PATRICK LEMIEUX

BABYCASTLES
May 7-17, 2015

PLATFORM GAMES

engages the community histories and material practices of players who transformed videogames from packaged products into open platforms for ludic and aesthetic experimentation.

Produced as part of a dissertation for the Media Arts + Sciences Program in the Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke University. Exhibited at Babycastles in New York City from May 7-17, 2015. Featuring a series of live events including an opening with music by Liz Ryerson; a symposium with presentations by Jacob Gaboury, Nick Montfort, Laine Nooney; a ROM hacking workshop; a speedrunning event with performances by Blechy, Cyghfer, Dram, Micro500, Tonic, Wyrm; and a screening of a film by Meghan Gordon.

PLATFORM GAMES is a solo exhibition at Babycastles by Patrick LeMieux that engages the community histories and material practices of players who have transformed videogames from packaged products into open platforms for making their own ludic and aesthetic experiments. From real time attacks and tool-assisted speedruns to ROM hacks and hardware reproductions, in the aftermarket of the videogame industry, play becomes a form of game design located between human experience and the nonhuman speeds and scales of digital media.

The exhibition focuses on the physical properties, technical capacities, and social play around a single game: Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* Featuring original ROM hacks and EPROM poetry, a speedrunning documentary and tool-assisted tablature on a self-playing guitar, a one-switch controller and a network of autonomous Nintendos, as well as an arcade of Mario metagames and a bucket of unrefined coltan ore, this "close playing" or "platformer study" of Super Mario Bros. does not reify Nintendo's game as a iconic or ideal piece of software, but appropriates, manipulates, perforates, duplicates, aggregates, and dissipates videogames into a different kind of "Mario Paint"—a historically specific medium for making metagames and media art.

If the MN4021B shift register is Mario Paint and the Ricoh 6502 processor is Mario Paint and the PPU graphics chip is Mario Paint and the APU sound card is Mario Paint the CMOS ROM masks storing *Super Mario Bros.* are Mario Paint then conflict minerals, slave labor, and e-waste are also colors in Mario's crayon box. **PLATFORM GAMES** attempts to paint a picture that disrupts the cultural logic of an immersive and escapist magic circle, black box, and white cube in which the phenomenal, political, economic, and material history of play are erased.

PLATFORM GAMES

PATRICK LEMIEUX @ BABYCASTLES
MAY 7–17, 2015

PLATFORM GAMES is a solo exhibition by Patrick LeMieux that engages the community and curatorial practices of players who have transformed videogames from packaged products into open platforms for ludic and aesthetic experimentation. Featuring original ROM hacks and EPROM poetry, a speedrunning documentary and tool-assisted tablature on a self-playing guitar, an eight player controller and a network of autonomous Nintendos as well as an arcade of Mario metagames and a bucket of coltan ore, Platform Games plays in the gap between human experience and the speeds and scales of digital media.

Babycastles
137 West 14th St, 2nd Fl
New York, NY 10011
Mon-Fri 10-6 PM

http://babycastles.com
meow@babycastles.com
@BabyCastles

[×‿×] @ ♡♪♫

MAY 7, 7PM — PLATFORM GAMES OPENING
w/ New Music by Liz Ryerson

MAY 8, 7PM — "TABLES, TEAPOTS, & A TARTAN COUCH"
Symposium w/ Jacob Gaboury, Nick Montfort, + Laine Nooney

MAY 11, 7PM — "CLIPPING, RIPPING, HACKING, BURNING"
ROM Hacking + Repro'ing Workshop w/ Patrick LeMieux

MAY 13, 7PM — "ETA IS ANAGRAM FOR ART"
Speedrunning Event w/ Blechy, Cyghfer, Dram, Tonic, + Wyrm
Film Screening w/ Meghan Gordon

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FUCKED MARIOS

12 x 12 inches each
12 laminated LaserJet prints on foamcore
2015

After asking "why does it always have to be about fucking videogames? why can't it be about art? or anything else?" Liz Ryerson writes "FUCK MARIO. fuck mickey mouse. fuck bugs bunny. fuck star wars." When did the term game become synonymous with hardware warranties, intellectual property, end user licenses, and digital rights management? When did rules become conflated with the physical, mechanical, electrical, and computational operations of technical media? When did player become a codeword for customer? Synthesizing Ryerson's "Fuck Mario" blog post with her daily Tumblr practice, this series of prints uses a modified version of Michael Brough and Andi McClure's *BECOME A GREAT ARTIST IN 10 SECONDS* to make "Fucked Marios."
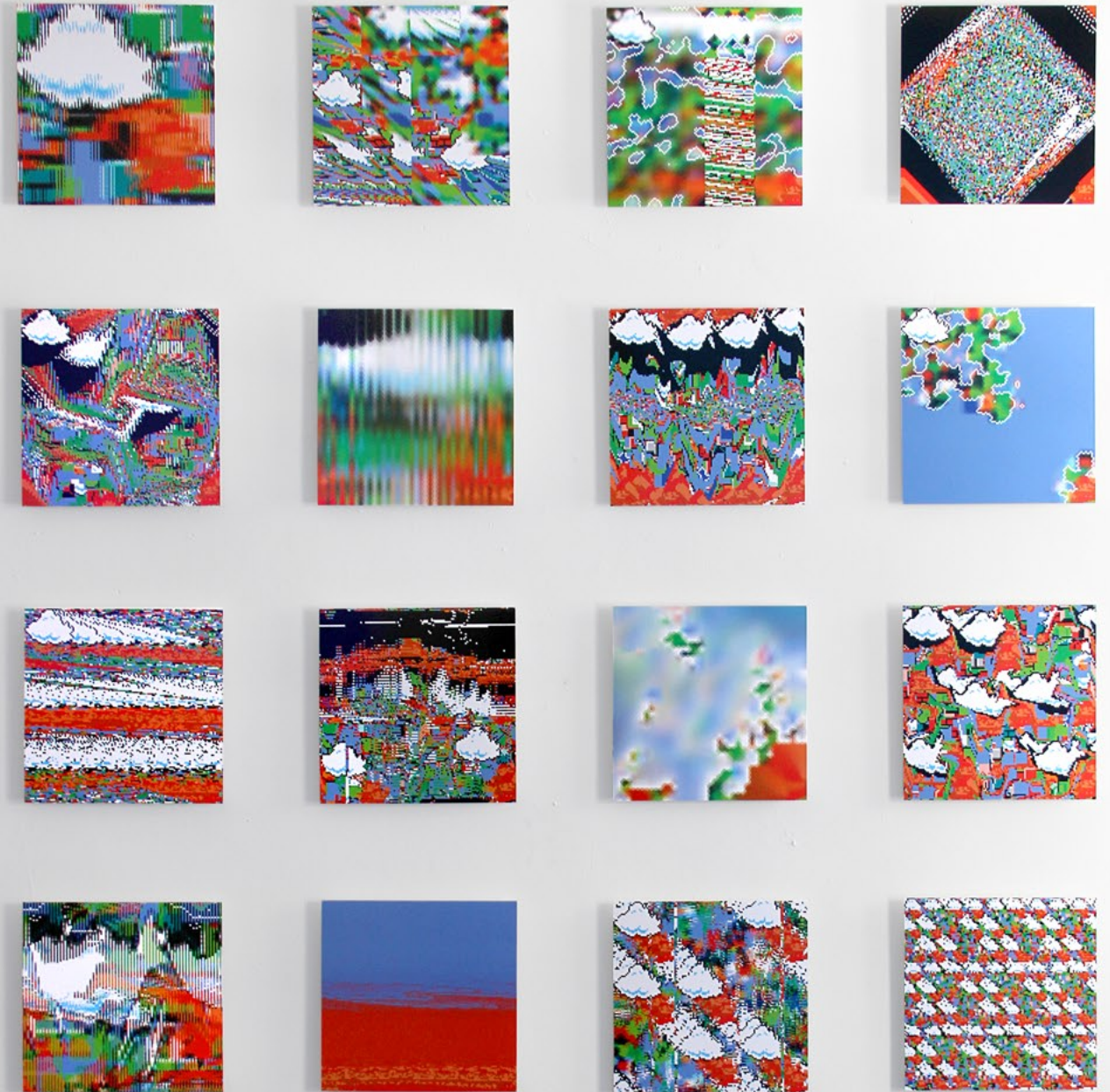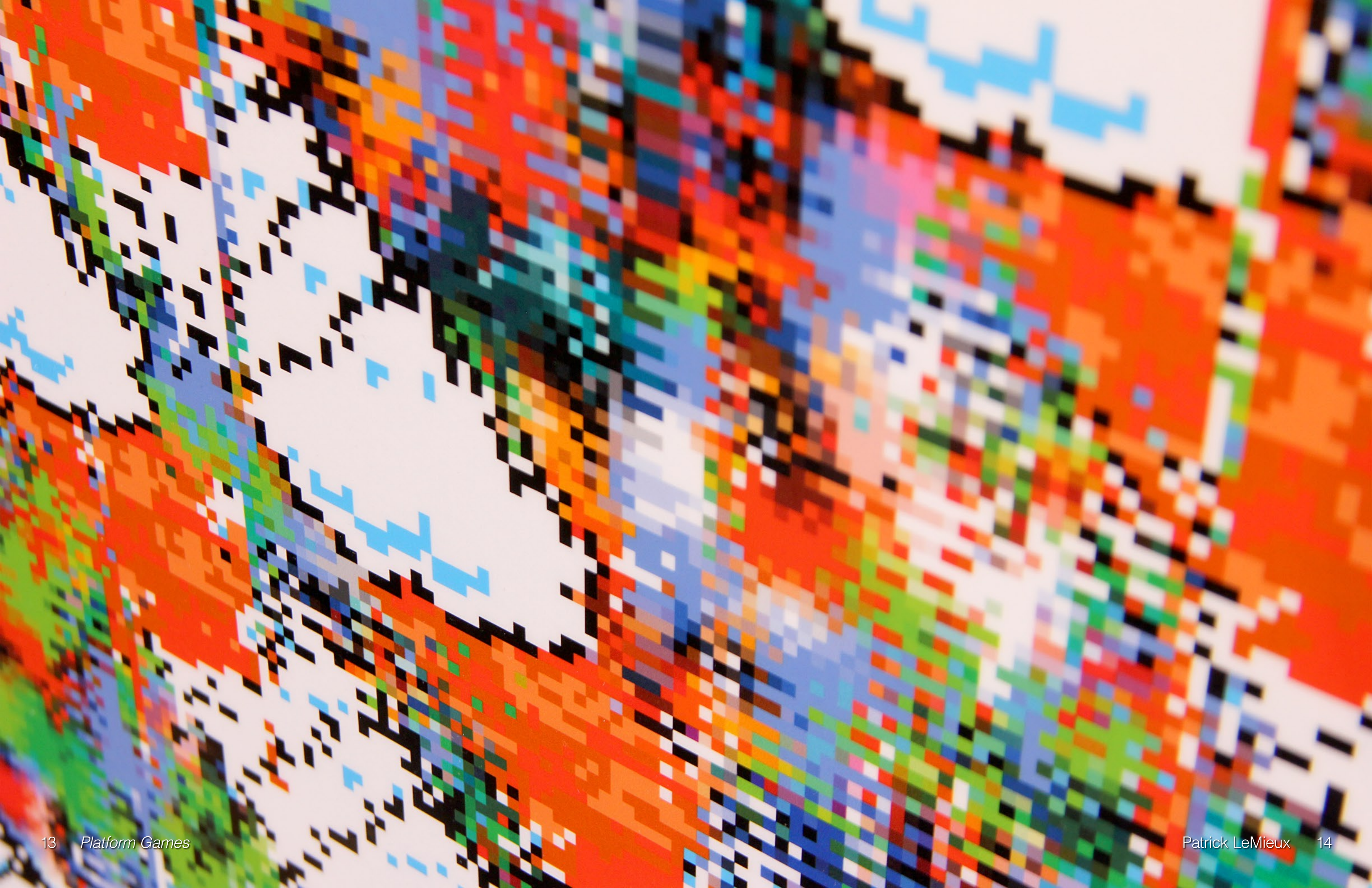
BROTHERS

Size variable
11 CRT televisions, 2 Nintendo Entertainment Systems, 2 ROM hacks
2013

A stack of CRT televisions display the nonhuman play of two networked Nintendo Entertainment Systems. Each console contains an original ROM hack of *Super Mario Bros.* with no music, infinite lives, and fast resets. The audio signal that plays upon Mario's death on one Nintendo triggers the jump button on the other Nintendo. When the one brother dies, the other one jumps. When that brother dies, the process comes full circle.

Without human intervention, the rhythm and repetition of the platform's electrical components and speed and seriality of the software's design produce an emergent, zero-player game that expresses the material play of the Nintendo Entertainment System itself. Driven forever forward by the rightward momentum of *Super Mario Bros.'* scrolling mechanic, a million mindless Marios must die to make it through the Mushroom Kingdom —Sisyphean brothers in a Tartarean landscape.

Platform Games   Patrick LeMieux
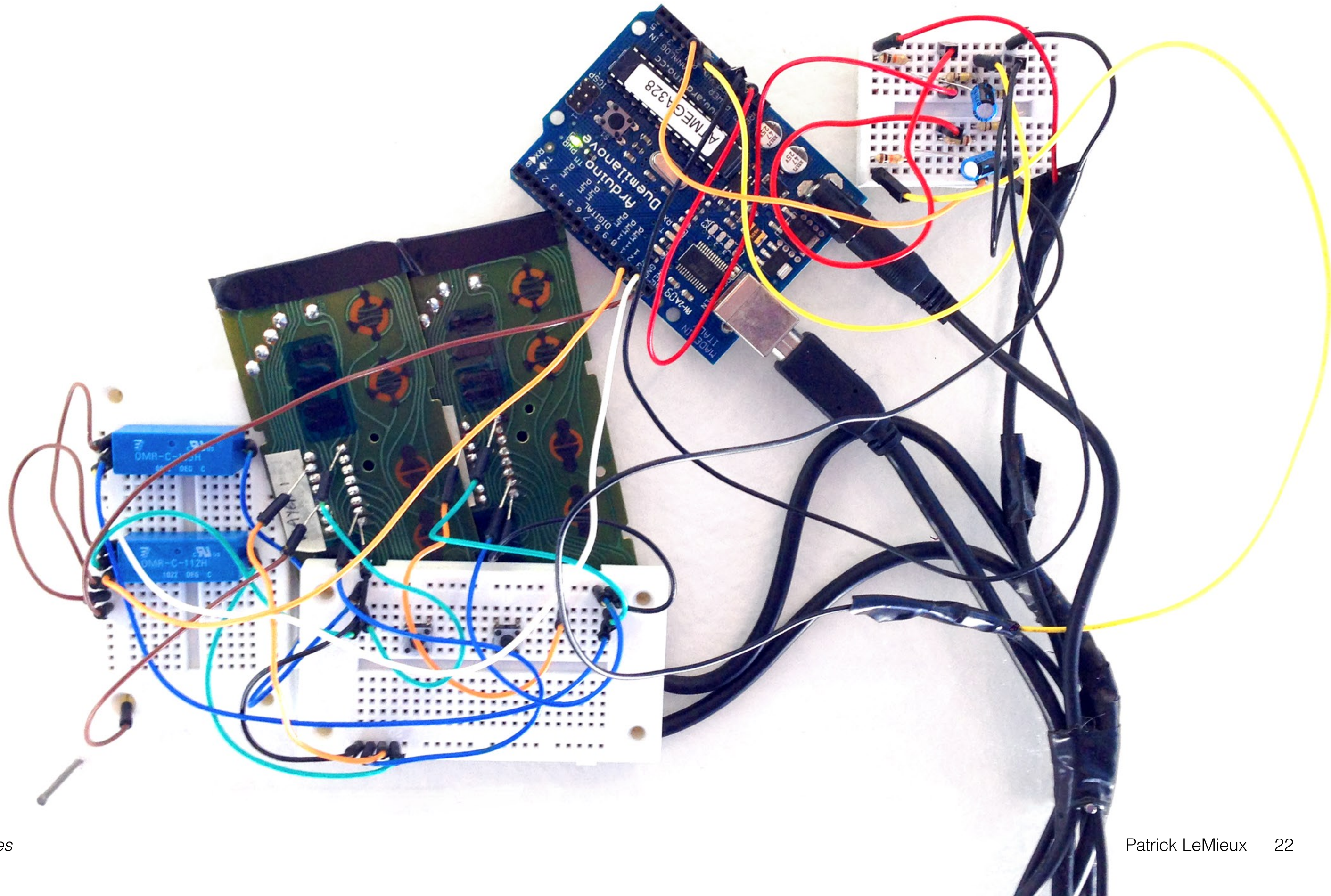
CONFLICT FREE

1 3/8 x 1/2 inches
EPROM memory
2015

Up to his chin in rippling water, down to his nose in ripe fruit, Tantalus can never consume that which he desires most. Just as Sisyphus embodies the very concept of labor, Tantalus *is* desire. Fused together in the depths of Tartarus, these two figures allegorize the ideology of play in the twenty-first century: an impossible desire for an endless labor.

Tantalum, the conflict mineral named after Tantalus, is used to produce the processors, shift registers, and ROM masks that make the technical operations of videogames possible. Doomed to the agony of another kind of Tartarus—a magic circle, a black box, a white cube—gamers and artists alike often unsuccessfully attempt to forget the material, economic, and political history of the platforms through which they play.

Here, an EPROM encoded with "Heaven Is What I Cannot Reach!" by Emily Dickinson—a poem that not only makes an allusion to Tantalus, but places his desire among the "cruising clouds" and interdicted ground" of *Super Mario Bros.*—is exposed to sunlight and slowly erased over the course of ten days.

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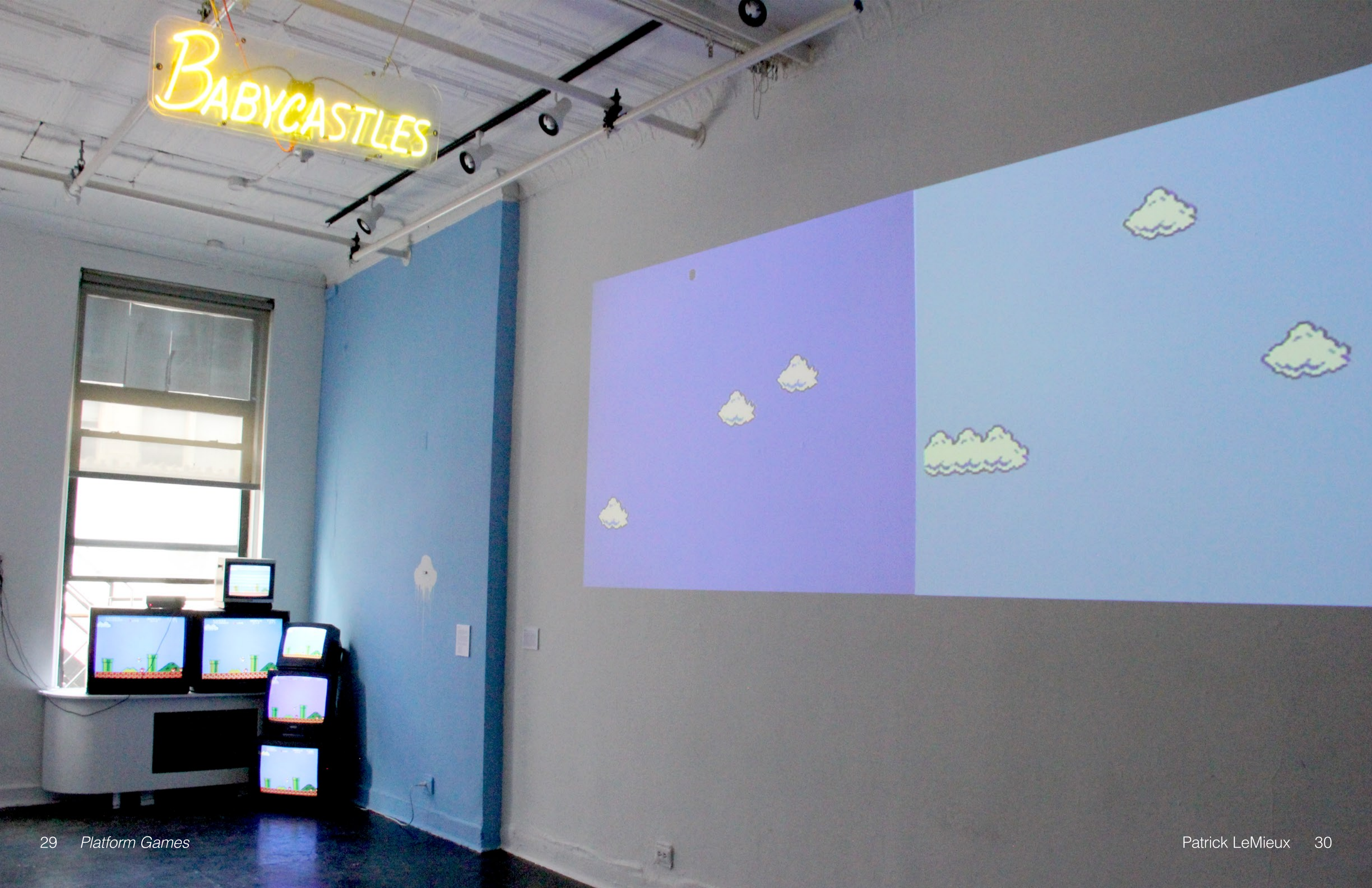
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COIN HEAVEN

Size variable
2 projectors, 2 Nintendo Entertainment System, 2 ROM hacked cartridges
2013

On of the most famous ROM hacks, Cory Arcangel's *Super Mario Clouds* has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American art since 2004. Arcangel claims "*Super Mario Clouds* is an old Mario Brothers cartridge which I modified to erase everything but the clouds." Although Arcangel embraces a hacker ethos and has open sourced much of his artwork, attempting to follow his instructions and "erase" *Super Mario Bros.* produces an entirely different game.

In *Coin Heaven* an invisible Mario walks on invisible ground, looping endlessly in a cloudscape where a cinematic sequence once took place between World 1-1 and World 1-2. Beyond the speed that the screen scrolls, the composition of the clouds, and even the color of the game's palette, something is very different from Arcangel's well-known artwork: a lonely coin remains, still blinking in the game's menu.

This coin, known as "Sprite 0," is the first sprite of the Nintendo's Picture Processing Unit and the only sprite that includes a hard-coded hit flag. Time does not move without money and making "Sprite 0" invisible freezes the game. This coin then, only appears to offer the player a "heaven" and, in doing so, reveals the intimate and intractable relation between scrolling software and the processes of the PPU chip as well as the larger circuits of global capital through which this game continues to move.
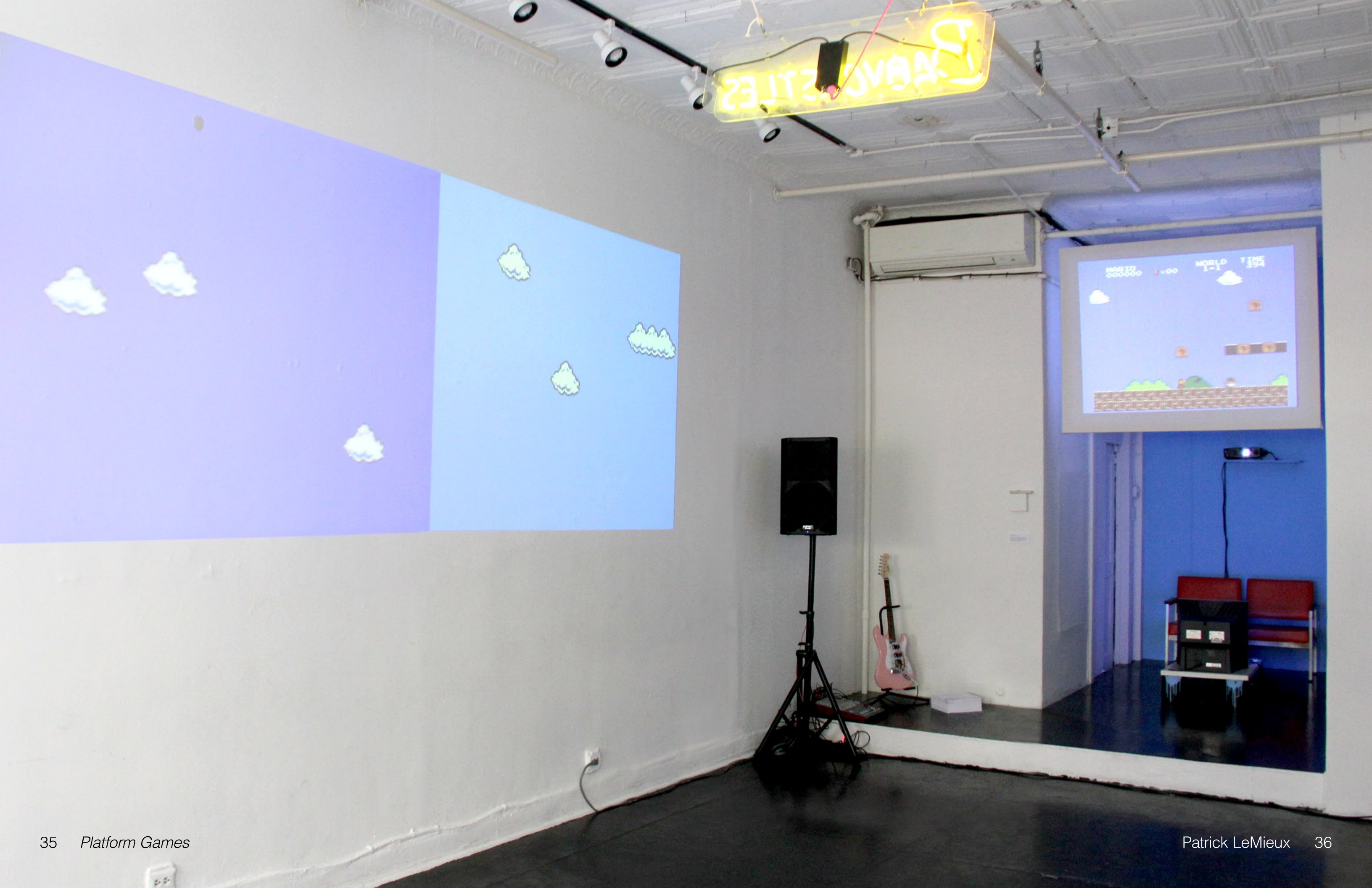
RGB-SMB-TAB-SSS

43 x 6 x 17 1/2 inches, 8 1/2 x 11 x 6 inches
Fender Stratocaster, Arduino, 6 Servos, 800 LasterJet prints
2015

A series of six servos plucks an open chord on a pink, "single-single-single" pickup Stratocaster. The guitar's idle strumming is set to the rhythm of Alexander Galloway's *How to Win Super Mario Bros.* or *RSG-SMB-TAB,* a record of controller input from a playthrough of *Super Mario Bros.* at Eyebeam between March 30th and April 4 in 2003. Formatted as guitar tablature and hosted alongside "tutorial" videos featuring only Galloway's hands, *RSG-SMB-TAB* satirizes text-based strategy guides on websites like GameFAQS by offering specific input instead of general guidelines. Although RSG-SMB-TAB deploys a conceptual aesthetic in which textual instructions take the place of the object or event, RGB-SMB-TAB-SSS makes Galloway's recording playable.

```
###############################################################
# RSG-SMB-TAB-1.1                                             #
###############################################################

How to Win "Super Mario Bros"          Nintendo Entertainment System

WORLD 1 - LEVEL 1

                        +----------------------------------+
  Key:    < = Left      |                                  |
          > = Right      |       ^                          |
          ^ = Up         |   < >                    0   0  |
          v = Down       |   v     select  start    B   A  |
          B = B button  |                                  |
          A = A button   +----------------------------------+

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```java
for (int h = 0; h < 6; h++) {
  for (int i = 0; i < tabs.length/6; i++) {
    for (int j = 0; j < 72; j++) {

      String currentLine = tabs[(i*6)+h];
      char currentCharacter = currentLine.charAt(j);

      if (h == 0) {
        if (currentCharacter == '-') {
          tas[(i*72)+j] = tas[(i*72)+j] + "X.";
        } else {
          tas[(i*72)+j] = tas[(i*72)+j] + "XL";
        }
      } else if (h == 1) {
        if (currentCharacter == '-')
          tas[(i*72)+j] = tas[(i*72+j)].replace("X", ".");
        else
          tas[(i*72)+j] = tas[(i*72+j)].replace("X", "R");
      } else if (h == 2) {
        if (currentCharacter == '-')
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + ".";
        else
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + "U";
      } else if (h == 3) {
        if (currentCharacter == '-')
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + ".";
        else
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + "D";
      } else if (h == 4) {
        if (currentCharacter == '-')
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + "...";
        else
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + "..B";
      } else if (h == 5) {
        if (currentCharacter == '-')
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + ".I........II";
        else
          tas[(i*72+j)] = tas[(i*72+j)] + "AI........II";
      } else {
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ONE SWITCH

5 x 2 x 2/3 inches
Custom controller, Nintendo Entertainment System, CRT screen
2015

From Atari's joysticks to Nintendo's D-pads, videogame controllers are designed to correlate qualitative play to the binary states of digital buttons. Whereas standardized control standardizes play and imagines normative players, alternative interfaces do not simply make videogames accessible, but radically transform what videogames are and what they can do. Following the practices of players at AbleGamers.com and the design of one-switch games made for persons with limited manual dexterity, this modified Nintendo controller constantly pushes Mario to the right. Without access to any other buttons, the player is left to rhythmically tap jump, transforming Super Mario Bros. from a single-player game into a single-switch game for multiple players.
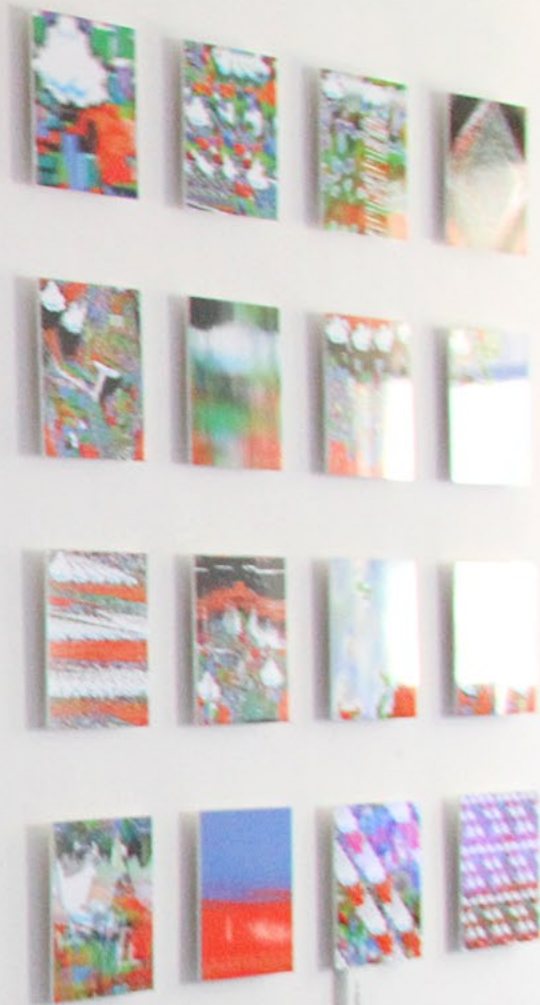
MARIO PAINT

32 x 26 x 6.5 inches
10 gallons of paint, unrefined coltan ore
2015

Up to his mouth in paint, down to his mustache in paint, Super Mario becomes a medium for making both metagames and media art. If the MN4021B is Mario paint and the Ricoh 6502 is Mario Paint and the Nintendo PPU is Mario paint and the ROM masks that store *Super Mario Bros.* is Mario paint then the conflict mineral tantalum is perhaps the most important color in Mario's crayon box. Here, each gallon of paint represents a color of *Super Mario Bros.'* palette. Sitting at the bottom of the empty, sky-blue bucket are chunks of unrefined coltan ore, the primary source of tantalum.

99 EXERCISES IN PLAY

Size Variable
4 Unity Games, 4 Nintendo Controllers, 4 USB Dongles, 4 Arcade Cabinets
2012

Based on the constrained writing practices of the *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* (Oulipo) and specifically Raymond Queneau's *Exercises de style,* this original game redeploys World 1-1 from *Super Mario Bros.* as a constraint for producing ninety nine metagames—an "Oujeupo" project that engages the serial histories of a single level.
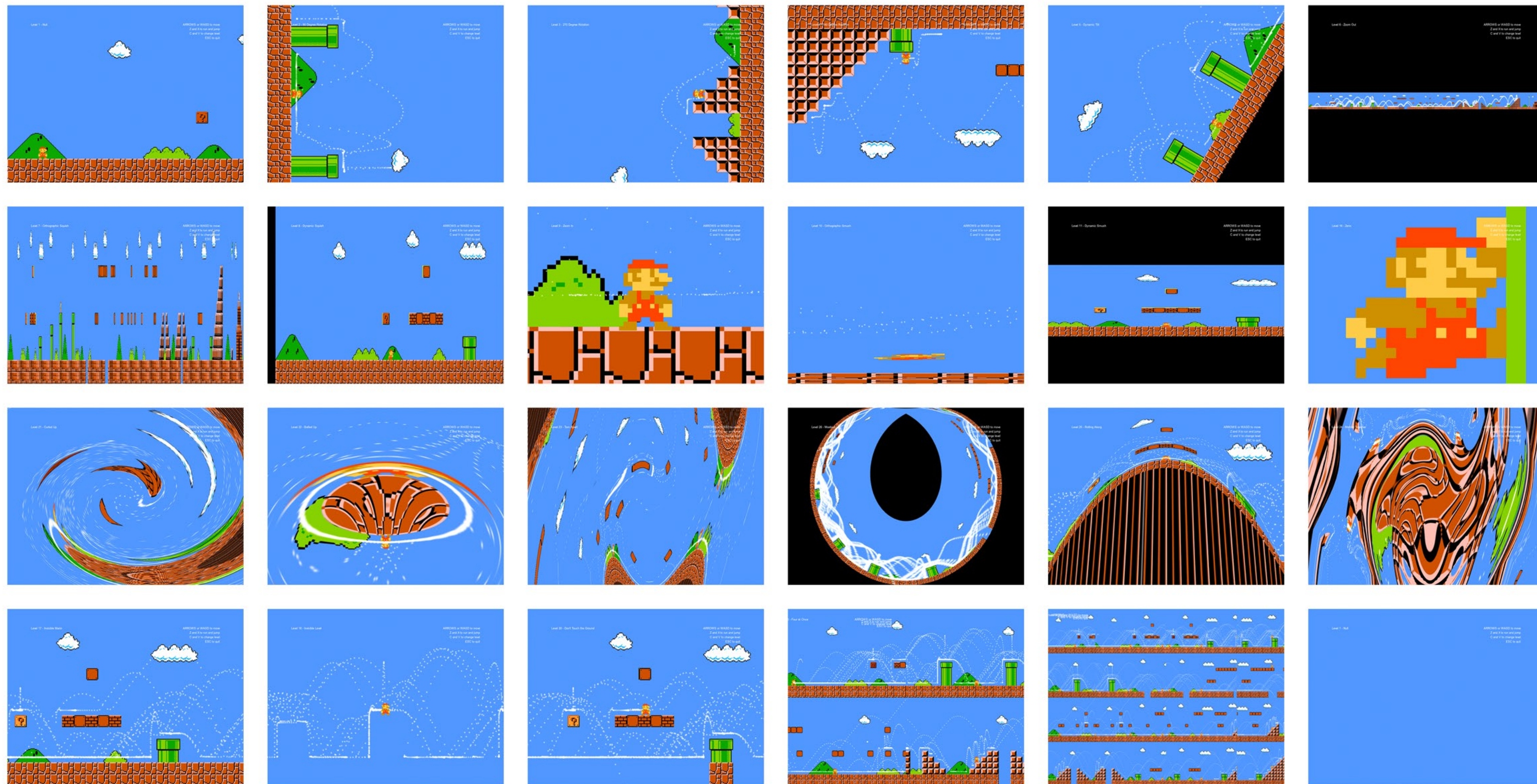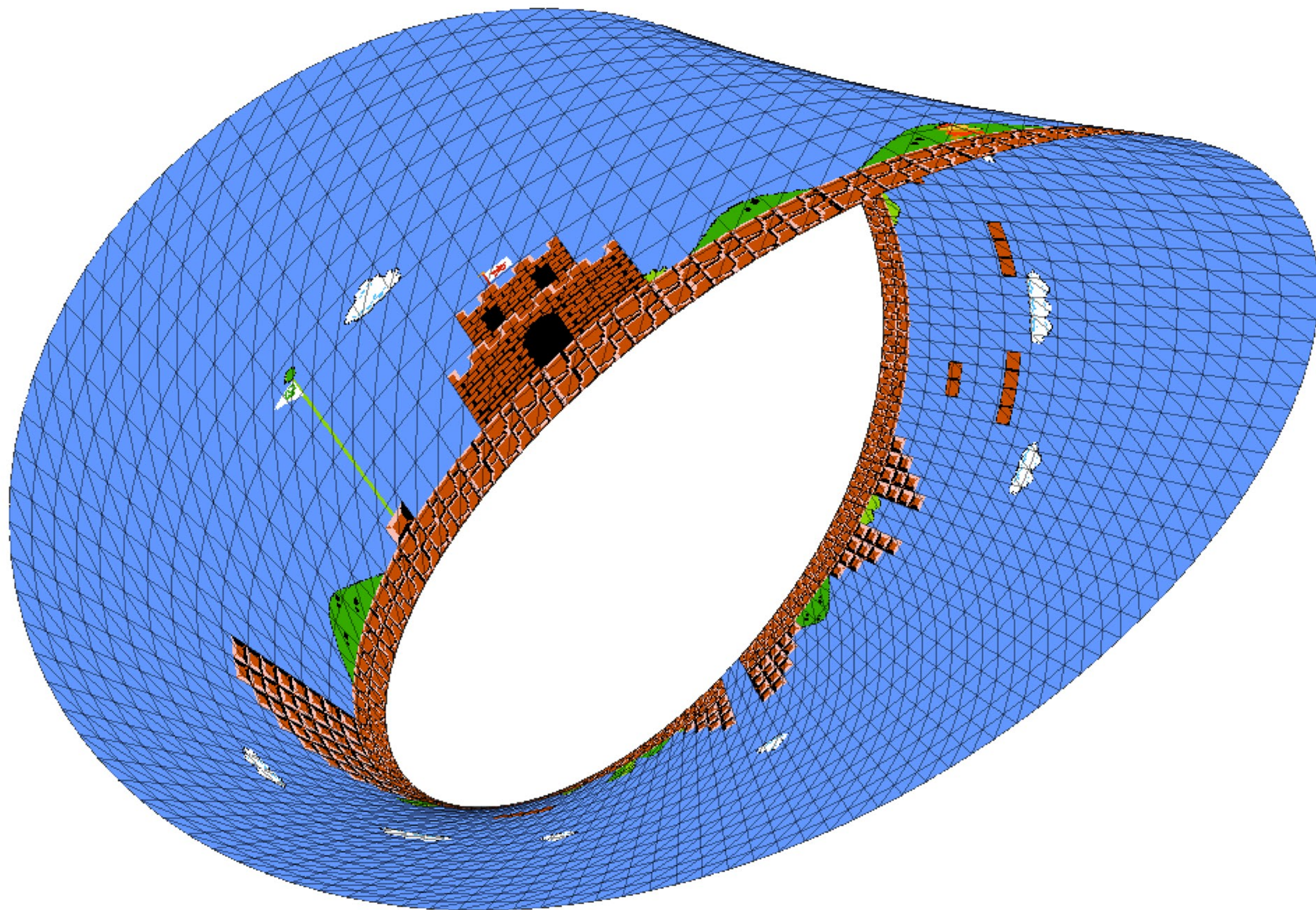
4:57

Size variable, 6 minutes
Single channel color video, stereo sound
2013

The number 4:57 represents one horizon of possibility for human play within *Super Mario Bros.* and the ultimate goal of a speedrunner named Andrew Gardikis—what he calls his "gaming masterpiece." Published by the Speed Demos Archive and raced in realtime at Speed Runs Live, speedrunners are "expected to use every method at their disposal, including glitches, to minimize time." One of the earliest and most competitive games to speedrun is Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* and Andrew Gardikis held the world record for seven years, from 2007 to 2014.

This short, five-minute documentary composites ninety nine of Gardikis' failed attempts to beat *Super Mario Bros.* as fast as humanly possible before he achieved a world record on July 1, 2013. At any given frame, the cloud of Marios in the middle of the screen is evidence of both Gardikis' precision as well as the temporal and spatial registrations undergirding videogames as technical media. At the end of the video, Gardikis shouts "oh my gosh, I don't even know!" Just as Duchamp transformed chess into a game of chance, for Gardikis speedrunning operates outside of human perception as *Super Mario Bros.* has ceased to function in terms of human agency.

Only after thirty minutes of decoding video and counting frames was this world record discovered in retrospect. Gardikis' uncertainty articulates a kind of play occurring outside the register of human consciousness and an unknowable, serial history of *Super Mario Bros.* in which thousands of thumbs have millions of Marios over goombas and green pipes.
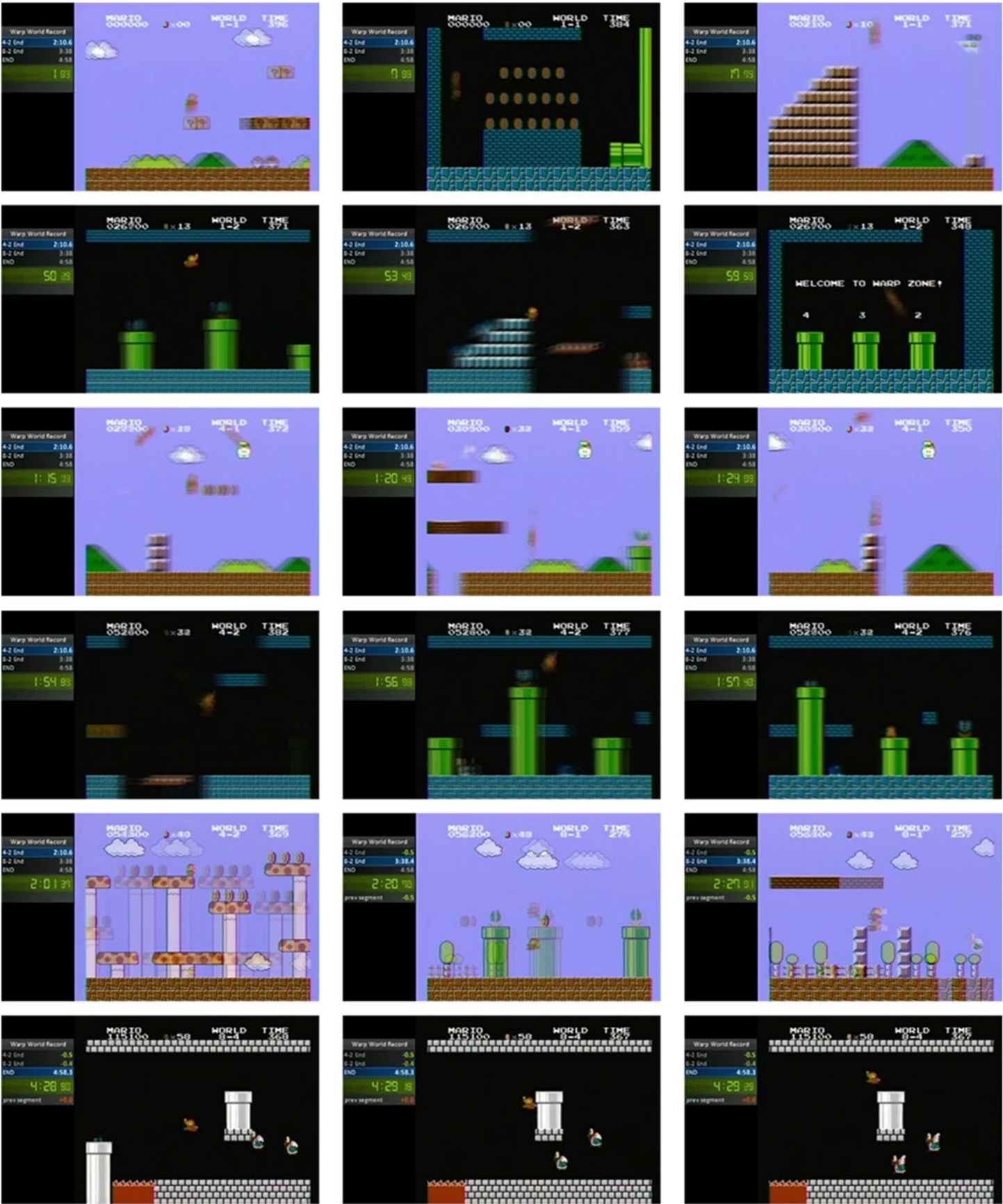
MAGIC CIRCLE

Size variable, 2 hours and 9 minutes
Single channel video, stereo audio
2015

On Wednesday, April 29, 2015, the Baltimore Orioles and the Chicago White Sox played a game at Camden Yards. For the first time in the history of Major League Baseball, the event was closed to the public due to the protests, riots, and general unrest in the city after the police murdered Freddie Gray on April 19. Despite setting a record for the lowest attendance in the history of the professional sport, the game between the Orioles and Sox was unremarkable.

Safely enclosed within the magic circle provided by the social ritual, formal play, networked media, and global capital of professional baseball, the game proceeded as usual. The crack of the bat and the snap of leather gloves punctuated the silence of the empty stadium as protesters and police faced off outside the gates of Camden Yards.

Platform Games   Patrick LeMieux

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PLATFORM GAMES = [+..••] + ⌐•ջ•? + <3 . Thanks to everyone at Babycastles, Hack Manhattan, and the whole Rat Park for making me feel at home! Special thanks to Todd, Lauren, Krissy, Frank, John, Del, Justin, Matt, and Nick for hanging out and helping me install the show and to Liz, Jacob, Nick, Laine, Jack, Craig, Jon, Peter, Patrick, Jason, and Meghan for collaborating and co-presenting with me!