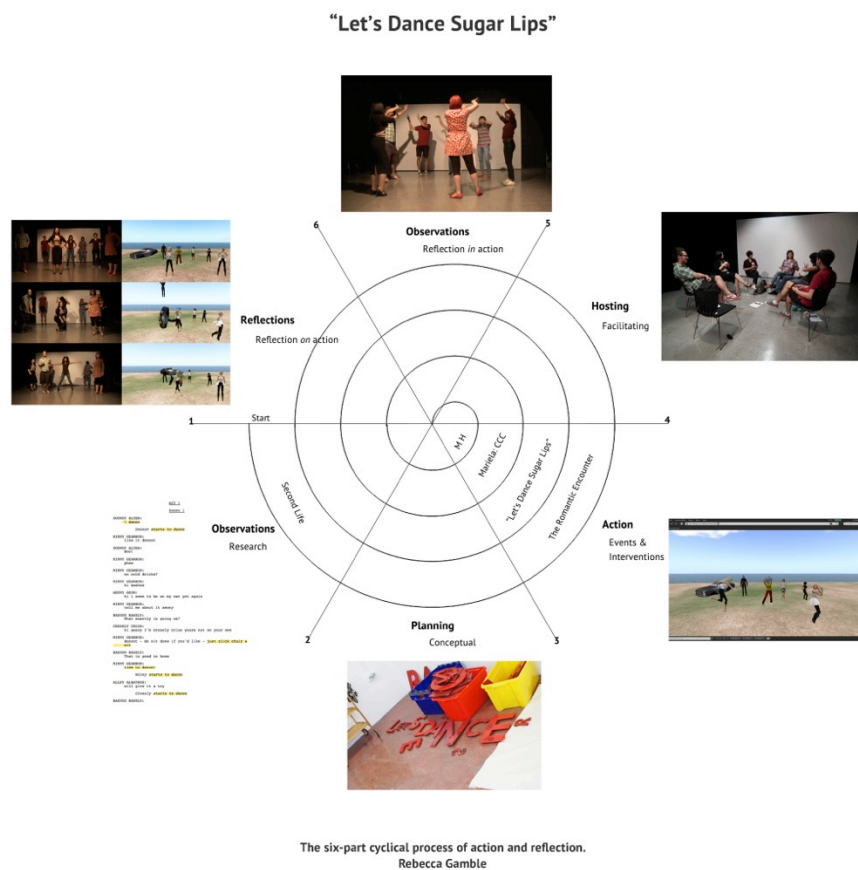


Figure 18. “Let’s Dance Sugar Lips”, methodological diagram, 2011

Observation and reflection on *The Romantic Encounter* prompted the need to reverse the attention from the physical-virtual to the virtual-physical: raising question to possibilities of extracting the virtual practices of this space to be re-performed in the physical. Specifically examining the gestures menu as rule or score to choreograph performance and the attempt to embody our avatars physically through re-performance of their movement. Reflections on the previous cycle also raised the necessity for the next piece of work to be of longer duration, with a smaller group of participants whom would have time to create their own digital self: avatar in Second Life rather than performing as an assigned avatar.

It was through reviewing the documented transcript of the conversation during *The Romantic Encounter*, in which I noted that the participants' discussion in the virtual café related to each others' movement and the invitation to one another to dance. On one occasion an avatar adds "Let's Dance Sugar Lips" to the collective conversation. The wording of this invitation encapsulated the playful and slightly provocative performance that was intended in the framework of the event as a speed-date between avatars. This phrase as invitation was later selected as the title for the next piece of work in the action-reflection cycle, in order to continue to mirror the initial observations from Second Life and the previous cycle of work.

These observations from *The Romantic Encounter* raised new questions to investigate through participatory performance in the practice-led enquiry:

How do everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in **virtual** space alter when transferred to a **physical** space? Specifically: how can the gestures menu choreograph movement of digital avatars to be re-performed in a physical space? And how are the differences between the virtual and physical examined in the participatory performance to camera and in the subsequent video documentation of this performance?

## **Planning**

In "*Let's Dance Sugar Lips*", therefore, I intended to further investigate gestural forms of communication, observed through interventions in Second Life and reflections on

participants in their virtual performances in *The Romantic Encounter*. On reflection and in moving the analysis to the next cycle of practice-led enquiry, I planned for the next piece of practice to take place during the *Summer Lodge* residency in July 2011 at Nottingham Trent University. This was due to the importance to work closely with a small group of participants in an intense six-hour long participatory workshop, to the access of computer equipment, access to Second Life and a performance space. The intention to coincide with the residency was also to have an audience with whom to share the final performance to camera.

The residency began with the analysis of the transcript generated in the conversations between participants over the two-hour long event in the previous work. I transformed this into a potential script for performance, to be re-performed to further reflect on the outcomes and documents of this cycle of enquiry. An extract of this was read aloud with the help of people in the audience as part of a paper for a postgraduate conference. In the reading of this aloud in a public space, as it echoed through the lecture theatre, it drew attention to the difference of short textual communication present in the virtual space. The phrase “Let’s Dance Sugar Lips”, extracted from this original transcript, became a form of new provocation and invitation for myself and the participants of the workshop to investigate the often social practice of dancing, in a participatory performance between virtual to physical space.

For the six-hour workshop I invited six participants to join me in the collective action and reflection of participatory performance. This included three artists and three undergraduate art students from the University. It was important that they would be dedicated to the six-hours to enable time for collective conversation, planning, action and reflection. In this case, following the last cycle, I intended to work more closely with participants, and therefore invited them to be part of the cyclical methodology.

## Workshop invitation and structure

To begin, the invited participants received the following information:

As part of the Summer Lodge residency at Nottingham Trent University I will be playing with a script – for the first time – that has transpired from dialogues and exchanges shared during the participatory performance *The Romantic Encounter*, which took place between a physical and virtual Lee Rosy's Café. This has raised questioning as to whether talking, flirting, and dancing in an anonymous and virtual space can be mirrored or translated in a physical space.

I will be working with six artists in a workshop setting to play with the reading of this script, to explore possibilities of performing, moving and dancing as an avatar and to explore new modes of participatory performance practice.

The “Let's Dance, Sugar Lips” Workshop is an experimental and collaborative workshop between seven artists. We will explore the possibility of embodying an avatar: Can we think, move, chat, perform and dance as a digital self? This involves playing with the reading of an experimental script, creating a digital self, choreographing a dance in Second Life and dancing with each other and each others avatars.

12.30 – 1.30: Introductions

1.30 – 2.30: Playing with the script

2.30 – 3.30: Creating your avatar identity

3.30 – 4.00: Choreographing a one-minute dance in Second Life.

4.00 – 4.30: Break

4.30 – 5.30: Dancing with avatars

5.30 – 6.30: Discussion

## Action and Facilitation

### Reflections of host and guests

With the negotiations between five technicians complete, I successfully have access to computer and performance spaces, the appropriate software to open Second Life on seven computers, and the cameras and screens needed for the performance, before the workshop participants arrive. With the documents printed and the cameras set up in both the virtual and physical space, I finally tape the boundary of the camera view and set out seven chairs. I meet and welcome each of the participants as they arrive. Once settled in the workshop space we are seated and I begin with an introduction to the workshop context and structure, I set the context of this practice as coming from an interest in everyday practices and human behaviours and how this has shifted to the virtual practices that exist in our interactions online. While there is a context and structure for the workshop, I encourage each artist to consider their personal interest and questioning through this individual and collective action-reflection. We each share this with the group:

**Rebecca:**

I am also interested in who Mariela is (my digital avatar), why she looks the way she does and why I have a desire to dance with her, copy her, move like her? There is a connection here; she is my virtual identity. I am interested in exploring her further. I am also interested in how we work together, how we might perform collectively and what happens in this environment as we attempt to move like an avatar.

**Brendan:**

Interested in the postmodern notion of that people don't have a fixed, consistent self, that we are contingent on context and circumstance and in a state of fluidity, and I was wondering if the avatar is the manifestation of that fluid self. I am interested in what the reality is of dancing in both spaces.

**LJ:**

One of the things that I'm looking forward to is the idea of movement, I'm interested in the incidental everyday actions and how that informs your identity and how that could be used in a more creative way. I am looking forward to seeing how I can form an identity through certain movements of the avatar.

**Katherine:**

I am interested in creating some kind of uncanny computerised version of myself, to try to make an accurate replica of myself, so it would be quite similar, but not like me. I want to see what characteristics I keep and which ones that I just can't get anywhere near to. Maybe empathising with myself and trying to project what I do in certain situations, and acting that out, virtually. Stepping outside of myself and seeing it on the screen.

**Sally:**

I am interested in bodily movements; I think it will be quite interesting to become aware of this, as obviously we take our bodily movements as quite instinctive. It will be interesting to be more aware of these subtle bodily movements, and the differences you can create, and how that could alter somebody's perception.

**Emily:**

A lot of things in my work are to do with putting things into boxes, there is a metaphor of putting things into boxes: today I feel like I'm creating an identity in a virtual box. The process of construction – deconstruction, and having a play with this. I am also interested in this, as on a social level I love dancing – it will be interesting to explore that within a creative and artistic process.

With all participants having no prior experience of Second Life, I facilitate their first introduction to it. As they open the application for the first time, they are given the option of eight avatar identities to select from, including male, female, animal and robot. After picking an 'off the shelf' avatar I introduce them to the 'Inventory' within Second Life, where options to clothing and body parts are available and where they can alter the size and shape of their avatar's body and features, and their skin, hair and eye colour. We now sit in silence, in two rows of computers, carefully creating and editing our digital selves. Some attempting a digital replica of their own physical appearance with others creating a potential alter-ego sharing some similarities to their appearance, and others experimenting with a different gender to themselves or as a hybrid avatar between human body and machine. After a break from the screen I introduce the participants to the gestures menu within 'My Inventory' in Second Life. This is a list of 'Gestures' which act as pre-designed animations to instruct your avatar to move. These can be triggered by setting different shortcut keys within Second

Life and viewed using the various view points within Second Life; making it possible to view your own avatar from above, in front or behind. The menu includes male and female gestures, some with sound effects. We begin by experimenting with all of these; the participants taking pleasure in seeing their avatar move for the first time. We each spend time familiarising ourselves with the gestures menu, creating new triggers through shortcut keys, and testing out different patterns of gestures. Working to the duration of one-minute and using the menu as script, we each choreograph our own movement in the virtual space – making notes of our sequence: /rock /muscle /stretch /whistle /dance1 /smoke /bow /clap. With little rehearsal time, we gather our avatars within Second Life, to perform to camera – through the use of iShowU screen capture software. The music starts and we begin to dance; frantically hitting keys, typing shortcuts, pressing buttons using the script created as a list of gestures from the menu. With a few false starts and attempts, we finally achieve a performance of movement as a group, ending as a one-minute, twenty-second dance.

We reconvene in the physical performance space where I playback the final virtual performance to camera. Each fascinated in watching the movement of our avatar, and suddenly aware of the next challenge: to repeat this physically through our body in the performance space. In order to warm up and practice mimicking movement through live observation, we gather in a circle to conduct an exercise. With concentration singularly placed on the participant opposite, each participant observes another's body. While attempting to remain still, each of us closely observe the others' slightest of gesture; the blinking of their eyes, the twitching of their lips, the movement of their fingers or readjustment of their posture. Observations made are then re-performed and slightly exaggerated. As each exaggeration ripples through the circle, we gain momentum from the initial still movement until our bodies are naturally dancing together.

We organise our positions in the physical space to mirror that of our avatars in the virtual space. The screen playing the virtual choreographed movement is positioned underneath the camera in the performance space. The music starts and we begin to dance; mimicking our avatars bodies, attempting to view the

screen while moving through the space, trying to not obstruct or crash into one another. Our eyes fixed on the screen; we jump, stretch, twirl, run and dance through the instruction of our digital avatar. We repeat this three times and without the music.

### Reflections and Analysis



Figure 20. “Let’s Dance Sugar Lips”, digital choreograph in Second Life, 2011

Following the workshop, reflection *on* action took place through the observation of the captured video from the performances in the virtual as well as physical space and through conversations and reflections with the group of participants. The video documentation of the performance to camera in the virtual and physical was edited to become a split-screen video, in which the first performance and the attempt in mimicking the digital avatars gestures could be viewed together. This followed with the dissemination of the video to the research community in Summer Lodge residency.

“Let’s Dance Sugar Lips” was the result of the action and reflection of the first cycle of practice-led enquiry, *The Romantic Encounter*. In particular this intended to further examine the modes of gestural communication and digital movement present in Second Life, structured through the menu of gestures provided by Linden Lab. I designed the workshop around the systematic process of action-research, in which the participants



were involved in the planning, action and reflection stages of the cycle. Participants were facilitated in their use of Second Life, however not in their creation of their own digital avatar or the selected movement of their choreographed dance. These choreography scores became lists of keyboard function keys and short-cuts, to trigger gestures, such as /dance1, /bow, /clap and F6 to twirl, drawing similarities to the Fluxus event score as instruction for performance. This resulted in a one-minute and twenty-second dance in the virtual space, captured through the software iShowU. It was the final dance, of five attempts, which we agreed to use as the video from which to mimic and re-perform the dance. This re-performance was through the live observation and mimicking of the avatars gestures, as viewed through a screen in the performance space. There was no practice or rehearsal of these gestures. We performed this four times to all be able to follow, as closely as possible, the digitally choreographed movements of our avatars. There were some difficulties in remaining in the position that mirrored the virtual space, as this was reversed in the physical space. We noticed that the use of music in the physical performance led ourselves to naturally begin to dance; responding to the beat of the music. We decided to change this and to instead dance silently, so that attention was drawn only to the mimicking of digital gesture.

### **Attempting to embody the avatar**

In this practice-led enquiry, we attempted to embody our avatars in a physical world. The digitally choreographed dance from Second Life was then repeated physically, as we attempted to mimic our avatar performance. Melinda Rackham (2006) considers it a necessity to 'become an avatar' in virtual networked spaces in order to 'operate in a parallel space' and to inhabit and interact with others in this multi-user community:

“To become part of the virtual networked environment in a multisensory mode, the user must inhabit the software-constructed material presence of an avatar, producing interlinked possibilities for subjective and interactive perspectives. This provides physical dimension and parameters for contact in the world, a malleable coded skin with which the user may touch others in softspace.”

(Rackham 2006, 53-54)

The process of creating a digital self: avatar, in a virtual space involves identity formation mostly through the digital body and appearance of the avatar. The offer made by Linden Lab for this virtual world as a space with infinite creative possibilities for avatar identity construction appears to be true in the reflections on the workshop. For example, of the six participants, one changed gender, one created a digital version of herself, two had elements of their bodily appearance incorporated, but were drastically different in appearance also and one avatar became a hybrid between a human body and a black car. One morphed shape, gender and non-human forms many times, until he ran out of time. Due to creating an avatar with no limbs who couldn't perform the dance, with his lack of time and technological understanding he resulted to going back to the start and selecting an avatar off the shelf, for which he chose an avatar whom resembled the film character Edward Scissorhands (1990).

The attempt to embody an avatar through movement and gestures is clear in the video documentation, as we move more mechanically and through the concentration and uncertainty on our faces. There became great difficulty in repeating accurately the choreographed movement in the virtual space, in part due to the delay between the human physical commands of the computer keyboard and mouse, to the speed at which the Second Life gesture animation began. Interestingly, this became mirrored in the physical re-performance, which can be seen in the split-screen video documentation, where there is a delay between the participants viewing the movement on screen and instructing their body to mimic this. In trying to achieve a sense of embodiment in our avatars through this act of studying and mimicking movement, instead what is achieved is a momentary disembodiment from the physical world, unaware of each other or the camera, in this silent, non-spontaneous, and unsocial act of performing a dance choreographed using the gestures menu of Second Life.

From studying the video there is clear uncertainty in our movements, as we attempt to perform a 1 minute, 20 second choreographed dance of a newly created avatar in Second Life, with little practice and no rehearsal. We begin by facing the camera and continue to turn to face the front, staring blankly and emotionlessly, as avatars do, in a similar way to how avatars wonder in Second Life. One participant spends much time wondering around, attempting to be in the correct position and failing to move as

ambitiously as she has choreographed her avatar to move. One participant is met with the challenge of interpreting the physicality of a car as a torso. The re-framing from the digital makes this dance abstract, ridiculous and humorous, similarly to the attributes of the transcript from *The Romantic Encounter*, re-framed as a script for performance.

The video documentation of this experimental practice maps the beauty, absurdity and impossibilities in the attempt to embody a digital self. The uncertain and robotic movements of the dancers achieves a disconnection and disembodiment from the real world they are within, unaware of each other, the camera, the audience, or themselves. The inclusion of the music ("Everybody Dance" by Chic, 1973) on the final video edit was included due to first being used when choreographing the dance in the virtual space. At the closing event of the Summer Lodge residency, I projected the split screen video of our digital and physical performance of avatars, the audiences reactions were of fascination and amusement and watching them watching us on screen immediately felt like a 'performance' to them; one that entertained and received an applause.

## Summary

The first question raised in the planning stages of this practice-led enquiry related to how everyday social practices and etiquettes of meeting and communicating in **virtual** space alter when transferred to a **physical** space? This piece of work investigated the virtual practice of performing gestures in Second Life using a prescribed menu offered by Linden Lab. This participatory workshop "*Let's Dance Sugar Lips*", employed the gestures menu as performance script or 'score' to choreograph a dance digitally, to be re-performed in an attempt to embody the avatar through the mimicking of movement. The transferal between the virtually choreographed dance – to the re-performance in physical space was challenging due to some of the impossibilities of moving our bodies in ways which are only possible in a digital space. In this process the social and relational context of dancing together was removed. The action became an individual performance rather than a collective one: each performing methodically to instruction-as-choreographic score in the virtual space and later in the repetition of the movement in the physical space. There became a noticeable automated mode to our behaviour

during and after the physical performance, therefore suggesting the physical embodiment of digital avatar is possible.

The second question revealed the differences between the virtual and physical, examined in the participatory performance to camera, and in the subsequent video documentation of this performance. The examination took place through each space acting as 'frame' to critically view the other (Goffman 1961). Interestingly in the process of embodying our avatar through movement in the physical space, we achieved a temporary disembodiment from the physical space. This became noticeable through the video documentation, in which participants are rarely aware of each others bodies or the potentially self-conscious act of dancing to camera.

### **Contributions to knowledge**

In this work I developed a closer relationship to my avatar Mariela, and through the re-performance of her virtual gestures and movement I first encountered what appeared to achieve a blurring between the virtual and physical, than previously experienced. This was due to the connection and re-framing of the virtual:physical and the first experience of beginning to embody avatar in the physical space through participatory performance. This motivated the questioning leading to the next cycle of enquiry: to investigate possibilities for performing as avatar in a physical space without the presence of digital technology. While this work generated an action-reflection between the six participants and myself, its dissemination in a private performance space as part of an internal residency resulted in not achieving a wider collective investigation of 'the everyday' in a public situation through participatory performance. This raised new necessity to situate the next cycle more publically.

## MARIELA: CMD, CLICK, CONTROL



Figure 20. *“Let’s Dance Sugar Lips”*, digital choreograph in Second Life, 2011

The reader is invited to view the accompanying visual chapter before and alongside this written chapter. The visual chapter can be found online, here:

<http://thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-cmd-click-control>

The chapter presents selected documentation of the practice-led enquiry, including the methodology diagram. The chapter is structured using the core stages of the developed methodological cycle of observe; plan; action/facilitation (live reflections as host); reflection/analysis; and summary.

## Introduction

*Mariela: cmd, click, control* was a live participatory performance as digital avatar Mariela, structured as an intervention in The Walk Café in Nottingham to café customers on a Sunday afternoon in July. It took place as part of the *Food for Thought: Noisy Eaters* performance programme, curated by Backlit Gallery for NotLost Festival. For the duration of one-hour, the digital avatar of Mariela was present in the café. Customers could order gestures from the menu provided on their table, after which Mariela would be delivered to their table to perform. As the third piece of work in the practice-led enquiry, this was informed by the observations and outcomes of “*Let’s Dance Sugar Lips*” and identifies significant insights from this work and how this informed the next piece of practice-led enquiry.

## Observations: digital gestures menu as performance score



Figure 21. *Mariela, cmd, click, control*, gestures menu as café menu, 2011

In “*Let’s Dance Sugar Lips*” the piece reversed the initial investigation in *The Romantic Encounter* from the physical:virtual to the virtual:physical, in using one as a frame to observe and analyse the other through participatory performance. It did this through

adopting the gestures menu of Second Life to choreograph a dance in the virtual space to be re-performed in a physical space and through the resulting split-screen video of these actions. This originated from observations of the gestures menu as a rule-based instruction for movement, which, due to the prescribed gestures provided by Linden Lab, results in a theatrical and flirtatious display of behaviour in communication between avatars in Second Life, thus affecting the social practices of this space. On reflection, the experience of beginning to embody our avatars through the mimicking of their digital movement developed the research as the practice of everyday virtual life, present in the gestural communication of Second Life, began to be critically questioned through the tactic of re-performance external to the virtual space.

This raised an increased interest in the exploration of my digital avatar Mariela Eyre, in particular, to the potential for physical embodiment of her through participatory performance, without the virtual space being present in the live performance. I therefore returned to Second Life to examine and practice the mimicking of digital gestures of Mariela.

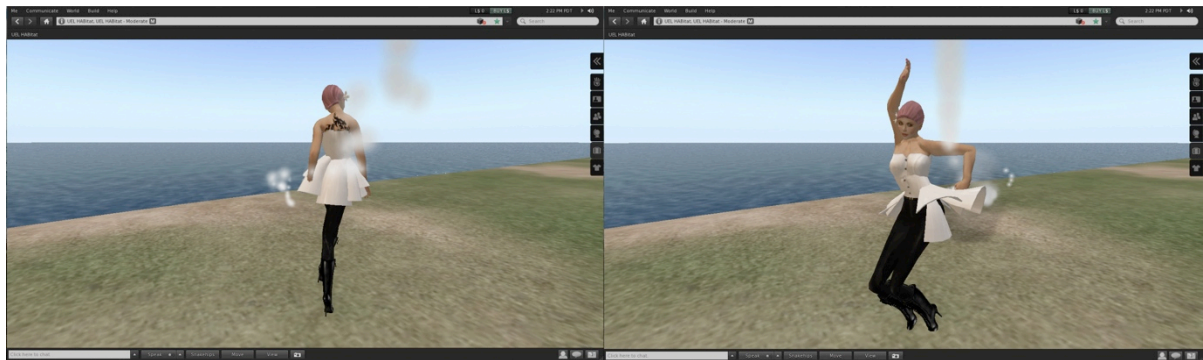


Figure 22. *Mariela, cmd, click, control*, observing digital movement, 2011

In this observation and on reflection from the previous cycle I noted the significance in the act of instructing the digital avatar to move, using a list of command (cmd) keys, keyboard shortcuts and mouse clicks. This initiated the title 'cmd, click, control' within the title of this next cycle.



Mariela: cmd, click, control, July 2011



Figure 23. *Mariela, cmd, click, control*, methodological diagram, 2011

The observations following “*Let’s Dance Sugar Lips*” informed the practice-led enquiry to investigate:

How can the everyday communication practices of the virtual space of Second Life become tactics for participatory performance to critically question ‘hybrid space’?

### **Planning: live intervention as Mariela**

In *Mariela: cmd, click, control*, therefore, I intended to once again extract the rule based structure of the gestures menu of Second Life as tactic for creating a script or score for participatory performance. However, in this piece the gestures menu was handed over to the participants, with which they could create the ‘score’ to choreograph live movement of a digital avatar in a physical space. This intended to introduce new levels of responsibility and trust in the relationship between artist and participant. On reflection and in moving the analysis to the next cycle of enquiry, I planned this piece to



take place in the public setting of a citywide arts festival, to enable a new audience of potential participants.

In planning the event I spent time in Second Life to further explore the gestures menu and to carefully study how her digital body moves when instructed by one of the animated gestures, including how she stood or sat between gestures. I practiced mimicking these digital gestures through physical movement to attempt to accurately re-perform them. In addition to this I worked with a dressmaker to create an outfit that accurately represented her appearance. Mariela's clothing in Second Life is created from the free 'inventory' provided by Linden Lab, this includes black knee-high boots, black skinny jeans, a bodice and short flared skirt which gathers at the waste. Her body is not adapted from the initial 'off-the-peg' avatar, which I selected on first entering Second Life; it became important to not adapt this in my interests to respond to the frameworks set by Linden Lab. However, her short pink hair, her green eye colour, the flower behind her ear and the oriental dragon tattoo across her back are adaptations to make her appearance different to other digital avatars in Second Life and which also, in part, reflect my own personality. It was important to reflect these elements of her appearance in attempting to embody her within the physical world, which included hairstyle, heavier makeup, fake eyelashes and temporary transfer tattoos.

The importance for the performance intervention as Mariela to be part of a curated performance platform in a citywide art festival was in providing a new physical space in the city and a different audience within the supported framework of the artistic programme. In particular, I worked with the curator ahead of the event to discuss the printed invitation to participate, the duration, arrival and departure and the video documentation of the live performance. The waiting staff of the café were briefed on the structure of the intervention and their involvement in taking orders from a menu of gestures provided within the café before leading me to the tables for performance.

The first introduction to Mariela was as 'Today's Special' within a printed menu for café customers and festivalgoers within the printed programme of the days performances. This was accompanied by details of how to order and a list of 'Mariela's Gestures Menu'.

This read:

*Mariela is the girl with the dragon tattoo. She lives her nomadic virtual life online in a Second Life, drifting through this digital landscape, squatting in other avatars homes and islands, longing to find others to dance with her.*

*MARIELA IS HERE*

*MARIELA IS TODAY'S SPECIAL*

*You can select and [cmd] her to /dance for you, blow you a /kiss, /lol, or /bow to you. To command Mariela to move for you, select a gesture from the gestures menu and place your order with one of the waitresses.*

#### *MARIELA'S GESTURES MENU*

<i>/bow</i>	<i>/kiss</i>
<i>/clap</i>	<i>/kmb</i>
<i>/dance1</i>	<i>/lol</i>
<i>/dance2</i>	<i>/smile</i>
<i>/dance 3</i>	<i>/smoke</i>
<i>/dance 4</i>	<i>/wave</i>

### **Action and Facilitation**



Figure 24. *Mariela, cmd, click, control*, 2011

## Reflections as host

It's 1.00pm, Sunday. Two hours before the performance. I'm at home, across town from the café. I make myself up: hair backcombed and bee-hived, make-up and false eyelashes applied, temporary tattoos transferred. I layer the garments: bodice, jeans, skirt, shirt and zip up the knee-high black leather boots. I drink two shots of vodka and await my pre-booked taxi. In the taxi there I am silent until we arrive at the street leading to the café. I take a deep breath and enter at exactly 3pm. The bell at the top of the door sounds as it opens, the only announcement to the arrival of Mariela. She sits down on a chair at a reserved corner table at the entrance to the café and is still. She awaits her first command. As she waits her body slowly slumps, becoming inactive avatar. Ten minutes later the waiter arrives with the first order. He gently places the order-slip on the table in front of Mariela and moves to wait at the café counter. She pauses to view the command. It reads: "*Table 4. 2 x Smile.*" She stands and approaches the waiter. He leads her to a corner table where two women are seated. She places the order-slip on the table in front of them and performs two smiles. This is followed by a short pause before turning in one swift movement and returning quickly to her seat. She sits down and is still. The next order-slip is received a few minutes later. The waiter places the order-slip on the table in front of Mariela and takes one step back. She pauses to view the command. It reads: "*Table 6. dance #2. 1 x wave.*" She stands and is led by the waiter to a middle table on the left where two women are seated. She places the order-slip on the table in front of them and performs the animated dance/2 followed by one wave. This is followed by a short pause before turning in one swift movement and returning quickly to her seat. She receives an applause from the two women and a few surrounding tables. She sits down and is still. She awaits her next command. Over the next forty-minutes, four more table orders are made with the waiter or waitress. With each order-slip received she repeats the same action in: her arrival to the table, her performance of the commands listed on the order-slip, the short pause and quick return to her seat. Each time and with the longer list of commands, she seems to attract more attention within the café and the applause seems to ripple further from the table being performed to. In the last few minutes of the performance intervention, Mariela receives a

final order-slip from the waiter. He places the order-slip on the table in front of Mariela and takes one step back. She pauses, this time for longer, to view the command. It reads: “1 x wave. 1 x lol. 1 x dance #4, 1 x smoke, 1 x kmb, 1 x smile, 1 x clap, 1 x bow.” She stands and is led by the waiter to the immediate table on the right where a woman and two men are seated. She places the order-slip on the table in front of them and performs each command listed in sequence on the order slip. This is followed by a short pause before turning in one swift movement and returning quickly to her seat. She receives a short applause from the surrounding tables. She sits down and is still for a minute before standing and departing the café. The bell at the top of the door sounds as it closes, the only announcement to the departure of Mariela.

### **Reflection and Analysis**

Following the live intervention of *Mariela: cmd, click, control*, reflection on action took place through observation of photographic and video documentation and the order-slips taken by the waiters and waitresses in the café. I also gathered feedback through conversations with the curator and some festivalgoers who participated.

In *Mariela: cmd, click, control* I attempted to embody my avatar Mariela through my appearance in clothing, hairstyle, makeup and tattoos, and in my bodily movement and gestures. This was the result of an intense period of observations made in Second Life to study and practice the mimicking of digital gestures of Mariela. For the duration of the hour, I performed as Mariela. She remained in the corner of the café while customers were invited to order from the gestures menu provided on their table when ordering their food and drink with the waiter or waitress. When an order was made from the gestures menu, Mariela would be led to the table to perform the sequence of commands to mirror the action of selecting gestures from a menu to command an avatar to move in Second Life.

### **Removing the digital**

In this piece I removed the presence of the digital screen of a live or recorded demonstration of the virtual space of Second Life. Instead the presence of my digital

avatar Mariela only existed in a written title and introduction to her and in my physical presence performing as her for one hour during the event. The title, 'Mariela: cmd, click, control' referred to the actions in the instruction of the digital avatar to move, using a list of command (cmd) keys, keyboard shortcuts and mouse clicks to trigger gestures from the menu. The title intended to draw participants attention to the digital language, in particular cmd as a common abbreviation for command key on a computer keyboard, in order to make the connection to the performances virtual origins.

The experience in performing *Mariela: cmd, click, control* was challenging. While participation was structured to ordering gestures from a selection of twelve, this resulted in the command to perform and repeat rehearsed digital gestures in a number of different sequences to tables of two-to-four people in a busy café. This resulted in a feeling of exposure as a performer-to-table, following a number of commands in which to entertain or bemuse those present, such as dance; smoke; kiss; wave; laugh; clap; bow. While I felt vulnerable during the performance, as though a performing puppet to a demanding audience, on reflection following the event I felt the audience had been generous in their participation as they pushed their own limits to join in and reciprocated with a sense of encouragement in their activation of the avatar to perform, without which there would have been no event.



Figure 25. *Mariela, cmd, click, control*, video still, 2011

Through observing the video documentation, it became clear that participation was also challenging. The flirtatious and sexual nature of the gestures performed in Second Life is made strikingly clear, through the intimate, yet public, one-to-one participatory performance of uncomfortable or humorous gestural performance of the artist. There is a clear uncomfortableness present in their reaction; as they visibly widen their eyes, nervously laugh, look at one another or cover their mouth. This is due, firstly, to the difficulties felt towards the command of another person to perform unfamiliar, theatrical, robotic or sexualised gestures directly to them in a public space, and secondly to the awareness of their exposure to the rest of the café audience and to their participation and reaction being filmed. In feedback received from participants there was a noticeable connection made between the performance intervention and the digital context in which it originated. This materialised through the language and invitation used on the printed menu and in the emotionless, robotic behaviour and repetitive movements of Mariela.

## **Summary**

The questions raised in this cycle included: how the everyday virtual practices of Second Life can become tactics for participatory performance to critically question hybrid space. It is through the tactic of participatory performance in this work that attention was drawn to the command, click and control actions of instructing a digital avatar to move. These movements, when removed and re-performed from their original digital context, highlight the problematic nature of everyday virtual communication, as it feels uncomfortable to perform, participate or witness this in a physical space.

While it exists as a particular example of virtual everyday life, in one virtual space, encountered through the digital embodiment of an avatar, it relates to many of the behaviours that can be accounted for across online social platforms. For example, the apparent authority felt through the anonymity of ones avatar or profile, the distance between what is considered real or not due to communication through the screen, an increasing familiarity in communicating via screen, through text, comments, tags, images, videos and gestures.

It was in this piece in which I observed that through the language and rule-based structure of the practice of communicating through gestural forms, and through the participation in the re-performance of this, that a questioning of hybrid space could begin to be critically questioned. This was achieved through the gradual removal of digital technology, and instead through the emergence of embodying digital avatar, whom now exists externally to the originating virtual space of Second Life.

The embodiment of Mariela in this piece however was limited to the repetition of virtual gestures instructed by the audience-participants in the café and her current digital appearance. As Mariela begins to develop into an advanced avatar through time, this would need to be reflected in the aesthetic of the advanced avatars common in Second Life, whom become visual spectacles through their creative and technically complicated digital designs of hybrid bodies; part human, part other species, part machine or part animated object.

### **Contributions to knowledge**

This led to the questioning in the next cycle to further investigate rule-based structures as tactics for participatory performance investigation of hybrid space without technology visibly present. The next cycle will continue to investigate potential tactics for participatory performance, specifically in the invitation, instruction, duration, levels of choice and responsibility between artist–host and participant–guest. In order to develop this investigation it became necessary to change the structure from the performance intervention in a public space, where participation is performed self-consciously due to the surrounding audience and camera, to a one-to-one encounter between artist–host and participant–guest.



## MARIELA HOSOMAKI



Figure 26. *Mariela Hosomaki*, 2014

The reader is invited to view the accompanying visual chapter before and alongside this written chapter. The visual chapter can be found online, here:

<http://thepracticeofeverydayvirtuallife.com/mariela-hosomaki>

The chapter presents selected documentation of the practice-led enquiry, including the methodology diagram. The chapter is structured using the core stages of the developed methodological cycle of observe; plan; action/facilitation (live reflections as host); reflection/analysis; and summary.



## **Introduction**

*Mariela Hosomaki* was a live, one-to-one participatory performance between myself as digital avatar Mariela and participants at the *Hatch Nights 1-2-1* performance event, devised for audiences of one, at Primary artist studios in Nottingham. For a two-hour duration audiences were “invited to encounter a one-to-one gastronomic performance that plays with notions of host and guest”. Tactics of invitation, instruction, choice and trust were tested in the on-going investigation of hybrid space and the examination of participatory performance practice. As the fourth and culminating piece of work in the practice-led enquiry, this was informed by the observations and outcomes of each of the cycles, in particular *Mariela: cmd, click, control*, which identified significant insights from this work and how this informed the research.

## **Observations: achieving a hybrid space**

In *Mariela: cmd, click, control* the presence of the virtual space was removed to investigate the practice of everyday virtual life through the live performance of digital avatar Mariela using the gestures menu extracted from Second Life. This piece was structured as a live performance intervention in a physical café, as part of the performance programme of a citywide art festival. This resulted in the café becoming stage for performances with a mix of unsuspecting café customers and festival goers becoming audience members and potential participants. In this piece the participation began by choosing to order from the gestures menu, provided on each table within the café. Following the ordering of a number of gestures with their waiter or waitress, Mariela would be delivered to perform at their table. Following the performance of each gesture in sequence of how it had been ordered, she returned to her own seat in the corner of the café and remained still, similarly to ‘inactive’ digital avatars, until she received another table order. This piece of work resulted in the embodiment of digital avatar Mariela, achieved for the first time publicly, through the rehearsed re-performance of bodily gestures, which originated from Second Life, and also through the altering of appearance including clothing, hairstyle, make-up and temporary tattoos transferred to the skin.

The performance revealed the practices of everyday virtual life in the virtual world of Second Life, in which avatars communicate predominantly through gestures using a menu of theatrical and flirtatious gestures provided by creators Linden Lab, which thus affect the types of behaviour common in this virtual world. The most challenging aspects in the performance as Mariela and in the participation of the audience were a result of the public intimacy of performing provocative gestures to tables of two-to-four people.

This piece raised interest in the further performance of Mariela as digital identity, independent from the virtual, in order to further question modes of behaviour which mirror that of a virtual rule-based structure and could examine the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist and participant in participatory performance practice. This advanced the investigation of tactics, specifically from the gestures menu used in *Mariela: cmd, click, control*, to adapting tactics using insights from each cycle of practice-led enquiry, including the invitation, instruction, duration, levels of choice and responsibility between artist and participant. The observations from the three previous cycles of practice-led enquiry, specifically in the examination of the everyday practices of Second Life, examined: How do we live online? This and the analysis of and active participation in other artists works led to the questioning for this fourth and culminating cycle: How can tactics of participatory performance critically question hybrid space? And what are the potential roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist-host and the participant-guest in this process?

### **Planning: tactics of participatory performance**

In *Mariela Hosomaki*, the tactics of participatory performance included: invitation, instruction, duration, rule-based structures of choice; to use one of six instruments to either feed the performer, or to eat from the sculptural garment worn by Mariela, and trust; implicit in the intimate one-to-one encounter in a private space.

In the process of attempting to embody my digital self: avatar, Mariela, this developed from the mimicking of gestures in the digitally choreographed dance “*Let’s Dance Sugar Lips*” to the extraction and re-performance of gestures in a live performance instructed

by participants in *Mariela: cmd, control click*. Following these two events, Mariela existed as a digital self, external to the virtual world in which she first existed. Through the performance of her in the physical space, there became a bridging and an achievement of the notion of 'hybrid space' without the original virtual space or digital technologies present. This next cycle in the practice-led enquiry, therefore, attempted to further this; by creating new tactics of participatory performance, based on those observed in the virtual space from the gestures menu, to a new set of rules to structure the interaction and participation in the one-to-one encounter. The rules in this cycle, acting as tactics, specifically aimed to structure the interaction between the artist as host-performer and the audience as participant-guest in a similar way to how the interaction between avatars in Second Life is performed.

In order to further the embodiment of Mariela, although now a developed avatar following her encounters with more advanced avatars in Second Life, still needed her physical appearance to become that of a hybrid body, so to mirror similarly advanced digital avatars which often extend the elements of the human body. This intended to enable participants first encounter with her without prior indication to her as an avatar "living her virtual life online in Second Life" as I had indicated previously in the public invitation to *Mariela: cmd, control click*.

The decision to include food and to create a gastronomic performance originated from the ongoing examination of the roles and implicit responsibilities between the artist-host and participant-guest in participatory performance. Reflection and analysis to participatory practices and theories developed the concept of hospitality in this research. While this concept has not always related directly to food, perhaps more often to the social space for encounters, it has previously been used as a method to engage participation, through the convivial act that exists in the sharing of food and drink.

In considering the possibilities for the combination of a one-to-one gastronomic participatory performance as a hybrid-bodied avatar, I worked with a dressmaker and a sculptor to visualise the possibilities for this construction. In collaboration we considered potential structures and materials suitable for wearable sculptural garments, which food could be carried or presented on. It was important that the food

be small and compact enough to sit well on the garment so it could be easily accessed during the performance. We decided, therefore, that sushi would be an appropriate food type to meet these considerations and following research, discovered that the smallest traditional sushi commonly eaten in th UK was the hand-rolled hosomaki sushi, with rice and ingredients wrapped in nori (seaweed) to a 1-inch diameter. This was later included in the title of the gastronomic performance; Mariela Hosomaki, to give the audience a sense that they would be encountering ‘someone’ of that name, and to also give a potential indication that the food offered would be sushi.

The live participatory performance was structured as a two-hour durational performance of one-to-one encounters between myself, performing as Mariela and the participants who chose to encounter the work during the performance event curated by the East Midlands performance platform Hatch. It was integral for this piece to be encountered within a structured platform for performances for audiences of one, as it enabled the participants to be willing individuals with some experience or interest in performance and participation, rather than the random nature of the audience-participants of an intervention in a public space. This was due to the intimate nature and trust required between the performer and the participant in this piece.

The six instruments included to select from to encounter piece were: a metal skewer, wooden chopsticks, metal tongs, a metal bull-dog clip, a metal decorators scrapper and a cold cuts fork.



Figure 27. *Mariela Hosomaki, 2014*

## **The invitation**

The public invitation read:

**Hatch Presents Primary Nights: 1-2-1**

**Sunday 1st December 2013**

**PRIMARY, Seely Road, NG7 1NU**

**4.30pm – 9.00pm**

*Hatch*, the East Midlands' leading performance platform, opens up the Primary building for a selection of performances designed for an audience of one. Mark your dance card at the Hatch Bar and choose your own adventures for an evening of intimate and playful encounters.

Performances by Ehsan Gill, Katy Baird, Laura Dee Milnes, Leentje Van de Cruys & Tine Feys, Lisa Newman with Alex Leistiko, random people, Rebecca Gamble, Richard Hancock, Sam Mant & Traci Kelly

Free event (pay what you think) - no pre-booking required

Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

This event is part of PRIMARY IS OPEN 2013, a weekend of open studios.

The published invitation for the Mariela Hosomaki performance read:

**Mariela Hosomaki**

The Boiler House

6.00pm – 8.00pm

You are invited to encounter a 1-2-1 gastronomic performance that plays with notions of host and guest. Choose your instrument at the door. You are invited to either feed or eat. The encounter ends on the sounding of the bell.

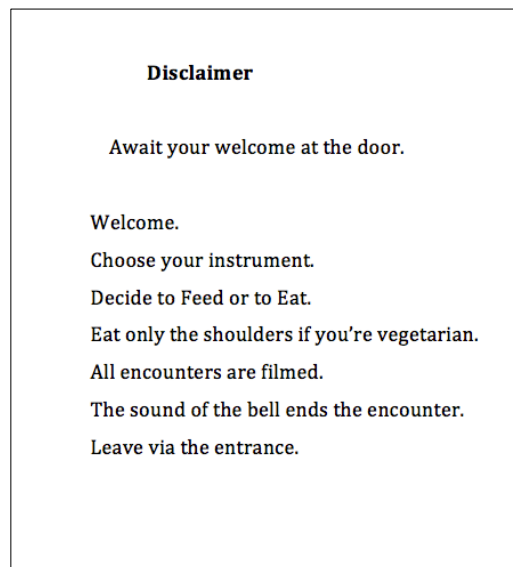
Mariela Hosomaki is a new artistic collaboration between a performer, sculptor and dressmaker.

Rebecca Gamble, Kashif Nadim Chaudry and Genelva Meikle.

## Action and Facilitation: First encounters

### The disclaimer

The first encounter for the audience-participant is with a performer who welcomes you at the door, draws your attention to the printed script and reads it aloud to you. The invitation on the door acted as a 'disclaimer'. This read:



Audiences of one were welcomed as guests at the door by their 'host' and read an intentionally brief invitation to participate, titled as a 'disclaimer'. This was read to the participant-guest by the host, a performer who was given the role to facilitate participation. They were then instructed to choose an a number between 1 – 6 and to indicate whether they would chose to eat or to feed, to enter the performance space alone and asked to sound the bell when they wanted to end their encounter. On entering the darkened space they were met by Mariela Hosomaki, a silent avatar wearing a sculptural garment which held over fifty pieces of hosomaki-rolled sushi. The instruments, numbered 1 – 6 were presented on the wall for participants to unhook and use to pick up the sushi to eat or to feed it to Mariela. At any point participants could sound the bell to end their encounter – giving them a choice of how to encounter the performance and how long to experience it for.

A 'host' was employed as an additional performer to welcome and facilitate potential participants before their encounter. She was given a script to read from, this read:

### **Mariela Hosomaki: Script for performer-host at the entrance**

When people are waiting by the door, **smile**. Wait for them to approach you and ask to take part. Or simply say;

**"Are you waiting for your encounter?"**

PAUSE

**smile.**

**"Welcome."**

**"Firstly, I must draw your attention to the disclaimer"**

PAUSE

READ:

**"Choose your instrument."**

(show them the cards 1 – 6, let them pick and take one, then take it back and say;

**"OK, you're instrument number is \_\_\_"**

PAUSE

**"Decide to Feed or to Eat."**

(This is intentionally meant to be ambiguous, give no other information)

PAUSE

**"Eat only the shoulders if you're vegetarian."**

PAUSE

**"All encounters are filmed."**

PAUSE

**"The sound of the bell ends the encounter. You or Mariela can sound the bell."**

PAUSE

**"Leave via the entrance."**

PAUSE

Push open the door, walk through it, pick up the torch, turn it on and shine it down the stairs. Turn and smile at the audience member.

## Action and Facilitation

### Reflections as guest

Wayne Burrows, published for Hatch:

“Rebecca Gamble with Nadim Chaudry & Genelva Meikle: *Mariela Hosomaki*

“[...] I’m allowed through the door that leads down into the cellar where the digital avatar of Rebecca Gamble, a woman known in the artificial realms of Second Life as *Mariela Hosomaki*, stands silently among lit candles, a variety of numbered serving implements (ranging from chopsticks to skewers) hung on the wall facing her. Before descending, however, there are formalities to observe, as Gamble’s assistant [...] issues instructions and requires decisions: we must choose a number, decide whether we will ‘feed’ or ‘eat’. Only then (all decisions made not knowing what lies in wait) can we proceed. On entering the space occupied by *Mariela Hosomaki*, the scene is uncanny: a woman stands frozen inside an elaborate red form, a sculptural costume made specifically for Gamble by the sculptor Nadim Chaudry in collaboration with dressmaker Genelva Meikle. [...] Perhaps it’s less the form that’s unsettling than the way its folds are serving dishes filled with the small egg-like rolls of sushi we’ve committed to eat using the implement designated by that chosen number. I take the skewer, spear a sushi roll somewhere inside a lower fold of the host’s gown and eat it, then wonder if it’s appropriate to speak, or make eye contact, before it becomes clear that Gamble, or *Mariela*, depending on how we consider the relationship of the costume to its inhabitant, is apparently elsewhere. I return the skewer to its hook, look back as I prepare to leave [...] and realise that the host seems to have developed a quite different meaning to that of the giver of food, the person I visit in this cellar. As I turn to go, Gamble, or *Mariela*, remains perfectly still, casting flickering shadows across the peeling paint-work on the cellar walls, while the air is permeated with the combined scents of burning wax, fresh sushi and damp earth.” (Burrows 2013)



## Reflection and analysis



Figure 28. *Mariela Hosomaki*, methodological diagram, 2014

Following the live participatory performance of *Mariela Hosomaki*, reflection *on* action took place through the observation of photographic and video documentation. I also gathered feedback through conversations with my performer-host and some participants.

### Performing as Mariela

In *Mariela Hosomaki* I embodied and performed as my digital avatar Mariela, in what felt like her coming to life for the first time through the performance, yet with no technology present. In this piece, wearing a highly detailed sculptural garment that moved awkwardly, the appearance of Mariela shared similarities to the avatars in *Second Life*, whose clothing often combines animation and in which cultures, genders and other species collide to create a hybrid avatar body. The sculptural garment worn was designed to move as one solid object, to create a sense of a hybrid-body; the figure of the avatar blending into this unfamiliar shape, more akin to a pyramid sculpture. The ridges, pockets and alcoves of the garment were then filled with one hundred pieces of

hosomaki rolled sushi, before beginning the performance. This was quite challenging as the garment was heavy, uncomfortable and the uneven floor made it difficult to perform rehearsed computersised movements. The duration of the participatory performance, of three hours overall, in the dark, damp and cold space was also physically challenging. However, the difficulty and discomfort I experienced moving around in the garment, furthered my ability disengage with the participants and to develop an emotionless expression with little or no eye contact with them.

As anticipated, each encounter between the performer-host and participant-guest was entirely different with some encounters slow and quiet where the participant chose to host, nurture and feed the performer delicately. Others chose to feast, feed, observe, lure, examine inquisitively, sometimes uncomfortably so, with encounters varying between five and thirty minutes long.

### **Artistic tactics in participatory performance practice**

In the examination of appropriate artistic examples in the use of tactics in their practice, specific works of Sophie Calle, Marina Abramovic, Yoko Ono and work by Instant Dissidence in which I was an active participant, should be sited. Japanese artist Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965) is a significant example of early one-to-one performance, which invited audiences on stage to cut and take a piece of her clothing. This radically challenged the traditional role of the audience in performance from passive spectator to active participant-performer. This work raises a number of questions about the trust in the relationship between artist and participant in participatory events and performances. Through the tactic of invitation, in the offer to the audience to participate or re-perform the piece using a written event score, she shifted responsibility onto the audience to perform; challenging the notion of authorship in participation. Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic's work most distinctively tests vulnerability, responsibility and power in participatory performance. Most notably, in *Rhythm 0* (1974), she embodied a passive role in a six-hour durational performance, while the gallery audience was encouraged to approach her using any of the 72 objects provided on the table beside her. The audience were given a choice in how to participate, to observe or interact using objects that can inflict pleasure or pain

on the performer, including a comb, water, grapes, a scalpel, kitchen knife, gun and single bullet. Abramovic later discussed how violated she felt, as the audience undressed her, carried her around the gallery and cut her. It became a confrontational environment, with one audience member loading the gun and holding it to her head and another removing it and throwing it out of the window. Abramovic's work radically tests these issues through tactics of long duration (6 hours or more), the limits of the body and possibilities of the mind: "*Stretching the length of a performance beyond conventional boundaries alters the viewer's typical perception of time and encourages both performers and audience to engage with this experience*" (Marina Abramovic Institute (MAI)). French artist Sophie Calle's work, often involving performative rituals, games and playful actions in the everyday, is exemplified in her book *Double Game* (1999) through the presentation of a series of works framed by collaboration with writer Paul Auster. In Auster's novel *Leviathan* (1992) he created a fictive character named Maria by using and inventing parts of Sophie Calle's life. In order to bring herself and the fictive character of Maria closer together, Calle used his text as tactic for 'rules to a game' in a series of performative actions. In order 'to be like Maria' she performed *The Chromatic Diet* (1997), where she ate only one food colour per day for a week and *Days Under The Sign of B, C & W* (1998), where she spent whole days 'under the spell of b, c or w', including 'B for *Big-Time Blonde Bimbo*', 'C for *Confession*' and 'W for *Weekend in Wallonia*' (Calle, 2007, p. 22).

The 'mingling of fact and fiction' in *Double Game* and the embodiment of fictional character Maria by Calle relates to how I have approached the embodiment of Mariela, my digital avatar, in my practice-led research. There is also a connection between how Calle uses the text written by Auster to structure actions and performances as Maria to how I have used the written 'gestures menu' from the virtual world of Second Life to structure my actions and performances in physical space as Mariela.

It was the embodiment and appearance of Mariela and the role of the participant that I wanted to develop from *Mariela: cmd, click, control*. I wanted to further question the trust and vulnerability of these roles following reflection on works, such as that Ono and Abramovic, which examine the relationship between artist-performer-host and audience-participant-performer. This was also influenced on reflection of my own

participation in others works, such as Instant Dissidence, where the participant experiences a demanding role, with more responsibility, which I argue results in a rewarding experience as a participant. I felt I had potentially created such a convivial and facilitated environment previously, that there was less potential participation present (in their decision making and action) beyond the structure provided. Without furthering this in this piece I could not achieve the reciprocal relationship, the questioning of host-guest, nor the uncertainty of response that arises once you hand over some responsibility and trust to the audience-participant.

## Summary

The questioning raised in this practice-led enquiry referred to how can hybrid space be critically questioned through participatory performance and what the potential roles, relationships and responsibilities are of the artist-host and the participant-guest in this process.

Firstly, this piece achieved a critical questioning of hybrid space through the participatory performance between digital avatar Mariela and participants. The gestures menu which had structured the previous public performance was replaced by my own: moving in a computerised way, as previously practiced when studying the digital movements between gestures. There now became a different set of rules and choices, decided upon at the entrance to the private one-to-one performance. This offered levels to the participant in how they would approach their encounter, but remained in a 'menu' of instruments and choices for how to approach it. For example, in

*Mariela: cmd, click, control* participants could choose movements to be performed from the gestures menu provided to their table in the café. In *Mariela Hosomaki* participants could choose their instrument from a number 1-6, whether to 'feed or to eat' and upon the duration of their one-to-one encounter in a closed space. In this piece, each new participant became similar to a new avatar-resident of Second Life: entering nervously and inquisitively (as I did when I first encountered Second Life) to an unknown space, performing as an 'off-the-peg avatar', following the rules, instructions and structured

choices available in the space and testing out different ways to encounter an other within this hybrid space. The participant encounters mirrored that of observations made in Second Life, particularly in how avatars often approach one another in inquisitive, playful, dismissive or aggressive ways. As with Second Life, the choice to end the duration of their encounter, at any time by sounding the bell in the performance space, mirrored the option to remove oneself from the virtual space by leaving location or logging out. This therefore informs the research that through the creation of a hybrid space, that exists between the physical and virtual through extracting and performing elements from the virtual into the physical, that the everyday virtual practices that exist online can be observed and examined external to this space, through the common behaviours that are produced through the participatory performance of a one-to-one encounter.

Secondly, the potential roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist-host and the participant-guest were tested through the tactics employed in the participatory performance: of invitation, instruction, choice and trust. The offer of choice, in particular, in how to encounter an intimate work, to be situated as a one-to-one performance in a private space and to involve eating and feeding food, tested the levels of trust between the artist and participant. This highlighted the vulnerability in inviting the audience to become participant, to have an active role in shaping their one-to-one encounter. This was most noticeable in the roles taken on by each participant during the performance, which ranged from directive, where intimidating attempts were made to coax the movement and reaction of the avatar, to attentive, displaying more nurturing behaviour, or even dismissive, limiting interactions with the avatar and instead directing their attention towards the food provided. As Richard Schechner (1968) argues, the audience participants become “co-subjects” or even “equals” in his work, to achieve a feedback loop between performer-spectator and to increase the uncertainty of the performance outcome. However, this “liberation” as co-subjects has in some cases lead to his performers feeling mistreated or exploited by the spectators. There is a vulnerability present in all participatory artworks which invite the participant to perform and shape their own interaction; however, this is heightened in participatory practices in which the artist-performer creates a space in which they perform as host, allowing the participant greater responsibility by inviting them to join

a reciprocal and often intimate exchange. This is demonstrated in the works sited, including Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965), Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0* (1974) and Instant Dissidence's *When Night Falls* (2011), in which the participant is entrusted with an action that could directly affect the physical comfort of the performer.

### **Contributions to knowledge**

This examination illustrates that the role of performer-host shares similarities to that of a digital avatar, as they become a potentially vulnerable subject. The shared similarity is most notable in the experience as performer in the one-to-one encounter with participant, in which the performer is approached and treated as though non-human or an object. In this encounter there is an assumed anonymity, as is felt in a virtual space while encountering digital avatars remotely through a screen, and perhaps an interest in testing the rules and etiquettes of this space. The assumed anonymity in the participatory performance of *Mariela Hosomaki* or Instant Dissidence's *When Night Falls* is present due to the closed space for the one-to-one encounter, in which there are no other observers. While there is a camera present in these two examples, the closed space and absence of an observer limits self-consciousness and social conformity, empowering the participant to perform and to test the boundaries of the role and responsibility entrusted to them as participant-guest.

# **The Practice of Everyday (Virtual) Life**

## *A participatory and performative artistic enquiry*

### **THESIS REVIEW**

As outlined in the introduction to the thesis, the increasing familiarity of everyday virtual life necessitates new critical questioning: How do we live online? How can hybrid space be critically questioned through participatory performance enquiry? And methodologically, what are the roles, relationships and responsibilities of the artist and participant in participatory performance?

In this practice-led enquiry the hybrid space between the physical and virtual was critically examined through participatory performance. In this research the observations of *Second Life* became the 'event scores' and 'tactics' for live actions, interventions and participatory performances. This virtual space was selected for the research due to the possibilities in the direct translation and comparison between virtual and physical social spaces and the performativity of social actions, which are performed by avatars using the functions and rules imposed by *Second Life* creators Linden Lab. Through an examination of the virtual space of *Second Life* as digital avatar Mariela, I found that while there are seemingly many open and creative ways to live, encounter and perform online, there are etiquettes, restrictions and problems within this. For example, in *Second Life* avatars move, 'perform' and encounter one another using a prescribed gestures menu, designed by creators Linden Lab. This menu contains mostly performative and flirtatious gestures, which results in theatrical, provocative and somewhat dangerous displays of behaviour. In this virtual space, which can be argued is consistent across other online social media platforms, people perform anonymously as digital avatars and therefore behave in a way that could be seen as inappropriate in physical public spaces. This raises critical awareness in particular to issues of responsibility, trust and vulnerability, present in participatory performance and present in the behaviours between the virtual:physical, for example what can be deemed appropriate behaviour in the virtual, while difficult or uncomfortable in the physical.

Hybrid space is specifically questioned through re-performing the practices, actions and structures, observed and extracted from the virtual, in a physical space with invited participants. The practice-led research first attempted to critically question hybrid space by blurring the boundaries of physical-virtual space in *The Romantic Encounter*; a speed-dating event between avatars situated in a real and virtual café simultaneously and “*Let’s Dance Sugar Lips*”; a participatory workshop choreographing movement in the virtual to re-perform in the physical, resulting in a split screen video of virtual-physical performance. This led to *Mariela: cmd, click, control*; a performance intervention in a café where customers could order gestures from a menu extracted from Second Life, to be performed live by myself as Mariela and *Mariela Hosomaki*, a one-to-one performance which furthered the embodiment of my digital avatar and closely examined the roles, relationships and responsibilities between artist and participant in participatory performance. It is through the latter two works, in which the technology was removed, that hybrid space was achieved. These works critically questioned the space between physical and virtual through the live performance of a digital avatar.

In each piece of participatory performance within this practice-led research, Mariela became more prominent and forefront as the technology was gradually left behind and she began to exist outside of the virtual space in which she originated. With the first two pieces, *The Romantic Encounter* and *Let’s Dance Sugar Lips* the pieces questioned the virtual (space, etiquettes, communication) through the attempt of blurring it with the physical; through live multi-media performances and split-screen videos of mirrored spaces and gestures. This changed in the *Mariela: cmd, click, control*, when the performance of Mariela took place without any digital technology present. Instead the gestures menu from the virtual space was extracted and presented to an audience, situated in a café, as a printed menu from which they could order Mariela (physically performed by myself) to perform the same gestures live at their table. The subsequent realisation of this was that no technology needed to be present to be able to question the virtual; it was present in the participatory performance of digital language, movement and gesture. Therefore, in the final piece *Mariela Hosomaki*, the avatar was embodied through the advanced hybrid-body of the sculptural garment worn for the



gastronomic participatory performance. Through reflection on the encounters experienced when performing as Mariela in participatory performances physical space, particularly in *Mariela Hosomaki*, I noted significant similarities to the encounters experienced as an avatar within the virtual space of Second Life.

Through action and reflection on the roles, relationships and responsibilities between the artist and the participant, I recognised that the artist activates and facilitates audiences in participatory performance. In the analysis of my own process and principles of Participatory Performance I acknowledged the appropriateness in the language and methods of hospitality to demonstrate my methodology. It is through reflections on the roles of the artist and the participant that I acknowledged the methodological process and principles to 'hospitality'. In this context the role of the artist shares similarities to that of 'host', who sets the rules and invites participation. The willing audience-participant becomes the 'guest' and enters into a reciprocal relationship with levels of responsibility, control, trust and vulnerability. The language of hospitality is reflected in the methods or 'tactics' used in the practice, including the ingredients, recipes, invitation, rules, instruments and duration. These differ in each piece of work depending on the context, questioning and structure for participation. For example: the public invitation and facilitation of 36 participants over a two-hour public event in *The Romantic Encounter*; the invitation and collaboration with six participants in the five-hour workshop "*Let's Dance Sugar Lips*"; the menu of instructions with a public audience in the live, one-hour performative intervention of *Mariela: cmd, click, control*; and finally the invitation and levels of choice in the three-hour structured one-to-one performance of *Mariela Hosomaki*.

## **The Practice of Everyday (Virtual) Life**

### *A participatory and performative artistic enquiry*

#### **Contributions to knowledge**

This is an embodied practice, in which the contributions to knowledge are gained through the action and reflection of participatory performance; each raising new critical questioning and an embodied understanding of the critique of everyday (virtual) life: specifically the communication practices and human behaviours present in the digital, which are brought to the foreground through their re-framing and re-performance in a physical space.

This critique of the practice of everyday (virtual) life reveals the problematics in the increasing familiarity of 'hybrid space' in which we inhabit and perform as digital avatars of ourselves. This specifically illustrates contemporary issues in human communication, that is, the perceived anonymity that virtual interaction and the digital screen create, and the inherent rule-based structures which prompt learned behaviours, both of which can create a vulnerable space.

This raises new questions to where this digital technology will continue, in particular with new 'born digital' generations, whom may naturally embody hybrid space without question.

This practice-led enquiry is ongoing, and intends to apply the same tactics of observation and participatory performance to question and reveal the problematics of other everyday virtual spaces, such as the online communication practices present in spaces like Instagram<sup>7</sup>, where the digital avatar is perhaps more complex; embodied in the performance of self, through edited imagery and highly constructed identities.

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<sup>7</sup> Instagram is an online platform for sharing images publically or within a social network. This space is predominantly used by a younger generation and is beginning to gain critical attention for the growing narcissistic behaviour of Instagram users.

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