



arcadia
the other life of video games

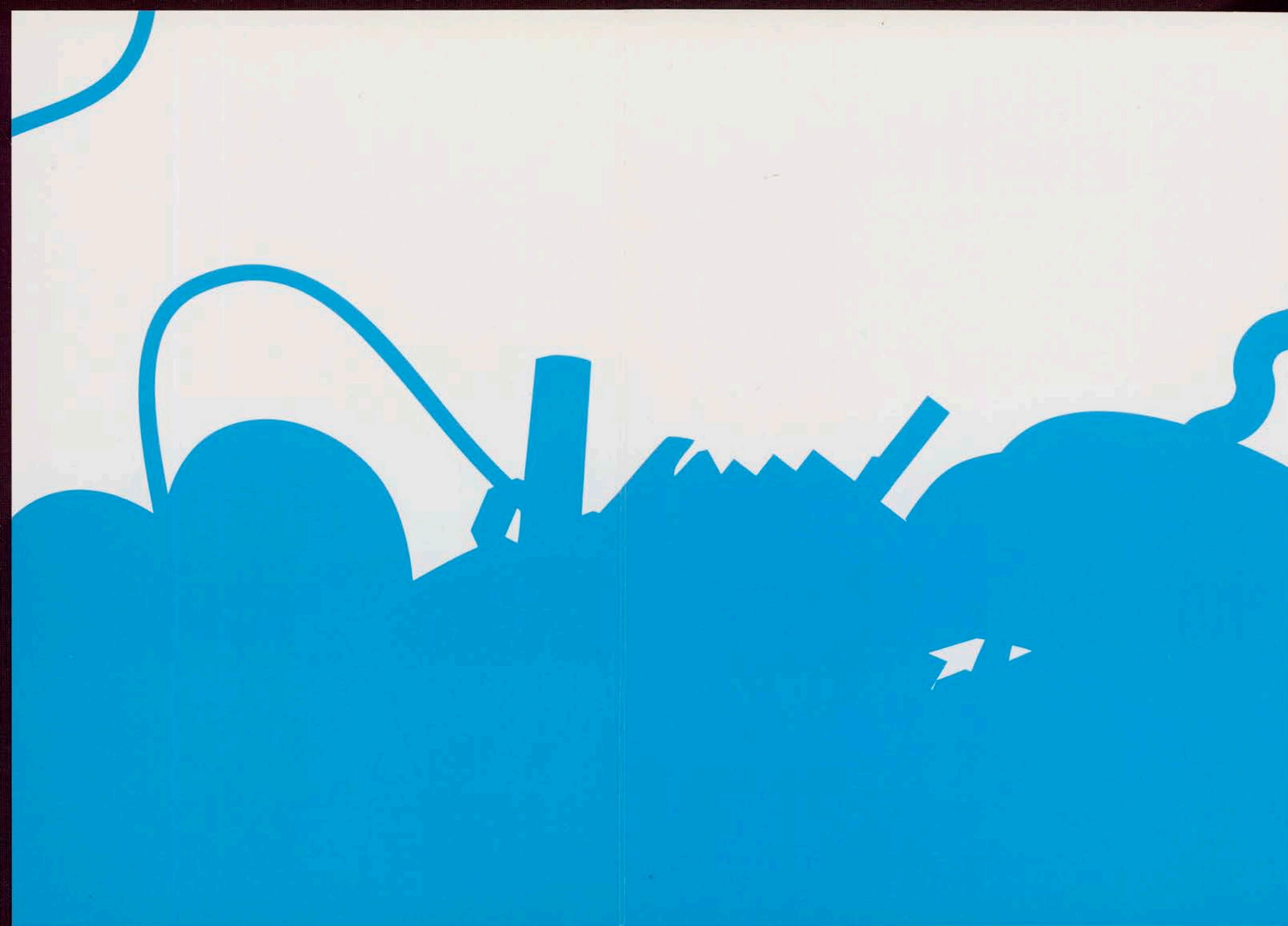
ARTISTS:

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ALEX CECCHETTI
et al.
OMER FAST
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MEHDI BELHAJ-JOSEPH &
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FENG MENGBO
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Arcadia

Arcadia: the other life of video games is the latest in a series of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery exhibitions including *Drive: power, progress and desire* 2000, *Feature: art, life and cinema* 2001 and *Extended Play: art remixing music* 2003. The exhibitions in this series interpret the response of contemporary artists to prescient and unsettling developments in contemporary culture. *Arcadia* explores the impact of computer gaming and digital aesthetics on contemporary art and visual culture. The exhibition also comments on the interconnection of computer games, advertising culture and recent sci-fi movies.

Lenders:

Air de Paris, Analix Forever, Dan Arps, Jim Barr and Mary Barr, Alex Cecchetti, et al., Eigen + Art, Omer Fast, Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani, Pierre Joseph and Mehdi Belhaj-Kacem, Sean Kerr, Lisson Gallery, John McCormack, Feng Mengbo, New Works Studio, Postmasters Gallery, Warren Olds, Julian Opie, Hye Rim Lee, Superflex.

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THE OTHER LIFE OF VIDEO GAMES

Hanna Scott

PLAYER ONE, PLAYER TWO: CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION

Softly carpeted, the darkened video arcade is a buffer from reality, a diversion from conventional space/time. The perfect venue for escapist fantasy, the spaces themselves are hardly the stuff of Arcadian dreams, they are black holes for squandered time. Game parlours are environments in which gamers can play against one another or against the machine. They are a safe-haven of choice for harmless friendly-fire competition outside the sports field.

The Danish artist collective Superflex draw on the space of the video arcade, and its update the Internet cafe, in their installation *Counter-strike*. Appropriating the *Counter-strike* interactive game wholesale and installing it on a bank of computers in the gallery space. Superflex appropriates the syntax of competition, channeling the collective energy behind multi-player games to political ends. Juxtaposed with the game, a series of documentary videos are available for self-service screening, videos about collective action and self-organisation. The game becomes a didactic tool; the installation is designed to attune users to the power of collective co-operation, bringing together a team of players for a common goal.

Rather than praise technology and the culture of video games the exhibition *Arcadia: the other life of video games* has an equivocal title. Artists have adopted the language of video games, the shifting viewpoints, the interactive possibilities, but more importantly, they are working with the deep structure of gaming, its genre boundaries and social codes. They are adapting the formal syntax of games, the characters, the spatial environments, and in the process are pointing out the limits of current representational paradigms.

Over the last 20 years games have shifted from the arcade to the lounge-room, from screen-space to virtual-space, and from single-or-double-player to multi-player interactivity. Moreover, the zone of gaming has proliferated from static game-specific technology to portable and domestic technologies.



CONTINUITY OR BREAK?

This divisive question arising in the wake of modernism is addressed in theorist Lev Manovich's book *The language of new media*.¹ In it, Manovich describes some of the distinct traits of "new media", but also argues for continuity in visual media from early experimental cinema and photography to digital visuals rendered in the panoply of formats. With his groundwork already

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in place, there is no need to assert that artists' use of games invents a new representational paradigm. Game technology does, however, encourage artists and theorists to challenge assumptions about representation.

In his video practice, Feng Mengbo modifies an existing game, *Quake III arena*, deploying the game's open-source code to insert his own likeness into the game. Mengbo has created a convincing virtual image of himself, as the game's mini-gun toting combatant. By pitching himself into battle Mengbo acknowledges his boyhood dreams of becoming a soldier or an artist. The character, or avatar, he produced for the resulting work *Q4U 2002* is downloadable from the Internet: by implication Mengbo has cast himself as the first clone-able artist.² This deployment aggravates an old wound in game culture centered on the question of whether a person's avatar or online character can have an obvious, one-to-one, relationship to the person playing the game.³ Mengbo astutely doubles himself with his online character, making them one and the same. Taking the idea a step further, he also ensures that everybody else in the game looks like him too, so that when playing the game computer generated 'bots', online gamers, and the artist all look alike, and are all using the artist's self portrait image.

Ah_Q (movie) 2002, included in *Arcadia*, is a non-interactive recording of Mengbo's live online performance. It is almost wholly without narrative, a stunning thrill-kill short-film: a splatter movie for the digital age.⁴ The work erodes the tenuous distinction between movies and video games, epitomised by the cross over, parallel development and marketing of the movie *The matrix reloaded* with the game *Enter the matrix* or the transition of *Final fantasy* from console to box office. The filmic interludes that shift games from scene to scene are encroaching on the game environment, introducing narrative elements just as the action sequences of films like *Crouching tiger hidden dragon* increasingly reflect the dynamic fight scenes of video games such as *Street fighter*. It's an erosion of genre that is occurring on a number of fronts, compounded by the parallel marketing of the end products, such as the *Matrix* compendium of branded experiences. While the distinction between games and films threatens to become relegated to a problem of genre in video stores everywhere, the coding of representation is becoming more and more critical. Mengbo's work embraces the passive versus active dichotomy between film and game, recreating the experience of watching a stellar game player down at the arcade, battling for the high score with a crowd of onlookers.

As a new mode of visual culture erupts into the common consciousness, games are subjected to all manner of symbolic cultural readings, the joystick is reborn in psychoanalytic theory and modes of game spaces become a tool for architectural theme parks. The merger of cinema and game aesthetics only scratches the surface of the pervasive shifts in representation that are already under foot.

UAC LABS

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CLICK TO CUSTOMISE

The customisation of computer software and from-scratch programming are caught in a face-off. *Arcadia* includes works that are adapted from existing platforms as well as original productions. Julian Opie, the et al. collective and Sean Kerr are three artists who programme their work from scratch; they are primary producers, animating static screen images. The Superflex collective appropriate video game software, shifting them into a contemporary art context without software modification. The working method of Feng Mengbo embodies the contradiction of customisation. His modifications use the open-source code of *Quake III arena* and involve both appropriation and writing new code. His customisation is an example for others to follow, even if the result elicits few options for modification. Because the avatar Mengbo has created is distinctly his own we can only try it on for size. Nevertheless, Mengbo's work relies on the gaming industry's spirit of collaboration and it's propensity for shareware.

The digital typeface designed by Warren Olds is also intended as free-to-air technology, replyware. The font is available for free via Internet download on the basis that the user must send a reply to the artist demonstrating the way the font has been applied. Olds' typeface can be seamlessly and endlessly customised.

NAVIGATION AND EXPLORATION

Pick-a-path style navigation is a hallmark of contemporary electronic games. *Half-Life*, for instance, has a strong element of exploration as one of its playing strategies. In a context where self-directed navigation is the norm, the navigation of the exhibition space becomes salient. The work *All roads lead to Rome 1999* by Maroan El Sani and Nina Fischer adopts an alternative form of navigation, based on technology, by using a Global Positioning System (GPS) device to draw a picture of their route. The interactive puzzle game *O-studies 2001* by et al. is another example of non-linear navigation at work.

The layout and design of the *Arcadia* exhibition are integral to the curatorial thesis. The Govett-Brewster's open-plan four-floor gallery space provides scope for roaming, and the exhibition design provides a series of cryptic icons as prompts for navigation. Adopted from game iconography these icons link works in the exhibition according to predetermined thematic trajectories. It is possible to navigate the exhibition by following or collecting one set of icons, before moving along the next thematic line and following another set of icons, mirroring the way in which game spaces are navigated according to power-ups, prompts and clues. The exhibition design is inflected by the visual language and codes of video games. More than just an exhibition that charts the impact of video games on contemporary art, *Arcadia* attempts to replicate some of the deep structures of video game culture, its codes and its specific iconography, to produce an exhibition that reflects the increasingly blurry separation of visual culture into discrete genres.

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LOGIN>ENTER USER NAME

Julian Opie's *This is Fiona* 2001 is a computer animated portrait that moves, blinks, and occasionally smiles or frowns. *Fiona* has a finite lexicon of facial expressions, and moves through them according to an algorithm. Captivated, we wait for her to move again. Audiences attribute her vacant staring face a psychology and personality, and try to predict her next move. Her portrait is, a digitally stylised drawing of an actual person, and this makes her like many other animations, derived and abstracted from the behaviour and movement of a 'real' subject. As an abstraction, she is a vehicle for projected character traits, and an inferred psychology. It's a futile exercise however, to project a life-style and personality onto *Fiona*, because she only possesses a limited number of expressions, and because her cycle of 'emotions' is random.⁵

This is Fiona neatly foils audience desire to project a fantasy life onto game characters. Mengbo's latest works *Q4U* and *Ah_Q* (both 2002) erode the boundary between game and life, fantasy and reality, by projecting the artist's image directly into a shoot-em-up game. His game character, like *Fiona*, is an abstraction based on observation. Mengbo's work is a tangible example of that moment when players project themselves into game space, developing a psychology and identity that is particular to the game space. His works represent the split second at login when aliases are adopted.

The ability to project into game space is conditional on the ability to customise a game environment to an audiences liking. *Quake III arena* is one of the most accessible games to modify, as the source code is readily available. Even so, the kind of modifications that Mengbo achieves, derived from his own body and locomotion, are beyond the reach of most ordinary gamers. Mengbo worked with an animator for three months to accurately model and map the behaviour of his character.

The development of game characters is charted in a cumulative project initiated by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe. Their budget animation character *Annlee* says with voice over passivity, "I am an imaginary character. I am no ghost, just a shell". The story of her evolving character is told through a series of collaborative works in *No ghost just a shell*.⁶ Purchased from a Japanese character design company she came without a name, as a two dimensional image, no voice, no biography. She was an animation bit-part.

Like *Fiona*, *Annlee*'s blank-slate quality provides ample opportunity for the seeding of an imaginary identity. The *Annlee* character is constructed through multiple artist projects, and questions a representational form and the tenets of originality and character construction. *Annlee* reflects the way that online users project themselves imaginatively into an online world, and adopt or develop an avatar that is more than just a set of clothes and a skill set. Avatars operate like a digital-double that has been attributed a personality, intention and occasionally a psychology. In the *No ghost just a shell* project *Annlee*'s character is openly touted as a sign amongst other signs.

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Contemporary video games provoke an expectation for interactivity. *Annlee*'s passive nature is a foil to that expectation; the character is a sign, a cipher, a repository for collective memory, and now a finite legal entity (only a limited number of representations of her that can exist). The approach that the *Annlee* project assumes about character, identity and global branding has massive implications for the way we understand game characters, as either wholly disembodied and disassociated or grafted from real-time source data. Like an *Identikit* portrait, and unlike *Fiona* or Mengbo's characters, *Annlee* is a composite image. She is a collection of all her amassed representations, no more, no less. Like a game character however, we attribute much more to her generic nature.⁷

Bruce (the watcher) 2003 by Sean Kerr introduces an apparent artificial intelligence to the exhibition. The character, *Bruce*, takes his name from his Simpletext title, a clear audible voice, used to read text files. The voice is a readymade, running alongside two cartoon style eyes. Kerr uses *Bruce* to establish the minimum conditions for a character, and seems preternaturally intelligent. Like the software programme *Eliza*, which fooled people into believing she was a real, *Bruce* can detect when there are people in the room, and will start talking to them, following the people with his screen eyes. There is a strong desire to load up to *Bruce* with a set of intentions, a sense of humour: things we would normally reserve for human interaction.

Bruce is the start of "the eerie, ghost-in-the-machine sense of interacting with a semi-intelligent creature existing somewhere on the other side of the screen. It's what happens when a lone sentry in the game *Metal gear solid 2* tracks your bloody footprints straight to your hiding place, calls in reinforcements, and then launches a sophisticated group assault on your position."⁸



SOCIAL GAMES

Games are attributed all sorts of sophisticated cultural affects. They have recently been blamed for violent behaviour among school students and the proficiency of child assassins with guns. Simulation games are used regularly in the training of pilots as such it is no surprise that they have been identified [by artists] as powerful tools for modifying behaviour. Superflex's use of the *Counter-strike* game to direct users from a young age to become adept at collective action and cooperation is a pertinent example.

On a slightly different trajectory, Warren Olds' use of alternative distribution networks to disseminate his *Befriend* 2003 typeface is another method to harness the clan-like structure of gaming communities to productive and pervasive activity. Not transparently easy to read, the typeface is codified, directed towards a sub-cultural clique. His work has an interactive element, requiring the user to email the artist to get an email reply.⁹ Using the open architecture style of gaming communities his 'reply-ware' font involves collective action, but on a one-to-one basis.

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Omer Fast's genre-bending documentary *A tank translated* 2002 comments on the idea that video games are corrupting our minds, by reporting that Israeli tank drivers compare their war experiences to video games. The film also tracks the slippage between genres often characteristic of documentary and artist filmmaking that mirrors the digital convergence of filmmaking and game design.



SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

The essentially competitive nature of games dovetails with an ingrained Darwinian notion of natural selection — only the fit survive. In a culture of video games, the consoles, joysticks, staggered release of new game versions there is a planned obsolescence, and a raft of competing strategies and players.

Ricky Swallow's work in *Arcadia*, possess nostalgia for obsolete technology. Swallow points to the positivist undercurrents of technology, and its branding, the assumption of continuous improvement promised by technology's relentless evolution.

Swallow's *Evolution in order of appearance* 1999 with moulded plastic skulls evolving from Cyborg through flat-head Neanderthal to *Homo sapiens* uses biology to invert the promise of technology. His work seems ironically aware of the way that adaptive strategies of evolutionary biology are rehearsed with game theory, and that iterated games have been used for the modeling of artificial intelligence and to synthesise adaptive learning. "A highly networked, self-organising player population is given the tools to customise and extend games, create new levels, modifications and characters. What emerges is a decentralised culture that rapidly learns, adapts and selects for best practices."¹⁰

In an age of accelerated competition, hypothetical game environments become astute testing grounds for weird science. Hye Rim Lee's assembly-line character, TOKI, implies a competitive world of overproduction, a brave new world where an individual life is dispensable, and perfect, super-human beauty is the new super hero quality.

Jane Prophet's landmark *Technosphere* web project (technosphere.org.uk) is a hypothetical world where you can breed anything. "if you establish the pay off and taxes, the right 'rugged fitness landscape' and manipulate your mutation rate to avoid become stranded on local fitness peaks."¹¹ If random mutations become the true hallmark of contemporary A.I. then where will human evolution end? Eye-of-god games like *SimCity* or *Civilisation* challenge us to project these thoughts into space/time, and works like Alex Cecchetti's *Saint Francesco's trilogy* 2002 project such portentous scenarios into brooding and sinister plots for theatrical videos.

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SPACE WARS

Dan Arps' sculpture *Impending doom* 2003 replicates the spaces of first person shooter game *Doom*. Remarkable because it was the first game to create space dynamically around the viewer, *Doom* spaces eat away at traditional concepts of space, based on x, y, z coordinates. At least *Doom* spaces are finite. The potential of games to develop environments or opponents 'on the fly', adapting to the input and actions of a subjective player, is another realm of space altogether and a haunting possibility for all representational systems.



Virtual space is tricky. Arps' work uses everyday objects as props to telescope space from micro to macro, to make a space that can expand and contract according to a virtual and limitless notion of space. His work elides the boundaries between physical space and virtual space. In comparison, Julian Opie's wall painting *Trucks birds wind* 2000 creates an immersive no-place, like the twilight virtual spaces in games where nothing happens, the in-between moments where the action has just departed or has yet to arrive. Until recently games have been representational in direct proportion to processing power required. Mimesis has lain in wait while hardware and bandwidth advanced. However, both Arps and Opie use highly stylised vocabulary to capture space, an abstract code of signifiers, and this highly abstract visual style is used widely in game design.



THE ANDY WARHOL CONNECTION: OFFICIAL PRODUCT

The *Arcadia* branding deconstructs the distinction between art and design. Warren Olds has developed a meta-project for the exhibition brand. Rather than a one-off logo he has created a series of interlocking icons that plug-in to a flexible identity system. The system of interlocking parts consists of a core logotype whose letterforms are developed from the 1979 arcade game *Afari soccer* and the logotype colours are derived from a combination used for the Commodore64 home computer in the 1980s as well as a series of icons that codify the themes of the exhibition.

Video games provide new representational paradigms. The artworks in this exhibition point to the limits of our current representational codes and conventions, and it is fitting that the design for the project reflected that attitude. *Arcadia* identifies shifts in the structure of contemporary representation and the design tests the limits of its own genre, encroaching on the artworks, moving pervasively throughout the exhibition and publication space. The slippage between genres, between art and typography, between game and artwork, between film and video game, rattles at the door of our visual perception. In *Arcadia*, the artwork has become a contested site, like a virtual game space can be a contested site.¹² The exhibition sees the relationship between the artwork and the viewer as a confrontational situation, a moment of conflict or of psychological projection.

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2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

- 1 Lev Manovich *The language of new media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001.
- 2 'Q4U: An artist as a Quaker' www.Mengbo.com
- 3 The word avatar is now commonly used in non-gaming scenarios to describe the monikers that people adopt in sophisticated, more lengthy interactions in chat rooms rather than the relatively short-lived role-playing that users undertake when logging into a multiplayer game that allows for little if any 'character development'.
- 4 The work has very little potential for character development, literature Professors worldwide must be wondering about the implications for character development as a whole in a world of open-source plug-in character modifications.
- 5 The series takes its title from a Japanese anime classic *The ghost in the shell* 1995 (a film that informs the aesthetics and story line of the cyber punk blockbuster movie *The matrix* 1999).
- 6 "The contract that provides the legal framework for this whole story. The acquisition of Anlee took place with a poetic project, which consisted of freeing a fictional character from the realm of representation. Logically, Philippe and I had to give up our rights [to Anlee's reproduction]..." *No ghost just a shell*, Walter König/Van Abbemuseum, Germany/The Netherlands, 2003, pp.28-29
- 7 Blankness is overtly challenged by contemporary movies that cast specific actors in generic game character roles. Perhaps the most roundly discussed example to date is the casting of Angelina Jolie in *Lara Croft tomb raider* 2000.
- 8 Steven Johnson 'Wild things' in *Wired* March 2002 p.78
- 9 Send an email to <mac@warrenolds.com> to receive a copy of the font for Macintosh systems. Send an email to <pc@warrenolds.com> to receive a copy of the font for PC/Windows systems.
- 10 J. C. Herz 'Gaming the system: multi player worlds on line' in *Game On: the history and culture of video games*, Lucien Kind ed., Laurence King Publishing, London, 2002, p.97
- 11 Simon Penny 'The Darwin Machine: artificial life and interactive art' in *New formations* Number 29 summer 1996, p.66
- 12 As suggested in the essay 'The art of contested spaces' by Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire in *Game On: the history and culture of video games*.

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EXTRA LIFE

Edward Colless

It was a period that now seems remote and archaic, before the arrival in 2000 of the Sony Playstation 2. (PS2) Released in Japan in March of that year, and in the USA and Australasia six months later, the PS2 timing was perfect, at the wave front of millennial euphoria. And, like the anxious countdown to the millennium itself, the urban legends that preceded the release of PS2 were shot through with mystery, awe, fear and apocalyptic fervor. The pre-release teaser campaign in North America involved a weeklong billboard blitz, with an unlabelled, gigantic neon-blue question mark. Like a conceptual art work, this enigmatic logo was not so much graphically tagged to the product, as it was a sign for the hype that was cloaking the product like an aura. "It's the PS2 question," explained North American senior vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment, Andrew House, with analytical succinctness. "We looked at the P in PS2 and said, 'Hey, if you put a dot under it, it becomes a question mark'."

What was the PS2 question? Probably not the prosaic issues such as "what will the PS2 do?" or even "what will it look like?" The question "PS2" was abstract, while still being brand based. It had metaphysical-even occult-overtones, while still penetrating everyday domestic space. Stories were about that the PS2 processor sitting on the living room floor was going to be powerful enough to control intercontinental ballistic missiles. Because of its capabilities in military decryption, it was to be banned from export out of the US or Japan to countries like Iraq. The PS2 could be used to run a global terrorist campaign, its tactics and its budget. And, also, it would revolutionise the videogame: in fact, perhaps the most challenging aspect of PS2 was that you should expect something utterly unrecognisable. With that kind of prospect, how

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could you picture what PS2 would do, or even what it would simply look like? So high were the expectations within the gaming market, and so extensive was the hype, that the San Francisco advertising agency TBWA/Chiat/Day, which had the contract for the US release of PS2, ran aground trying to adequately respond. They initially proposed a campaign, according to executive creative director Chuck McBride (in *Adweek* 6 Nov 2000), based around "what a Playstation 2 could *not* do". Like, mow the lawn. But the agency quickly turned around the concept, realising that a campaign promising anything at all about PS2 would conflict with the market's hysterical expectations for the product. With such a reputation, no matter what you promise you'd be bound to disappoint.

"We needed to articulate a big idea," said Sony's Andrew House, "[the idea] that this system will change your lifestyle." This was going to be, in House's words, "The biggest consumer electronics product launch in history". But how can you deliver something that has already been hyped, beyond your control and beyond your own promotional goals? And how can you link something as abstract as this to lifestyle choices? The solution was ingenious, and reached not by reacting against the speculation, but by conforming too much to the audience's hysterical anticipation. The agency cleverly created a campaign for an alternate and fictitious product. Outbidding the market hype with a fantastic, exaggerated vision of that hype itself, the agency came up with a sixty second spot (released to movie theatres in the US on October 24, 2000, two days before the product release date). But it was an ad for Sony Playstation 9 (PS9)

"New for 2078," announces a smoothly monotone female voice with a synthetic edge, "Playstation 9's new electronic spores tap straight into your adrenal gland." In what looks like the introductory Full Motion Video (FMV) for a brand new PS2 game, a teenage boy in a funky leather zip-up outfit stands on a rooftop against a

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busy sci-fi skyline of blue-grey towers, monorails and aircraft. He's peering with a mix of amazement and incredulity at a small transparent sphere, the size of a snow globe that he holds cautiously between his fingers. Pulling it apart neatly into two halves, along an invisible seam, he releases a cloud of bubbles, which swirl pollen-like momentarily in the air, and then, as if homing in on a signal, and shoot straight up his nose. In close up these bubbles are nano-bots, speeding toward a rendezvous with his nervous system like infectious viral clusters. But, with an audacity surprising for Sony and for an American ad agency, this is no mere nasal spray at work; the action is-of course-equally suggestive of a snort of cocaine, speed or amyl.

And what a hit! A second later the boy is leaping off the rooftop and landing, some twenty stories below, in a Chinatown alley to kick some ass that looks like it could have been recruited from the cast of *Tekken* or *Mortal kombat*. Stepping further down the alley, as two jousting Japanese warriors on horseback charge him, he drops through a grate into a bottomless sea and encounters a mermaid who morphs into a giant squid. A helmet forms around his head and he finds himself in a sleek motorcycle sidecar, racing along a city's elevated freeways, but driving at full speed inescapably into an armoured car. "PS9 has improved retinal scanning," we hear, as graphic codes and crosshairs flash onto his expressionless face throughout the scene changes, like a "head-up display" on a cockpit window. His eyes seemed burned out, blasted, blinded, in hypnotic trance or just drug-fucked.

The voice-over reassuringly advises that PS9 has "a mind control system, holographic movie surround vision, and telepathic personal music." And as that music peaks, so too it would appear does the boy. As he collides with the car, a strobe cut flashes us back to the rooftop, from the start, and to the player in close shot, front on, as he rolls his head forward recovering from the rush. Eyes closed, jaw clenched, lips swollen, and fast coming down, he resembles

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

the silent, head and shoulders star of Warhol's *Blow job* in the last moments of that film. "The ultimate just got better," declares the female voice, with a closing air of intimacy, as the boy's trembling eyelids open. His blanked out face dissolves into the crystalline PS9 sphere that is now closed up and poised for action, magically virginal once again as it rests on his fingertips. Ready to restart. As an allegory of the market expectation for Playstation 2, this advertisement demonstrates an exhilarating intuition of the consumer delirium that caused 98% of stocks of Playstation 2 to be snatched up in the first few weeks of the US launch. (Units only days old and purchased for US\$299 were appearing on web auction sites for four times that price.) The PS2 legend, like the PS9 sphere, is inexhaustible and inscrutable. Indeed, the PS9 sphere resembles (both in appearance and function) the sort of luminous but indistinct tool that you seek out as a power-up in a PS2 game! PS9 might be described as a fantastic prize, obtainable within the milieu of PS2: a magical boost of PS2's performance. And if PS2 can change one's lifestyle, as Andrew House wished it to, then it does so-like the power-up of its simulacrum-by generating "extra life". Extra life is a paradoxically quantitative surfeit on the video gamer's consumer ecstasy. "A simple gift", as Steven Poole explains in his videogame anatomy, *Trigger happy*, "of more time." Those little duplicates of your avatar's icon, lined up along the edge of the screen, are like the volumetric clicks on a battery level. Extra life is an extended duration that can only be realised in expenditure. Its only value is in its depletion. Thus, extra life is not an investment, but an index of dissipation. It is an intensity that, deferring death and trivialising death's symbolic function, is lived as additional playing time.

This is surely what prompts the moral panic over addictive and so-called isolating or asocial behaviour associated with video gaming. In culturally reactive critiques and in techno-phobic scenarios, the obsessive and seemingly inexhaustible reloading of game levels is an expression of captive subjectivity, snared in the repetition-

compulsion of consumer desire masquerading as healthy socialised play. Or, with even more sinister intentions, the videogame interface is considered to have been appropriated conspiratorially by a military-industrial complex up-skilling a generation of cyber-bureaucrats, data-drones or cyborg warriors uninterested in the human inhabitants of their information architecture and desensitised to death. And, gaming enthusiasts probably wouldn't disagree with the post-human implications of these complaints. They might just value the experience differently: as evolution rather than regression; as the emergence of the new rather than decomposition.

Extra life is a post-human concept. And there is no question that the video gamer provides one of the timely caricatures of a generalised cultural fascination with the retreat of our humanness against the emergence of a technological post-human condition. Even if embracing it positively, we tend to characterise this trans-valuation of the human in evolutionary terms, and consequently envision it, to adopt one of Marshall McLuhan's metaphors, in a rear-view mirror. Thus, plugged in to the Web, our nervous system may figuratively extend across global communication networks, but the hypnotic extremity of this condition is the image of a pasty, etiolated Net-geek, indifferent to anything but his or her addiction to information and effortlessly cruising the Net while sitting motionless in a litter tray. Heroin chic seems athletic in comparison. As McLuhan put it, media are prosthetic "extensions of man" that degrade the organs they are grafted onto. The wheel amputates sensory experiences associated with walking. In a car, a human may as well be legless. How much of that hunched, immobile, inert volume of a nerd's body is invoked when their fingers, feverishly tapping into a Playstation console, execute the command for a ten-step combo that spectacularly cartwheels the luscious Ling Xiaoyu into combat in *Tekken 3*? Our bodies, Stelarc might add, are superseded by the media that extend them.

But we can think of this change in a different way, neither disintegrating nor mutilating some original, organic entity that composes the human. And PS9 provides a demonstration. What happens when "the ultimate gets better"? This is not an evolutionary process. It is inflation: a flare-up; an after effect; a special effect, a sales pitch. Hype that revalues the superlative qualification of a thing by doubling it and disregarding its essential and hence unrepeatable value. Value is folded over on itself, repeatedly, to a degree of superabundance and redundancy. Extra life is an inflation that revalues life by folding it in on itself, giving it a power-up. Extra life, however, is not an enhancement of life, an improvement or a makeover, but a doubling of it. Extra life surpasses life because it superimposes all possible lives in a temporality that has no essence. The multitude of lives played out in a Playstation game are not successive movements proceeding toward a transcendent or consummative *telos*, nor actualising a logical principle (even the logic of consumer capitalism). These are lives, in other words, that have no meaning in that they do not represent some originating value recovered in a last judgement or nirvana. They are self-identical, and yet each is played out as an event, singularly appearing and disappearing. A life is a play of possibles, topologically condensed in multiplicities that superimpose silicon, muscle tissue, neurones, genetic and electromagnetic codes. And this superimposition-which we'll call extra life-is not a configuration or unity of strata (of information, of time), but a differential conducting the changes that each strata has upon the others.

Extra life, we could say, is not a feature of game play, but game play as a *becoming*. Becoming what? Becoming PS9. Teleport yours today.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

STATEMENTS ON WORK
ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES



DAN ARPS

*The work is colonised by forms referencing architecturally to satellite spy stations and utopian biosphere structures; and computer generated bio-morphic forms from science fiction cinema, films that posit a formless and unseen enemy that is at once everywhere and nowhere beyond comprehension and infinitely dangerous.*¹

Curator of an exhibition *Rumble in the Bronx* 1999 that was held in a disused video arcade, artist Dan Arps has a longstanding interest in video games that culminates in his unfolding sculpture *Impending doom* 2003. The work maps the spaces of first-person-shooter game *Doom* 1994 as an imperfect scale model.

Working from notes, drawings and his memory Arps set about replicating the curious first-person space of the game. At once static and dynamic, the game space constantly shifts in relationship to the shooter. The player can stay put while the architectural space navigates around the player, an impossible space to try to render in static form. *Impending doom* deploys a system of expanding and contracting spaces to cope with this complex spatial dynamic. Miniature spaces contained by collapsible drawers give way to full-scale folding furniture, as his work oscillates between actual and virtual space.

Doom spaces are quintessential no-places, stacked with hidden doors and secret passages. Moreover the game space is a completely virtual space, modelled in coordinates outside of the physical world. Plotting the game space in x, y and z coordinates Arps' work alludes to limits of representation. His work requires an alternative mapping of space; a mapping based on a virtual bookmark and grounded in the off-key coordinates of cyber-space, a mapping translated into the viewer's space.

¹ Artist's statement 2003

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1978 born Christchurch. Lives and works in Auckland.

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2002 *Complex (drawing towards an articulation of the fourth dimension)*
Starkwhite Gallery, Auckland
- 2001 *New Contemporaries: abstract art Rm401 gallery, Auckland*
- 2000 *A winter garden* The Physics Room, Christchurch

Selected group exhibitions

- 2002 *Break* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
- 2001 *Fuse* Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin
- Trash* Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, Australia
- 1999 *Evergreen* Platform Artists' Space, Melbourne, Australia

Further reading

- 2002 Simon Rees 'Point Break' *Visit # 5*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, p.5

ALEX CECCHETTI

The video work *St Francesco's trilogy* 2001 is a meditation on spiritual conflict and confrontation. The middle scene in the film has the saint-as-rock-star engaged in spiritual communion by the side of the road, while two members of the band remark on rather more cynical spiritual offerings. Their spiritual discontent is played out in the next scene when a dubious miracle takes place, questionably healing a girl's amputated leg.

The narrative is set in the first episode, the early life of the saint. Above a water tank, two boys called Francesco are play-fighting, kicking and punching. It's not till later, once the Shellac soundtrack has reached its most confrontational moment, that we realise that the action of the boys is being controlled by a third character, a girl, enthusiastically thumbing an imaginary game console, and yelling out instructions, "I said flying kick!" But the boy implores, "When do we use the secret move?" and the girl retorts, "Forget the secret move! I said flying kick!"

Rather than read a literal moral from this scene where the boy's games are a precursor of later spiritual conflict or an indicator of a profligate youth overcome in later life, Cecchetti revels in the futility of children's games. Cecchetti uses the devices of games and cinema, holding the action in freeze-frame while subtitles swell up on screen in coloured, 1980s 3-D typefaces. Cecchetti's own nihilistic, eye-of-god position as director enables him to operate as the meta-character in the Saint's evolution. Like the girl in the first scene, controlling the puppet strings to the boy's mock battle, Cecchetti is the unseen designer of the film. Like the game designer, his role is only ever implied, the seamless construction of the film/game attributable to a higher intelligence.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1973 born Terni, Italy. Lives and works in Milan, Italy.

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2003 *Alex Cecchetti Analix Forever Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland*
- 2002 *Blind 1* Galeria Viafarini, Milan, Italy

Selected group exhibitions

- 2003 *Someone to watch over me* SMART Projects, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2002 *EXIT Mondadori* Fondazione Sandretto Re, Turin, Italy
- 2001 *The 1st Tirana Biennale* Tirana, Italy

Further reading

- 2003 Michele Robecchi 'Ouverture: Alex Cecchetti' in *Flash Art* January-February, p.103
- 2002 Francesco Bonami *EXIT Mondadori*, Milan
- Lucca Cerizza 'Critic's Picks: EXIT', <http://www.artforum.com>, November

et al.

O-studies 2002 is a series of three interactive computer based works, comprised of a modified PC, furniture, and a canvas blind scrawled with a philosophical text fragment. Set up as if it were a multi-player scenario, each *O-studies* work is discrete, similar to the next one, and running the same interactive memory game. The parallel soundtracks run together in an atonal medley of experimental music and the work is driven by flat, two-dimensional design and a series of confusing word prompts.

Equal parts instruction piece and puzzle, the animation requires a series of prompts from the user to move from level to level. The confusing aesthetics of the et al. collective defies the traditional logic of maps, characters or linear narratives. With very few clues as to how to play, the gamer is left to trial and error by clicking or double clicking on the rapidly moving icons on screen. An errant click will result in punishment, regression to the previous screen. Any sense of a normal, linear game structure is distorted to create a feeling of impotence and passivity.

The soundtrack, the wall painting and the persistently moving objects conspire to produce an addictive game environment. The strong design thread that runs throughout the installation is characteristic of the et al. collective, and it is this pervasive use of a design aesthetic that creates an immersive environment, akin to a game space. Shadowy grey, it's an environment in which alternative logic and incoherence flourishes. Mutely interactive, this diagram/psycho-map challenges the game industry's irrevocable move to replicating three-dimensional space. Rather than navigate the uneasy space between reality and virtual reality, this work flutters into the slipstream of the fantastic, a cul-de-sac of infinite proportions.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

includes lionel b, Minerva betts, l budd, cj (arthur) craig & sons, marlene cubewell, merit grøting, p mule, blanche ready-made all presently living and working in Auckland

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2003 *et al. abnormal mass delusions?* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
- 2001 *Simultaneous Invalidations, second attempt* Artspace, Auckland
- 1996 *L. budd and G. Treadgold* Teststrip gallery, Auckland

Selected group exhibitions

- 2002 *Good Work: The Jim & Mary Barr collection* Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin; City Gallery, Wellington
- 1999 *Toi Toi Toi: three generations of artists from New Zealand* Museum Fredericianum, Kassel, Germany; Auckland Art gallery Toi O Tamaki, Auckland

Further reading

- 2003 Jim Barr, Mary Barr, Greg Burke, ed.s, *arguments for immortality* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
- 2000 Jim Barr, Mary Barr and Robert Leonard *Who Do I Think I Am?* Artspace, Auckland
- 1999 Jonathan Bywater "L.Budd et al." *Home and Away: Contemporary Australian and New Zealand art from the Chartwell Collection*, Auckland Art Gallery & David Bateman Ltd., Auckland

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

OMER FAST

Omer Fast's documentary film *A tank translated 2002* is an eerie overlay of dialogue with four Israeli tank drivers. As the tank commander, gunner, loader and driver speak about their experiences through subtitles, the artist makes subversive changes to their testimony.

A four channel video work interviewing each of the tank drivers, the work is configured on plinths that match the physical position of each soldier within the tank. The interviews run concurrently with subtitles, as the drivers liken their experience inside the tank to a video game. The driver compares the gear shaft to a joystick, and the view out the tank window to the viewfinder of the game display. Describing potshots at real buildings and real people on one of the world's longest running war fronts this work takes on a surreal and disturbing tone as the driver projects himself imaginatively into a virtual game space.

The film tracks between documentary and fictional film genres. The errant subtitles slip in an out of a sometimes galling humour as one soldier has trouble distinguishing between the real and the virtual world. In a swift malapropism his actions are no longer executed for his "captain", but for the "camera". The work reveals the extent to which we live in a world already mediated by media. The slippage between documentary and fiction film in this work highlights a simultaneous slide between video games and digital films, making them increasingly difficult to distinguish, as games and videos are manufactured, produced and marketed in tandem.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1972 born Jerusalem, Israel. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2003 *Omer Fast* Postmasters Gallery New York, United States
- 2002 *A Tank translated* Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt, Germany
- 2002 *based upon TRUE STORIES* Witt de With, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Selected group exhibitions

- 2003 *Pol.i.tic* Sadie Bronfmann Centre, Montreal, Canada
- 2002 *Monitor; video 2* Gagosian Gallery, New York, United States
- 2002 *Whitney Biennial of American Art* Whitney Museum of Art, New York, United States

Further reading

- 2003 Carolyn Christov-Barkargiev 'Omer Fast,' in *Cream 3*, Phaidon Press, London
- 2002 Jennifer Allen 'A Tank Translated' *Inside Out*, Festival of Contemporary Art Publishing, Berlin
- 2002 Judicæel Lavrador *Omer Fast: I want to tell you something* GB Publishing, Paris

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

NINA FISCHER & MAROAN EL SANI

*The interface with technology during our performance with the car was like an interactive game with the car navigation system. The result or aim of the game was to drive the logo as perfect as you and the navigation system could.*¹

A conceptual drawing *All roads lead to Rome - a line made by driving* 1999 uses a Global Positioning System (GPS) installed in the artists' car, to trace their road journey of Rome. Rather than travelling in a straight line from A to B, they roamed in two giant circles, constructing a drawing of the BMW logo, which doubled as a digital trace-map of their journey.

The work involved a guided exploration of physical space, like the virtual game space where the environment is laid out before the viewer. Moreover, the work borrows a number of visual conventions from arcade games. The ability to switch between views is a fundamental aesthetic convention of contemporary video games, as is the device of mapping your route in advance. GPS technology enabled a new view of the terrain, and prompted a driving experience mediated by satellite surveillance technology. The technology prompted an exploration game where the artists treated their immediate environment as topography for exploration.

All roads lead to Rome uses visual conventions from game design; multiple viewpoints and the ability to shift from view to view. It points out an underlying representational shift at work that is distinct from merely borrowing the aesthetics of game design. In Chomsky-an terms, the work reflects the *Arcadia* exhibition's investigation of the 'deep structure' of game systems, codes and languages, in relation to the techniques of representation: the shifting view point, the endless close ups, the things that technology makes accessible.

¹ Artists' statement 2003

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1965 born Emden, Germany. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.
1966 born Duisberg, Germany. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Selected solo exhibitions

2002 *Maroan & el Sani* Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin, Germany
2001 *Aventura Artists Platform* Vaasa, Finland
1999 *Tsunami and other secrets* Kunst Haus Dresden, Dresden, Germany

Selected group exhibitions

2003 *From Dust to Dust: art between light and dirt*
Chartottenborg Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark
2002 *(The World May Be) Fantastic* 13th Biennale of Sydney,
Sydney, Australia
2002 *P-A-U-S-E* 4th Gwangju Biennale, Seoul, Korea

Further reading

2002 Boris Groys 'The Aura of Profane Illumination' (*The World May Be*)
Fantastic, Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, pp.77-80
2001 Jennifer Allen 'Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani' *Artforum*
March, p.154
1999 Krystian Woznicki 'Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani'
Frieze #48 September - October, pp.107-108

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

PIERRE JOSEPH & MEHDI BELHAJ-KACEM

Pierre Joseph worked with philosopher Mehdi Belhaj-Kacem to develop the script for his *Trickster theory* 2002 as part of the *No ghost just a shell* project. Using Annlee's shop-fitted default characteristics and an almost single-frame image Joseph and Belhaj-Kacem directed Annlee to recite in French an essay, with a female voiceover and a male translator. The essay he/she reads is one long paragraph, a meditation on creation, collective action and the convergence of art and games.

The essay describes a game as a "new esthetic form, neither narrative, nor figurative", and the stakes of the game are to become co-existential with art. The text also refers to creation and the creators of the game. In just one of many subtle double plays on Annlee's predicament, we wonder who are Annlee's creators. In fact the quote about the game's form is an apt description of the *No ghost just a shell* project as a whole; it isn't narrative, nor descriptive, but enmeshed in a virtual limbo. Annlee is loaded up with narratives, which it reads or recites, but the character itself is not a narrative, the project just becomes a collective of so many stories. Similarly, Annlee's image is representational or figurative, but she is a mere fictional character, a sketch, a fantasy, her image does not describe an objective reality.

The Annlee project, with its decentralised point of production dispersed amongst many artists, collectively launched a new debate about that status of the (readymade) art object, the status of an individual art maker, intellectual property rights and copyright legislation. The project asserts a host of shifts in current representational paradigms, one where games are on a par with art.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1965 born Caen, France. Lives and works in Nice, France

Selected solo exhibitions

2002 *Outside the walls, outside the group, outside identity* Lycée des
Glières, Little Democracy Chateau de Rivau, Chinon, France
1998 *Pierre Joseph* Galerie Air de Paris, Paris, France

Selected group exhibitions

2003 *The Living Museum* Museum of Modern Art, Frankfurt, Germany
GPS: representing the modern world and what it means
Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
2001 *Cognissance* (prelude to) 6th Lyon Biennale de Art Contemporain,
Lyon, France

Further reading

2000 Pierre Restany 'If on the others idea of art' *Domus* # 822 January,
pp.81-86
1998 Mark Gisbourne 'Whatever happened to Paris'
Contemporary Visual Arts # 18, pp.18-25
1996 Giorgio Verzotti 'No man's time' *Artforum* November, pp.148-149

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

SEAN KERR

Artist Sean Kerr codes his animations from the ground up, building his 'googley' eyes as a string of code in Microsoft Director™. His radar-like work *Bruce (The watcher)* 2003 is part of a series of works that use a pair of cartoon-style eyes. Kerr anthropomorphize screen technology by having one eye each on a pair of monitors, making the plastic outline of the monitors like the frame of a fashionable pair of square-rimmed spectacles.

This work uses a surveillance camera as a motion sensor, feeding the co-ordinates of the viewer to two display TVs. The cartoon-style eyes move according to the coordinates of the motion, as if the monitors were really watching the viewer. Simultaneously, the viewer triggers *Bruce* to call out critical comments.

Although it seems as if we are being watched and spoken to by someone with artificial intelligence, *Bruce* doesn't have a personality. He takes his name from a generic voice in Simpletext software, a voice that reads aloud any text file on an Apple computer. The words he reads are comments from previous gallery visitors.

The work seems like an interactive artwork, the viewer can make the eyes track around the exhibition space, and can prompt *Bruce* to read out text. But as with most game experiences, the work is interactive only in limited ways, as we can only affect *Bruce* in a set number of ways. This limited interactivity is a bit like customising your computer; you can change the setup of your desktop, but only from a menu of pre-determined choices.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1968 born Wellington. Lives and works in Auckland

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2002 *Bartley Nees Project* Bartley Nees Gallery, Wellington
- 2001 *DOT part IV* Moving Image Centre, Auckland

Selected group exhibitions

- 2002 *Media City 2nd* Seoul Biennale, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea
- 2001 *Prospects 2001* City Gallery, Wellington
- 1998 *Leap of Faith* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Further reading

- 2002 Sean Kerr 'The conversation' *Digital Sublime, Media City 2nd* Seoul Biennale, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul, p.73
- 2001 Mitchell Whitelaw *Stacker* Artspace, Sydney
- 2000 Felicity Milburn *Uneasy spaces* Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch

FENG MENGBO

Feng Mengbo endorses fantasy as fertile territory for making work. His latest works are modifications of the gory, gun slaying game *Quake III arena*. Mengbo has inserted himself into the game by developing his own avatar. Wearing regulation camouflage-pants but naked from the waist up, his carefully drawn avatar runs, jumps and shoots its way through the game. He becomes a live action robot, playing against other on-line gamers. In one hand he carries a Mini-DV camcorder, filming the action the whole time, and in the other, his weapon. *Ah_Q* 2003 is the documentation of one of his live online exchanges with other players.

Mengbo's video-toting avatar is every ounce a stereotyped Asian tourist, on hand to record the nuances of these bloody events in digital clarity. Mengbo records a modern splatter movie, gory to the point of banal numbness. The work mimics pre-recorded, passive game scenes and draws attention to the blurry line between cinema and game industries.

Mengbo's work projects the artist into the game space, developing a psychology and identity that is particular to the game. Both attracted and repelled by the violence of video games Mengbo argues that; "I want to do the documentation of all the terrible things. If something happens, I want to be there". With the shadow of China's cultural revolution still fresh in his memory Mengbo beguilingly reveals, "When I was a young boy, I want to be soldier in the Chinese Army, and I wanted to be an artist, too." Irreverently casting himself into the Code of online gaming, Mengbo has achieved his goal. His real-time performance experience in the virtual realm means he can live simultaneously as both artist and efficient killing machine. He may be the first artist that can be downloaded via the Internet.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1966 born Beijing, China.

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2003 *Past virtualised — Future cloned: Feng Mengbo 1994-2003* Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2002 *Q4U* The Renaissance Society, Chicago, United States
- 2001 *Feng Mengbo: phantom tales* DIA Center for the Arts, New York, United States

Selected group exhibitions

- 2003 *Cyber Asia media art in the near future* Hiroshima City Museum of contemporary Art, Hiroshima, Japan
- 2002 *Documenta 11*, Museum Friedricianum, Kassel, Germany
- 2001 *Living in time* Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany

Further reading

- 2002 Brian Wallis 'Documenta 11' *Artforum* May, p.87
- 1998 Jonathan Goodman 'Feng Mengbo at Holly Solomon' *Art In America*, September, p.126
- Henry Tsang 'Uncertain pleasures' *Art Asia Pacific* # 17, pp.29-31

WARREN OLDS

Designed by Olds, *Befriend* 2003 is a digital typeface, a perfectly dematerialized object. Available as freeware by emailing the artist, the 'all caps' letter system can be applied to as many different uses as there are users, creating a spreading system of branded interaction. Hooking into the open architecture of the gaming community, freeware is a democratic system designed to make software available for all users. It's also a pervasive technique for dispersing information amongst a sub-culture. Such a highly codified typeface like *Befriend* is perfect for communicating with non-mainstream clans. Its square format runs together in an organic way, recalling the ebullient Art Nouveau and the blocky Viennese Secession period typefaces. The font is not transparently easy to read, and reinforces a sense of belonging to a unique subculture established by a unique visual code.

The font is reminiscent of those of the 1960s. The rapid expansion of typography was due at that time to the development of photo setting, an analogue technology, whereas now the flowering of typefaces is due to digitisation. In both cases however, technology played a central role. In *Befriend* a sense of digital decay is apparent in the way that the solid blocks of black teeter off into white space. The angular and exaggerated font is also highly reminiscent of the PS2 branding launched in David Lynch's surrealist advertising cartoons.

Olds also developed the branding and gallery signage associated with the *Arcadia* exhibition. Both the exhibition branding and the font are a kind of meta-project, one that signals the increasing proximity of art and design. The project proposes a progressive, interlocking discursive framework for information sharing; an interface that users are seldom aware of when sitting down to use Microsoft Word™.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1973 born Dunedin. Lives and works in Hamilton.

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2002 *Tonight's broadcast was supposed to be a celebration*
Rm401 gallery, Auckland
2001 *Mobile HQ* The Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin
1999 *Handbag jungle* S*W*A*B gallery, Christchurch

Selected group exhibitions

- 2002 *Fibreiculture digital film festival* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
Honestly: new artists 2002 Artspace, Auckland
1998 *Bland* George Fraser Gallery, Auckland

Further reading

- 2002 Susan Ballard 'Exhibitions: Dunedin' *Art New Zealand* # 104 Spring, pp.50-51
Danny Butt '

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

JULIAN OPIE

Julian Opie's large-scale wallpaper landscape *Trucks birds wind* 2000 creates a flat two-dimensional environment. Based on the concept of a computer screensaver it is held in a state of suspended animation, the work's understated soundtrack burbles ever onward, as the action in the landscape remains the same. A "landscape tradition in collision with its synthetic future," Opie's installation is immersive and minimalist, like a video game environment, a space where the walls act as a backdrop for the action. His engineered images can be interposed from medium to medium, with mutable, digital precision. But it's the precise 'lack' of action that propels these images into the hyperspace of video game territory.

Opie's installation is a no-place, a generic, synthetic space that is poised between states, between night and day, between real and imagined. Abandoned and alone in the room with Opie's wallpaper painting and its nuanced soundtrack that hovers on the threshold of consciousness it's easy to imagine that this is the space of the video game, the point at which the player has just departed. Like the moments when Lara Croft is held in perpetual pause while the user makes a cup of tea, the game on hold, Opie's work fashions a deliberate space of vacuous, sensuous, enjoyment.

Alex Coles 'Julian Opie's feel good landscapes', *Artext* Spring 2002, p.73.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1958 born London, England.

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2002 *Berlin classics* Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, Germany
2001 *Julian Opie* Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, United Kingdom
1994 *Julian Opie* Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom

Selected group exhibitions

- 2002 *Remix: contemporary art and pop* Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom
2002 *Projects 77 billboard project* Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States
2000 *Drive: power, progress, desire* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

Further reading

- 2000 Greg Burke and Hanna Scott *Drive: power, progress, desire*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, p.48
1998 Simon Grant 'Julian Opie' *Every day* 11th Biennale of Sydney, Jonathan Watkins ed., Sydney, p.172
1994 James Roberts *Julian Opie* Thames and Hudson, London

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 1 0 1 1 1 2 1 3 1 4 1 5 1 6 1 7 1 8 1 9 2 0 2 1 2 2 2 3 2 4 2 5 2 6
2 7 2 8 2 9 3 0 3 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 3 5 3 6 3 7 3 8 3 9 4 0 4 1 4 2 4 3 4 4 4 5 4 6 4 7 4 8

HYE RIM LEE

*TOKI exists somewhere between dream and fantasy, between conscious and sub-conscious reality. TOKI's world asks us to consider the boundaries between reality and fantasy in a world where more and more of us live in the virtual as much as the real.*¹

The recurring character in Hye Rim Lee's projects is *TOKI*, a human-like cyber bunny. Part of a larger body of work describing *The birth of TOKI*, a digital creation story, the digital stills describe the trajectory of her character along a virtual production line. "By presenting incomplete cyborgs I question the myth of technological perfection and by association, our modern obsession with transformation." Documenting several phases in the graphic production process *TOKI*'s perfect features are constructed in wire frame, 'join-the-dots' accuracy. Like a Photoshop™ image painstakingly rendered with multiple layers, *TOKI*'s image is also constructed in a transparent way, exposing the make-up of the animated image.

TOKI is well aware of her own status as a mass-produced readymade. Lee has converted *TOKI*'s anime image into an inflatable doll, the merchandise for her art installations. An artist's edition of 1,000 the dolls are a complicit part of a mass cultural identity, reflecting a collective rather than individualistic identity. Lee's assembly-line character implies a world of overproduction, a competitive world where an individual life is dispensable. *The birth of TOKI* describes a kind of evolution, albeit for a super-feminine, aestheticised heroine.

¹ Artist's statement 2003

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1963 born Seoul, Korea. Lives and works in Auckland

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2003 *Hello Toki* Anna Bibby Gallery, Auckland
- 2002 *Hello Toki* the Moving Image Centre, Auckland
- 2002 *Night vision* Public projection project, Freyberg Place, Auckland

Selected group exhibitions

- 2002 *Break* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
- Small Time* George Fraser Gallery, Auckland
- 2001 *Streets ahead Streets alive* NZ Film Archive, Auckland

Further reading

- 2002 Simon Rees 'Point Break' *Visit # 5*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, p.5

SUPERFLEX

*A highly networked, self-organising player population is given the tools to customise and extend games, create new levels, modifications and characters. What emerges is a decentralised culture that rapidly learns, adapts and selects for best practices*¹

Counter-strike by Danish collective Superflex explores the cooperative strategies at work behind the counter-terrorism video game of the same name. Superflex appropriate the game *Counter-strike* wholesale and install it on a bank of CPUs for public access. A live, multi-player game, it is played on-line in teams. The installation is an allegory for collective action and social cooperation.

The vast network of self-organised clans that vie for dominance on the internet testify that the game is strongly social, dependent on highly cooperative team interaction, and increasingly a level of complicit co-operation with game developers. The installation of the game runs parallel with a suite of self-service video documentaries about self-organisation and cooperative social strategies.

Counter-strike is itself a modification of the game *Half-Life*, an equal parts shoot-em-up, puzzle and exploration game. Modifications are one of the ways that the shelf life of gaming product is extended. In truly adaptive style gamers make alterations to the game environment, add characters, change spaces, using open-source code. The intersection of open software and on-line social dynamics propels the evolution of gaming software into new territory.

Strategic teams are all important to success on the *Counter-strike* circuit. Survival of the fittest is the rule of law, and it's clear that some strategies are more successful than others. Evaluation of individual and collective skill level and experience are crucial, just as the position of your leading sharpshooter can be a decisive decision in a successful sortie.

¹ J. C. Herz 'Gaming the system: multi player worlds on line' in *Game On: the history and culture of video games*, Lucien Kind ed., Laurence King Publishing, London, 2002, p.97

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1997 founded in Copenhagen, Denmark by Bjørnstjerne Christiansen, Jakob Fenger and Rasmus Nielsen

Selected projects

- 2003 *Social pudding with Rikrit Tirvanija* Leipzig, Germany; Bangkok, Thailand
- 2002 *Counter-strike* Rooseum Centre for Contemporary Art, Malmö, Sweden
- 2001 *Diesel Lukket in collaboration with Diesel Fashion Industries* Copenhagen, Denmark
- Super Game* Corcoran Gallery, Washington, Unites States
- 1999 *Biogas* Artspace, Sydney, Australia

Further reading

- 2003 Doris Berger and Superflex *Superflex Tools* Kunstverein Wolfsburg, Wolfsburg
- 2000 Henrik Plenge Jakobsen and Lars Bang Larsen eds. *Remarks on Interventive tendencies*, Borgen Publishing/DCA, Copenhagen
- 1998 Åsa Nacking 'Superflex' Gilda Williams ed. *Cream*, Phaidon, London, pp.376-379

RICKY SWALLOW

Evolution (in order of appearance) 1999 by Ricky Swallow takes a gentle swipe at the entertainment industry in its title credits, suggesting that our Darwinian ideas about evolution are now mediated by cinema experiences, from *Planet of the apes* to *Terminator 2*. The work stacks five cast-resin skulls side-by-side, demonstrating just such a perverse evolution: from hi-brow Cyborg flat head through Neanderthal to *Homo sapiens* in five easy segues.

This 'key-chain' history of human development signals a species in identity crisis. A science fiction nightmare, the survival of the fittest has been merchandised to its logical extreme. Like *memento mori*, the skulls create nostalgia for our recent past; a reminder of the perils of accelerated competition and genetic engineering and hypothetical environments that have the potential to run out of control. The ordering of skulls, with its concession to the movies, triggers an alternative order, a way of charting human development without the positivistic model of progress put forward by evolution. If random mutations become the true hallmark of contemporary 'A.I.' then where will human evolution end?

His nostalgic *Apple* 2000 one painted in outmoded rainbow stripes the other in the similarly dated PC Tower Box gray borrow the designer aesthetics of hardware design. The apples, with telltale bites removed, could be a Christian reference to 'the fall', but could equally spell out the sad demise of talented mathematician and cryptographer Alan Turing, forefather of the modern computer industry, who died as a result of eating a cyanide-coated apple. Swallow's archeology of signs has excavated a thriller in our midst from this 'fossil fruit'. Swallow takes the simulated world of computer games and produces 3D versions of their likely output; hypothetical props for a hyper modern world. The technicolour apple, a genetically modified cousin of a contemporary apple, could be engineered by technology to slot into a perfectly branded world.

SELECTED BIOGRAPHY

1974 born San Remo, Australia. Lives and works in Los Angeles, United States

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2002 *Wooden problem* Karyn Lovegrove Gallery, Los Angeles, United States
2001 *For those who came in late* University of California Berkeley Art Museum + Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, United States
2000 *Unplugged* Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, Australia

Selected group exhibitions

- 2001 *So You Want to be a rock star: portraits and rock music in Australia* National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Australia
2000 *Are you experienced?* The Physics Room, Christchurch
1999 *Contempora 5* Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne University, Melbourne, Australia

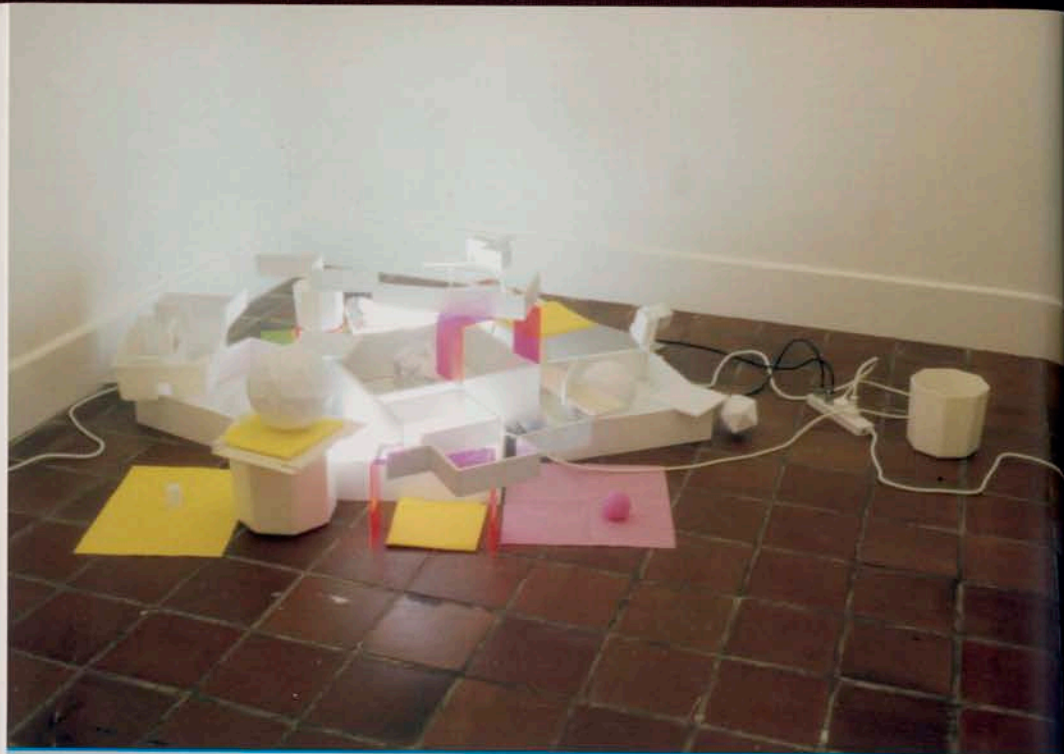
Further reading

- 2001 Daniel Palmer 'Shadow play' *Frieze* #
2000 Felicity Fenner 'New Life in Melbourne' *Art in America* January, pp.74-77
Justin Paton *Ricky Swallow: above ground sculpture* Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin

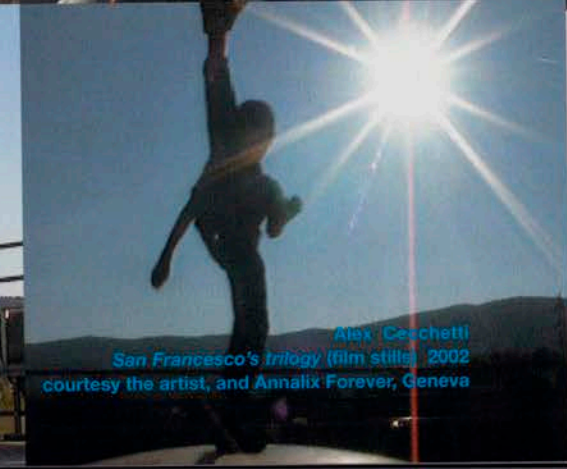
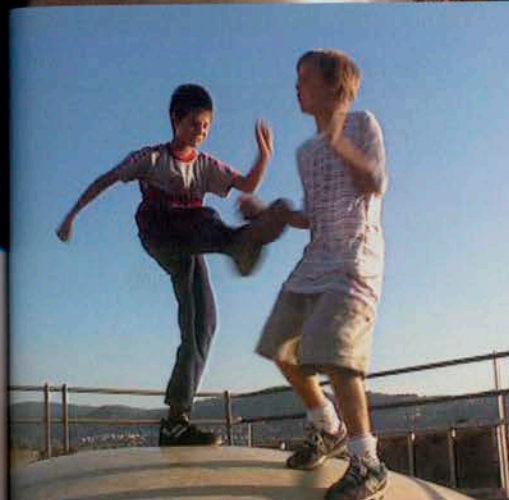
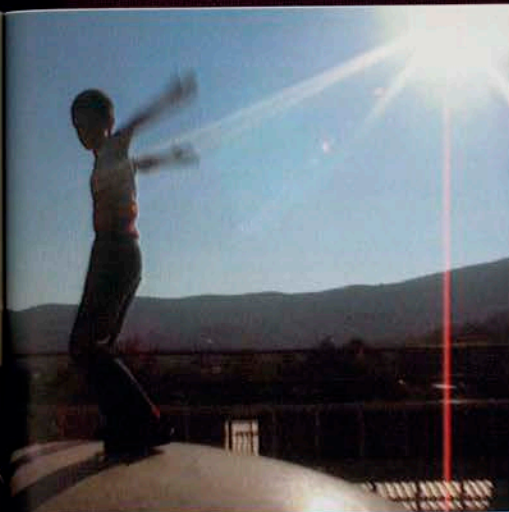
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THE EXHIBITION

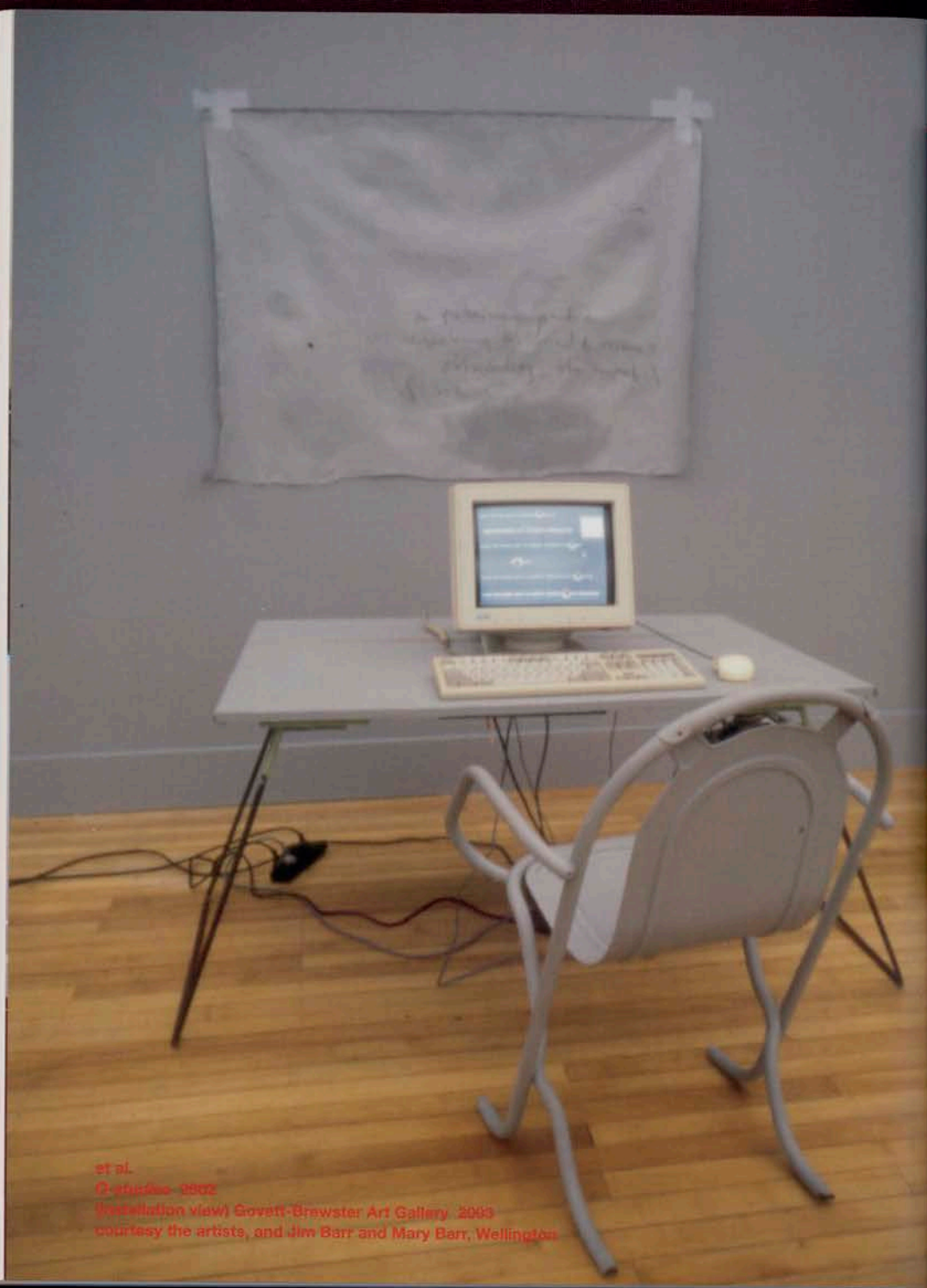




Dan Arps
Impending doom 2003
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artist



Alex Cozzetti
San Francisco's trilogy (film stills) 2002
courtesy the artist, and Annalix Forever, Geneva



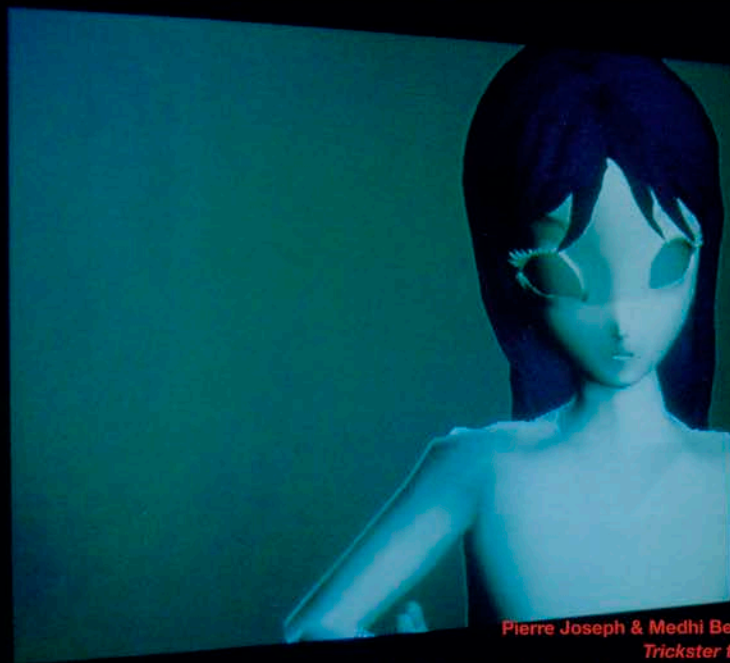
et al.
Q-studio 2002
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2003
courtesy the artists, and Jim Barr and Mary Barr, Wellington



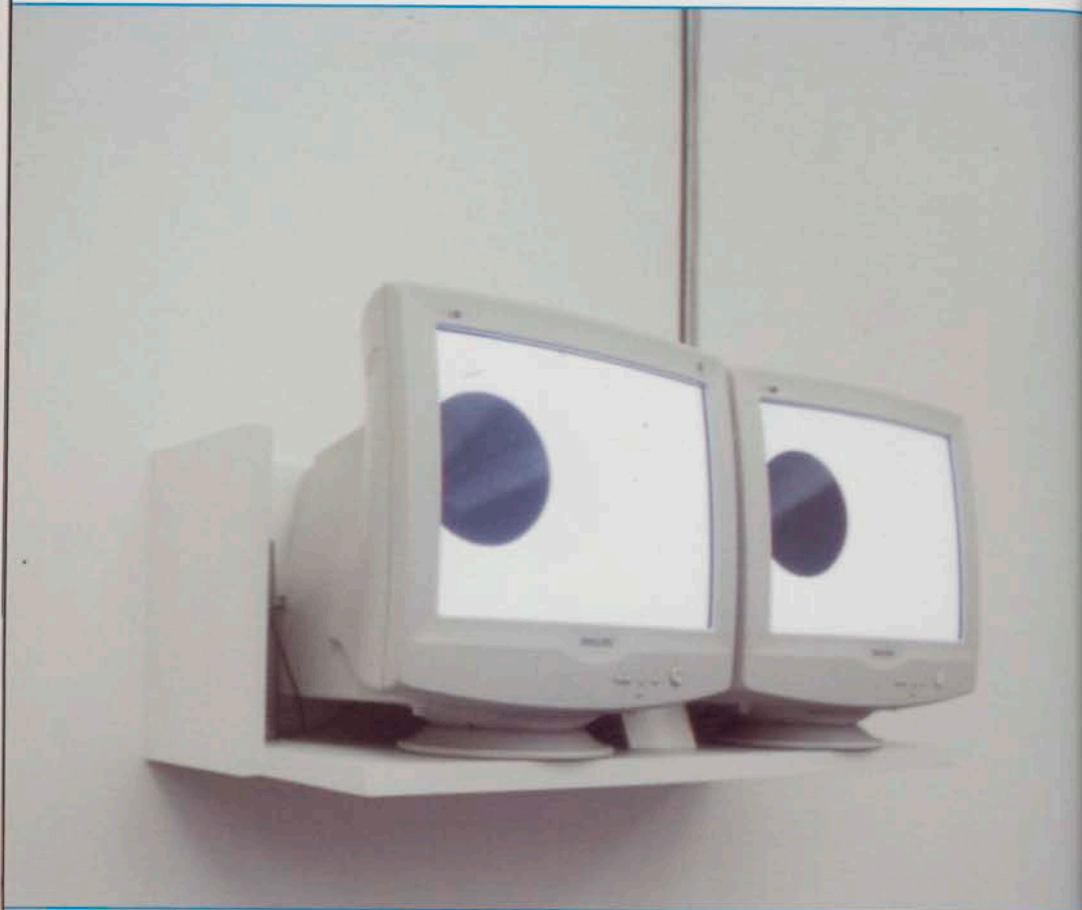
Omer Fast
A tank translated 2002
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, 2003
courtesy the artist, and Postmasters, New York



Nina Fischer & Maroan El Sani
All roads lead to Rome - a line made by driving 1999
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artists, and Galerie Eigen + Art, Berlin



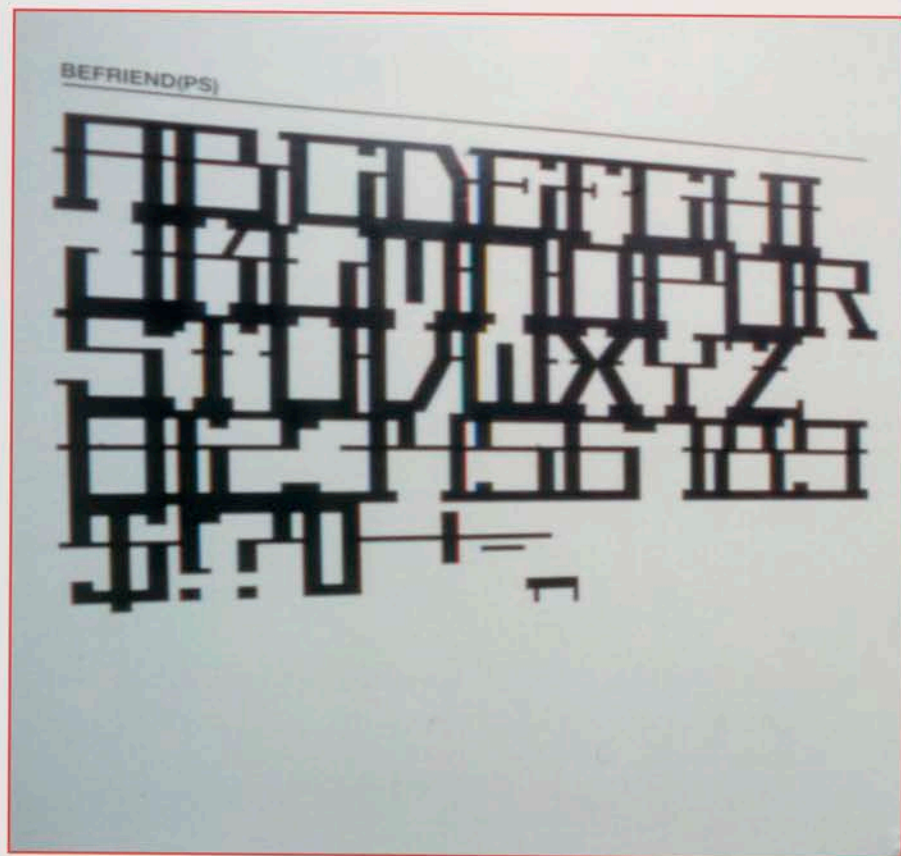
Pierre Joseph & Medhi Belhaj-Kacem
Trickster theory 2002
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artists, and Galerie Air de Paris, Paris



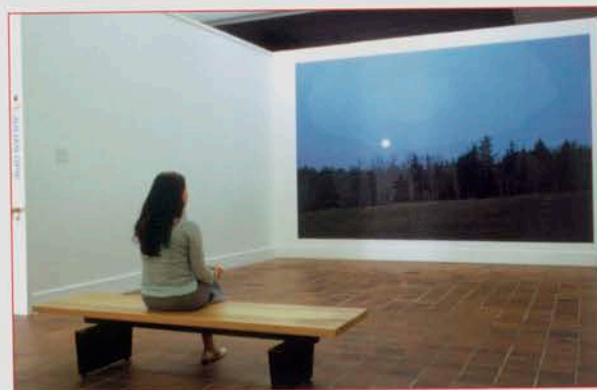
Sean Kerr
Bruce (the watcher) 2003
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artist



Feng Mengbo
Ah_Q (movie) (film stills) 2002
courtesy the artist



Warren Olds
Befriend 2003
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artist

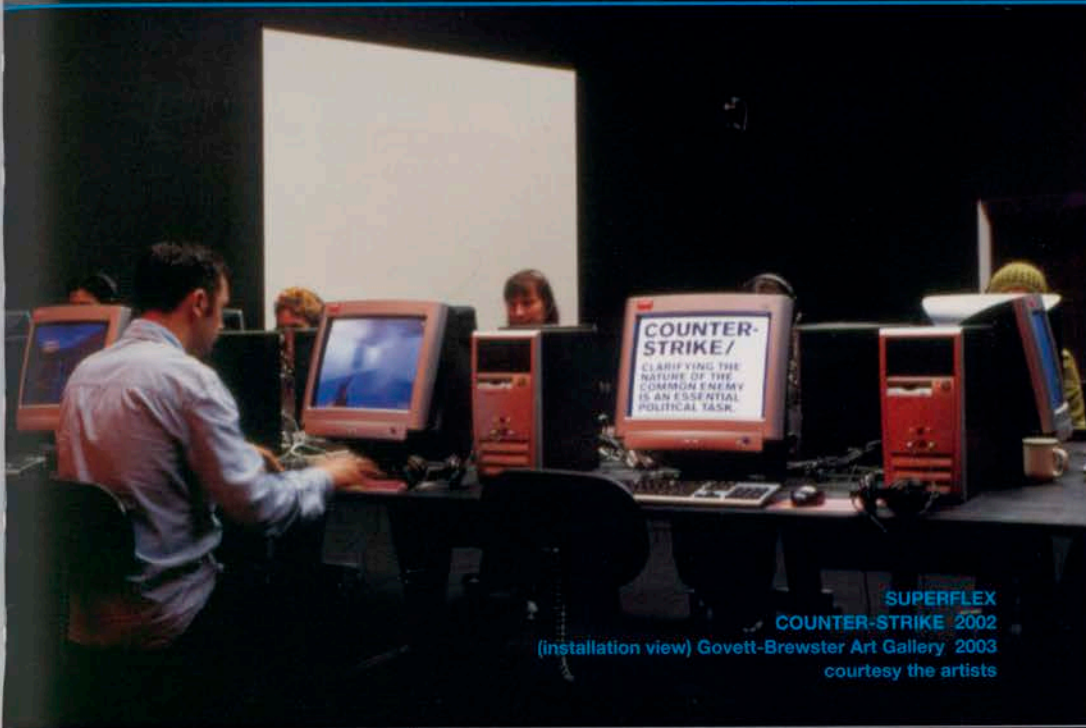


Julian Opie
Trucks birds wind 2000
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artist, and Lisson Gallery, London



Hye Rim Lee
Mesh (The Birth of TOKI series) 2003, Smooth (The Birth of TOKI series) 2003,
Patch (The Birth of TOKI series) 2003
(Installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artist

COUNTER-STRI



SUPERFLEX
COUNTER-STRIKE 2002
(Installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artists



Ricky Swallow
Apple 2000 2000, Evolution(in order of appearance) 1999 and Grey apple core 2000
(installation view) Govett-Brewster Art Gallery 2003
courtesy the artist, Jim Barr and Mary Barr, Wellington and John McCormack, Auckland

Published in 2003 by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in association with the exhibition *Arcadia: the other life of video games* 10 May – 20 July 2003, at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. And the subsequent tour of *Extra Lives: arcadia the other life of video games* to The Gus Fisher Gallery, University of Auckland, 6 September – 18 October, 2003.

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Gregory Burke is Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and is responsible for initiating this acclaimed series of thematic shows and catalogues including: *Drive: power, progress, desire*; *Feature: art, life and cinema*; *Extended Play: art remixing music*. In December 2003 Burke is presenting the sixth exhibition in this series titled *Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime*.

Edward Colless

Essayist Edward Colless is Head of the School of Art History and Theory at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne. Colless has been published in a variety of journals, catalogues and anthologies, within Australia and internationally. An anthology of his own essays, *The error of my ways*, was published in 1995 by the IMA, Brisbane. Colless has also worked as a curator, a filmmaker and theatre director. He is currently buried in two large-scale projects: *Porno chic* and *Sample culture*.

Hanna Scott

Curator of *Arcadia: the other life of video games* Hanna Scott is currently Arts Editor for influential New Zealand magazine *Pavement* and is working for the 2003 Auckland Festival. Her recent projects include *Honestly: new artists* (2002) at Artspace, Auckland and *Deep down: Joyce Campbell* (2001) at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

cover image: Julian Opie *This is Fiona* 2001
courtesy the artist, and Lisson Gallery, London

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

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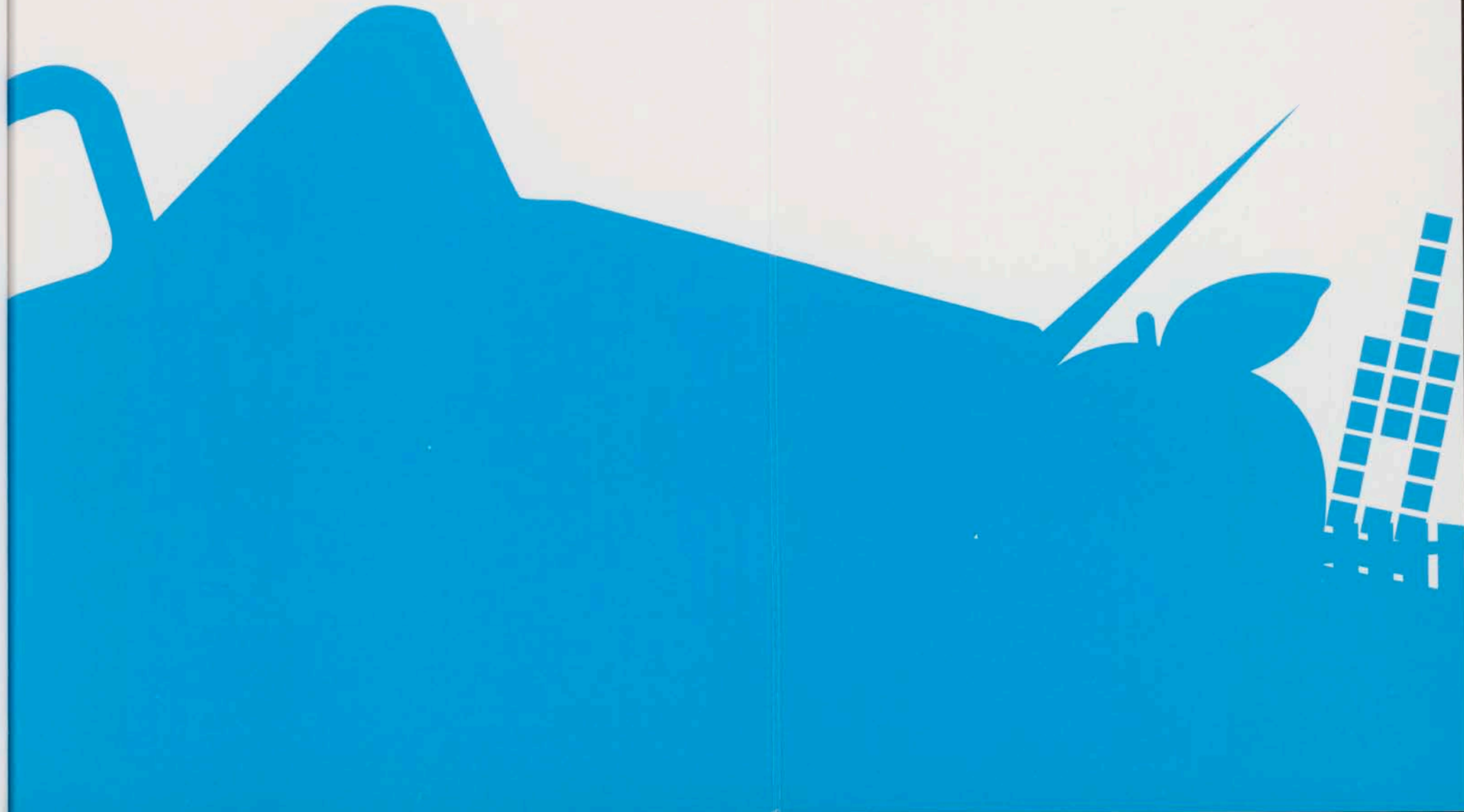
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