



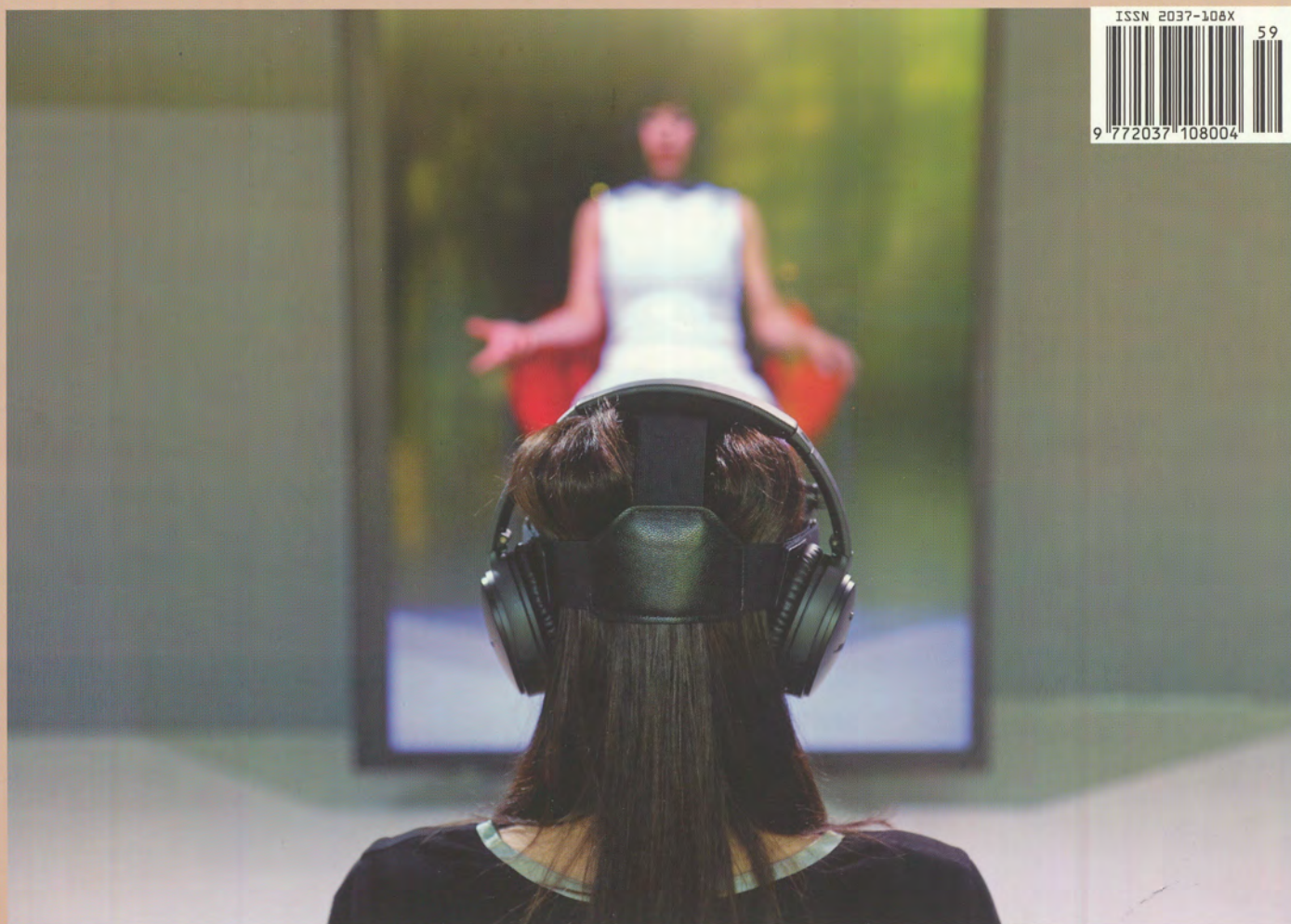
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# Viktor Timofeev - Sazarus IV



Sazarus IV at Two Queens, Leicester, UK, Ph. by Oskar Proctor





In your "Sazarus IV" the performer is crawling on the floor, playing a game in VR that the surrounding audience can't see, while different other elements (videos and digital print) are strategically placed in the same room. Was your intention to show how differently it is possible to negotiate the 'seen' and 'unseen' which are innate to VR? The videos, prints, chairs, audience and other "sculptural" material are placed around the VR work in order to contribute to a sense of the larger environment. My intention was for this setup to feel somewhere between a "classic" art installation and a pop-up operating theatre. The sculptural objects around the room function something like a permeable skin that wraps around the VR game, a surface you encounter which leaves some trace on you on the way in and out. While a user is crawling around playing the game, this public cocoon of a space is surrounded by concentric rings of chairs and the feet of an observing audience, some of whom might be waiting their turn. The game itself centres on observing and moving like other, smaller creatures who are oblivious to your existence. This relationship is mirrored outside the game and put on display in exactly the way you describe - observers see users respond to unseen triggers.

You seem to affirm that what happens outside the virtual world, surrounding the performer, is equally important, and that the relationship of the two worlds (virtual and real) is far from being safely settled, even in our highly

technological culture. Would you agree (or disagree) with that?

I agree. "Sazarus IV" takes this hierarchy between the "worlds" - between the user and the observer, and exaggerates it by asking the user to literally be on all fours in front of their audience. The game pauses until the user adheres to these rules. It also does this by being selective about what it displays from the game to the audience. The only material that is made visible is a top-down map, on which real-time paths of movement of the user and the virtual creatures are rendered, as well as a point scoring system and the time elapsed. This information is displayed to the audience on an LED screen, hanging somewhere in the environment. So, observers only see this abstracted version of the game, further differentiating the two "worlds".

The performer's body also reaffirms a centrality in the work, together with the inscrutability of the world he sees. In your opinion, what's the viewer's body's role in VR work as seen from the outside? And what's the symbolic role of the VR headset?

I think there is this interesting cause and effect across all gestural interfaces - corporeal movement and what it triggers. These interfaces are seamless - we are kind of used to it with trackpads, keyboards and touch-screens. With VR your whole body can potentially be instrumentalized but maybe this interface isn't as fluid yet, and within a public setting the interaction can be alienating, absurd and funny. It's this awkwardness I was particularly interested in harnessing. In "Sazarus IV", through the course of eight levels, the user's body is persuaded to lower to the ground, eventually brought to a crawl, moving in random directions. From the outside, this looks like the user turning into an "otherly" quadruped. From inside, I don't think this is immediately obvious, as the user is simply responding to triggers and constraints placed on them, such as creatures, walls, and explosions. I wanted to reinforce the tether to the outside world by coiling a rope together with the helmet's cables, reminding users of the outside "infrastructure" that can't be



Diane Gromala, The Virtual Dervish: Virtual Bodies

displaced, as it periodically brushes across the user's hands and legs. I think it's important to keep some persistent physical connection - wearing a bulky screen on your face is the price one pays for immersion, at least for now.

Let's consider "The Virtual Dervish: Virtual Bodies" a VR artwork by Diane Gromala in 1996, where parts of the artist's body were available to the viewer, but both decaying and changing ways of interaction over time. Do you think that this manipulation of the body, in such a pioneer work, can be related to how you use the body in Sazarus IV, and how?

I think there is most definitely some common ground and I am humbled at this relationship. Whereas Diane Gromala subjects her digital body to transformation at the "hands" of participating users, my intention is to subject the users' bodies to transformation in the eyes of the participating, observing audience. Gromala makes her own body public and vulnerable, displacing users into her digital crevices and organs. I ask for users to make their own bodily movements public and therefore vulnerable, placing them in a setting where they are potentially observed as part of the work.

Born 1984 Riga, Latvia. Based in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Recent solo exhibitions include "Stairway to Melon" at kim? Contemporary Art Center, Riga, "Sweet Guardian" at Podium, Oslo and "Porcelain" at Sydney  
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