All Gameplay Is Performance

Jane McGonigal

Performance Studies @ UC Berkeley
Pervasive game design @ 42 Entertainment
All Gameplay Is Performance

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

- Jon McKenzie’s Perform or Else
Gameplay = Perform or Else

3 categories of the performance challenge in contemporary digital culture:

- technological → efficient
- cultural → efficacious
- organizational → effective

Jane McGonigal
www.avantgame.com
Gameplay = Perform or Else

3 categories of the performance challenge in contemporary digital culture:

- technological $\rightarrow$ efficient
- cultural $\rightarrow$ efficacious
- organizational $\rightarrow$ effective

*Digital gameplay also requires all 3.*

Jane McGonigal

www.avantgame.com
“Perform — or else. There is no performance without challenge, without claims and contestations, demands and accusations, field tests and identity checks, as well as the occasionally untimely dare.”

- Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*
“Perform — or else. There is no performance without **challenge**, without claims and contestations, demands and accusations, field tests and identity checks, as well as the occasionally untimely dare.”

- Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*

Gameplay is the challenge to perform: the challenge to be challenged.
Performance will name the embodiment of digital virtualities [...] just as theater once actualized the virtual spheres of literary societies and ritual actualized those of oral societies.”

-Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else*
All Gameplay Is Performance

“Playing is at the heart of all performance.” – Richard Schechner, founder of Performance Studies

The time has come for Game Studies to make the corollary claim:

Performance is at the heart of all play.
The state of the (performing) art game

2005. This is the state of the art game:

High performance gaming is the embodiment of digital virtuality.
3 High Performance Games

The Organum Playtest (2005)
(multiplayer)

Twister Cage Match (2004)
(moderately multiplayer)

I Love Bees (2004)
(massively multiplayer)
A performance lecture in 3 acts

Act I: Kinds of performance that arise during game play

Act II: Factors in the complicated relationship between play and performance

Act III: Design strategies for high performance play
The ORGANUM Playtest (2005)
The ORGANUM Playtest (2005)
The ORGANUM Playtest (2005) MEDIA

Play Organum videos:
1. Learning
2. Master
3. Play
5 Kinds of Gameplay Performance
5 Kinds of Gameplay Performance

1. Talent-based performance (art)
5 Kinds of Gameplay Performance

1. Talent-based performance (art)
2. Master performance (interaction)
5 Kinds of Gameplay Performance

1. Talent-based performance (art)
2. Master performance (interaction)
3. Expressive performance (identity)
5 Kinds of Gameplay Performance

1. Talent-based performance (art)
2. Master performance (interaction)
3. Expressive performance (identity)
4. Spectacular performance (attention)
5 Kinds of Gameplay Performance

1. Talent-based performance (art)
2. Master performance (interaction)
3. Expressive performance (identity)
4. Spectacular performance (attention)
5. Theatrical performance (“as if”)
Twister Cage Match (2004)
Twister Cage Match (2004)
Play and performance
a complicated relationship
Play and performance
a complicated relationship

1. All gameplay is performance.
1. All gameplay is performance.
2. All gameplay is theatrical.
Play and performance

*a complicated relationship*

1. All gameplay is **performance**.
2. All gameplay is **theatrical**.
3. Performance is improved by gameplay’s theatrical magic “as if”.

**PLAYFUL**

*the state of the art game*

Jane McGonigal

www.avangame.com
Play and performance
a complicated relationship

1. All gameplay is performance.
2. All gameplay is theatrical.
3. Performance is improved by gameplay’s theatrical magic “as if”.
4. Performance is scary, games are safe.
Play and performance

a complicated relationship

1. All gameplay is performance.
2. All gameplay is theatrical.
3. Performance is improved by gameplay’s theatrical magic “as if”.
4. Performance is scary, games are safe.
5. Play is autotelic, performance is telic, and gameplay can be both.
Play and performance

a complicated relationship

1. All gameplay is performance.
2. All gameplay is theatrical.
3. Performance is improved by gameplay’s theatrical magic “as if”.
4. Performance is scary, games are safe.
5. Play is autotelic, performance is telic, and gameplay can be both.
I Love Bees (2004)

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

Control has been yielded to the
SYSTEM PERIL DISTRIBUTED REFLEX.

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

In 4 days, network throttling will erode.

In 18 days this medium will metastasize.

COUNCNDOWN TO WIDE AWAKE AND PHYSICAL:

31:11:00:54:54

Make your decisions accordingly.

FAQ
Q: What happened to this site?
A: No idea. Help me out here.
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High performance design strategies

1. Make play more physical.
High performance design strategies

1. Make play more **physical**.
2. Make play more **visible**.
High performance design strategies

1. Make play more physical.
2. Make play more visible.
3. Make play more spectacular.
High performance design strategies

1. Make play more **physical**.
2. Make play more **visible**.
3. Make play more **spectacular**.
4. Make play more **demonstrative**.
High performance design strategies

1. Make play more physical.
2. Make play more visible.
3. Make play more spectacular.
4. Make play more demonstrative.
5. Make play more conspiratorial.
High performance design strategies

1. Make play more physical.
2. Make play more visible.
3. Make play more spectacular.
4. Make play more demonstrative.
5. Make play more conspiratorial.
6. Make play more psychological.
All Gameplay Is Performance

More physical
More visible
More spectacular
More demonstrative
More conspiratorial
More psychological

Playful
The state of the art game

Jane McGonigal
www.avantgame.com
Go play! Go perform! thank you.

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42 Entertainment: www.4orty2wo.com