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The body of the gamer: game art and gestural excess

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Abstract
Where is the body of the gamer in game art? While game art explores the materiality of digital games through examinations of the glitch, and in-game performances, it is less successful in revealing or examining the materiality of the body of the gamer. This presents an interesting problem for game art because, since motion sensing technologies have been incorporated into gaming technology following the introduction of the Wii, the body has reached an unprecedented visibility in popular culture, and increasingly depictions of gaming make the body part of play by celebrating gestural excess. Game art is crucial for documenting the fleeting styles of gestural excess, styles that are both amplified by the proliferation of motion sensing technologies and the integration of gesture into gaming, and constrained by the ongoing processes of being absorbed into official practices of popular gaming culture and design.

Keywords: body, digital games, game art, glitch, performance

1 Introduction
Where is the body of the gamer in game art? The body is essential for game play—the hands on the controller, senses focused on the visual and audio information coming from the game—the gamer is embroiled in a vital imbroglio of feedback between their body and the software and hardware of the videogame (and platform). But the body is rarely a subject in game art. However, in popular visual culture around videogames, there has recently been a turn towards the body. Bart Simon (2009) pinpoints this shift to the popularity of ‘active’ or ‘motion’ gaming ushered in by the Wii, and the subsequent incorporation of motion sensing controllers across all major globally distributed platforms. The visual advertising material for the Wii, and more importantly the popular practices of sharing videos of gameplay, often included the body of the gamer in order to illustrate particular techniques with the Wiimote (the handheld controller for the Wii). Simon argues that this renders the body of the gamer spectacular—which, this article will argue, has important consequences for understanding the significance of the body in game art.

Game art has several dominant modes: that of glitch aesthetics, which links game art to contemporary discussions formulated around the ‘new aesthetic’ (Berry et al. 2012,41–46); and performance, which may be found in in-game interventions (Apperley 2010,109–113) or practices like machinima (Lowood 2007). In this contribution I...
assert two contentions on game art. The first contention is that these two modes of game art—glitch aesthetics and performance—imply the body as a key site in the everyday experience of digital gaming, by exposing the effort and labour that the body of the gamer produces during play. The second contention marks the cleavage between the spectacular body of gaming in popular visual culture and the implied body more commonly suggested in game art. What is missing from game art is ‘gestural excess’ (Freeman et al. 2012; Simon 2009), the labour that is produced by the body at the location of play but is not registered by the digital game as an input. In this gestural excess there is a nascent, but precarious, sense of style that formerly dissipated into everyday life but is now indexed by popular visual culture. This style is a crucial subject of game art.

This contribution begins by providing a brief background to game art, and then expands upon the general turn to the spectacular body of the gamer in popular visual culture. Then each of the two contentions already raised will be discussed: first, that game art tends to expose the labour that goes into playing digital games; and second, that game art has difficulty accounting for gestural excess. Taken together, these suggest a challenging potential direction and critical capacity for game art.

2 Game art

Game art can be broadly defined as art that is inspired by digital games. In Matteo Bittanti’s introduction to Gamescenes: Art in the Age of Videogames (2006a, 9) he specifically defines game art as ‘any art in which digital games played a significant role in the creation, production, and/or display of the artwork’. It is an extremely dynamic field, and consequently difficult to map. Dominico Quaranta (2011), a prominent critic and curator of game art, argues that introducing categorisations or subgenres within game art supports the development of a critical appreciation and comprehension of the genre. However, scholars and practitioners should not focus on developing and cataloguing these categories at the expense of overlooking the evolution of game art that is taking place in ‘border crossings, hybridisations … [and] crossbreeds’ (Quaranta 2011, 120). For Quaranta, at the core of game art is an act of ‘reinvention’ that is an ‘appropriation of technologies of delivery’ which results in ‘their conversion into technologies of cultural production’ (Quaranta 2009, 21). There is a general consensus among scholars that game art is characterised by the ‘appropriation’ (Stockburger 2007, 29) and ‘modification’ (Cannon 2007, 45; Stockburger 2007, 29) of existing game software.

The development of ‘modding’ as a common practice among gaming communities and the rise of a strong artistically inclined independent games scene considerably complicate attempts to mark a clear delineation between game art and the commercial digital games industry. Given the predominance of modding, scholars are divided on how clearly to distinguish between game art and the practices of producing ‘mods’ by fans. It is argued that game art emerges from fan activities and cultures (Poremba 2010, 43; Saul and Stuckey 2007, 68), and that it harkens back to the ethos of independent development and re-development that characterised the ‘golden age’ of digital games (Huhtamo 1999). However, Galloway (2006, 107) carefully distinguishes game art from fan-based ‘mods’. Primarily, this is because game art, unlike fan creations, are characterised by glitch aesthetics; they are not focused on producing an experience optimised for playability (Galloway, 2006, 108, 111). In particular, modding highlights the reliance of game art on the commercial games industry, but the relationship between them is complex enough for game art to be characterised as both ‘symbiotic’ (Galloway, 2006, 113) and ‘parasitic’ (Schleiner 1999), to the commercial industry.

Game art is typically constituted as an entirely different approach from mainstream commercial and independent game development. While Stockburger (2007, 29), mounts an argument in favour of the inclusion of the production of original games within game art, most definitions deliberately exclude original games. On this position,
Bittanti (2006a, 7–9) is exemplary: he carefully steers away from the inclusion of original games, which he calls ‘art games’, in the category of ‘game art’. However, game art may potentially offer insight into the commercial games industry. It is excellent at excavating forgotten technologies and imbuing them with new possibilities (Quaranta 2009, 20–21), creating a media archaeology of games that is part an alternative history of digital gaming and game technologies (Huhtamo 1999, 2005; Pias 2011), and part ‘affective nostalgia’ (Parikka 2012, 3). But the relationship between game art and the commercial game industries remains ambiguous and potentially contradictory, as it is founded on an alignment of practice, rather than shared concerns or objectives.

3 Glitch

In his comprehensive and ground-breaking post on game art to the <nettime> list (http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0503/msg00026.html), Tilman Baumgaertel establishes the centrality of the glitch aesthetic in game art. He outlines three key trends in game art: ‘modifications’ of existing games using level editors; ‘abstraction’, art produced by modifying the code of digital games; and ‘socialisation’, art centred on the social element of gaming. This latter category will be revisited in the following subsection on performance. In terms of the glitch aesthetic, however, the first two categories are closely related, both using software as a tool to produce art, and sharing a similar ‘defect paradigm’ that often involved deliberately creating or exploiting glitches (Baumgaertel, see http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0503/msg00026.html). Together these categories demarcate one of the dominant understandings of game art: the glitch aesthetic—art which ‘aestheticises the glitch’ (Krapp 2011, 88).

Game art is just one area where the glitch aesthetic is symptomatic. Glitch art is ‘a set of audio/visual artistic practices which capture, exploit, and produce glitch artifacts’ (Cloninger 2011, 23). In The Glitch Moment(um), Rosa Menkman (2011, 18) provides the following definition for ‘glitch’: ‘an unexpected occurrence, unintended result, or break or disruption in a system’. Briz (2011, 55–56), historicises glitch art by linking it with the ‘Pop Art’ movement, through their mutual interests in the ‘mistake’ and ‘popular culture’. Links are also clear between glitch art and the practices of ‘found art’ or the ‘readymade’ (see Menkman 2011, 35–38)—although glitches are far from the everyday objects Marcel Duchamp used in his original presentation. However, glitch art differs from these previous movements in the respect that it uses emergent characteristics of popular digital media—typically understood as mistakes—to explore new possibilities for the media.

The glitch makes it explicit that complex processes are underway beneath the assumed user-friendliness of the contemporary interface, disrupting the illusion of smooth, invisible—‘transparent’ (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 14)—mediation by revealing the artifice of the digital software and platform (Menkman 2011, 30–31). In New Aesthetic, New Anxieties, David Berry and his collaborators describe the way that the glitch exposes mediation as follows: ‘just as digital technologies and software mediate our experience and engagement with the world, often invisibly, so the “digital” and “software” is itself mediated and made visible through the representational forms of pixelation and glitch’ (Berry et al. 2012, 43). However the ‘glitch’ in ‘glitch art’ is often more of a metaphor rather than a technical reality. Thus, glitch should not be automatically understood in a strict technical sense (Menkman 2011, 34). For example, McCormack (2011, 15) goes as far as distinguishing between artists who make art using actual glitches from those that reproduce glitch-like aesthetic effects.

The glitch art movement, along with game art that makes use of the glitch aesthetic, may also be understood as part of a larger aesthetic shift that music theorist and composer Kim Cascone calls ‘the aesthetics of failure’. He writes:

Indeed, ‘failure’ has become a prominent aesthetic in many of the arts in the late 20th century, reminding us that our control of
technology is an illusion, and revealing digital tools to be only as perfect, precise, and efficient as the humans who build them. New techniques are often discovered by accident or by the failure of an intended technique or experiment. (Cascone 2000, 13)

Later writers on glitch art endorse the connection between both, exposing failures in technology and the discovery of new techniques, originally mapped by Cascone (see Stearns 2011). Menkman describes the relationship between failure and discovery as follows: ‘The perfect glitch only exists for a spectator at the tipping point between destruction and the creation of something new; this is more a dialectical relation than a linear trajectory of possibility’ (2011, 65).

4 Performance

An emerging sub-genre of in-game performance or ‘aesthetic protest’ (Winet 2007, 98), based on the possibility of artists using games as ‘real-time performance instruments’ (Cannon 2007, 43), is not registered in Baumgaertel’s initial categorisation of game art (see http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0503/msg00026.html). This sub-genre of game art involves artists using digital games as platforms for performance art. The use of America’s Army (US Army, 2003) by Joseph Delappe to produce dead-in-iraq (DeLappe 2006–ongoing), is a particularly well known example. The artist enters into and takes action in the game as a player and the performance takes place in the ‘virtual’ game environment. While in ‘some sense all games are performances’ (Flanagan 2009, 149) and all players performers (Farley et al. 2009, 96), in-game performances are a reification of the everyday performance of digital gameplay.

This approach is markedly dissimilar to glitch-based game art, as it relies on the smooth operation of the game for the artist to effectively stage their intervention. However, in-game performances often do cause significant disruption of play within games for the duration of the performance. In the logic of the games, and the cultures of the players, in which he staged his performances, DeLappe’s (DeLappe 2006–ongoing) dead-in-iraq and the similarly constructed, but more abstract, War Poetry: Medal of Honor, Allied Assault Online (2002) were ‘spamming’ the chat channels, which disrupted the in-game communication that was vital for coordinating actions between the disparately geographically located players.

An emphasis on performance is often found in discussions of machinima and artistic practices in multi-user virtual environments. Machinima is often located within a context of wider ‘contemporary artistic practice[s]’ that makes use of ‘performance rooted in computer games’ (Lowood 2007, 59). Similarly, wider mappings of artistic practices in Second Life (Linden Lab 2003) —a multi-user virtual environment that is often used by artists—suggest that having a ‘performative’ emphasis is a characteristic of the art practices that have emerged from the digital environment (Tasa and Görgülü 2011, 107; see also Clemens 2011; Clemens and Nash 2010). The in-game performance incorporates digital games into artistic practice as a tool and method of communication. But like game art using glitch aesthetics, in-game performances have difficulty directly dealing with the issue of the body of the gamer.

In this respect Baumgaertel’s third and final category, ‘socialisation’ (see http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0503/msg00026.html), has a certain resonance, which suggests a manner of locating the body of the gamer in game art. For Baumgaertel, socialisation includes all art that deals with the social elements of gaming. He writes, ‘Instead of dealing with the inner life of the games—the code—and instead of making the superficial into a major theme, they deal with how computer games in the “real world” are relocated’. This evocation of the ‘real world’, is important, as this loosely formed category is defined in opposition to the ‘virtual’. This does not mean that the art itself is tangible, but that the subject of the art is located in a specific time and space. Baumgaertel illustrates the importance of this category through the examples of Reiff and Morawe’s Pain Station (2001–2003)
and the series *Shooter* (Geissler and Sann 2000–2001).3

While *Pain Station* is one of the few artworks that palpably and explicitly deals with the body of the gamer, *Shooter* approaches the issue in a more ambiguous fashion. The artwork presents a series of portraits of gamers playing games at a LAN session, arranged by the artists at their studio (Tanni 2006, 154). At some formal levels the photos follow the portraiture genre faithfully: each individual is shown from the shoulders, with their face in the centre of the frame; behind them is a neutral grey background.

However, it is impossible to mistake the subjects of *Shooter* for typical portraits; rather than looking and smiling at the camera, the gaze of the subjects of these portraits is directed outside of the frame, and they exhibit a range of facial expressions, all indicative of intense concentration. Through these facial expressions the series captures something of the intensities of gaming, but the body of the gamer is presented as immobile or inert. In part this is due to the construction of the subject through the genre of portrait—the hands moving across the keyboard and mouse, the pulsating digitorms, the sympathetic motions responding to movements in the game, the kinaesthetic components of gameplay are lacking—cut off by the frame. *Shooter* thus highlights both the interest in and apparent difficulty that game art has in approaching the body of the gamer.

5 The body in gaming

Why does game art so rarely depict the body of the gamer? The major commercial producers of digital games and game hardware, Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony, have no such hesitation. The major innovations from this sector—motion sensing controllers, the touch screens of mobile gaming platforms, and the ‘natural’ user interface associated with the Microsoft Xbox Kinect—all offer new expressive possibilities for the body of the gamer. Motion gaming was popularised through the release of the Wii in 2006. The wireless Wiimote operated through a combination of a motion sensor and an infrared pointer, as well as the more traditional buttons, directional pad and trigger. Similar devices were incorporated into the other major consoles: Sony released the PlayStation Move, a motion sensing controller for the PlayStation 3 in 2010; the add-on Kinect was also released in 2010 for the Microsoft Xbox 360. The Kinect introduced the ‘natural’ user interface to commercial gaming. It is a ‘controllerless’ device which uses a 3-D camera advanced enough to allow motion capture and facial recognition. The technologies combine to create a computer interface that can be used intuitively, through a combination of motions, movements and gestures that are recognised by the Kinect. This device allows people to play games—and use other media—on the Xbox 360 and Windows PC through movement and voice alone, making it the contemporary gaming technology that is most intimately linked to the body. The product is incredibly popular; in the sixty days following its release the Kinect sold eight million units, becoming the worlds ‘fastest selling consumer electronics device’ (Moses 2011). This newly expressive gaming body suggests that the commercial game industries may have a valuable insight for game art.

Key work has earmarked these developments as expanding the expressive possibilities of gesture in digital gaming. Traditional console and computer controls for games ‘incorporate the gamer into a sensory regime which privileges consistency, accuracy and restraint’ (Shinkle 2008, 909). How people interacted with games was quite limited, particularly in terms of expressive—gestural and emotional—physical responses (Shinkle 2008, 909).

Shinkle’s concern with understanding the role of sensory feedback in building emotional engagement in games leads her to argue that the use of the Wii allows a more engrossing form of play because it engages the player at an embodied kinaesthetic level (2008, 912). For Shinkle, the Wii controller, and presumably other forms of motion control gaming, opens up gaming for new forms of bodily expression, including gestural excess.
However, at the same point that the body of the gamer is offered new possibilities for expression, it is also offered up to new regimes of surveillance. Simon (2009) makes this point obliquely in his discussion of gestural excess by connecting the Wii to a turn towards a spectacular body of the gamer. The advertising campaign that accompanied the Wii suggested that ‘the object of consumption is no longer just the spectacle of the game on a screen but rather players’ corporeal engagement and kinaesthetic involvement in that spectacle’ (Simon 2009, 1). This new attentiveness to the body of the gamer was accompanied by an implicit shift in understanding the role of the body in game play. This shift is largely centred around gestural excess, the movements and gestures made during play that have no effect of the algorithmic or representational processes of the game, but in advertising materials are ‘represented as the very source of fun and pleasure in the game’ (11). The significance of gestural excess is that it is not registered by the gaming technology; it is in no way programmed or coded (12–13). Yet, once gestural excess and the body are acknowledged as significant sites, and rendered spectacular and public, they are vulnerable to new forms of surveillance (Berenhausen 2007; Millington 2009), not just by members of the public, but through the ever-increasing accuracy of the technologies of gaming themselves.

In any case, the ‘freedom’ in the gestural excess may be somewhat limited. Simon (2009) argues that this is because gestural excess is always given meaning in relation to the particular game being played. Gestural excess does not exist independently; it only supplements the programmed algorithmic experience of playing a digital game. Thus, Simon argues that ‘bodily excess’ must be understood ‘against a background of the logic of control in a digitised society’ (14). This shift towards gestural excess and the spectacular body of the gamer has serious stakes for scholars of digital games, who can no longer justify directing their critique at a ‘purely representational level’ (4). But how does game art approach this shift towards the spectacular body of the gamer? Game art often does deal with bodies, but in a manner which is more often indirect or suggestive than it is explicit. It often acts to expose the labour of games, both the labour of the player and the labour that goes into producing the gaming artefacts. Where there is labour, even immaterial labour, there is a body that performs the labour.

6 Exposing labour

While the ‘body of the gamer’ is often not explicitly visible in game art—particularly glitch art—it often implicitly exposes or reveals the labour in gameplay. Through exposing labour, game art does implicitly reference the labouring body, the physically embodied actions that both perform play and construct game environments. Labour, and with it the suggestion of a labouring body, is exposed by game art in a number of ways. DeLappe’s series of artworks The Artist’s Mouse (DeLappe 1999) are among the most direct exposés of the labour that goes into play.4 The Artist’s Mouse draws attention to the repetitive motions and movements that are made while playing digital games. In a 2007 Interview, DeLappe describes his process:

*I created a mechanical appendage for my mouse which allowed the attachment of traditional artists tools to create drawings while using the mouse on my desktop. The notion was to use this device to record, or map, my desktop mouse activity ... Attaching a pencil to my mouse and then playing computer games for hours became a very basic way of getting down to the core of what the mouse actually is while, at the same time, literally mapping obsessive computing activity.* (Winet 2007, 95)

By feeding his play into his artistic practice by recording the movements of his mouse, DeLappe imagined a new way of understanding the labour, motion and gestures used to play digital games. The intensities and movements captured and mapped by The Artist’s Mouse ossify the dissipated energies of the labour of playing digital games. The repetitive lines transcribed from the
movement of the mouse (and body) to the paper through play make the labour required to play digital games clearly visible.

Other artworks highlight particular elements that make contemporary digital play similar—or indeed identical—to various forms of work. For example, *Chinese Gold* (UBERMORGEN 2006), which documents the emergence of ‘videogame sweatshops’ in South-East Asia (Quaranta 2006, 289). Several projects mark tangible connections between gaming and real-world practices of labour. Whether game art is based on modding, or on in-game performance, it has focused on critiquing the role that digital games have in simulating war by connecting what unfolds in the virtual world of online digital games with contemporary global events. *The Velvet Strike* (Schleiner, Leandre, and Condon 2002) mod for *Counter-Strike* (Valve 2000), and DeLappe’s performances in *America’s Army* (US Army 2003) both directly connected the games in which they staged their intervention with the US invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq. Amongst other issues, both interventions highlighted the peculiar cognitive and phenomenological resonance between digital play and soldierly labour found in those games, which was conspicuously acknowledged in *America’s Army* and thoroughly integrated into the game, but was also implicit, however muted, in Valve’s extraordinarily popular first-person shooter.

Even when game art using glitch aesthetics does not directly attempt to expose the labour of play, the glitch aesthetic itself inadvertently draws attention to the construction of the virtual world. Rather than presenting digital games as smooth ‘natural’ interfaces, the glitch aesthetic exposes them as imperfect objects or tools that are subject to error. Various projects by the JODI collective make excellent examples, including *untitled game* (1996) and *SOD* (2000). The collective is well known for their practice of aesthetic minimalism; each of the works in the series *untitled game* was made by erasing an increasing amount of code from the original source code of *Quake* (id software 1996). But the use of the glitch aesthetic by JODI, while pointing to the fallibility of the digital game medium, also exposes the labour that goes into producing virtual worlds and the ‘immersive’ interactive experience. The labour of producing games is exposed by the revelation that these apparently autonomous, seemingly transparent interfaces are built from lines of code, which then become tools for artistic expression, and ultimately produce various ‘broken’ non-interactive, yet aesthetic, experiences.

The issues of labour and the body are crucial for digital game studies. A major thread of scholarship examines how the digital games industry makes use of players by outsourcing issues to them for ‘beta testing’ (see de Peuter and Dyer-Witheford 2005; Kücklich 2005). But beyond the issue of exploited immaterial labour (Lazzarato 1996) that exists in various sectors of the games industry, there is the now long-standing acknowledgement that digital games have a role in training and education, which connect play with future forms of labour through the notion of exchangeable capital (Walsh and Apperley 2009). Research directly on the role of the body in gaming is rarer, but growing in momentum. This area is particularly crucial because, as the body of the gamer becomes spectacular through the celebration of gestural excess, it also becomes subject to new regimes of surveillance. The body and gestural excess are exposed as potentially available for incorporation into gaming, suggesting future practices of gaming where the body is increasingly monitored and disciplined by gaming technologies. There are opportunities for game art to intervene, but this may involve a more assertive acknowledgement and documentation of the body of the gamer.

7 Gestural excess and style

Gestural excess includes movements made unconsciously and those which are made deliberately as an act of ‘style’. Gesture and gestural excess in gaming has existed since the technologies’ inception—and indeed some gestures were possibly inherited from technological precursors like pinball (Huhtamo 2005) and video art (Wilson
However, subsequent to the mass popularity of the Wii, the body of the gamer and gestural excess are increasingly understood by the digital games industry—and in the popular imagination—as an integral part of gaming. New forms of control in gaming that are based on ‘natural’ user interfaces using motion sensing, touch and voice seem to offer a new potency for gesture. Buttons, for example, rarely mimic ‘natural’ actions or gestures (Parker 2008; Shinkle 2008, 908), and it is the limited recognition of human input that establishes the possibility of gestural excess; it doesn’t matter how hard or fast that the button is hit. The ‘natural’ user interface, which operates through an ‘intuitive’ recognition of gesture, signals the possibility for the recuperation of gestural excess. This possibility is considerably enhanced by the shift toward motion sensing gaming which has vastly increased the capacities for gesture to be accurately tracked, recorded and incorporated into play. In short, the continuing existence of gesture in gaming as a form of excess is far from secure.

What exactly does gestural excess offer people? Some of the movements are unconscious—for example, leaning one way or another in sympathy with the on-screen avatar—such movements both register and dissipate intensities, as players struggle to align the micro-movements of play into seamless action in the game’s virtual spaces. The movements that are crucial are those which are consciously made; gestural excess offers a sense of unique style. Yet, such style remains defined in relation to the game, and thus does little to directly challenge the over-riding algorithmic logic. Still, the style produced through gestural excess is a part of the social and embodied experience of digital game play, which exists in relation to — but is not indexed, measured or evaluated by — gaming technologies. Style individualises the experience of play, while digital games allow for many different configurations, each is only a possible configuration that has existed in latency since the programming of the game’s algorithm. In contrast, style in the form of gestural excess emerges from the context where it was made, thus is always embedded within a specific set of relations that are located in a particular time and space. Style, through gestural excess, connects players to the space and time in which the gesture is made, that is simultaneously connected to, and outside of, the algorithmic register of the digital game.

Gestural excess in gaming is a particularly ‘weak’ form of excess. For a start, its very existence runs counter to the agonistic logic of efficiency and precision that are usually equivocal with success in digital games. It may be fun, but style created by gestural excess does not contribute to winning. This point is illustrated in Berenhussen’s (2007) ethnographic work with players of Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) (Konami 1998). He reports on a disagreement between players on the importance of gesture during play. One player who considers playing DDR a form of dancing consistently adds excess gestures, which annoys another player who approaches DDR as a game and takes on a minimalist style that avoids making any gestures or movements that are not registered by the game (344–345). Simon (2009) notes a similar dynamic: ‘As a rule, it seems that the most minute movements will suffice, but what many Wii players also soon discover is that playing the game with minute motions is simply not as fun as playing with broader-than-necessary motions’ (12). But this logic of efficiency and precision is also enhanced, as the margin of the ‘broader than necessary’ is gradually narrowed by technologies capable of registering motion and gesture with increasing accuracy.

Style through gestural excess presents a bodily ‘glitch’, an emergent actor that does not impinge on the smooth operation of the game. The ‘glitchiness’ of gestural excess is exacerbated by its recuperative potency; gestural excess is consistently under threat both by the logic of efficiency that characterises gameplay and the ongoing development of technologies that can track gesture and give it meaning within games. Gaming’s body glitches, the moments of style which are simultaneously within and outside of the algorithmic parameters of game software, are just as erroneous as software glitches, at least within the context of the game. The glitch itself,
notes Menkman (2011, 26), has, from the moment of its inception by the astronaut John Glenn, never just been confined to issues of technology.

Style has been sporadically documented by game art. *Gamers* (2006) by Todd Deutsch and various individual works by Miltos Manetas have focused on revealing the embodied gamer. At first glance Deutsch’s work appears remarkably similar to Geissler and Sann’s *Shooter* (2000–2001). However, *Gamers* has an ethnographic sensibility. Rather than setting up a LAN in his studio, Deutsch travelled to and documented LAN parties, with the goal of capturing what was unique and interesting about the subculture (Bittanti, 2006b, 138). Deutsch’s photography documents the players in the strange temporary spaces of the LAN party, and is able to record something of the unique and fleeting style of the events. In the piece *Halo 2* the young, male, hoody-wearing figure in the foreground leans intently forward, elbows on thighs, clutching the controller looking off to the left towards an absent screen; in contrast the similarly attired figure in the background leans back, his feet up on another chair, while holding his controller in his lap. Other pieces in the series document various postures, the equipment and space involved in the LAN, and the preferred drinks and snacks of the participants (Mountain Dew and Munchies Classic Mix).

Manetas is considered one of the first artists to depict gaming through art. Painted in 1997, the piece *Christine with PlayStation* evokes another fleeting moment of style. Angled from above, the painting surveys a domestic scene, the eponymous girl or woman kneels on the floor in front of the television, leaning forward and resting her elbows on a large floor cushion, and holding what is clearly a game controller. Her face is obscured by her long hair, but her attention is clearly directed at a small television that is encircled by a tangle of cords. Around her are various scattered remotes, CDs (probably PlayStation games) and videotapes. Both artists capture the fleeting style of gamers and gaming, managing to record the intensities of digital play before they dissipate into mundane everyday existence.

These pieces also suggest why the body of the gamer is a difficult subject for game art. Capturing gestural excess in art is difficult. How is gesture represented in static art? But still, something of the style of play, its place and moment, the body at play is revealed in these artworks. As technologies evolve that index gesture more thoroughly, will the retreating space for gestural excess even be a viable subject for game art? The body glitch is not registered by the computer system, but as the body becomes a tool for transparent communication with and through computers, the significance of the body glitch is exacerbated.

8 Conclusion: the body glitch

Game art implicitly acknowledges the body of the gamer as a key site in the everyday experience of gameplay by exposing digital game play as a laborious process and the labour that goes into producing the game worlds. Even so, game art lags behind popular culture in its incorporation of the body. The production of gestural excess is now a part of digital game play in the post-Wii era, yet game art still has difficulty approaching the body of the gamer directly. *For game art, the body of the gamer is a glitch*; a glitch that can initially be tolerated and ignored, because it does not impinge on the smooth operation of the system. Gestural excess has no meaning within the algorithm of the game; but when the algorithm produces glitches, these errors, however small, are registered as noise.

But the ‘glitchiness’ of the body of the gamer is in the process of becoming more significant, precisely because it is increasingly exposed by gestural excess, which makes it open to the possibility of being incorporated into game play. Gestural excess always operates outside, but in relation to computational processes, and as these processes become more efficient, and domestic motion sensing technologies like the Xbox Kinect become more ubiquitous, the operational spaces of gestural excess will become increasingly limited. This is because the smooth operation and everyday implementation of the ‘natural’ user interface that uses the body as a controller requires that gestural excess is understood as a glitch. Thus,
the growing significance of motion sensing controllers suggests both an opening and immanent foreclosure for bodily expression in gaming through gestural excess, which makes it a crucial subject for game art.

Notes
1 There is just one proviso: the question of videogames as art (are videogames art?) has been made convincingly elsewhere (e.g. Bittanti 2006a; Smuts 2005). This article is not concerned with that question; rather, it is focused on a discussion and critical examination of game art.
2 Performance has become a key theme in scholarship on machinima, see Lowood and Nitsche (2011).
3 For a more detailed discussion of Reiff and Morawę’s art projects, see Laso (2007).
4 A gallery of DeLappe’s The Artist’s Mouse series is available at: http://www.unr.edu/art/delappe/mouse/The%20Obsessive%20Mouse/OM%20MAIN.html.
5 This resonance is discussed at length by Kontour (2012).
6 See Apperley and Jayemanne (2012, 15–17) for a current summary of this area of research.

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