



## [work 6](#)

*Synthetic Performances*, by Eva and Franco Mattes  
(0100101110101101.org), 2007-ongoing

### DANCING IN THE MINEFIELD OF VIRTUAL EMBODIMENT

by [Patrick Lichty](#)

For the past year, New Media pranksters Eva and Franco Mattes (0100101110101101.org) have been performing recreations, or "Synthetic" renditions of famous performance art pieces such as Abramovic/Ulay's *Rest Tension*, *Imponderabilia*, and Acconci's *Seedbed*. According to their website, these pieces question what is engaging about

performance art by relegating pain, risk, perhaps even empathy for the artist to computer agency and performative poppets in virtual worlds like Second Life. Leading the cabal of artists exploring this questions, including Kildall, Babeli, and Second Front, the Mattes distinguish themselves by taking the performance piece to its most minimal. Each work is stripped of its original context (moving to the virtual), of its identity (by their adoption of their own avatars), and of risk (by distancing the body from physicality). The Mattes problematize virtual performance through these strategies, and through their performance of ambivalence (during their Performa 07 event), they stated that they did not like performance art, and were trying to understand it by recreating it in Second Life. While the novelty of "performance" has a magical quality to the online community of SL, the actual questions that are embedded in the *Synthetic Performances* have little or nothing to do with Second Life. First is the overall question of whether one can "perform" in virtual worlds at all, or merely engages in performative gestures. Given that we are at least *talking* about virtual performance, the other two questions that emerge are whether decontextualizing performance art reduces it to theatre, and how the meaning of the work changes in regards to who performs it.

Marina Abramovic was asked both sides of the question of performance vs. theatre and the biographic/bodily specific nature of performance art that resonates in the Mattes' work. The first example of this conversation was Chris Burden's decline of Marina Abramovic' request to re-present one of his works [1](#) at her 2005's Performa event, *Seven Easy Pieces* [2](#) at the Guggenheim. According to Burden, many of his pieces were specific to a given context and time, and it was his belief that taking them out of



- ↓ [sommaire](#)
- ↓ [dossier](#)
- ↓ [compte rendu](#)
- ↓ [œuvre 1](#)
- ↓ [œuvre 2](#)
- ↓ [œuvre 3](#)
- ↓ [œuvre 4](#)
- ↓ [œuvre 5](#)
- ↓ [œuvre 6](#)
- ↓ [crédits](#)

- ↓ [numéros précédents](#)
- ↓ [liens](#)
- ↓ [collaboration](#)
- ↓ [abonnement](#)
- ↓ [contact](#)
- ↓ [ciac](#)

context turned them into stage productions. The most ironic of these re-performances the works that were approved, was Acconci's *Seedbed*, multiplying the challenge to the audience through masturbatory confrontation, but also by the representational functions of the act and switching gender context. But conversely, it was Abramovic herself who asked the question of whether her "body" of performance had exhausted itself and was then doomed to re-perform her life. This was after her final piece with Ulay, *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk* (1998), in this they met and dissolved their relationship by walking from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China, she felt that she was so destroyed by then end of the piece, that all she could do at this point was to re-perform her life, resulting in *Biography Remix* (2004) [3](#) which was a re-presentation of much of her work to that time. Considering this led to 2005's *Seven Easy Pieces*, perhaps her retrospective was a catharsis that led to reflection on whether performance itself could be re-presented. This progression of the conversation of the nature, mode and efficacy of performance art resounds in the current wave of virtual performance artists, including the Mattes, Second Front, Scott Kildall, Yael Gilks, and others.

But lastly, what is the result if works like Burden's *Shoot* (performed at different times by Kildall and the Mattes), are abstracted through computer agency in virtual worlds to relegate performance art's issues like pain, embodiment, and risk to the machine? Do they divorce from their immediacy to the point where we bemusedly watch a game of *Super Mario Self-Mutilation* [4](#) with no real stakes beyond watching hip media artists "using non conventional communication tactics to obtain maximum visibility with minimal effort" [5](#). This tactic has been effective for other digital Neo-Pop artists like Beige, Cory Arcangel, and Paperrad (all very bright artists who have used the tactic of naïveté to position their work), but it is possible that that the "minimal" gestures of the Mattes' dance at the edge of being drawn into the all-too-serious question of the future of performance art.

---

#### Notes

- [1](#) : John Perreault, "Abramovic at the Guggenheim", in [Artopia Blog](#), November 30, 2005. [↑](#)
- [2](#) : Marina Abramovic, [Seven Easy Pieces](#), (documentation website). [↑](#)
- [3](#) : John Hopper, "A matter of life and death", in [The Guardian](#), September 29, 2004. [↑](#)
- [4](#) : In a lighthearted note, I lay claim to developing this piece... [↑](#)
- [5](#) : Franco & Eva Mattes, [Splashpage](#), as of November 24, 2007. [↑](#)

[↑top](#)  
[←back](#)

L