2011

Video Game Theatre

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VIDEO GAME THEATRE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Richmond, Virginia
May, 2011
Acknowledgment

The author wishes to thank several people who helped make this thesis possible. I would like to thank my supportive family for their love and devotion during the past two years it has taken me to graduate. I would like to thank my supportive girlfriend, Katherine, who has always been my safe haven and ever ready proofreader. I would also like to thank Mr James Couche for his wonderful video work, Mr Zachary Goodell for his effort and help with CPS Technology, Mr. Jim Konecny and everyone at the Break Point, and everyone involved in the Richmond Game Truck. This project would not have happened without their tireless effort of my cast for Video Game Theatre. Those individuals are Jacob McFadden, Jeannie Melcher, Jason Gardner, Tim Suddeth, Henry Jenson, Cory Johnson, Elizabeth Strauss, Michelle Nuckols, Rachel Shigley, Charlie Resnick, and Trista Dandrea. I would finally like to thank all the supportive teachers at VCU and especially the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Noreen C. Barnes, Dr. Aaron Anderson, and Mr Barry Bell for their kinds words of encouragement and their belief that my work has merit and importance.
Abstract

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Video games are becoming the fastest growing and most lucrative form of entertainment across the globe. The goal of this project was to take gaming to the next level; to the theatre. I have devised an original piece of theatre using the CIC’s of video gaming: Creativity, Interaction, and Community and put on a production from members of the VCU community.

Aside from the project, I have detailed why video games are growing in popularity at an alarming rate and why they belong in the category of ‘Art.’ With new technology and new stories being told, the gaming industry is now an entertainment force to be counted.
The project was exposed to the VCU community involving gamers from many different areas of study through theatre as our medium allowing us to convey our thoughts, emotions, and message to an audience.

This experimental project is an exploration into bridging the world of gaming into the laps of an awaiting audience.
Preface

The inspiration of video games in my life has always been there. From a young age, the bright images, challenging concepts, and engaging gameplay captured my attention. In my family, video games were tolerated but often condemned, especially as my brother and I grew up. Gaming was my escape from reality. No matter how hard my parents yearned for books to be that escape, it never stuck. The visuals of video games became my battlegrounds, my creative outlets, and my inspirations. They allowed my imagination to go beyond simple visualizations, but also into the world of choices, as I became the writer of the story through my actions. This power, or control is blatantly absent from books and written materials. Video games give us the sensation of creating and manipulating, where written materials give us only the sensation of someone else’s experience.

As a theatre practitioner and actor, I understand and embrace the powers of the stage. There is no better place to encounter emotion, passions, pain, and the human condition itself. In my 20 years of acting, the stage has always been a scary, powerful weapon for creativity. Theatre is the highest form of art where individuals share stories that need to be told.

By merging my two passions, video games and theatre, I am attempting to bridge the rewards and advantages found in both. In video games, I aim to bring the human condition into focus and allow for audiences to experience a visceral, powerful emotion due to the actions of someone on stage. In theatre, I am bringing in the ability to interact and control the environment.
By allowing these two juggernauts of entertainment to fuse, the results can become a unique event.

This thesis will explore the effects of video games in our society, video games as legitimate forms of art, the creation and implementation of the Community, Interaction and Competition (CIC) of gaming in theatre, working and collaborating with individuals that are not theatre majors in a production, and finally highlighting audience and personal reflections on the production, Video Game Theatre. This project was ambitious and daunting but video games and theatre need and deserve each other as they are the highest forms of entertainment in our modern world.
Chapter I

Video Games in Today’s Society

The ESA, Entertainment Software Association, gathers and surveys data each year on the video game industry highlighting new trends and fluctuations in popularity in gaming. In 2010, the ESA reported several interesting and amazing findings; 67% of American households play computer or video games, 12 years is the average number of years adult gamers have been playing, 64% of parents think gaming is a positive part of their child’s life, 86% of children receive permission from their parents to play games, and in 2009, the video game industry made 9.9 billion dollars (ESA 1). Jesse Schell, instructor at Carnegie Mellon University states, “There are games now for pretty much every age, every demographic. It comes down to everybody is playing games. Games are just evolving like species in order to fit into every little niche of our lives” (ESA 2).

The recent release of Call of Duty 2: Black Ops is also something to examine. The opening sales numbers for this game reached up around $360 million (Activision 1). This sales figure is the largest of any entertainment, shattering not just gaming sales but also box office records. Why are people willing and excited to spend their hard earned money on a video game? The answer is simple. It is part of our culture.

What are the connections between video games and society? Are there any links or bridges that are present? Harry J. Brown says ‘yes’ in his book, Videogames and Education.
“Videogames challenge us to define our humanity in relation to rapidly evolving technologies, which complicate our notions of identity, creativity, and moral value” (Brown 13). Brown believes that, “video games, are the first widely disseminated post-human art form, emerging from the synthesis of human and artificial intelligence,” and I could not agree more (Brown 13). Video games could only have been created by our bridging gaps between technology and narrative forms. One cannot exist without the other. In this combination, we can begin to see why society and gaming are connected: as we expand our technological advances, we are more inclined to employ them in such creative ways as video games.

Video games entered into the mainstream in the early 1980’s and have continued to climb their way out of parent’s basements and into the public eye. With more research, videogames are also becoming more accepted and seen as educational tools. In Steven Johnson’s book, Everything Good is Bad for You, he explores research and contemporary criticisms about video games. “It is not what you’re thinking about when you’re playing a game, it’s the way you’re thinking that matters” (Johnson 40). Video games require a new way of looking and dealing with certain situations. By having a new approach to analysis and observation, video games are making individuals think in a different way which brings about new-found results. In his research on different educational models, Carmi Schooler, a social psychologist claims,

The more diverse the stimulus, the greater the number of decisions required, the greater the number of considerations to be taken into account in making these decisions, and the more ill-defined and apparently contradictory the contingencies, the more complex the environment.”(Johnson 146)

By creating new ways of expressing thoughts, ideas, and dreams, video games allow individuals to express themselves in new ways, and in the process, make us smarter. “It’s not the change in our nutritional diet that’s making us smarter, it’s the change in our mental diet” (Johnson 144).
With new technology, engaging and interactive software, and embracing new and old gamers, the industry has grown drastically. The creation of the casual player is one such major growth. According to Jesper Juul in his book, *A Casual Revolution*, this new genre of game player is revolutionizing what and how games are being created. “The rise of the casual gamer has industry-wide implications and changes the conditions for game developers, pushing developers to make games for a broader audience” (Juul 7). He also outlines some differences between casual and hardcore players:

The stereotype of a casual player: this player has a preference for positive and pleasant fictions, has played few video games, is willing to commit little time and few resources toward playing video games, and dislikes difficult games. The stereotype of a hardcore player: this player has a preference for emotionally negative fictions like science fiction, vampire, fantasy, and war, has played a large number of video games, will invest large amounts of time and resources toward playing a video game, and enjoy difficulty. (29)

His concept of casual players is profound in today’s world, as individuals who grew up playing games are finding less time to play games due to parental responsibilities. Greg Howson stated this fact clearly in his article, “Casual Gamer Rule Chart”, “Maybe that is the market that the Wii has tapped into. Not the non-gamer, more the ex-hardcore-now-parent gamer” (Juul 12).

With the birth of this new gamer, players and games are being more accepted in society and entertainment venues. Even in Richmond, VA, there are 2 different establishments that to this day, have a biweekly gathering to play a casual game, *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. Casual games have introduced video games to all kinds of new players who would have just brushed off video games only a few years ago. The change in acceptance in society is clearly visible. This force will continue to grow as gaming becomes more and more an actual contemporary form of entertainment as all indicators and research say that it will.
Another new force in casual gaming is on the digital and phone front. Downloading and playing games for free or relatively inexpensive has taken the gaming industry by storm. Games on laptops and phones are becoming more accessible each day. Games such as *Angry Birds* received around 42 million downloads in a few months (*Angry Birds*). The ever growing digital and mobile gaming arenas continue to impact everyone with the technology to play these games. It is not uncommon now to see a business man or woman sitting on the subway playing a quick game on his/her phone while waiting for his/her stop; in the past, this activity would look childish and juvenile, but today, it is a common occurrence thanks to a new positive view of video gaming.

All though you sit by yourself, and engage in a game, a gamer is never alone. With the advent and implementation of online gaming, an opponent or partner is closer than ever.

One of the common criticisms of video games is that they can only wrap those who play in enforced and occasionally deranging solitude, but to take part in a multiplayer game is to give a game new life every time one plays, because one is matched against human players, whose ingenuity and deviousness no computer can hope to equal, and because one can exchange with one's fellow players advice, congratulations, and taunts. (Bissell 63-64)

Different franchises such as *Madden*, *World of Warcraft*, or *Starcraft* have developed such mass appeal that theme parks are being opened specifically for them. The gaming community is also ever expanding and ever welcoming. Despite the bad stigma many hold for video game player, not everyone lives in his/her mother’s basement and eats only Ramen. “Videogames are often criticized for the passivity of their players, but really, it is often a sense of curious exploration that primarily interests gamers, and motivates them to explore the potential of a fictional world” (Tavinor 147). As our generation gains more power and responsibilities, video games will also do the same as we have grown up with them. They hold a special place in our hearts.
and after your first meaningful encounter, tearful ending, or gaping jaw, you are hooked. As Bissell points out, “For the first time in your life, a video game has done something more than entertain or distract you. It has bypassed your limbic system and gone straight for the spinal cord” (Bissell 26).

Another force in society is the involvement of women in the gaming world. For decades, women have been the silent partners for the growth of the gaming industry, but now they are gaining a much needed and optimistic voice. In T.L. Taylor’s book, *Play Between Worlds*, her expression of the new possibilities gaming has for women is clearly visible:

Women are afforded an experience that they are not likely to have had offline. While both the landscape and its creatures might threaten the explorer, in the game space this threat is not based on gender. Unlike the offline world in which gender often plays a significant role in not only the perception of safety but also its actuality, in *EverQuest* women may travel knowing they are no more threatening by the creatures of the world than their male counterparts are...Because of this gender-neutral approach to threat and safety, there is a kind of freedom of movement that women often do not experience otherwise. (Brown 143)

The video game culture is still adjusting to the new and meaningful influences of women. As more women enter into the design, story, and creation of meaningful and powerful video games, the female presence will not just be something to droll over as in creations and games like Lara Croft, but someone that can be respected.

Videogames need to continually change and grow. As the future becomes filled with new technology, new advances, and new innovators, the industry must adopt and morph to keep players interested. Henry Jenkins, a video games developer and theorist, stated in a conference at MIT in 2000:

If we would see videogames as something more than a juvenile art form, videogame technology itself must become more stable, more integrated into the human experience out of which literature emerges and slower in its evolution, so that writers may develop a
mastery of the digital medium, and critics may reflect on the significance of the technological and theoretical challenges it poses. (Brown 19)
The gaming industry is still very young and, much like the film industry, “in the early twentieth century, is still a novelty to be tinkered with than a medium to be crafted and studied” (Brown 19). I would place Video Game Theatre in this tinkering and tweaking phase of entertainment fields.

Video Game Theatre will be a success, because gaming is now such a large part of our society and theatre is the ultimate expression of our humanity in society and someone must combine them. “The awakening self-consciousness of videogames as art, the use of games as vehicles for critique, and the ongoing cross-fertilization between games and other art forms signal that they are coming out of their infancy, nurtured by an increasingly coherent discourse of game studies” (Brown 36). I am ready to embrace this new individual as an adult not as a child and explore a new vision for videogames. My experience working on Video Game Theatre is that initial spark and first attempt into a world never explored.
Chapter II

Video Games Are Art

“We’re not looking for a spot in the museum; we’re looking for a place in the heart of the public at large. And for that we will need to work as artists” (Almost Art 1). This quotation by Michael Samyn holds value and truth for many videogame artists and creators. Is it important that videogames be called art or not? As the medium of videogames develops, the idea of art has come into the fray. Are videogames really art or just games? What separates or connects gaming to art? In highlighting these questions, we can see some similarities and differences between the medium of theatre and video games as art forms. It is important to remember that video games are only about 30 years old and theatre and other art forms have been around for millennia. Let us begin by looking at negative views in regards to video games as an art form.

In his controversial article for the Chicago Sun-Times, Roger Ebert lays out why he thinks videogames will never be art. One main point focused on is winning. He writes, “One obvious difference between art and games is that you can win a game. It has rules, points, objectives, and an outcome. [With Art] you cannot win; you can only experience them” (Ebert 1). This statement does ring true but also has some flaws. It is true that video games are games with a definitive winner and loser. But in the artistic realm, are there classifications of winners and losers? Ebert’s main argument is, "No one in or out of the field has ever been able to cite a game worthy of comparison with the great poets, filmmakers, novelists and poets" (Ebert 1).
This statement is absolutely correct. There has not yet been that great work of art in video
games, but I would once again like to make clear that video games have been around for only
three decades.

I can see why Ebert cannot label videogames as art. The critic Robert Hughes called it,
“the shock of the new”: the sensation of encountering a creative work that knocks loose the
familiar critical vocabularies and makes them feel only partially applicable to what stands before
you. “It is a powerful, powerless feeling of knowing your aesthetic world has been widened but
not yet having any name for the ground upon which you stand” (Bissell 26). This new creative
force is something we have yet to define or understand fully. Much like theatre before Aristotle
wrote his Poetics, this form of entertainment is hard to define. It is such a combination of artistic
principles that no words can fully capture the essence yet, but argue, as many others will, that
videogames remain art. As Thierry de Duve expressed, “the modern aesthetic questions is not
‘What is Beautiful?’ but ‘What can be said to be art” (Counsell 50)?

Denis Dyack, game designer and writer for Gamasutra, states, “Video Games are
probably the most advanced form of art thus far in human history because they synthesize text,
image, sound, video, and the active participation of the audience into a unified aesthetic
experience” (Brown 21). By utilizing and combining all of our human potential, we are able to
create something new and different. There is no other form like videogames and labeling them
as art makes perfect sense.

Some individuals find this battle to be futile and unnecessary. To individuals like Tom
Bissell, the debate between art and not art is just a losing battle.

The video game is the youngest and, increasingly, most dominant popular art form of our
time. To study the origins of any popular new medium is to become an archaeologist of
skeptical opprobrium. It seems to me that anyone passionate about video games has better things to do than walk chin-first into sucker-punch arguments about whether they qualify as art. Those who do not believe videogames are or ever will be art deserve nothing more goading or indulgent than a smile. (Bissell 34)
The juvenile nature of videogames, in the past at least, cause most to find videogames as an escape from reality and simply a past time for children. Today, with new technologies and new artistic visions for the industry, videogames are not for children anymore, but for everyone.

One last note on video games as art comes from Kellee Santiago who defended her claims that video games are art in her 2009 TED x USC talk. In her presentation she states, “How awesome is this? How many times does a generation get to witness the birth of an entirely new artistic medium? Games could be a collaboration of everything we have learned to date as humans about telling stories through visuals, audio, and interactivity” (Fellows 2). Her simple yet inspiring words that this generation has the potential to be at the forefront of a new form of entertainment and art genre truly gives me goosebumps. While the debate about videogames as art continues, there is no denying that videogames are a major part of our world and will continue to be for as long as we keep pushing ourselves and the medium.
Chapter III

Video Game Theatre - Concepts

When trying to bridge the gap between these two passions, I analyzed their similarities and their differences. Gaming had interaction and theatre had humanity, while both were filled with passion. In the world of the theatre, doing is better than thinking so I had to come up with a solid approach to bring these mediums together. But I had never been in a theatre that had direct interaction nor a video game that allowed me to peer into the human condition. The humanity of live actors is what separates stage from games. “Actors represent an essential difference between traditional cinema and digitally rendered games and films, something games cannot fully replicate” (Brown 51). I needed to come up with a way to capture the human and the machine on stage. To do this, I formulated the idea of the CIC’s of Gaming Theatre: Community, Interaction, and Competition. By using these 3 methods and techniques, I was successful at bridging the massive gap between video games and theatre.

Community in gaming and theatre is well respected and well established. As previously stated, the gaming community is still a fledgling, but the growth potential is astounding, while theatre has always had a community in the arts. In this production I wanted to bring these two distinct communities together under the same roof and allow each to experience the power of the other. For many in the video game audience, I assumed that it would be their first trip into a theatre. For regular theatre goers, I assumed that several of them many never have even picked
up a controller. These two cases did not bother me, but rather inspire me. I loved the idea of a wonderful event that might be created by bringing these communities together and the reactions each would have to this new form of theatre.

As a child of the early 80’s, I have grown up with the computer and have embraced all the instant gratification and stimulation that goes with it. In that vein, I have been looking for something new and stimulating in the theatrical world as well. I longed to have a meaningful impact on the stage as an audience member. As a director and someone searching for new stimulation, I have read with great interest the thoughts by Antonin Artaud about audience interaction. In his book, *The Theatre and Its Double* he proclaims, “As long as the theatre limits itself to showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets, transforming the public into Peeping Toms, it is no wonder the elite abandon it” (84). According to Artaud, Theatre needs to “resort to a mass spectacle” (85) or else there has been no change, no impact on current theatre patrons. It is my vision to create this event where the worlds of video games and theatre collide.

The best way to make this convergence a reality, is to incorporate interaction. Instant interaction is seen in many area in today’s society, but little in the arts. Film is unable to create this sensation, as Mark J.P. Wolf in “Inventing Space”, says, “Whereas the cinema offered a window and positioned the spectator within the world it depicted, the video game goes further, allowing the spectator to explore that world and take an active role in its events” (Brown 53). By allowing the audience to have an active, meaningful role in the production, they take ownership of the production and pride in their work. In *The Art of Videogames*, Grant Tavinor highlights the importance of interaction in gaming,

The interactive gaming nature of videogames may thus put them somewhat at odds with the narrative aims of traditional fictions, and the reasons for this should be relatively
clear: the events are not ‘chosen for their contribution to an unfolding plot. Rather, they are chosen by the player for their contribution to a game fiction. (120)

Tavinor also understands the power and usefulness of the Interactive Narrative:

*Interactive narrative:* a narrative in which the player-character has an interactive role, even if the narrative is closely scripted. They are effective because they retain the scripting that seem necessary for dramatically weighted fiction, but they also allow the player-character an interactive role of discovery which engages the player’s fear, apprehension, curiosity, and even wonder concerning the events occurring in the game world. (125)

The only way to find and utilize this interaction, is by looking to technology to lend a hand. As I have explored several options for interaction in theatre such as Classroom Performance System (CPS) and laser pointers, this world is still in its infancy. As my generation ages and becomes more inclined to make improvements and advances in technology, I guarantee that the majority of the improvements will circle around interaction and interactivity. In a blog detailing their mission statement, Muzzy Lane commented on the importance of interaction and the values it has in not only the gaming world, but in reality itself:

Interaction between students is often a missing component in a classroom. When students collaborate and compete, they are empowered to construct their own solutions to complex problems, and more fully explore and understand materials. Game encourage problem solving, team building, and communication and foster complex decision-making skills. Our games provide players with variables that simulate the often-unseen influences behind complex systems. In order to succeed, students learn that they must examine problems from various points of view...When actively involved and when teaching others, students are more motivated to learn and more likely to retain what they learn. (Brown 120)

In my production, I knew that I had to utilize current technology to create in the audience a sense of ownership and control over the production they were witnessing.

The final component in gaming I wanted to bring to the production is competition. Nothing is more satisfying than the defeat of an opponent in a heated and contested battle. Competition between any number of individuals is a driving force in who we are as humans. To
compete and win or lose is a primal motivation we all inherently possess. Playing a video game in no different. We want to beat the game, we want to beat the guy standing next to us, we simply want to win over someone else. This concept of competition is difficult to conceptualize in the theatre as we strive to create a community and dialogue between actors and audience members. So where can competition live in this environment? My solution is simple: take it outside!

For the production, I want individuals to test their skills and abilities at gaming but in an environment outside the stage. I wanted to separate the aggression found in competition away from the stage and into an arcade atmosphere. To do this, I have contacted several companies, businesses, and individuals to help in this endeavor. These individuals will be explained in detail later when I discuss all the contributors to the project. By involving others and their forms of businesses to create some competition after each show, I was able to keep the concept of competition alive while maintaining the opportunities for success in the theater.

In conclusion, the CIC’s of gaming remain fresh and new ideas. Because of its youth, some ideas are not fully developed and visualized but I know that with each performance and production, Video Game Theatre will be a different experience all together. As I continue to experiment, elaborate, and create using these three principles, I continue to find each to be sound, functional, and fundamental in a theatrical sense. As these concepts live in both worlds of stage and video games, they were the perfect bridge to link these two entertainment forms.
Chapter IV

Video Game Theatre - Community and Collaborations

The videogame community is a vast network of individuals looking to have a fun and memorable experience. I wanted to bring that fun and excitement back into a theatre space with this production. I realized that my vision would be a bigger creation than anything I had attempted to do before. I knew I needed help to create this new type of theatre. I needed help creating an interactive arena for the audience and multiple visual representations on stage with individuals who had the passion and interest to work on this project for three months. Fortunately, I was able to find all the people I needed through networking, patience, and also due to the collaborative nature of video game players.

My first task was to find a way to get the audience to interact with the action on stage. During my research, I came across CPS or Classroom Performance System. This technology not only interested me as theatre partitioner, but also as an educator. I realized the great potential for this technology in both the theatre as well as in my classroom. I wanted to integrate this technology in the production but also become familiar with it so I can use it in the future. I started looking and acquiring information weeks before the initial production meeting.

On the Virginia Commonwealth University campus, there is an office called the Center for Teaching Excellence, which specializes in assisting teachers with new technologies, workshops, and seminars in improving the teaching experience. I contacted their office looking
for help utilizing the CPS technology and I was introduced to Mr. Zachary Goodell, the co-director for the CTE. I talked with him about what I wanted to do with the technology, my lack of experience with the system, and the possible ways we could work together to make this possible. He was very excited and willing to work with me on the project. I gave him as many details about what I was looking for and we soon were in constant dialogue about the process and about utilizing the technology.

In several meetings, we discussed the advantages, pitfalls, and possibilities for the CPS technology. We discussed the different programs that VCU installed in most computers and how to access them in other places, such as a theatre space. We set up sample slides to be used, calculated certain time limits to specific questions, and set up the system so I was comfortable explaining it to my projectionist. Further details of what we came up with will be outlined and described in the Interaction section. Without the help of Mr. Goodell, the interactivity I wanted in my show would never have come to fruition.

For this performance, I wanted to work with individuals who were video game players and not just actors. I find that acting is the best creative outlet we have as humans thus far and I want as many people to experience the joys I always find when on stage. The first meeting for the production was simply an interest meeting. Many people were curious about what this production was going to be, the time commitment, and just to see how much interest was generated by my production ideas. To get the word out on campus, I made flyers, set up a table in the common area where I played music and answered questions, and set up a Facebook page highlighting some ideas, concepts, and reflections I had about the piece.
After the interest meeting, I wrote about how the event turned out. The following is a collection of my personal notes about the initial meeting and thoughts on the future of the project.

- Notes from Informational Meeting - Dec 8th, 2010:

  Had a good turn out of individuals who seemed interested in getting involved. Captured the sound and video on laptop and answered some questions. Big thing was getting noticed by Breakpoint staff member Jim Konecny and seeing his interest and want to get involved in my program. I am going to utilize that!

  Some good ideas poised to me that I was unsure about were: auditions for cast, when to begin rehearsal, and possible ideas for all genres. I have some ideas for each genre, but none that are amazing yet. I hope more come to the surface.

  Lots of people told me that roommates and friends were interested so I hear back from them on who to contact them so they can get involved. I updated the facebook page afterward and my page to start getting the word out. Also I sent a mass email to all those who came tonight with an attachment of the powerpoint so they can take a closer look at it.

  I did see lots of interesting people who came out with some great ideas. Armando had some great ideas for sounds and ambiance that he would work on and so did Cory Johnson who I already gave the assignment of getting together people for FF7 music and scores. A few annoying individuals were chatting, but only a small amount as I just kept pushing through them.
A good feeling of, no matter what, this will be something different that will get the entire school involved came over me as only 3 theatre people came tonight and many other majors attended. I really am excited about all the great possibilities before me. It is my job now to harness them and use them effectively!

I do need to start finding out who my actors are so I can lay out a schedule and get them into some basic acting ideas and workshop things with them. The sooner I find my actors, the sooner we can start. I would love to get started by 1/10, but school is not back till 1/18. That would only leave a month for the show! I would like a little more time, but if not, we will meet each night and rehearse!

When next week, 12/10, I need to write 3 pages of material each day so I can keep on track with my thesis work. I am going to get this done and grow from this experience. I also was able to capture this meeting with my computer and record all the questions, comments, and thoughts the audience had so I can use them in the future.

After this meeting, I took some time away to get set up for the auditions for actors to be held a week later. I wanted to have a cast selected before everyone left for winter break. In the auditions, I did some basic physical exercises, mental improvisatory games, and introductory explorations. There was a far less number of people at this audition/meeting opposed to the interest meeting, since some people wanted to act and others were just interested in the concept. After the audition, I had around ten core individuals interested with only one being a theatre major. My journey had begun.
My next collaboration was in the form of creating a movie for the show. I wanted to highlight multiple forms of media in the production and some genres of games lend themselves to films. I got the number of James Couche from the owner of Play n’ Trade, a local video game retail shop in Carytown. James had worked on several films in the area and was looking for more experience directing. I sat down with him at Strange Matter, the video game bar, and we discussed my ideas and his thoughts on the project. He taught me about creating a treatment for each film I was interested in creating and we discovered that both the First Person Shooter and the Fighting genre would work the best for a film. We discussed several possible ideas for each and we set a time to meet again after the break to discuss some treatment ideas. His initial interest in the project was clear when we began our first conversation. His involvement would come to not only be for creating specific films, but much more.

Another component in creating a community and collaboration with individuals was with Jim Konecny, the manager of Break Point at VCU. Jim came to my Interest meeting and took a great interest in the production. We were able to meet and discuss how the Video Game Theatre and the Break Point could come together. Then the idea of creating an event for each night of the production became clear. We would have a tournament and an after party in the Break Point following our Saturday night performance. Jim was right on board with the idea and really pushed to get the word out on the event. His staff was willing and excited to help because our production would bring more students down to the Break Point and increase awareness of such a great space in the VCU community. His collaboration on the project was something I never would have thought about utilizing but I welcomed him with an open mind and excitement about working together.
Designing a logo and an image to represent the project was yet another way I was able to use networking skills and collaboration in the project. I wanted to be able to capture the spirit of fun and excitement with our logo but I didn’t have the technical abilities to make it a reality. James Couche recommended that I contact a friend of his, Colin Blair, about helping with some design elements. Colin is a graphic designer in Pennsylvania where he manages an online company designing logos and advertising campaigns. James had given me his information and I contacted him with information about the project. He was more than willing to send some initial images, concepts, and pictures he had created that would fit the project. His original sending can be seen on the following page. Because of his interest and excitement for this new work, Colin agreed to help me with the project for no charge.

Working along with him and showing the cast the images, we gave him multiple ideas and impressions from his first images and he created the next set of logos for our consideration. Finally, after this look, the cast and I really liked image number 6 and decided to use that image with different colors. What Colin sent next would be the final logo we would use for the show. Using that final design, we created our production poster and began spreading the word on campus. Without the experience, passion, and willingness to work with me and my cast on creating these amazing designs and concepts, the production would not have had the great turn out that it did due to the great publicity generated from our advertisements.

I established a final collaboration was established between myself and the Richmond Game Truck. I was fortunate enough to have met the operator for this interesting company, Jeff, at a video games launch party in December. This unique set-up is perfect for parties, birthdays, or just gathering where people want to play videogames on the go. Jeff has a trailer attached to
his truck which contains 5 gaming consoles and leather seats. The event for Friday night was complete as he would come to VCU campus and set up the truck near the theatre. Getting permission for him to set down on VCU property was a big hassle as many individuals and facilities managers needed to be on board with the event but by opening night, the stars had aligned and he was able to come and make our opening night an event rarely seen on campus.

A final note on community and collaboration must be extended to the SALT, Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre, members and my production team. I was so pleased that the SALT gave me the go ahead hold my production in their space. Without their confidence in my project and my vision, my production would never have taken its first steps. Without the unending support and efforts by my production team, the show would have not come together and beautifully as it did. My production team consisting of the lighting designer, Jasmine Cole, my projectionist, Cody Richardson, sound designer, Andy LeSueur, and my Production Manager, Sara Worden all put in so much effort and support that their contributions to the production were immeasurable.
Chapter V

Video Game Theatre - Interaction

A core principle in the CIC’s of gaming is interaction. In both the theatre as well as in video games, interaction and participation are not only exciting but also vital.

As a form of rhetoric videogames fundamentally differ from other media. Their method of persuasion is not strictly verbal, like that of speech or an essay; nor is it strictly visual like that of a propaganda poster or a sculpture; nor is it strictly performative, like that of a play or a demonstration. Like film, videogames synthesize words, images, and drama, but they differ from film in their capacity to create empathy and to construct arguments by demonstrating causal relations between player action and the changing conditions of the game world. Interactivity itself constitutes a distinct rhetoric. (Brown 77)

I discussed my collaborating and utilizing the CPS systems with Zachary Goodell, but I also utilized laser pointers in my production so ever more interaction could be had on stage. By using these two different forms of interaction, I was able to bring this important concept and principle to all my audience members.

As the audience entered the space, they were greeted by either myself or our MC and told to take a CPS Clicker from the case. Upon hearing this, most individuals mentioned that they had never seen or held this apparatus before and even commented that it felt like having a controller in their hands. I wanted everyone in the audience to have a fair chance at choosing certain things for the production, giving the audience responsibility for their decisions. We created several slides from Power Point that used the CPS technology. By having these slides in
the production, the audience was able to select the individual performances they wished to see that night.

The slides gave the audience specific questions they were to answer that would directly affect actions and props on stage. For example, the audience was asked “What song would you listen to while going for a jog?” We then gave a list of four multiple-choice answers for them to choose from. The list of choices, however, was tied directly into the song our ‘Rock Band’ would play. The cast had to know all the songs on the list and how to adapt to each song that was selected.

My initial thought for this project was to have 5 complete pieces and through the use of the CPS technology, the audience would get the option of choosing which pieces they wanted to see on that given night. By doing this, it opened up the possibilities for multiple viewing from audience members as not all the pieces would have been performed on a given night. Unfortunately, the cast was not happy about allowing the audience to choose which pieces were to be performed as they were scared a piece many not ever be seen. Instead of having the audience choose the entire piece, we gave them options as to which items would be used in the Horror genre and what song would be selected for the Music Game genre.

With the use of CPS underway, I focused on using laser pointers as well. I wanted to use them because of the instant feedback they would show actors and other audience members. As I mentioned earlier, instant feedback is important for my generation and laser pointers seemed like a great throwback and useful tool. When I got the idea about using these gadgets, I wrestled with how to distribute them to responsible individuals because with the power of these devices, all it takes is one individual to be annoying with it and the effect would be lost. The only thing I could
come up with would be to find individuals who I knew and trusted to be responsible with the pointers and just let them have them. The pointers were only used during the RPG genre for and there were no problems or flaws with individuals using them and the effect worked well. During certain fight sequences, the MC would stand on stage and hold up a sign. On the sign was choices that the audience would pick form like ‘Punch,’ ‘Kick,’ ‘Head butt.’ After the MC gave time for the audience to select using their laser pointers and eventually their voices as they were shouting for their specific option, he could clearly see which option the audience had picked and he would shout out the command to the actors on stage. This prompt for the actors varied for each attack and relied on both the audience to choose the right attack against a specific opponent and the MC to vocally convey that choice to the actors.

By only handing out only a few laser pointers, it made other audience members want to take part in the action and they did so the only other way they could, by voicing their opinions. In each performance, the energy of the crowd to choose certain actions and pick certain items during the segment became electric. Allowing the audience the freedom to be loud and voice their opinions gave them an opportunity to do something many had never experienced in a theater before, to talk during the performance, be loud and have fun!

Interaction in video games is obvious, but to bring that life and energy to the stage was something new that I wanted to tackle. In the past, theatre groups such as the Living Theatre and The Bread and Puppet Theatre have pushed for audiences to be moved or overwhelmed by what the actors were doing on stage and thus breakdown the walls between the actors and the audience. Instead of overwhelming the audience, I wanted to welcome them into the production with open arms. I wanted them to be as invested in the show as the actors were on stage.
Interaction and audience participation was a key component to the success of the show. People in the audience came back several times because they loved the excitement, energy, and fun they all were having as a group and not just sitting there watching a show.

Without the audience, the show would have gone on, but not with the great energy it received. At the end of each performance, individuals were encouraged to sing along or get up and dance around during the Music genre section. By the time the band was finished, the stage was full of people jumping around and just having fun. This sense of enjoyment and freedom is why video games and theatre make such a great team and they bring together the passion of gamers with the spirit of the stage.
Chapter VI

Video Game Theatre - Competition

Competition in video games was a staple back when arcades flourished in malls across the United States. The rush and excitement of playing against a strong opponent standing next to you made many shake with nervous anticipation. As arcades died, competition found another place: friends’ houses. Consoles such as the Nintendo 64 and the Playstation became the quarters and a friend’s couch the environment. Epic wars were fought there and continue to be played out there today.

As technology advanced, so to did competition as it moved to the digital and cyberspace arena. Games today can be played against opponents across the world as though they were sitting next to you. This global- competition has grown through games like Street Fighter 4 and Call of Duty: Black OPS.

How do you find competition in the combination between video games and theatre? For starters, Greek festivals in the 5th B.C. were set up as a competition between playwrights. The sensation of having a clear winner and a loser in a given situation is a commonality in both. Which production will make more money and gain the most fame? In video games, this idea of creating a stellar gaming experience is also under heavy economic restraints as individuals are being laid off in rapid succession not because their game they helped create are bad, but because
not enough people are buying them. Even EA, Electronic Arts, one of the industry’s largest companies had to make some cuts to trim the fat in recent years,

Large-scale layoffs have been hitting everywhere in the past year, and Electronic Arts is now no different: according to Gamastra, the game publisher announced today that it will lay off 1,500 workers by April 2010, after posting a year-to-year decrease in revenue and a net loss of $391 million. (EA 1)
The commercial nature of both theatre and gaming are being tested and stretched as our economic situation fluctuates.

Aside from the competitive fires of the industry, there aren’t many connections between gaming competition and theatre. For that very reason, I still am struggling to find a suitable avenue to approach this aesthetic. As a theatre goer, I want audiences to continue to come to productions and enjoy their time there, but as a gamer, I want someone to win and someone to lose. In doing so, the loser may not be invested to attending again, as they may feel excluded. But as a video game player, this is not an uncommon occurrence as we hope to change the way we play a certain situation so we don’t “die”:

Death in videogames almost always play the function of failure to meet the challenges set by gameplay. Once the player-character dies, the game almost always sets the player back to an earlier stage in the game so that they can retry the section. This formal demand of gameplay introduces elements of repetition and contingency into videogame worlds that make them unsuitable to presenting sustained narratives. (Tavinor 118)

Competition in our production through an audience-based and audience-participatory talent show highlighting certain odd skills audience members could perform. There was a prize, concert tickets, given by the local student radio organization given to an individual who the audience would audibly vote for after they performed a “Stupid Human Trick.” This activity was also done in conjunction with setting up the final scene of the show and allowing the audience to be distracted by the activity and not the changing of sets and setting up of additional props.
The competitive nature of the crowd was also tested after each performance. Environments of gaming where individuals would have the opportunity to play others in games were established. These consisted of the Game Truck, Break Point, and Strange Matter settings where games and tournaments were held after the shows.

As this section of the production needs the most refocusing and scrutinizing, I hope to find a better and more aesthetically pleasing connection between competition and theatre. The competition found in gaming continues to grow with groups such as the MLG, Major League of Gaming, becoming increasingly more mainstream. Competition in theatre has been established and many forms of competitions and festivals are around the world but the battles waged are between large groups and not audience members. One day, the audience will have their own say in a given production through competition as well as interaction, and that is a core idea of Video Game Theatre.
Chapter VII

Video Game Theatre - Working with Non-Theatre Gamers

Video games and theatre are both forms of entertainment meant to be shared and experienced by all. Though both have steep learning curves and require practice and patience to master, both are geared to entertain a certain audience. In that vein, I wanted to bring the joys and passions I have toward theatre to those who may or may not have previously experienced them but have had the pleasure of playing video games. I cast a majority of non-theatre majors in our production and in doing so, learned that the teaching and understanding of theatre does take time and effort on the parts of all involved.

In my past, I had the pleasure and the pain of working in the community theatre world. I had memorable experiences and horrifying trials through my days with actors who were not trained in the theatrical arts. I began to realize some core ideas and concepts that many people were not applying simply because they did not know that the theatre required those skills. Some of those skills involved vocal projection, ensemble creation, physicalization of text, and commitment to the rehearsal and production process. I knew if my infusion of theatre and video games was to be a success, I needed my cast of non-majors to understand these concepts as I have found them to be most important as an introduction to some stage basics. To bring these ideas to them, I utilized several rehearsal techniques, acting games, physical activities, and stressed the necessity for being on time and respecting the process of creating something new.
At our first rehearsal, I began creating a safe, enjoyable, and friendly space to make those unfamiliar with the rehearsal space feel welcome and invited to actively participate. We played several name games, common childhood games like 4 Corners and Freeze Tag, and we also learned about each other and our unique backgrounds and interests in both our lives and our gaming habits. In that meeting, I also began to craft them as a cohesive ensemble and not a group of individuals. To do this, I utilized exercises learned from my experiences in Serbia with the Dah Theatre as well as through activity/response games I created. With the stage set of an enjoyable theatre experience for everyone involved, I focused next on stating clearly what would be expected of them in our production.

As this show was to be devised in a fairly short amount of time, I knew I need to initial their creative sparks right away. To do this, I played several ensemble building games, creative exercises, and writing prompts to get their creative thoughts brewing. I wanted to remain an outside, watchful eye in the process, allowing them to build their show, not mine. To do this, I needed to stress the amount of time they would need to put in, each day, not just at rehearsals, but outside of the space, as well as the drive they needed each time they came to rehearsal. Bringing ideas from home, thoughts on interesting topics for the show, and energy and excitement for coming were critical each day as many individuals were not accustomed to bringing that focused energy each day for such a prolonged time.

After our first few rehearsals getting to know what was expected of them, doing some basic exercises to strengthen their voice and physical presence, we began exploring our subject matter. We began exploring the core ideas and reasons why we liked specific gaming genres. We compiled lists upon lists of essential things needed to make a great horror game or create a
memorable role playing experience. I wanted to keep the discussion focused not on theatrical ideas but on gaming ones and we would refocus on those issues with my help. In any brainstorming session, any and every idea is important and in creating lists, everyone’s voice was expressed and heard.

After some concrete ideas and concepts were created and crafted, we needed to decide how the format of the show would progress. Would all the scenes be tied together somehow or would they stand apart? After debate and speculation, we decided on have pieces not connect but have certain items be seen throughout all the pieces as connective tissue. Some of those items would be mushrooms, peaches, and certain references such as World 2, our fictional supermarket.

Once we established that the stories would stand alone, I divided the group into three different groups according to what genre they preferred best. Fortunately, the split was even and the groups began to write and bounce ideas between themselves. I allowed the groups to meet and come up with their ideas for a few days where they were to have a create collective stories to present to the rest of the cast in relation to their given genre. Because the cast was small, everyone, no matter which genre they were interested in writing, needed to act in the others. As they were competing this task, I continued my correspondence with other individuals involved in the show as well as technical matters, but I made it a point to stop by each group for at least 10 minutes to see how they were progressing. What they came up with in those groups, would be the nuggets of stories and ideas that would eventually be molded into our production.

The first story that we focused on was the horror genre. Several individuals in the cast were very passionate about this genre and I was not going to get in their way. They began
coming up with some crazy ideas including zombies invading the audience, a girl being
kidnapped, and implanting actors into the audience. We eventually arrived at the idea to have a
girl get kidnapped and she would have to escape utilizing a specific tool found commonly in
horror games. Once this seed was planted, the Horror crew began writing and throwing out ideas
while the rest of the cast focused on the Role Playing genre.

The idea of the Epic Mundane came to mind as the main hero, Rachel, would go on a
rather mundane task but place the action on an epic scale. As she would travel to the grocery
store, she would encounter individuals whom she would battle. Once in the store, she, again
would be confronted with normal obstacles but she would need to defeat them in an epic, RPG,
battle style. The idea allowed for the use of audience interaction as the audience could choose
what actions the hero would perform which was exactly what I was hoping a group would
incorporate.

The Platform genre was the next genre discussed. We wanted to represent a classic
Platform game, *Super Mario Bros.*, in a natural and contemporary light. By not using the name
Mario and naming the hero Mike, we gave a close enough approximation to the audience that
they were aware of what game we were commenting on. The cast wanted to employ Silent Film
style actions and over the top physicalization as was so often done in original Platform games.
Again, the idea of the Epic Mundane was utilized as, much like Rachel in the RPG, Mike was
heading to the store but with a different intention.

Our last genre, Music, was the hardest to write material, as we had ideas of having a
Battle of the Bands between gamers and real instruments, but we had trouble getting those ideas
on their feet. Fortunately, a cast member was friends with someone in a live band and through
contacts with him, we were able to work out a short script putting the two rival bands against each other. In the end though, the story for this genre was the weakest as we knew it was going to be our final act in the show and we wanted the audience to leave the show excited so we focused more on the presentation of the material and not as much on the words spoken.

Once all four shows were created, we began to sculpt them into theatrical pieces. This was when I knew I had to step in as the role of the director. Utilizing my background in directing and staging, I knew the cast needed a directorial eye that would make the show come together and be pleasing to an audience. During this phase came the first problem we encountered. One of our actors had to leave for a trip and would be gone for two weeks of rehearsal. Because she wanted to stay committed to the project, we did not want to lose her, so we focused our attention on all of her parts and made certain she would be ready on her return. This was accomplished but in doing so, several details and other pieces were left to picked up after her return diminishing valuable rehearsal time. No director wants an actor to leave the rehearsal room, but when the cast is small and in need of strong acting presences, which this individual had, I had to accommodate her absences.

During the weeks to come, we would continue to polish our work, head out to promote our event, and begin to gather materials such as props and costumes. I laid out a specific schedule for everyone as we only had a few weeks to get everything together. As someone who has worked on shows before, gathering costumes and props can either be the best or the worst experience. In the case of Video Game Theatre, it was awesome! The cast members were responsible for creating their own costumes and bringing in their own props. The only thing we needed to make were the flats we wanted to use during the Platform section. Even though it was
simple assignment, gathering the correct shade of paint, retrieving the right type of cardboard, and painting them did become a problem, but it was easily fixed after a few nights of painting and hard work.

It was important to keep reminding the actors, especially those who were new to theatre, that they needed to continue to explore who their character was. We were not creating caricatures, but real characters with hopes and dreams. With that idea, I told them to write about their characters, as many played more than one role, and come up with a list of certain things: what they like, where they are from, what do they do, what makes them happy or sad, etc.

Armed with their answers, we met the following rehearsal and character began to take shape. This was clear after our first run with the emphasis on character. Character and character creation can be a tricky challenge for the director, especially when you are writing and creating one from scratch with actors. Without the imagination and perseverance of the cast, several of the characters would not have been as memorable as they made them to be.

The following weeks of running the show really brought the energy, passion, and excitement from the cast that was needed. They were not just excited to share with ideas and excitement for our project with their fellow cast members, but their excitement began to spread all over VCU campus. By utilizing radio spots in the campus radio, speaking about the show to their friends, hanging posters around campus, and wearing t-shirts to promote the show the week before we entered Tech Week, the cast was ready to share all the great material they had created. As we entered that phase of the show, I reminded them of their constant commitment that was needed even more as things were going to be changing and adapting on a daily basis.
During Tech Week, the cast and myself were able to view the finished film for the First Person Shooter genre created by James Couche. He created a video around five minutes long involving a typical college day through the perspective of a famous First Person Shooter character, Fly McTaggart from Doom. We did some shooting for him during our rehearsal process for a few nights and an afternoon so he could generate material. He used this material to craft an entertaining, and crowd-pleasing opening act for the show. James wanted to use new editing techniques in the film both so he could learn how to use them properly and also to help create the timeless feel of an original FPS and all the stereotypes that many associate with the genre. I wanted to let this wonderful collaboration piece begin the show before any announcements or actors would appear on stage.

My concerns then turned to technical aspects such as lights and sound, but the cast, even though many were not theatre majors, were able to stay focused and excited each day. Without this energy, there would not have been the amazing outcome that there was. Due to their hard work and diligence, a cast of mainly non-theatre majors, was able to create a brand new form of theatre. My hopes of bringing theatre to individuals who had not experienced its power was a success. Even though many of the actors were not trained, they brought more energy and enjoyment to the stage than I have seen before. At no time did they ever question a direction I gave, they simply jumped in with my suggestion and ran with it. This show was a success not because it was my idea, but because of all their efforts.
Chapter VIII

Video Game Theatre - Audience Reactions and Future Plans

This groundbreaking production was not without flaws and imperfections. From the start, this experiment was aimed specifically at certain audience members. Though many individuals in today's society do fit into the genre of a video game player and would understand many of the references and comments in the production, there are others who have never picked up a controller in their lives. When beginning the production, the idea was to find a way to bring gamers and non-gamers together through a theatrical experience, but from listening to certain audience members, this did not happen to everyone. Some were thrown by the shouting and the disconnect in the stories while others did not understand the references or jokes that were imbedded in the production. They were right. The audience did become polarized between gamers and non-gamers.

This was not a bad occurrence. Though some did not understand the references, those who did, shared their enjoyment through laughter and excitement for the production. Through their expressions of enjoyment, those who did not know the references could easily see how the gaming culture has become some strong and established. I was most delighted when an individual came up to me after a show and told me, “I don’t play video games, but now I want to.”
After each performance, the audience left with joy and excitement in their hearts. The production left the audience either wanting to go play games, or simply go out and enjoy the rest of the evening. Theatre needs to have that spirit and excitement after a show. The theater door should burst open with people discussing what they just saw and asking questions about the human condition. This was most certainly the case after each performance as people left the theatre space smiling, questioning, and exploring their connection to the world of video games.

The reactions to the Horror piece did stir up some controversy and interest from audience members, especially women. The story of a young girl being kidnapped, placed in a cage, and tortured and killed left a very sour taste in many female audience members. Several people asked, “What game was that based on?” or “What were you trying to accomplish with that section?” My answer relayed how the cast wanted to create an original piece not based on a game, but a piece that embodied the spirit of the Horror genre. We utilized sounds, isolation, and disorientation as the cast knew these were paramount in Horror games. Unfortunately, many females, even after the show, were disturbed by the images they say during the production. This is not necessary a bad thing as the piece became an interesting PSA for not walking home by yourself in Richmond. Out of all the pieces, the Horror genre generated the most confusion, disgust, and impact to almost all audience members.

As Video Game Theatre finished up, many wanted to know the future of this project. Would there be more shows? Would new genres be used? Would different technology be implemented? The answer to all those questions is “Yes!” Even though this project was for a thesis, there are plans to keep this new form of theatre alive. The publicity of the production in such place as SETC, the South Eastern Theatre Conference, and the internet through video
interviews and websites, have allowed the word to be spread about the work. Individuals from all over got the chance to come and watch the show and take that experience back with them to their communities and their couches. Further exploration will take place involving online media, motion gaming, fighting games, and the ideas of casual gamers in our society. In that regard the first of a series of Web Episodes about the show was recently added to YouTube.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxiV-hsUEBg

This type of theatre is new. It has never been done or tried to the scale that we were able to accomplish at VCU. The future plans for VGT are to keep expanding and closing the gap between theatre and gaming. The work put forth by everyone involved was what made this such a thrill to work on. No other production I have done compares to the commitment, the energy, and the fun that was had on this production. The cast formed a bond while in rehearsals that still exists today and without Video Game Theatre, they never would have met. Video games and theatre collided with one another for a few nights and the result was truly a unique and wonderful experience.
Chapter IX

List of References


Chapter X

Appendix A

Final Scripts

These scripts were created and utilized on all three nights of Video Game Theatre.

Alterations and changes were made during the final performances. They are formatted according by the certain cast members who are not playwrights and are unfamiliar to proper formatting and techniques in written plays. They are kept unaltered in keeping with spirit of created original theatre by non-theatre majors.

Platform Script

Characters:
Mike (protagonist)
Todd (friend of Mike)
Lucas (antagonist)
extras - Old Lady, Store Clerk, Set Movers

Costumes:
Mike: denim overalls, red shirt, red hat
Todd: Blue shirt, white shorts, white hat
Lucas: Green hoodie, yellow/gold shirt, jeans (or matching yellow pants)
Bum: brown, tattered, over-sized jacket
Hipster: skinny jeans, green and white hardhat/helmet, yellow tshirt
World 2 sales clerk: blue vest, khakis

Props:
Scene 1: Stool
Scene 2: flats/buildings, tree branches, World 2 Supermarket sign, double doors
Scene 3: grocery aisles, wet floor sign, walker (elderly woman), produce sign, crate of peaches
Scene 4: trash can, crate of peaches

SCENE OPENS

Scene 1

Todd sits center left on a stool. Mike walks on stage right, Todd pops up from his seat. He waves his arms frantically but in a mechanical fashion as he delivers his line:

Todd - Yo, Mike, Lucas was just here. He stole all your peaches. How ever will you make your daily peach power smoothie?

Mike - NOOOO!!

Mike learns of the atrocity and reacts. He exits stage right. blackout

Scene 2: World 1

Lights up on semi-urban street view. Upstage, extras holding cardboard flats painted as buildings. Mike enters down stage right. He notices the hipster and the bum on center left. The hipster harasses the bum, and makes the decision to take his jacket. The hipster struts off stage left. Mike walks a few paces to center left, and then ceases to keep walking across the stage, but continues to walk in place. When he stops the buildings will begin to move from stage right to left, simulating that Mike is moving. This can continue for about 15 seconds or so before the bum shambles into Mike. Mike stops, the buildings stopping with him. He removes his jacket and drapes it in over the bum’s shoulders. The bum can make an exclamation and walk on. As the bum walks on, the buildings begin to move again. Mike walks in place. The next obstacle is a series of low-hanging, swaying tree branches, held by extras, slowly approaching Mike. Mike has to duck to avoid being hit by the branches. Once he makes it past the branches, the hipster enters stage left, walking in a strut in the same direction as Mike but slowly backing up towards him. When the hipster and Mike meet, the buildings stop. Mike taps the hipster on the shoulder. The hipster faces Mike. Mike bops the hipster on the helmet, grabs the helmet, puts it on the ground, mimes kicking it, and it is pulled off stage by a fishing line. The hipster, ashamed at his nakedness, runs off stage right. Mike continues walking. The buildings cease to enter from backstage, and sliding double doors appear on stage left. Mike approaches them, pausing to give a moment for a “WORLD 2 SUPERMARKET” sign above the doors to rise. Mike walks through the doors. The doors swing across to stage right, turning 180 degrees so that Mike is now standing against the doors, facing the audience on the inside of the store.
Scene 3: World 2

As he walks on stage right, Mike is greeted by the supermarket greeter, an extra dressed in a blue vest and khakis. He says:

Clerk - Welcome to World 2. There’s a special on peaches today, grab em while theyre hot. Clerk exits

The environment is set up by using flats painted as grocery aisles which move behind Mike as he walks in place. First obstacle is a wet floor sign, and Mike must jump over the sign. He then comes upon an elderly woman who has fallen. He must jump over her. Mike encounters a shopping cart which enters from stage left. The cart has a child attached to it via a leash. Mike unties the leash and releases the kid. Mike then walks under a sign that says “produce”. The flats go off stage, and standing stage left is another blue vested store clerk, who says:

Clerk - I’m sorry, this store is all out of peaches. Clerk exits

At that moment, Lucas pops in on stage left, holding a crate of peaches.

Lucas - HAHAHA!! (ominious voice)

He gives a maniacal laugh and exits. Mike runs across the stage and exits.

Scene 4: The Fight

Red wash up on Mike and Lucas. Lucas stands stage right, Mike left. Upstage of Lucas is a trashcan on its side. The crate of peaches are behind Lucas.

Mike - Lets go!

Lucas gives a roar, and lunges at Mike. Mike steps to the side, sticks his foot out in front of Lucas. Lucas stumbles, and before he has time to recover, Mike picks up the trashcan and puts it over Lucas. Mike walks across the stage to take the peaches. He thrusts the peaches into the air, golden spot shines down from the ceiling.
RPG Script

Characters:
Rachel
Jeff
Mom/Crazy Cat lady
Grandpa/Milk Man/Manager
Hobo1 & Hobo2/Person A & B
Hobo 3/ex-boyfriend
Hobo 4

SCENE OPENS

Lights come up on bare stage as Mom enters and begins stirring a bowl.

Rachel enters. Behind her is a Powerpoint projection featuring a kitchen

In house, with mom.

Mom - I wanted to make a cake, but we have no ingredients, Rachel would you mind running out to the World 2 and picking some stuff up?

Rachel - Mom, it’s about to start snowing; the store is going to be crazy right now! Plus, you know I hate going there since I got fired. The manager still hates me.

Mom - Please, sweetie? I really need to make this cake.

Rachel - Uuuugh. Fine mom, I’ll be right back.

Outside house. Porch with grandfather on rocking chair. Grandfather is rocking back and forth with a mechanical motion like a character from “Zelda”

Grandfather - TIMMY! Wait, Timmy!

Rachel - You mean Rachel? What is it grandpa?
Grandfather - A long and dangerous journey, fraught with peril lies ahead of you! You must choose your weapon, and thus your path.

Rachel - What are you talking about grandpa?

Grandpa - You must choose your weapon and thus your path!

Rachel - Grandpa wha—

Grandpa - You must choose your weapon and thus-

Rachel - FINE!

He holds open his coat revealing A battle axe, a sword, a mace, and car keys. Audience chooses weapon by shouting and the MC decides which item the audience picks and shouts answer. If they choose anything but car keys, Rachel responds negatively.

Rachel takes keys

Grandpa - You have chosen wisely!

Stage goes black, car noise sounds, radio mentions snow, world map appears and shows travel. Projector shows parking lot and the message “You discovered parking lot!” Several panhandlers are outside with Sims diamonds and speech bubbles. Can only speak Sims language. One is asking for money, another is asking for food, another is talking about having to go to the bathroom. Another is rambling incoherently.

Rachel approaches panhandlers, two options appear for audience. 1: give them money. If chosen, only crazy person attacks 2: Ignore them. If chosen, panhandlers attack. 3: kick nearest panhandler and initiate combat.

Combat starts and background blurs final fantasy style. Fight music plays. Rachel bounces back and forth like FF characters. Hoboes stumble around. Crazy hobo twitches and runs around. Background is replaced with battle scenery. Audience chooses from several attacks. Headbutt, punch, kick and grayed out non selectable ultimate attack. Audience attacks 3 times then hoboes upgrade and Jeff appears

Jeff - Need some help there?

Rachel nods in compliance

Jeff helps defeat hoboes.

Rachel - Thanks, but I could have handled that on my own.
Jeff - I'm sure you could’ve. Hey, can you help me with something?

Rachel *warily*- What is it?

Jeff - I need some help finding a shopping cart

*Audience can choose to get shopping cart right next to Jeff (1), say “sorry, no” (2) or kick him and tell him to fuck off (3)*

*If 1 is chosen, Jeff joins the party and his dialogue is spoken.*

*If 2 or 3 is chosen, Jeff - “You’ll rue the day!” and his remaining dialogue is not spoken.*

Rachel walks into World 2 supermarket as the background changes to aisle 1-1

Rachel looks for chocolate cake mix, sees that there is none on the shelves but finds a guy who has some.

Cake guy - Where is the milk?! Where is the milk?!

Rachel - Hey, do you need that cake mix, or can I have it?

Cake guy - Where is the milk?! Where is the milk?!

Rachel - Oh. One of you.

Rachel walks off stage into and around audience and back onto stage, grabs milk from a treasure chest as Zelda treasure music plays, and walks back around to the guy and gives him milk.

Jeff (while walking around audience) - This is a really big store. Can we pick up some of my groceries while we’re here? Oooh, there’s a sale on peaches.

Rachel - Here, I found this.

Cake guy - Thank you! Now I don’t need this anymore!

Rachel (frustrated) - Great. Thanks.

Rachel leaves aisle 1-1 and goes to aisle 1-2. Upon entering the aisle, she sees her ex-boyfriend and hides out of sight regardless of whether or not Jeff is there.

Rachel - Shit, my ex. Alright…there’s two ways I can go about this: either be mature and face him, or…sneak by like a coward…

Jeff - I’m all for sneaking. Conflict isn’t really my thing.
Audience chooses either to sneak (1) or confront (2)

SNEAK OPTION

Rachel hides in box and moves towards eggs as boyfriend looks back and forth. When she gets the eggs she stands up to celebrate and must then confront her ex. Battle starts.

Battle menu appears in background and fight music plays in same way as the hobo fight.

Ex boyfriend - “All your love are belong to me!”

Along with her normal attacks, Rachel now has “Guilt trip”. When used it is a super effective one hit k/o. When it hits, “Forever alone” flashes in the background as ex falls to the ground in the fetal position.

CONFRONT OPTION

She walks out and says awkwardly

Rachel - Hi, Chris.

Ex boyfriend points accusingly at Rachel.

Above battle begins.

Upon ending fight she just takes eggs as FF 7 victory music plays.

Jeff - Well. That was awkward.

Rachel - Alright, only one more item on the list: Vegetable oil.

MC - Attention World 2 shoppers; there is a sale on vegetable oil in aisle 3.

Background changes to another supermarket aisle. Part of the aisle is the pharmacy. the vegetable oil is “guarded” by a crazy cat lady who will not move.

Jeff - God I wish this lady would move. I hate it when people do this.

Cat lady turns around and upon seeing Rachel, she initiates the fight by throwing a stuffed cat at Rachel.

Fight music plays as background blurs and fight menu appears. The fight options are the normal headbutt, kick, punch and grayed out final attack, but there is also an option for “item” given the proximity to the pharmacy. If “item” is chosen, Rachel grabs pills from a shelf and throws them
at cat lady. They’re super effective and cat lady throws several stuffed cats into the air, now defeated.

Rachel - Finally. I hope I can get home before the snow gets too bad. Richmond drivers are awful…

Background changes to checkout lane as Rachel steps in line with two other people. It is implied that there is another person who is currently being helped at the register. They are person A and person B.

Person A *turns to Rachel* - You can’t possibly be thinking of facing the Manager like that!

Rachel - What do you mean?

Person A - My father is the greatest smith in the land. If you want, he can forge for you a set of the finest armor ever made.

Rachel - Uh, no thanks. I think I’ll be alright.

Person B - Young lady, you can’t really be thinking of facing the manager like that! With your permission I shall forge for you a set of the finest armor ever made.

Rachel - (sighs and looks at both person A and B) Alright…Show me what you can do…

*Three armor icons pop up on the background, each one more formidable looking than the last.*

Person B - You have three choices. The first offers limited protection, but allows for greater attack speed. The second offers good protection without slowing you down too much. And the third offers the greatest protection but slows you down substantially. You must choose. (turns to and points at audience)

*Audience chooses and regardless of their choice, the stage goes black*

Person B - You have chosen wisely.

*Rachel changes her outfit while the lights are down. Lights come up revealing the costume change. She is now in a much skimpier outfit. Think Princess Leia in *Return of the Jedi***

Jeff - *whistle and cat-call*

Rachel - How is this going to help me fight anyone, much less the final boss?!

Person B - Take a look for yourself!
The stats show up on the background Powerpoint slide as +100 strength +100 defense +100 speed +100 special + final attack

Rachel - I stand corrected…

Person A and B go offstage as Rachel waits in line. She is confronted by her old boss, the manager.

Rachel - I’m starting to remember why I quit working here. All the crazy people…

Manager - You know, Rachel, I could have you kicked out of the store for coming in dressed like that. But then again…I can think of a lot of things I’d do to you…

Rachel - Screw you, you pervert!

Manager - Oh that is it! (Throws clipboard at her)

Fight is instigated and Rachel's final attack is unlocked. It is the only selectable option. When chosen, there is a loud buildup and the lights get brighter until she pulls out a restraining order. The lights go down as she says

Rachel - I got a restraining order. You need to stay at least 40 feet away from me at all times or you are in violation.

Manager - NOOOOOOO! Legalese! My one weakness! *runs offstage*

Rachel sighs and leaves the store. Assuming she did not help Jeff, he appears and runs into her with his shopping cart while yelling “I told you, you would rue the day you crossed Jeff the Shopping cart guy!” and background displays Game Over. If she did help Jeff, they part ways before she leaves the store and she returns home to her mother.

Rachel - Mom, I’m home. I got the cake stuff.

Mom - Oh, Rachel. I decided to make a pie instead. You took too long.

Rachel - You mean the cake-

Mom - Was a lie. Yes. (Blackout)
Horror Script

Characters:
Jeannie
Trista
Creepy Guy
Party People

SCENE OPENS

Bare stage, Jeannie on DC stage facing audience putting on makeup and talking on phone. Well-lit.

Jeannie - Hey girl, hey what’s up? Yeah, I told you I was gonna come. It starts at 10, I’ll probably show up around 10:30, 10:40 or something. No, I don’t know how to get there. Let me get a pen.

Jeannie pulls a pen out of her purse, along with some paper:

Jeannie - Uhhh, yeah, I’m ready. Okay. Go to Franklin. (sigh) Left on Franklin, right on N Harrison. There’s a 7-11 right there so I’ll stop and get some drinks. Ok, go to Park. Ok so, I leave the 7-11, I go to Park, and then I turn right on Park, right? Jesus, okay, a left at Grove? (sigh) and then another left on Meadow, you said? Then make a right at S Meadow St…girl, this is confusing… Right at Parkwood. Ok, last house on the right. What’s the addy, what’s the number? Ok, come in through the back? Ok, awesome. See you there.

Lights go down, Jeannie exits SL. Rest of cast, in costumes, but to a more believable extent, fill the stage from backstage DL. Everyone is holding a cup, people are paired up. Mid-song, “Whip My Hair” is playing to set the stage for the party. Jeannie enters from off-stage. Lights up.

“Party in the U.S.A,” and “Dinosaur” are songs to be played during party. Make-out couple positioned in one of doorways at back of stage. Typical party scene. Jeannie floats around, talking to most people and taking pictures. (Character specific dialogue, actors use real names)

Jeannie bumps into Creepy Guy (Jason). Jeannie drops cup.

Jeannie - Dude, what the fuck, man?
Jeannie moves away from Creepy Guy, back toward her friend Trista. During the following dialogue, creepy guy exits the room through the doorway that the make-out couple occupies.

Jeannie - Dude, some guy just spilled drink on me. Besides, it’s getting late and I think I’m just going to leave.

Trista - Awww, that sucks. Do you need someone to walk you home?

Jeannie - Nooooo, no, I’ll be alright. I always walk home by myself. Thanks anyways, though.

Jeannie turns and exits DSR. Lights out, rest of stage clears.

Jeannie somehow ends up at SR. Lights are very low, street light effect preferred. Actors back stage make random noises for creepy effect. She slowly makes her way across stage, making improvisational responses to various sound effects. She acts cautious, but not terrified. This scene changes the tone of the play completely, adding confusion and BUILDING TENSION. When she gets to edge of SL, black out. From SR, Creepy Guy enters.

CG - Hey beautiful.

Creepy Guy runs at her, she drops her keys/purse. Profanities are said [“Oh shit, oh shit”] by Jeannie only. Silence. The two position themselves behind the flat, while Jeannie goes from party attire to a dirty wife-beater and the bent fairy wings.

Someone drags cage into position on stage (drags, not carries). Then Creepy Guy drags Jeannie over to the cage and puts her inside before exiting through the closest door. She comes to and tries to take in her surroundings. The scene is dimly lit, a flickering light effect preferred (like a basement). She’s laments about how scared and alone she is. She gets angry and curses the situation and the guy who put her there. She rattles the cage for a moment, then slumps down and cries. We hold on her crying for 20 seconds, and then the lights go out.

When the lights come back up (same setting) Jeannie is still in the cage. She straightens up, bitch screams her loudest, fiercest bitch scream and shakes the cage again. This time the back of the cage opens up when she kicks it. She crawls out of cage and over to contents of her purse, sifting through for anything useful. She complains about how dark it is cycling through useless items, before settling on one that is selected by the audience.

Three of the four items can be explained away the following ways. The key light is broken [stomped during the scuffle], the camera has no battery left, the cell phone has no signal and the mirror is broken.
Once Jeannie has one of the items, she slowly gets up (making sure to move slowly, to compensate for time in the cage and back pain).

Break into 1 of 4 possible endings:

Ending 1 (Mirror):

Jeannie goes to one of stage doors and uses the mirror to peek around the corner. Once she decides it’s clear, she goes through the door. Black out. A sudden snap of bones breaking is heard, followed by copious amounts of horrid wailing. Silence. Lights up on Jeannie lying at the center of the stage, her legs broken. Creepy Guy walks out, pets her hair, whispers:

CG - Hey beautiful.

Final black out. “GAME OVER” projection comes on. END.

Ending 2 (Phone):

Jeannie grabs her phone from the pile of crap. The key light is broken, the camera has no batteries and the mirror is broken. The battery is nearly dead, and she searches the stage for a signal. Jeannie continues to explore the stage, before getting one bar near the back of stage right. She falls to her knees, and opens the phone. She starts to dial the phone as creepy guy emerges out from the door behind her. He grabs her by the hair, jerks it down [in such a way to expose her neck] and brings a knife to her throat. The lights turn off, and we hear blood splatter on the stage. GAME OVER projection comes on. End.

Ending 3 (Camera):

Jeannie fidgets with the camera, accidentally taking a picture in the process. The flash lets her see the room clearly, so she starts taking photos while exploring the room. As she makes her way across the stage, her flash reveals the creepy guy standing there with a crowbar in his hand. He rears back, and the lights fall. Once the lights are out, we hear the crowbar fall to the stage. When the lights come back on, Jeannie is hobbled on the stage. She’s crying, defeated, as creepy guy circles her and takes pictures.

Ending 4 (LED Keylight):
Jeannie finds her keys in the pile of crap. She clicks the key light, and it comes on. She scans the light over the audience, and along the wall. Back along the audience, and then along the floor. She follows the light to the door (whichever is irrelevant) and then finds Creepy Guy’s feet. She moves the light up his body, muttering “oh god” before he reaches forward, cradling her head and pushing his thumbs into her eyes. Lights out.

Reopen on Jeannie in the middle of the stage, blood smeared all over his eyes and cheeks. She is choking on tears, while the Creepy Guy watches her, fingering his belly button. Let the blood stay on his hands, so it stains his clothes and abdomen.

-Over
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Shafer Street Playhouse  
- Handicap accessible restroom located at Shafer Dining Court

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Poster design by Colin Blair
Rehearsal and Production Stills

Rehearsal - Horror Scene
Production - Horror Scene

Production - Platform Scene
Production - RPG Scene

Production - Music Scene
Vita

Aaron David Willoughby was born on October 8, 1982, in Butler County, Pennsylvania, and is an American citizen. He graduated from Knoch High School, Saxonburg, PA in 2000. He received her Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education with a concentration in English and Theatre from Point Park University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2005. He has traveled and taught English Conversation in schools across the world in Osaka, Japan for 1 year then returning to teaching High School Drama, Speech, and Journalism at Prince Edward County High School, Farmville, Virginia. He has directed productions in both high school settings and college settings including *And They Dance Real Slow in Jackson, Dark of the Moon*, and *Actor’s Nightmare*. He currently resides in Richmond, Virginia.