

## *F-USER*

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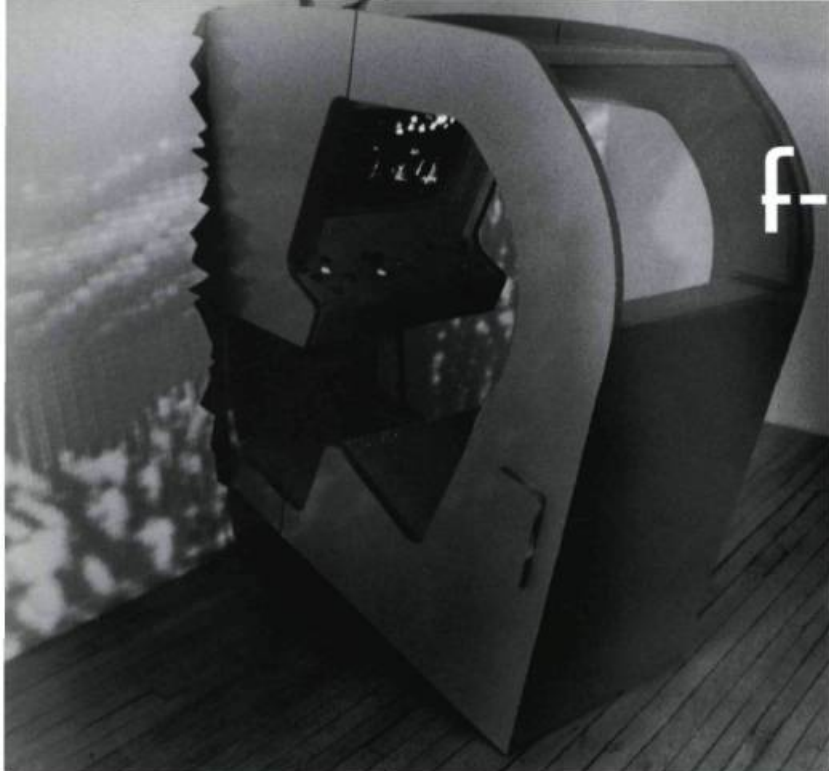
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# F-USER

Jonathon Cage

**F**-USER took place in two locations within the six story Belgo building of downtown Montreal. Ground Control was the amusement arcade Casino Royale. The Crash site was in the gallery Observatoire 4. Cast in the system of gravity's production both sites are players in the business of cultural altitudes. Thus accordingly the arcade is at street level whilst the gallery resides on the 4th Floor, a little closer to the heavens.

For this project kit<sup>1</sup> linked these ports of high and low "interactive culture" by virtue of their lost communication. A connection seeking (among other things) to question academic discourses which vilify video games and amusement arcades.

Discourses exemplified by Virilio's<sup>2</sup> recent alarmist text in which he sites videogames as being at the forefront of a western attempt to implement a computer narco economy to defy the Latin based narco capitalism of illicit substances. In the 1990's, videogame interactive behavior has been damned in an analogous fashion to the 50's hostility towards teenagers "uncontrolled, uncivilized" reactions to rock'n roll. Within the current electronic arts arena such attitudes take similar positions in their distaste for the unthinking, adrenaline rush of reactions [when you're good] associated with game playing.

It was however within the distance created by both audiences' remote relationships to the other space that F-USER intended to operate; entering the space of dislocation which re-

sults from perceiving at a distance. A dislocation which McKenzie Wark<sup>3</sup> sites as being a critical and integral point within communication vectors created by two or more locations relaying information.

Using these two spaces to initiate a dialogue meant the discourses of the work were framed by the contradictory value systems of each location (one a space of ethereal reflection, the other of real time reaction). These systems were re-formatted to produce questions about how art represents entertainment; what happens between the distance of transmission and reception of the disastrous event; how video games affect the digital death cycle, etc. Coordinating these culturally defined spaces in composition, one as a ground control, the other as a crash site set up a dynamic of unarticulated association. The lost reception of the crashed mobile was a metaphor for the static transmissions between high and low cultural activity.

Thus the fusion of these mutually exclusive codes of conduct produced a silence in the ongoing rhetoric of electronic connection. For it is within the screen that communication systems are marketed as religious figures; spreading the word over and under the land, it is a rhetoric which preaches the ascendance of the connected. The recognition of this makes F-USER's use of the reverential silence of the gallery as crash site a salient point, as the crashes within developed communication systems become increasingly about the

fear of these sites of silence. For as the Critical Art Ensemble<sup>4</sup> notes, "the most costly disaster that can happen in this economy is a communication gap". As an audience we are informed by distance or rather the abstraction of it—of the fractured developments. Becoming an implicit part in the drama played out amongst the wreckage, as we become statistics in the ratings poles and witnesses to the demise of function as the sole transient narrative.

Searching for the crash site which gave birth to the transient soul, it was in the arcade, amongst the aural discord of digital death, that players were allowed to examine the wreckage. There the players participated in a reconstruction of the event, searching for the fusion of flesh and its extensions, it became a proposition of the cyborg as celebrational victim.

To begin this search was to embrace arcade interaction and to manipulate a joystick controlled director program which, installed in a whited out stand-up video game housing, appeared both suited and anomalous to its surroundings. Reflecting the architecture in which both gallery and arcade exist, the game's digital structure used blueprints of the building to move between six levels of mediated aircraft crashes. To travel through the program was to fly through the monitored static of lost reception, each screen representing a room of the building. Within each level a single crash was surrounded by its mediated wreckage, reports, investigations, conspiracy theories, memories, plus pictures of aircraft and body parts found beyond the impact point. For this journey you were a dead player traversing walls, ceilings and floors as a ghost(space)ship looking for the site where collision with the face of the earth ejected the soul into the realm of the interface.

When the visitor located the crash site, a F-USER sign flashed as s/he (the spacecraft) flew into a video-game landscape and the gallery location. In playing with notions of representative space, kit sought to re define ideas of what it is to represent an existent phenomena, or what it is to be

virtual when interaction is determined by a physical structure; thus how do we travel through disembodied terrains when our bodies inhabit the structure those terrains represent? Playing as a ghost (ship) posited the player as a reflection of existence between terrains, worlds and walls in an attempt to locate points of contact. The intended place of contact here was the gallery, hence the incarnation of the videogame crash. Breaching the unmarked boundaries of the gallery space, a sit-in videogame shell lay embedded in the wall upon which distant lands were projected. Within the blue faux metal housing, a monitor played frame by frame the last seconds of a TV news programs being shut off. Intermittent with static, it became the monitor of lost contact. A closing in of the mediated image from afar, it simulated the crash of a simulator as an "on the spot" representation of a report.

Thus the crash site became the point at which perception at a distance (telesthesia) becomes not only the collapsed distance of located news reports but also the place where technologies transfer narrative bodies.

Here, progress's journey is defined by the last gasp of the F-USER traveller as s/he hands over the mic to the on-the-scene crew, allowing the disaster relay to carry on until it passes the tape across the fiber optic line. ■

Kit, F-USER [Full Impact - Unified Soul Ejector Resource]  
Observatoire 4 and Casino Royale  
February 12 - March 2, 1996

## NOTES:

1. Kit is an amorphous international collective of bodies which has exhibited, performed and intervened in cities in Britain, Germany, Holland and Canada. Seeking anonymity they look to negate the specificity of the named individual and choose to relegate their identity to the footnotes of the work.
2. Paul Virilio, "Speed and information: Cyberspace Alarm", appeared in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 1995.
3. McKenzie Wark, *Virtual Geography*, Indiana University Press, 1994.
4. Critical Art Ensemble - Mythos information: Welcome to the Wired World The Mythology of Terrorism on the Net. Talk given at Ars Electronica, 1995.

Kit, F-USER [Full Impact - Unified Soul Ejector Resource], 1996. Observatoire 4, Montreal. Photo: Tony Revoy.