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## Editorial Notes For Switch Art and Games Issue

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## Editorial Notes For Switch Art and Games Issue

Anne-Marie Schleiner on Jul 16 1999

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### Nodes of intersection between computer games and art have been surfacing in the years 1998 and 1997

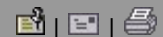
Editorial Notes For Switch Art and Games Issue and the *Cracking the Maze Game Patches and Plug-ins as Hacker Art* On-line Exhibit  
by Anne-Marie Schleiner

Forums of public intersection between computer games and art have surfaced with accelerated frequency over the course of the last year. To briefly chart some of the recent terrain, *The Doors of Perception* Conference in Amsterdam took place in the fall of 1998 with it's focus on *Play* and included some games by artists, the *Synworld* conference and exhibit at Public Netbase in Vienna occurred in May of 1999, the *Interactive Frictions* conference and exhibit met at USC in Los Angeles in June of 1999, the *Game Over* exhibit was presented at the Institute of Design in Zurich in July and the upcoming online *Re: play* Panel organized by Eyebeam Atelier and TechBC is scheduled for July and August of 1999. Computer gaming is emerging as the dominant form of media interpolation into shared social apparatuses even at the expense of television and film. As an entertainment form linked to online network data flow, computer gaming is at the present time more open than television ever was to reinvention and rearticulation of its genres and modes of interactivity, sign systems and politics of representation. The time seems ripe for critical intervention from artists and theorists, who follow in the wake of the fervid cultural sabotage and shape shifting of the game fan players and hackers themselves. Equally imperative is an examination of the historical underpinnings of given computer gaming tropes in military and filmic simulation technologies and early computer programming.

The *Art and Games* issue of Switch and the hosted (nested) exhibit, *Cracking the Maze Game Plug-ins and Patches as Hacker Art*, offer a variety of perspectives on issues pertaining to computer games and art, gender, game hacking, game interface history, networked game play and opportunities for new modes of game interaction, navigation and narrative. Marsha Kinder describes the extensive research and thought processes that went into the creation of *Runaways*, a narrative soon to be online role playing game that incorporates the melodrama of real life stories of teenage runaways into the driving narrative structure of the game. *Runaways* offers teens (and other aged players) from a variety of ethnicities, genders and gender preferences an opportunity to relate to one another in a game environment. Norman Klein and Lev Manovitch's accompanying text to the *Freud/Lissitzky Navigator* game/artwork traces the genealogy of the *Freud/Lissitzky Navigator* with the device of a historical fiction that reveals convincing linkages between architecture, 20<sup>th</sup> century theoretical frameworks, the simulation technologies of fantasy theme parks, military simulators, film and computer games. Interestingly, the dualistic character of Freud's and Saussure's theoretical mappings seem to echo the secondary signifying systems of simulation technologies in the *Freud/Lissitzky Navigator* text. At the increasingly fuzzy border between computer games and film, Jason Brown's *Paranoid Machines: Conspiracy Games and Desire Control in Tron* probes the hermeneutic apparatuses of this 1980's game/film. An interview with Vangie Beal of GameGirlz by Switch's co-editor Geri Wittig and Switch's network Quake aficionado Max Hardcore is an expedition into the

rough and ready world of female gamers, who don't waste much time on chatting while they are busy fragging their opponents asses. GameGirlz and their associated gaming clans like PMS (Psycho Men Slayers) present a model for how women gamers can network with both female and male players and participate in violent online game play on their own female friendly terms.

In the *Cracking the Maze* online exhibit, besides my own curatorial statement, are two articles which pertain more specifically to game patch art by Erkki Huhtamo and Laura Trippi. Game patches, (or game add-ons, mods, levels, maps or wads), refer to alterations of preexisting game source code in terms of graphics, game characters, architecture, sound and game play. Game patching in the 1990's has evolved into a kind of popular hacker art form with numerous shareware editors available on the Internet for modifying most games. In *Game Patch - Son of Scratch?* Erkki Huhtamo contextualizes computer game alterations within the historical framework of the 1980's subversive media art interventions of the British scratch video artists, whose re-edited, re-dubbings of broadcast television constituted an ironic critique of mainstream broadcast television. Similarly, game patch artists often subvert prevailing gaming genres and character stereotypes, although Erkki Huhtamo is careful to delineate how the parameters of the computer game industry differ from the one-way character of broadcast television. The game patches included in the *Cracking the Maze* exhibit are both patches created by game patch artists who circulate their patches through online gaming venues and by artists from outside of the usual game culture enclaves. >From Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski's *Bio-Tek Kitchen* killer vegetable patch for the Marathon game engine to jodi's abstracted black and white hack of *Wolfenstein 3-D*, all fourteen game patches represent a provocative array of literal and cultural hacks of prevailing game interface and spatial semiotics, of game scenarios and environments, of game character identity and gender configurations, and of gaming modes of interactivity. *Cracking the Maze* initiates a discourse at the point of intersection between the hacker, the avid gamer, the artist and the cultural interventionist. Situating itself within the network arena of game fan homepages which offer shareware game patches along with gaming news, cheats and guides, *Cracking the Maze* is a solely online network art exhibit with all of the patches available for download or network viewing from the *Cracking the Maze* site.



## ::CrossReference

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:: Cracking the Maze Online Exhibit - Jul 16 1999

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