

CD-Roms

Boredom

Michael Gibbs

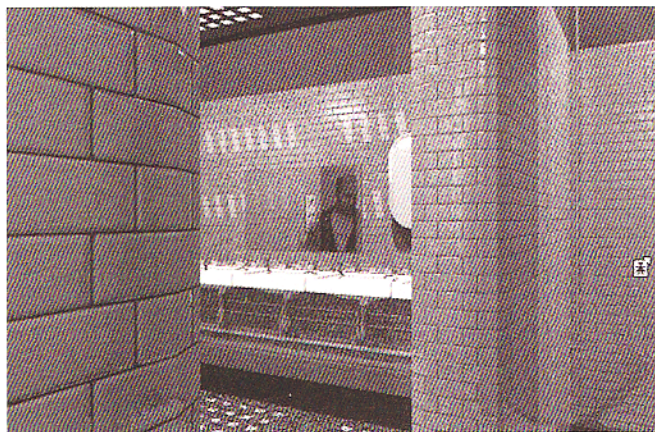
Engaged, issue 3, 1995, Macintosh/Windows compatible CD-Rom, £10, available from *Engaged* magazine, 334a Kennington Rd, London SE11 4LD.

Boredom, curated by Susan Morris, Macintosh compatible CD-Rom, Cambridge Dark-room Gallery, 1997.

To view a CD-Rom often one has to navigate a realistic rendered environment, clicking one's way through doors, rooms and corridors. There are virtual versions of museums, galleries, ancient buildings and stately homes, and now, with the publication of issue 3 of *Engaged* on CD-Rom, a typical London public toilet, complete with the sounds of dripping water, passing tube trains and the hum of fluorescent lights. Partly intended as a follow-up to a series of collaborative artists' projects organised by Strike in the public lavatory in Spitalfields, this CD-Rom is less constrained by the requirements of actual, public space and allows more room for an imaginative occupation of the entire, albeit virtual, environment.

The rendering of the public lavatory is extremely detailed and makes effective use of the sorts of clickable objects that will be familiar to users of game CD-Roms. Entering the attendant's room, for example, one encounters a table. On it is a working radio/cassette recorder which plays interviews with the artists, an answering machine with messages left for the editors of *Engaged*, and a pile of letters and drawings, each of which can be perused separately. On the wall is a clickable calendar that contains more artists' works. Adjacent to the attendant's room one sees a row of washbasins. Clicking on the mirror takes one to a sequence about Strike's series of projects, while the towel dispenser next to it provides a further series of texts written on the towel roll. The actual works included in *Engaged* are to be found in the eight toilet cubicles and each begins with a useful written description or statement. The full gamut of

Engaged no 3 1995
(screengrab)



digital techniques is deployed, from aural and visual collaging (Oona Campbell and Paul Ramsay), remanipulation of mass-media images and found footage (Kath Moonan, Tony Patrickson), image-text sequences (Ronald Fraser Munro) to John Cayley's Hypercard project, *Book Unbound*, to which readers can add their own material. Katie Wates's *A Portion of Personality* turns the user's cursor into a cute little wiggling mouse that moves across a collaged portrait of the artist, causing eruptions of zany animations.

The producers of another recent artists' CD-Rom, *Boredom*, have eschewed virtual environments and opted for a fairly conventional catalogue-like format, complete with introductory essays printed on an accompanying fold-out poster. David Bate's essay makes a comparison between Baroque space and boredom and points to 'a Baroque trend of spatial illusions, theatrical imaginations and intense feelings' which has been made possible by digital forms of representation. Although it may be argued that the ubiquity of computerised images has produced a kind of boredom, or 'Sunday neurosis', where simulation has replaced stimulation, none of the works included in *Boredom* could really be said to illustrate this symptom. What several of the works do illustrate is rather a thwarted stimulation, as in Edward Dorrien's *hPRICK*, which uses shots from a soft porn video session together with the coaxing voices of the two cameramen. The viewer can control the girl's poses to some extent but only at the cost of a sense of frustration

Edward Dorrien *hPRICK* (screengrab) 1997



and awkward complicity. Equally thwarting is Susan Morris's *Text*, which slowly scrolls from top to bottom for 38 minutes, revealing a succession of bibliographic entries and quotations on the subject of boredom. Not only are various typefaces employed, but the text is also frequently cut off at the sides, rendering it unreadable.

'Boredom', writes Andrew Benjamin in his philosophical essay printed on the fold-out, 'will open up beyond itself only to close in on itself'. Boredom is characterised by the confines of repetition and continuity, and so too are some of the pieces on the CD-Rom, such as Marielle Neudecker's *Default Twilight* which loops low-resolution bands of colour based on four stock images of sunrise, dawn, dusk and sunset. Anna Mossman's *Tunnel* is also a loop, a relentless, repetitive zooming in and out of a mundane video scene showing cars and pedestrians moving through a tunnel. The use of repeated variations in Baroque ornamental art is updated in Robert Mabb's animations of changing circular patterns, which, although mathematically precise, are definitely boring! So too, I'm afraid, is Mathew Hale's *There was Silence in Heaven about the Space of Half an Hour*, which requires the viewer to complete a 24 minute writing exercise using barely decipherable letters comprising circles and ellipses, with a translation of a German word representing each letter. It's all too reminiscent of those pointless exercises teachers give to school children as punishments.

Nevertheless, as a whole *Boredom* is not boring. Indeed, the issues it raises (and these include social issues such as electronic tagging of recidivists) are relevant to the conditions of life as experienced at the end of the 20th Century, a time in which the sensual, the decorative and the melancholic combine in an ennui not unlike that at the end of the previous century. While *Engaged* looks ahead to the virtual transformation of public conveniences, *Boredom* reminds us of the inconveniences of the present. ■

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