

Wayfarer

Stephen Dunne
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Actors become video-game-style characters controlled by the audience in *Wayfarer*.

Genre

Performance Art, Theatre

Location

CarriageWorks

Address

245 Wilson Street, Eveleigh

Date

5 September 2007 to 8 September 2007

Tickets

\$15/\$10

Phone Bookings

1300 438 849

Online Bookings

www.carriageworks.com.au

- *Web link:* [Wayfarer Project on MySpace](#)

Preview

Shall we play a video game? And not just your bog-standard console job. Wouldn't it be more fun if you were controlling a real human in a real environment? Such is the premise of *Wayfarer*, an interactive performance and game hybrid by artists Kate Richards and Martyn Coutts.

In a chilly office in CarriageWorks, they outline the project, surrounded by interface mock-ups, architectural plans and numerous computer screens.

"We have four groups of audience here in the foyer," Richards says. "They're looking at a large plasma screen. Each [group] has their own screen."

Essentially, the players - one for each audience group - have to explore the area backstage, a place the audience has never seen before.

"The audience control their player via the most simple interface imaginable: voice," Richards says.

In this hybrid of stage and game, roles are not easily categorised. Aren't the audience groups, giving orders over headsets, the players? What do we call the performers they're controlling? After some discussion, "bots" is rejected and we settle on "avatars".

"It's fairly standard gaming," Richards says. "Your avatar's point of view is there filling the screen most of the time. So you're effectively using them as an agent to navigate through



You were a-maze-ing ... Kate Richards and Martyn Coutts.

Photo: *Domino Postiglione*

the space and ... find the triggers."

Anyone who has taken aim in a "first-person shooter" game will be familiar with the basics.

"There are goals that have to be reached in the game and you are racing against a clock and you are racing against your fellow audience members," Coutts says. "You have to search for a key to get through into the next level."

What the audience sees is conveyed to the plasma screens via a camera on a computer carried on each avatar's chest.

Also conforming to gaming tradition, the physical space is full of pick-ups that are both loot- and task-based.

"The provocations range from solo endurance activities, like, 'You must walk on tiptoe until you find the next trigger,' through to quite fine-grained movement where they might have to do a photocopy or find a small object," Richards says.

"So, improvisationally, it goes through a lot of different tones."

With its top-down map and visible loot - yellow dots, anyone? - old-school gamers might be reminded of a classic.

"There are circumstances where you can swipe a trigger on the wall, like you swipe all the other triggers, but for the next five or 10 minutes, that avatar can then kill any of the other three players by swiping a tag that's on their back," Coutts says. "That's exactly like Pac-man: you chomp the dot and then the other people become the ghosts and run away."

The survival of your avatar will depend on your team's skill at controlling it. Your team wins by completing all three levels of the game and collecting the most loot in the shortest time (the game is time-limited, at this stage to 45 minutes). Is it possible that no one will finish?

"If they get lost in the grunge backstage, yes," Richards says. "It's the core gaming ideas: co-operation and-or blocking, a clock, loot, levels, degrees of difficulty, puzzles. But we feel with the improvisational elements and the unpredictability of the humans and what happens between the audience that a lot of really complex situations arise."

In the process, Richards says, the audience members "become a show for passers-by. So anyone in the foyer seeing one of the other theatre shows, or something [else], can stand behind and observe the audience behaving badly."

The avatars are meant to do what they're told but unlike game sprites, they do possess some autonomy.

"They are an interface that has independent thought," Coutts says.

"So if you are stupid with them, if you f--- them off, they may actually buck you."

Richards says: "We're trying to produce an ethical spectacle raising questions about control, agency and privacy. We're really interested in using things like ubiquitous surveillance

technologies to explore the way in which technology does impact on us so much and the questions that arise around voyeurism, exhibitionism and surveillance - to get people to think about that."



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