

## RealPlay

Curated by Gita Hashemi (Iran/Canada) for  
[R][R][F] 2005--->XP  
[Remembering-Repressing-Forgetting] global networking project  
<<http://rrf2005.newmediafest.org>>

RealPlay has little to do with play, really. It is about playing for real. Topically positioned in specific times and/or places, the works in RealPlay contest, counter and/or subvert dominant geopolitical and/or cultural notions with reference to the colonial constructs of the “Middle East” and the “West.” This selection is brought together as a political commentary as well as a response to certain trends in “new media” discourse that explicitly or implicitly (sometimes inadvertently) postulate and promote fundamental distinctions and discontinuities between the “virtual” and the “real”, distinctions that inevitably idealize the illusionary (utopic or dystopic) space where *code* is entirely capable of masterminding *experience*, or where code *becomes* experience. The projects in this selection reject such Western-oriented techno-centric and techno-determinist tendencies by privileging urgent socio-political issues over media formalism and by insisting on the priority of social interaction over, as well as through, cyberspace interactivity. Using diverse practices of documenting and archiving, the projects in RealPlay capitalize on the function of the internet as a repository of retrievable data and, more importantly, as a communication channel that can advantageously be put to use towards inciting counter-hegemonic thought and action.

Subverting stereotypical representations of Palestinians as fanatic terrorists or people solely occupied and pre-occupied by war, in *Farah: In Search for Joy* <<http://farah.dyne.org>>, an account from a trip to Palestine following the brutal Israeli re-occupation campaign of the West Bank in 2002, software pioneer and artist Jaromil (Italy) gives an account of the everlasting human search and capacity for joy in towns and refugee camps under siege (again). *Farah: In Search for Joy* is a brief and unpretentious traveler’s search for and documentation of those aspects of the Palestinian popular culture that continue to create, offer and celebrate joy in spite of the prolonged conditions of colonial occupation and war. As an archive (in progress), the website is inherently gestated in and reflective of the artist’s interactions with his environment as it is a virtual space for our encounter with a dimension of Palestinian reality categorically forgotten or ignored in dominant representations in the West.

An initiative of Hard Pressed Collective (Canada), a group of media artists with a penchant for politically-engaged art-making, *The Olive Project* <<http://www.charlesstreetvideo.com/project.php?id=1>> is, on the surface, a programmed compilation of short videos by diverse international artists. Thematically grounded in the historically rich and culturally diverse symbolism of the olive, the videos exhibit a range of artist responses to the ruthless practice of uprooting olive trees in Palestine by Israeli forces— a favourite occupation strategy aiming to force Palestinians off their land by effectively undermining the economic survival of the growers and their local production. Collectively, the videos construct a time-based memorial to “peace and justice” made of 2-minute blocks. Before, through and beyond the remediated compilation and its dissemination in cyberspace, however,

this project functions as a tool for consciousness-raising, mobilizing and networking around an issue of real world significance.

*Migrant* <<http://www.crixa.com/mireille/Migrant/Tampa.htm>> is the web component of Mireille Astore's (Australia) larger sculpture and performance project that takes as its starting point the infamous Tampa ship incident in August 2001. The incident brought local and international public attention to the plight of the "boat people"—refugees primarily from the "Middle East"—who, upon arrival in Australian waters, were first refused landing and then recast as prisoners by a xenophobic "Western" state. Astore's obsessive photographic documentation (from the inside looking out) of her 18-day self-inflicted virtual imprisonment—in a scaled recreation of Tampa on a public beach in Sydney—functions as a looking glass in which to observe the uneasy and disturbing reactions to the arrival of new migrants by a society that has repressed its own memory and buried its own racist and colonial settler history under the grounds on which Woomera and Nauru detention centres currently stand for real.

*Project Threadbare* <<http://www.threadbare.tyo.ca/>> is animated by a coalition of activists in response to the detention in August 2003 of 21 South Asian (primarily Pakistani) students in Toronto, Canada under the guise of anti-terrorist and national security operations. Since its inception, *Project Threadbare* has been an immensely successful local expository and legal campaign against racial targeting, detention and deportation of immigrants and refugees by Canadian police, intelligence and immigration forces, who are hotly in the race for the third place prize of dishonour, after USA and Australia, for breaking their own nation's civil liberties codes as well as international human rights conventions. This website, an ongoing forum, newsboard and archive for Toronto activists, is one wiki that doesn't pretend to be the virtual world's better-than-original replica of "democracy." Although some of the active members of the coalition are artists and their website is pretty slick, *Project Threadbare* was not conceived as and does not make a claim to being new media art; rather, it is a real world experiment in social and creative participation and collaboration, with tangible impact in the lives of the original 21 detainees and now in the lives of many others in similar predicaments.

*Survey of Common Sense* <<http://surveyofcommonsense.net/>> is a recreation of an earlier participatory painting installation project by the same title by Haleh Niazmand (USA). A parody of the polling industry that for the past 5 or 6 decades has been the engine of "democracy" in the United States, Niazmand's image-text intervention, in the form of survey questions with forced yes/no "choices," is not only an authorial comment on the practices of polling as determinant of "democratic outcome," but a strong challenge to notions of "pragmatism" and "common sense" preached from political pulpits in the present-day United States. Beyond this, *Survey of Common Sense* is an invitation, courtesy of an artist from the "Middle East" and a citizen of the "West," to the participants/viewers to recongnize, acknowledge and reflect upon the ways in which each and every one of us are intricately and deeply implicated, really and virtually, in the bloody absurdity of this political moment. As such and in the very impossibility of responding with any degree of ease and resolution to Niazmand's questions, this work is an incessant challenge issued so we will not slip into forgetting.

The projects in this selection have taken shape independently of this curatorial effort. My thanks to all the participants for allowing me to include their work in RealPlay.