FACT explores the blurred boundaries between videogame spaces and real spaces with artists who use games as a subject, alongside playable, commercial games that push the limits of the medium.

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**INTRODUCTION**

From minimalist text-based adventure games to the detailed cities of Grand Theft Auto, the computer game environment has progressed towards increasing levels of realism. But what happens when game space and real space are confused?

Computer game environments are deceptively varied, but at their core tends to be a maze. Confining the player to an environment that clearly shows progression and achievement, the maze acts as a virtual mirror of the shopping malls, city streets and galleries that make up the ‘maze’ of everyday life. But the push towards increasing realism in computer games has rendered the simple mazes of Pac Man and Super Mario Brothers an anachronism. Games are no longer always defined by ‘progress’ in a strict sense - ie, defeating a level - but have become focused on creating an environment where the player is allowed the freedom to explore; one that looks and feels like the real world.

With this as a backdrop, two threads emerge. On one hand the exhibition looks at works that explore the computer game environment in new ways, from within the screen. Whether bringing rich, stretching environments to the forefront ([Flower or The Night Journey](Image 303x181 to 559x401)), or making modifications that subvert existing game environments ([CuteXdooom](Image 632x491 to 887x688)), or highlighting the imagined game space ([Player Map Archive, Collapsible Cave Adventure](Image 899x57 to 1154x261)), these works bring new perspectives to the computer game environment.

But what about the relationship between the real and the virtual? The exhibition also highlights the effects of blurred boundaries between game environments and physical environments. From re-entries of video games ‘in real life’ ([COSPlayers](Image 37x43 to 291x246)), to augmented reality games ([COSPlayers](Image 37x43 to 291x246)), to works that bring game data off the screen ([What It Is Without the Hand That Wields It](Image 632x491 to 887x688)), these works bring new perspectives to reality gaming. In an attempt to brighten everyday commutes ([The Obelisk and the Night Journey](Image 899x57 to 1154x261)), these works allow the audience to bring the gaming perspective to reality with a pair of do-it-yourself cardboard glasses bearing the ‘virtual’ weapon arm from the popular first-person shooter game, Counter-Strike. While the piece is a provocation on violence in computer games, the tongue-in-cheek nature of the two-dimensional image underlines how separate real space and game space are, each with their own set of rules.

**GALLERY 1**

**COSPlayers** (2004)

**Cao Fei**

Internationally acclaimed Chinese artist, Cao Fei explores the growing subculture of cosplay (costume play) against the backdrop of her hometown, Guangzhou. Here, a group of teenagers bring virtual battles to life while dressed in martial arts getups from their favourite computer games. In their fantastical outfits, the teenagers wreak havoc against the backdrop of one of China’s fastest growing cities. The next day, the unabashed spectacle is forgotten, as the city awakes, and the teenagers return to their everyday lives.

Amagatana (2009) Yuichiro Katsumoto

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The ordinary umbrella, a common weapon against the dreary weather, becomes an imaginative device for solo augmented-reality gaming. In an attempt to brighten everyday commutes through the city, the player swings the umbrella to hit an invisible opponent’s blade. A self-contained performance, the piece turns jousting into an endlessly entertaining form of independent gameplay.

**Ready Played** (2006)

**Ludic Society**

A video of individuals practising parcour – a growing sport of French origin where participants move efficiently through the city while climbing, jumping and crawling over urban objects – is projected and overlaid with computer game scores. While parcour is generally non-competitive, with this video Ludic Society bring it one step closer to the city-game genre, taking gamers beyond the screen to use the city as their gaming environment.

Ready Played (2006) Ludic Society

Ready Played (2006) Ludic Society

**First Person Shooter** (2006)

**Aram Bartholl**

The first-person shooter perspective has become a ubiquitous image for gamers, particularly the presence of the game character’s weapon-wielding arm at the bottom of the screen - used to shoot enemies and blow up buildings for points. Here, audiences can bring the gaming perspective to reality with a pair of do-it-yourself cardboard glasses bearing the ‘virtual’ weapon arm from the popular first-person shooter game, Counter-Strike.

Chinese Gold (2006)

**Uemborgan.com**

Mimicking the real (the game), with the virtually real (money), Uemborgan’s ‘Chinese Gold’ documents online gamers known as ‘Gold Farmers’. In their crowded offices, these underpaid gamers perform repetitive in-game actions for hours on end, collecting currency and points for characters that are then sold to American and European gamers via eBay. Accompanied by a manifesto from these politically contentious artists, the piece is a timely and relevant comment on the post-credit crunch world.

What It Is Without the Hand That Wields It (2008)

**Riley Harmon**

As gamers make a kill in Counter-Strike, the sculpture dispenses a blood-like liquid in real time that trails down the wall, making physical the game’s violent play data. The artist writes: “Violence is an inevitable, mechanical function of the human brain, hard-coded down through time by culture, genetics, and evolution. Mediated experiences of killing change our perception of violence and death. The trails left down the wall create a physical manifestation of nebulous kills.”

**Grand Theft Auto IV** (2008)

**Rockstar/Microsoft XBox**

Grand Theft Auto, the contentious cops-and-robbers gang game, takes its urban violence one step closer to reality in this latest version of the franchise. In a dark narrative that wouldn’t be out of place in a Tarantino film, this version takes the player into Liberty City, an environment modelled after New York City with a precision never before seen in the gaming world. The game adds a virtual layer to the real city: the intricate map and copied buildings would allow the skilled Liberty City tourist to navigate the real New York City with ease. Yet, the game’s brutal imagination is far from New York’s own American dream.

**Counter-Strike** (1999)

**Valve Software**

A popular game from the era where the now-ubiquitous ‘first-person shooter’ perspective was born, Counter-Strike is used in this exhibition as source material for two separate artists. It started as a player-made modification of an earlier game, Half Life, and became so popular that Valve eventually bought and commercialised it. Counter-Strike is a successful example of the kind of ‘level modding’ that game companies now actively encourage, by giving players sophisticated tools to create their own game universe.

Fracture (2008)

**LucasArts/Microsoft XBox**

A military action game, Fracture is notable for making ‘terrain deformation’ a central part of the gameplay: players can shape, mould, and change the game’s environment while playing, as part of their strategy to defeat enemies and win. If players can’t find a way around an obstacle, they might raise the ground itself or dig themselves a tunnel, all using a special weapon called ‘The Entrencher’. With this novel game concept, Fracture players can’t simply memorise the level’s terrain and move around it - the changing game environment is the game’s central challenge.

**GALLERY 2**

**Video Terraform Dance Party** (2009)

**Jeremy Bailey**

In Video Terraform Dance Party, Jeremy Bailey documents a performance where he plays an over-enthused geek creating his own dream environment in ‘God Mode’ – the all-seeing, all-knowing, powerful Creator perspective pioneered by the Sim City
franchise. Sporting a VR-mounted forehead controller, he demonstrates new modelling software that will allow him to hop his head to ‘plan the ideal landscape’.

Malfunction (2009)

Mark Essen

One of the rising stars of indie game art, Mark Essen makes lo-fi games using the colourful 2D graphics the commercial game industry has left behind. Playing one of a number of crew members on a space station who are systematically wiped out due to malfunction of the onboard computer, you carry out tasks to fix the problems and get back to sleep. By collecting secret information that the rest of the crew will depend on, the game requires you to work with subsequent players in the game who you may never meet. A new commission for Space Invaders, Malfunction is a cooperative game among players who never actually play together in the game – only by chance collaboration in real space can you share information to help you win.

LevelHead (2007)

Julian Oliver

Using a hand-held, solid plastic cube as its only interface, Julian Oliver’s LevelHead tricks and engages with the player’s spatial memory. On screen, it looks like each face of the cube contains a small room, which is logically connected to doors. In one of these rooms is a character, who can be transported from room to room by tilting the cube. The ultimate goal for the player is to direct the character out of the cube, where it will walk across the playing surface and vanish. LevelHead is an innovative example of simple augmented reality gaming, where virtual information is mapped over physical objects.

Play Generated Map and Document Archive (ongoing)

Timothy Hutchings with others

A common computer game environment is the dungeon, an elaborate maze that a player must navigate, one room (or cave) at a time, with limited directional information. Sometimes a map can be found partway through the level, helping players orient themselves, but often they are left guessing where they’ve been and where they were going, essentially building the game’s overall environment in their imaginations. The more dedicated dungeon game players create their own maps, charting their routes to assist them in beating the level. Here, Hutchings has collated and preserved a series of these maps from gamers’ own collections. These sketchy manuscripts and drawings from childhood communicate a shared imaginative space. They act as both historical records of experimental play, as well as aesthetic objects in their own right.

Flower (2009)

thegamecompany & Sony PlayStation

From the indie game developers of the underground hit flOw comes the new unconventional game, Flower. Unlike conformist gaming environments, Flower aims to explore emotional chords uncommon in video games. The surrounding backgrounds are pushed to the forefront, allowing the gamer to engage with vivid landscapes that are both stimulating and challenging. Playing as the ‘wind’, the user’s task is to guide a swarm of flying petals, interacting with flowers and the surrounding environment to cause the chaotic, on-screen world to change.

Colossal Cave Adventure (1977)

William Crowther & Don Woods

Adventure (as it was known in various versions) is an early text-based computer game. Made at a time before detailed graphics, the computer acts as your ‘eyes and ears’, describing your surroundings to you in text format. Using simple commands like “walk forward” to explore the cave, the game space is completely imagined by the player while navigating. Yet in a strange twist, the game is based on the layout of an actual cave in Kentucky, USA – that avid Adventure players report navigating with ease on their first visit.

MEDIALOUNGE

CutExDoom II (2008)

Anita Fontaine & Mike Pelletier

CutExDoom II is a game modification that hijacks the traditionally violent Unreal Tournament 3 to create a new, luscious and super-cute game environment. In it, Sally Sanrio wakes up to find herself in a familiar, yet changed, place. Drinking a liquid nearby, she notices that the cute environment she once sought to enter is becoming increasingly strange. She realises she has been poisoned, and that the cult of CutExDoom is not what she thought it would be... She must fight the effects of the poison, find the antidote and escape. The second game in a series of Unreal modifications, the artists subvert the commercial game by radically changing and challenging its environment.

Monstecor Corral (2009)

Onteca

Monstecor Corral is a fast paced fun action strategy puzzle game in the same genre as Pikmin and Lemmings. Players control a herd of Sdompe, cute and not-so-brigt monsters who, once activated, never stop running. The player’s job is to accumulate and guide them successfully through each level. Taking the role of a Monster Herder, the player flies above and saves them from the dangers of their changing environment – and the ever growing ominous robot population. From Liverpool-based Onteca, an indie game development company whose innovative work often includes young people as collaborators.

Rider Spoke Liverpool (2009)

Blast Theory

Experimental Gameplay Online Competition Winner!
The Experimental Gameplay Project is an online indie game developer community which aims to discover and rapidly prototype as many new forms of gameplay as possible, who hold monthly competitions based around three rules: each game must be made in less than seven days, by just one person and be based around a theme. For Space invaders, FACT has teamed up with Experimental Gameplay to co-host the November/December theme of ‘Art Games’. The winner will be featured in the exhibition and online at http://www.fact.co.uk

PUBLIC SPACES

Rider Spoke Liverpool (2009)

Blast Theory

(Fridays & Saturdays only, 3.00 – 6.00 pm)

Rider Spoke Liverpool is an adaptation of a previous Blast Theory work for cyclists. Liverpool artists Lorena Rivero de Beer and Vanya Kruikov worked with Blast Theory in a series of workshops to develop new questions inspired by the streets and sites of Liverpool. Combining theatre with game play and state of the art technology, it invites the audience to cycle through the streets of the city equipped with a handheld computer. Using wi-fi technology they search for a hiding place, listen to the questions and record a short message there, in an augmented game of hide and seek.

Tetris (2009)

Michael Johansson

Using the eponymous game as a starting point, Swedish artist Michael Johansson’s Tetris uses everyday objects to reference a phenomenon brought on by playing the puzzle game for too long. Commonly known as Tetris Syndrome, avid players report seeing Tetris blocks in objects all around them. Blurring the limits between ‘real space’ and ‘game space’, Johansson’s piece, constructed from found objects, articulates a shared and puzzling trick this computer game plays on our minds.

Space Invaders graphics (2009)

Ben Jones

Specially commissioned Space Invaders-themed graphics decorate the building, created by Ben Jones of the hyper-colourful art collective Paper Rad. For Space Invaders, Jones draws characters and objects that at surface level look like they’re taken directly from popular computer games. However, on closer inspection, the familiar turtles, mushrooms and space aliens look slightly different from how we remember them – images from our fading collective memory.

RELATED EVENTS

This is just a selection of the events we have on offer. For full details see the latest brochure or visit www.fact.co.uk

FAMILY PROGRAMME

The Film Programme expands the exhibition’s theme and looks at computer games in wider contemporary culture.

Meet and Greet With Bob Wakelin

FACT Bar 13 January 6.00pm FREE

Liverpoolian Bob Wakelin is responsible for some of the most interesting video game art designs of the 80s. Meet him in the FACT bar then watch the documentary.

The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters [PG]

The Box 13 January 7.15pm £4.00/£3.00 (Members & concs)

Retro Screening: The Wizard [PG]

The Box 27 January 7.00pm £4.00/£3.00 (Members & concs)

Game Over: Kasparov and the Machine

The Box 10 February 6.00pm £4.00/3.00 (Members & concs)

TRON [PG]

The Box 12 February 6.00pm £4.00/£3.00 (Members & concs)

FAMILIES / YOUNG PEOPLE

GAME ON: New Tools for Young People

Mediatlab 16 January & 13 February 11.00am-5.00pm FREE - Booking essential (For young people aged 16-17 years old. Max. 6 people per booking)

To book please email louise.latter@fact.co.uk or call 0151 707 6446

Chip Tuna Samba Band

The Box 31 January 11.00am - 6.00pm FREE - Booking essential

For children aged between 5-12 years and their parents/guardians

To book please email anna.kronenburg@fact.co.uk or call 0151 707 6417

SCHOOLS EVENT

Computer Games Graphic Workshop

Mediatlab 01 February 10.00am – 3.00pm FREE - Booking Essential

An Evening with Pixel8

The Box 01 February 6.00pm – 8.00pm FREE - Booking essential

To book please email anna.kronenburg@fact.co.uk or call 0151 707 6417
**EXHIBITION WORKS LIST AND LOCATION OF GALLERIES**

### GALLERY 1
- COSPlayers (2004) - Cao Fei
- Amagatana (2009) - Katsumoto Yuichiro
- Ready Player (2006) - Ludic Society
- First Person Shooter (2006) - Aram Bartholl
- Chinese Gold (2006) - Ubarmorgen.com
- What It Is Without the Hand That Wields It (2008) - Riley Harmon
- Counter-Strike (1999) - Valve Software
- Grand Theft Auto IV (2007) - Rockstar/Microsoft XBox
- Fracture (2008) - Lucasarts/Microsoft XBox

### GALLERY 2
- Video Terraform Dance Party (2009) - Jeremy Bailey
- Malfunction (2009) - Mark Essen
- LevelHead (2007) - Julian Oliver
- The Night Journey (2009) - Bill Viola
- Play Generated Map Archive - Timothy Hutchings with others
- Flower (2009) - Sony Playstaton
- Colossal Cave Adventure (1977) - William Crowther & Don Woods

### MEDIA LOUNGE
- CuteXdoom II (2008) - Anita Fontaine, Mike Pelletier
- Monsteca Corral (2009) - Onteca
- Experimental Gameplay Online Competition Winner! - *

**PUBLIC SPACES**
- Rider Spoke Liverpool (2009) - Blast Theory
- Tetris (2009) - Michael Johannson
- Nintendo controller in the Café - Retro games cabinets (courtesy of Jonathan Thompson, Direct Games Room)

**FLOOR PLAN**

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RIder Spoke has been developed in collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab at University of Nottingham, Sony Net Services and the Fraunhofer Institute as part of the European research project IPeRG (Integrated Project on Pervasive Gaming) and is sponsored by Trek. Blast Theory is supported by Arts Council England South East. Rider Spoke Liverpool has been developed with the support of ICDC at John Moores University and FACT

**FACT 50** is a new scheme designed to help fund FACT’s education and community programme and expand our support to more participants and disaffected communities across Merseyside. For more information, please contact fact.fifty@fact.co.uk / 0151 707 4444.

Please note that photography is not permitted in the galleries.