

OTHER PEOPLE'S PAIN



*"Pain itself can be pleasurable accidentally in so far as it is accompanied by wonder, as in stage-plays."
- Thomas Aquinas*

Can you really imagine someone else's pain? Why do writers and artists, even when they evoke the pain of experience, rarely describe physical pain in detail? *Other People's Pain* is a one-person performance about trying to get inside other people's pain. The performer, Jeremy Xido, chases a video-blogger, Ellis Defonte (Xido), chasing an alcoholic South-African war correspondent, Max Dros (Xido), who hangs upside down in gravity boots for his back pain and plays endless hours of video games. Max no longer chases other people's pain; he's done with "war pornography." The chase culminates when the three meet in a machinima animation, lost in the desert of a first-person shooter video game inspired by the B-Horror movies of Val Lewton. Ellis's mother is heard in the background on a baby phone, sick in bed.

The piece exists as a live multimedia performance, as well as online through blogs of real and fabricated interviews and machinima films about pain produced by Xido, Defonte, and Dros. The actual Pain interviewees, culled from real documentary footage, include the captain of a bowling team, dog-walker/psychologist, chronic pain clinician, conflict diplomat, English professor, economic journalist, torture therapist, migraine sufferer, and professional ballerina.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Other People's Pain investigates the problematic role of war journalism in a society over-saturated with images and reports about pain. The project has two main threads: first, a series of documentary video interviews with experts on pain; and second, a live performance piece, which acts to tease apart the interviews and the assumptions that went into their creation.

Other People's Pain is conceived as an exploration of how different types of pain – from the banal, to the chronic, to the traumatic – frame what it means to be human and what it means to imagine other people's lives (as well as engage in our own). Can one really imagine the pain of others? The piece brings together radically different perspectives on pain, including those of Chronic Pain Clinicians, War Journalists, Migraine Patients, Dog Therapists, Torture Victims, Celebrities and Athletes.

Actual documentary testimony is placed against two fictional characters that are dealing with physical and psychological pain in different ways.

One of the characters, a South African television journalist injured in the field, has removed himself from the world and is undergoing various forms of extreme self-

medication - from pills, to alcohol, to hanging upside-down in gravity boots, to playing video games (a common new form of pain treatment designed to enable disembodied distraction). The journalist eventually becomes lost in the world of popular commercial video games, notably in the first-person shooter "Call to Duty" and Playstation's world of cartoon physics, "Pain."

The other character, a young Brooklyn video-blogger with his own web-broadcast (OPP TV, or Other People's Pain TV), wants to focus on the pain of others, while he simultaneously deals with his unseen and bedridden mom in the back room. He goes searching for the TV journalist and ultimately wanders into an interactive landscape reminiscent of B-movie horror film producer Val Lewton's films, such as *I Walked with a Zombie*, *Cat People*, and *Isle of the Dead*.

A recurring motif in the performance deals with how we abstract ourselves from pain, and to show this, the live physical performer interacts with virtual characters whose relation to pain is disembodied, even playful. The virtual element of the piece consists of a series of machinima animations derived from contemporary video games, which will then be triggered to interact in real-time with the live performer.

The machinima elements are to be developed with the consultation of Matt Dominianni, one of the pioneers of the machinima genre, as well as co-founder of the group Ill Clan and currently Creative Director of the Electric Sheep Company in New York. The interactive programming is also being coordinated with the assistance of Heather Kelley, video game designer and Guest professor at Carnegie Mellon University, where she currently teaches a course entitled "The Poetics of Gameplay."

Other People's Pain oscillates between documentary artifacts from the real world and the increasingly labyrinthine imaginative landscapes which exist somewhere in the social space between our literal physical bodies.

