

# Fragile fantasy: Photography and critical responses to 3D video game images

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# Fragile Fantasy: Photography and Critical Responses to 3D Video Game Images

Nicholas Aloisio-Shearer

2019

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

UNSW Art and Design  
Faculty of Art and Design



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This practice-led research project examines how the 3D video game image is constructed and understood within photographic frameworks. Through artistic practice and scholarly research, this project unpacks the ways that computer-generated and photographic images are interrelated, how their processes generate meaning and affect, and how artists can deconstruct and reimagine the potential of these images. The thesis specifically examines theories of photography and new media to analyse artworks by Jon Rafman, Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parenno. These artists, as well as my own practice, appropriate and redeploy 3D video game images to investigate how their emotive, symbolic and narrative qualities reinforce dominant modes of representation. Through my own practice, I combine analogue photographic processes and digital, 3D imaging technologies to redirect the expected affective outcomes of the video game image. Together, the thesis and artistic practice interrogate the ways that the technical structure of computer-generated 3D video game images draw directly from photographic technologies. This project argues that the link to photography is crucial in understanding not only how 3D video game images reproduce the affective, symbolic and narrative possibilities of photography, but also how artists can intervene and reorient these patterns of meaning and affect.

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# Introduction

This practice-led research project examines the ways that contemporary artists engage with the photographic qualities of 3D video game images. While the burgeoning field of 3D gaming relies largely on computer-generated images, what Flusser calls the “technical image” (Flusser, 2011), these images call on the language and rules familiar to the technical and visual conditions of photography. This project examines how the 3D technical image generates meaning and affect through photographic foundations, and how artists respond through new approaches to the production and dissemination of photographic images. This research project combines artistic practice and scholarly research to unpack how 3D and photographic images are interrelated, how their processes generate meaning and affect, and how artists can deconstruct and reimagine the potential of these images. This thesis draws on theories of photography and new media to examine artists that appropriate and redeploy 3D video game images to investigate how their emotive, symbolic and narrative qualities reinforce dominant modes of representation, visual modes that are traditionally photographic. In my own artistic practice, I engage with ‘fanart’<sup>1</sup> strategies through 3D computer imaging and gaming software, as well as working with analogue photographic processes to question the photographic effects of 3D technical images.

This research project is situated in the field of expanded photographic practice, which George Baker describes as the “...play with representational codes [which seek] a form that would allow such codes to exceed their place within an image, within a frame, and return to re-code the reality or cultural realms that they can no longer adequately represent” (Baker, 2005, p. 136-138). As video games are increasingly becoming a fertile source of content for contemporary artists, this project engages with this “re-coding” of cultural realms through the combination of different digital, 3D and photographic technologies. A number of artists have

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<sup>1</sup> Fanart is the amateur practice of making artwork from that draws from fictional media, including TV, Film, Literature and video games. These practices commonly employ hacking and modding strategies, which involve the reverse-engineering of media, such as video games, and the reinsertion of their fanart into the hacked media.



actively engaged in this field of practice, as can be seen in practices as varied as that of early game art collective JODI (Boswell, 2017) to the contemporary hacks of Cory Arcangel (Halter, 2008) and the living game worlds of Ian Cheng (Vickers, 2016). These artists appropriate and rework the form and content of video games in a number of ways, from JODI's creation of 'mods' which interfere with the regular functioning of a game<sup>2</sup> (Boswell, 2017), to Ian Cheng's autonomous virtual worlds in his work from the *Emissaries* series (Vickers, 2016). My practice differs from these strategies in that it is primarily concerned with the material, photographic basis of 3D video game images and what this means for the way they operate on an emotional and symbolic level. The central focus of this research project is therefore on how an engagement with the photographic frameworks of 3D computer image-making can be used to question and intervene in the ways that emerging image technologies might reinforce dominant modes of representation and affect. Rather than see the 3D and photographic as being at odds or merely tangential with each other, it is my contention that there are significant overlaps between their technical and affective qualities. By engaging with these overlaps, artists and audiences can develop alternative approaches to and understandings of contemporary image making.

In this thesis a number of different kinds of images are discussed, including the 3D image, computer-generated image, digital image, video game image, fanart image, technical image, and the photographic image. While many of the examples examined in this thesis overlap across these categories, there are important differences in their definitions and use. The video game images which are examined in this thesis are those images that are created by the actual video game itself as well as those images which surround it, such as in its promotion, marketing and development. This includes the images generated on screen during the playing of a video game and the production of 3D models and environments, concept art, promotional material and other images that surround the video game. The 3D image also at times refers specifically to the video

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<sup>2</sup> Examples include *Jet Set Willy Variations* ( 1984, <http://jetsetwilly.jodi.org/>) and *SOD* (1991, <http://sod.jodi.org/>) a modification of the game *Wolfenstein 3D*.

game image but also more broadly describes 3D, computer-generated images, that are constructed in digital workspaces, based on photographic forms, rules and frameworks. The digital image refers more broadly to those images which are electronically generated, be that 3D, computer-generated images or digital photographs. Fanart images refer specifically to the images created by fans of video games and other media, who appropriate elements of the object of their fandom and create works of art derived from those media. Chapter 1 further discusses and explores the fanart image. The photographic image which is examined in this thesis refers to a range of different photographic mediums, including analogue photographs, physical prints and digital photographs. The technical image which is referred to in this thesis is a concept developed by Vilém Flusser, which describes images produced by machines that appear to be an “automatic reflection of the world” (Flusser, 2000, p. 59). This concept is discussed in depth in the following chapters, with a specific focus on how artists can use this understanding of contemporary image making technologies to unpack the way they create affective resonances.

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. Chapter one establishes a range of connections between photography and 3D imaging by synthesising a number of theoretical frameworks. To further this discussion, chapter one examines examples of Cory Arcangel’s work in detail and discusses how the relationship between photography and the 3D image can be rethought through his practice. To do so, this chapter also introduces key theoretical concepts from writers such as Vilem Flusser, Susan Sontag, Lev Manovich, W.J.T Mitchell and Hito Steyerl. Some of these theorists have noted the inherent photographic qualities of the 3D image (Manovich, 2001). For example, Manovich notes that the 3D image reinforces Renaissance two-point perspective as the dominant mode of representation (Manovich, 2001) and Flusser identifies commonalities among both as “technical images” (Flusser, 2011), whose functioning is hidden from their human operators. These concepts are applied to ideas explored in the writing of Sontag and Mitchell, to examine how 3D images develop meanings and affects in similar ways to photographs.

The second and third chapters further develop this line of enquiry by focussing on the work of specific artists operating in this field. Chapter two examines the work of Jon Rafman in relation to Flusser's concept of the "technical image". Rafman's work *A Man Digging* is particularly helpful in understanding how artists can critically examine the technical structures of the 3D, video game image through the appropriation of their technologies and visual codes. This chapter closely examines the structural relationships between 3D video game images and photography and breaks down how Rafman has redirected the affective properties of these images. Chapter three analyses the collaborative project *No Ghost Just A Shell* by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno. Examined through Mitchell's concept of the "vitality of the image" (Mitchell, 2005), this chapter uses Huyghe and Parreno's project to draw parallels to the kinds of relationships that fanartists have to the characters, images, and affect they manipulate.

The fourth chapter provides an overview of my own artistic practice and focuses on how my use of specialised 3D imaging technologies and analogue photographic processes disrupts and questions the technical, emotive and narrative boundaries of these respective image making technologies. This chapter examines the development of my practice throughout this research project and discusses its numerous exhibition outcomes. This discussion contextualises how my own artistic engagement with 3D video game images has developed and how the focus on its affective and structural qualities has been approached through a variety of methods. This chapter also discusses the strategies employed in the works exhibited in the final exhibition at UNSW Galleries, focusing on my compositional and material processes that are designed to generate heightened emotional and symbolic responses.

What emerges through my practice and its analysis in this chapter is a tension between the photorealism of 3D imaging technologies and the digital materiality of the subjects. While harnessing the potential for realism and high-definition, the final body of work created in this project also retains signs of disintegration in the images, subtly revealing the jagged, sharp edges and polygons that underpin the technical 3D image. In this body of work, video game objects are

placed back into familiar photographic materials and compositions. However, these objects are abstracted or cropped very closely, making them sometimes difficult to recognise or place in an obvious narrative context. This conflation of these apparently separate imaging technologies is discussed as a productive and critical means of engaging with the structural and affective qualities of these fields.

Taken together, this thesis and my artworks suggest new ways of understanding the relationship between photography and 3D computer-generated images. By working at the points of overlap and intersection, it is my contention that artists can critically engage with and counter the dominant modes of representation present in much video gaming content. As a practice-led research project, the primary means of discovering how 3D images can act affectively in a way that is inherently photographic is through my creative practice. Rather than taking a directly oppositional or antagonistic approach, I argue that artists working in this field can harness the affective and symbolic potency of the technical image to suggest new narrative pathways and experiences.

# Chapter 1: The 3D Image and its Photographic frameworks

This chapter charts the theoretical and creative fields that inform this research and applies the insights of this analysis to the fields of 3D imaging, fanart and photography. The chapter establishes a framework for understanding how artists can critically engage with 3D video game images by actively working with photographic processes and principles.

The beginning of this chapter outlines the context in which I have begun engaging with 3D video game and fanart images, providing an overview of these fields and their cultural significance. Key theoretical concepts that have influenced and shaped the arguments that follow on specific artistic practices, including the two following case study chapters, are then discussed. After this discussion this chapter briefly examines how a number of contemporary artists have engaged with the 3D video game images and how the affective potentials of these images have been investigated by these artists.

A number of communities have developed around video games and their images, including fanartists, modders, streamers and hackers. The community that is of particular interest to this project is the fanart community. Fanart is the practice of creating original artworks that are derived from fictional media, such as films, television, or video games. Fanart is distinct from contemporary art in that it is almost exclusively celebratory of the content which it reproduces and is rarely self-reflexive or critically oriented. The fanart community which I refer to in this thesis operates online, particularly on websites like DeviantArt and is comprised of 'gamers'. While this is a broad moniker that seems to describe anyone who plays video games there has been a recent stirring of 'gamers' as an oppressed group of people.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This is exemplified by the subreddit r/GamersRiseUp.

The vast popularity of video games means that the demographics of their players are more diverse than ever before<sup>4</sup>, however the 'gamer' subculture is bound up in what Michael Salter calls 'geek masculinity' (Salter, 2018). Salter describes 'geek masculinity' as "a technologically-focused form of masculine subjectivity that requires, for its coherence, the maintenance of gendered stereotypes about male technological skill and female ineptitude." (Salter, 2018, p. 5). 'Geek masculinity' is replicated in much 3D video game fanart, often explicitly reinforcing gender, race and sexual stereotypes from a masculine perspective.

These 'gamers' have been at the centre of a number of scandals including the drawn out 'Gamergate' controversy (Wingfield, 2014). Beginning in 2014 'Gamergate' involved a backlash against feminist game critics raising concerns of sexism and progressivism in video game culture, and particularly in the representation of women in video games. "Gamers" believed that "treasured symbols of techno-masculinity", that is video games, were "...being destroyed in a 'culture war' waged by feminists and progressives..." (Salter, 2018, p. 16). This evolved into an aggressive harassment campaign that targeted several women in the video game industry, including game developers Zoë Quinn and Brianna Wu, as well as feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian. Threats included doxing (the broadcasting of personal information online), threats of rape, and death threats (Wingfield, 2014).

Because of examples like this, the 'gamer' subculture is now widely seen as a vocal group of white, male gamers that are invested in controlling and demanding certain representations within video games, namely those that reflect them and their desires. Michael Salter notes that the language of Gamergate has spilled into the vocabularies of the increasingly vocal men's rights and white supremacist movements, particularly in Europe and the U.S. Salter writes that 'gamers' "rhetoric of 'social justice warriors' is now a regular

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<sup>4</sup> A study by the Interactive Games & Entertainment Association in 2018 reveals that 67% of Australians play video games and 46% of players are female identifying. (Brand, 2018)

part of the vocabulary of right-wing politicians and pundits.” (Salter, 2018, p. 17) ‘Gamers’ oppose what they view as the increasing influence of feminism and progressivism on video game culture, which occurs as calls for a wider range of representations in video game media, and seems to be born from a fear that their desires and likenesses may not be found within the worlds in which they are so invested.

The fanart community largely overlaps with the ‘gamer’ community. The sexist, violent imagery that ‘gamers’ are deeply invested in is translated from the game into the creative output of the fanartist. These fanart communities are largely found online such as the Xnalara groups on Deviantart.com or the users of vg-resource.com (Seymour, 2018). These communities largely maintain or are complicit with the narratives of the games from which they make fanart. While the imagery I work with is appropriated, hacked and extracted from video games, the composition and content of the images I create are informed by the “fanart” communities mentioned above. While I draw on these communities and their processes, my work is specifically located in a contemporary art context and it is important for my work to be critically oriented.

The images ‘fanartists’ create are varied but I am focused in this project on those that reflect familiar genres of photography, in content, composition and form. The most common examples of these include vernacular scenes of banal social situations (see **Figure 1**), including characters eating together, or playing musical instruments, as well as pornographic images (See **Figure 2**), of which there are multitudes, ranging from the mundane to the fetishistic. Most of these heteronormative images depict female characters in ways that are aligned with the narratives of the games they come from and the phallogentric and heteronormative visual pleasure of most pornography. As 3D imaging technologies become more accessible and more photorealistically complex it seems that much of photography’s affective and social functions have been co-opted by the fanart community.

Figure 1 has been removed due  
to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 1:** WITH YOU by DeviantArt user MayaRokuaya, (DeviantArt.com 2018)

It is important then to understand the nature of the 3D image, how it is constructed and how it draws on photographic modes of representation. The nature of 3D, computer-generated images is often examined in the context of new media theory, its relationship to photographic representation and the construction of vision is examined by different theorists. Lev Manovich analyses these relationships in depth in a number of different texts. In Manovich's foundational book, *The Language of New Media*, he discusses the fundamental principles of new media and examines how 3D computer-generated images can be considered inherently photographic. Manovich writes "...what computer graphics have (almost) achieved is not realism, but rather only *photorealism* - the ability to fake not our perceptual and bodily experience of reality but only its photographic image." (Manovich, 2001, p. 200). This is reflected in the terminology and models that 3D imaging uses to construct images. For example, the 3D modelling and animation software Maya allows for the user to place 'cameras' from which the scene can be rendered. These cameras can be



adjusted to have specific lens focal lengths, film ratios, aperture size and shapes, and shutter speeds and can be tumbled, tracked, dollied, rolled and zoomed. Lights can also be added and adjusted to emit a certain number of simulated photons, and their intensity and diffusion can be altered via a simple slider. This commitment to photorealism is the dominant mode of representation in 3D images and, in particular, video game graphics. It appears that 3D images might function similarly to photographs, that fanartists, players and audiences invest in these images the kinds of emotional and symbolic intensities that have historically been found in our relationships to the photograph. This observation on the link between 3D images and photography is central to understanding fanartists and the kinds of affective responses they draw from 3D video game images.

Figure 2 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 2:** *LFV Cover* by DeviantArt user nightmaretango1693, (DeviantArt.com 2016)

In his later article, 'Image Future', Manovich also points out that the way we usually experience the 3D video game images is mediated by the screen. He notes that "a lens-based recording process flattens the semantic structure of

reality – i.e. the different objects that occupy distinct areas of a 3D physical space.” (Manovich, 2006, p. 39). The material nature of the screen, the way it “flattens” 3D space into an image, is purposefully hidden from the player. Video games tend towards a state of immersion in their players, hiding the technical structure of the image from them. This acknowledgement of the surface of the screen again speaks to the similarities in what is expected from 3D video game images and photography and how they are encountered. This process of flattening the “semantic structure of reality” is enacted in both photography and 3D imaging. Both of these technologies flatten discrete objects, places and people into images through similar processes, codifying them through similar means.

This focus on the surface of the image is also examined in James Elkins’ book *What Photography Is* (Elkins, 2011). Elkins looks closely at the surface of the photograph examining what has to be looked past in order to look at the photograph. For Elkins this is not limited to physical photographs but also to digital images. He writes “There is always the surface, and now there’s light from the screen.” (Elkins, 2011, p. 24). In this preoccupation with the surface of the photograph, Elkins examines “...how hard it is to see the world...” (Elkins, 2011, p. 76) through photography and the limits of photography’s affective potential. Elkins’ observations on photography’s inability to represent the world adequately is important in understanding how 3D video game images also operate. As Elkins writes, photography “...promises a view of the world, but it gives us a flattened object in which wrecked reminders of the world are lodged.” (Elkins, 2011, p. 17). Similarly to Elkins, Manovich observes that 3D images ‘flatten reality’. 3D images and photographs function in a similar way, flattening not only reality but also how the world is seen, showing us only a wrecked reminder of what it is.

These ideas are also examined in Martin Lister’s article ‘Photography in the Age of Electronic Imaging’ in the book *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Liz Wells (Lister, 2009). Lister also examines what is expected from images and how new technologies reinforce or complicate these desires. Lister notes that

“Photography is more than its machines, it is also an ‘economy of photographic desires and concepts’.” (Lister, 2009, p. 323). Here, quoting Geoffrey Batchen, Lister describes how, even with the shift in the way that computers and video games represent the world, our investment in images helps us to position ourselves in the world. The ‘economies of 3D desires and concepts’ are developed in fanart practices, usurping the role of photography.

Lister also writes “At the centre of this economy is a desire to be securely placed as observers in relation to objects which interest us. ...Overall, we have looked to photography to provide a picture of a reassuring world in which everything appears to stay in its time, space and place.” (Lister, 2009, p. 323) If 3D video game environments are constructed in a ‘photo-realistic’ manner, tapping into this “economy of photographic desires and concepts” (Lister, 2009, p. 323), then video games also provide a way to develop a position in the world. The interactive and fantastical nature of video games might complicate this claim, when these environments are constructed without a referent and are subject to the players’ movement through them. Perhaps this reflects a contemporary state of the fanartist’s relationship to the image, where there is no delusion that images have a referent, or they are able to make the world “stay in its time, space and place” (Lister, 2009, p. 323), but they exist for the fanartists to construct a reality in which they can locate themselves.

Vilem Flusser’s book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* outlines a particular framework for critically engaging with photography, and by extension 3D imaging technologies and video games. Flusser describes photography, and other imaging technologies as impenetrable “black boxes” or “apparatus” (Flusser, 2011). Flusser argues that the way these technologies encode meaning in images is hidden from the operator and the audience. Flusser writes that images:

“...are supposed to be maps but they turn into screens: Instead of representing the world, they obscure it until human beings’ lives

become a function of the images they create. Human beings cease to decode the images and instead project them, still encoded, into the world 'out there', which meanwhile itself becomes like an image - a context of scenes, of states of things." (Flusser, 2000, p. 10).

For Flusser, technologies like the camera, or 3D video games, programme their users to act and create images for their own benefit. Flusser describes this as a "global image scenario" (Flusser, 2000, p. 10), where humans forget that we have created images in order to situate and understand our place in the world and instead invest in the image as being the only relevant view of the world, rather than our own perception or vision.

Because we are not able to comprehend the complex mechanical, chemical and digital processes occurring when an apparatus, such as a camera, or 3D video game, produces images, Flusser believes we see these images as "...an automatic reflection of the world." (Flusser, 2000, p. 59). Flusser describes these images as 'technical images'. In his book *Into the Universe of Technical Images* Flusser further explores the technical image. Flusser claims they are the reverse of earlier images, that they "don't receive meaning from outside but rather project meaning outward." (Flusser, 2011, p. 170). The fanartist is an example of an operator of the apparatus, one who produces the technical image and in Flusser's words "are freed from the pressure of depth and may devote all their attention to constructing images." (Flusser, 2011, p. 36). Flusser does not believe that we are completely powerless in the face of the technical image, instead, he calls for a dialogical or playful engagement with technical images and their apparatus to overcome the "fascistic, totalitarian circuitry" (Flusser, 2011, p. 171) inherent in the technical image. This play is evident in many artists' practices where artists might 'hack' photographic equipment or video games while playing them. These artists use the internal structures of these apparatus to edit or create images and reveal the way that they encode meaning and construct how we see and understand the world.

Marcel Rene Marburger follows Flusser's conception of the apparatus and technical image and looks at practices that interrogate the black box systems of the apparatus. Marburger suggests three ways of critically engaging with the photographic apparatus:

"1) the use of existing technology against itself; 2) the disclosure of photography's manipulation through the manipulation of photographic images; and 3) the encoding of programs to respond at light speed to encodings of technological devices." (Marburger, 2013, p. 120).

Marburger's first technique, the use of existing technology against itself, can include approaches such as hacking, machinima and reverse-engineering. The second technique includes approaches such as appropriation, compositing and 3D reconstruction. The third technique could involve the use of other programmes that are able to react as quickly as the apparatus itself might, such as in practices that make use of screen-recording, machinima and hacking tools. These techniques allow these artists to examine the connections between these two forms and to unpack how 3D video game images produce specific desires and affective responses in their audiences. In my own practice I employ these techniques to reveal how 3D images are bound up in a photographic understanding of the world and how they generate similar affectively, emotionally and symbolically charged images.

Susan Sontag's book *On Photography* is an important primer on photography's omnipresence and the ways in which this proliferation of the photograph shapes the world. This book also helps further an understanding of the intense affective power of the photograph. Of specific interest is the last chapter 'The Image-World', in which Sontag discusses photography's relationship to the 'real'. Sontag writes that "...reality has come to seem more and more like what we are

shown by cameras." (Sontag, 1977, p. 161). In a contemporary context where 3D video game images are created by an apparatus that is built on a 'photo-realistic' paradigm, I would extend Sontag's claims to suggest that reality seems more and more what we are shown by video games and 3D fanart.

Sontag also goes on to write that images "anaesthetise" (Sontag, 1977, p. 20) us from lived experiences. Sontag warns that "Photograph collections can be used to make a substitute world, keyed to exalting or consoling or tantalizing images." (Sontag, 1977, p. 162). Today's fanartists employ 3D imaging technologies to much the same effect, creating galleries of 3D, photographic images depicting these substitute worlds, where characters gather to eat at the same table or are contorted to create intimate, sexual tableaux. In Sontag's words, "It offers, in one easy, habit-forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others - allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation." (Sontag, 1977, p. 167). Fanart communities are built on this relationship of participation and alienation. Fanartists contribute their images to groups of like minded fans but are emotionally and symbolically confined to the image worlds they create.

## Artistic practice and critically engaging with the video game image

Artists have been engaging with video games and 3D images since the advent of these technologies, critically reflecting on how they shape the world. These artists include Jon Rafman, Harun Farocki, Eva and Franco Mattes, Ian Cheng, JODI, Cao Fei, Angela Washko, Feng Mengbo, Tabor Robak and Jon Gerard. While the conceptual and material concerns of each of these artists differ, there is a common engagement with how the images of video games and 3D imaging technology prescribe the way we think and behave.

Figure 3 has been removed due  
to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 3:** Cory Arcangel, *Super Mario Clouds*, 2002, Modded Super Mario Brothers cartridge, Screenshot

There are certain methodologies that are commonly found in artistic practices that appropriate and reconfigure video game images. Hacking and modding are two processes that allow artists direct access to video game images. Cory Arcangel is one artist who makes use of these techniques, in what Flusser would call a “playful engagement” with the apparatus of the 3D image. In his work *Super Mario Clouds* (2002), Arcangel has hacked and altered the code of the video game *Super Mario Bros.* and has removed all the graphical elements of the game, except for the images of clouds and the background of the sky. Arcangel turns this game into a meditative space where 8-bit clouds gently drift across the clear, blue sky. The removal of Mario, the hero of the narrative and the player’s avatar, suggests a futility in the game’s usual function for players (a

quest to save a princess, and gain as many points as possible, as fast as possible). Arcangel's work is indebted to the politics of "hackers" and their D.I.Y deconstruction of technology but eschews the naive utopianism of their approach to reclaiming consumer products. Arcangel's work suggests that the function of video game images is hidden from their audiences, the interactivity and mechanics of the game they play shroud this. By stripping *Super Mario Bros.* down to its most basic visual features, Arcangel asks the audience to consider the hidden formats and messages of these video game images. Artistic strategies that employ these D.I.Y. and 'hacking' techniques will be further examined in subsequent chapters, with an in depth analysis of how this strategy can be applied to 3D imaging and photographic technologies.

Artists such as Tabor Robak make use of highly specialised, 3D imaging software and technologies, adopting the processes and techniques of these complex commercial tools to make visually opulent artworks. In his work *A\** (2014), Robak has pushed the visual resolution and gleam of the video game image to its spectacular, logical conclusion. Rendered at 8k resolution, far beyond what most consumer screens are capable of reproducing, and exhibited on 14 screens, using 12 BrightSign media players, and standing in installation at 14 x 14 feet, this work also pushes the material and technological limits of the video game image. This work features a number of speculative video game interfaces designed by Robak, each referencing particular genres of video games. These include puzzle games, such as *Candy Crush* and *Bejeweled*, horror games and simulation games, such as *Farmville* and *The Sims*. These interfaces play through their own game scenarios with no input from the audience, puzzle pieces fall and dissolve into satisfying sparkles, animals move about in repetitive animation cycles, each individual strand of fur visible in their high resolution render. Robak's refinement and sophisticated development of commercial video game imagery makes this work engaging and spectacular, but the infinite looping of these games and their pleasure inducing special effects reveals an empty, inhuman end to these images. These video games seem to play out for themselves, leaving a bleak, yet highly polished, view of a world that advanced technology might bring. Robak's application of specialist, commercial



3D modelling and animation software and techniques is a strategy that is deployed not to create an exemplar video game image but to critically redirect the affective properties of the video game, from the engrossing to the indifferent. This artistic strategy is discussed in the following chapters and is one that I have employed in my own creative research.

Figure 4 has been removed due  
to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 4:** Tabor Robak, *A\**, 2014, 14-channel 7k Video, Networked Media Players, 10 minute loop

This chapter has outlined the conceptual, theoretical and creative ideas that have informed and driven the creative research of this research project. The linking of Flusser's and Manovich's ideas around new media to Sontag's and Elkins' and Lister's discussion of the photographic image helps to reconsider how 3D video game images generate affective relationships with their viewers. These relationships have been examined in numerous ways by contemporary

artists but rarely with a focus on the photographic foundation of the 3D image. These relationships closely resemble the kinds of relationships we have with the photography, as seen in Elkins' and Sontag's discussions on the photograph and the way it "flattens" our view of the world and "anaesthetises" us to our experience of the world. These ideas, along with Flusser's conception of the technical image, are fundamental in the analysis of Jon Rafman's and Pierre Huyghe's and Philippe Parreno's work which are discussed in the following chapters. The conceptual and methodological arguments outlined in this chapter also forms the framework by which I have produced and analysed the bodies of work which form the creative research output of this project.

## Chapter 2: Photographic perspectives and the video game apparatus: The playful engagement of Jon Rafman's *A Man Digging*

This chapter examines the work of the artist Jon Rafman and how he engages with and appropriates 3D video game imagery in order to critically examine the kinds of affective relationships these images produce in their players. Rafman is an American artist whose practice includes a large number of different mediums, processes and artistic strategies, including filmmaking, virtual reality, photography, sculpture and installation. Rafman's practice is generally concerned with the internet and virtual spaces and the people and subcultures who reside in them. In this chapter I will discuss Rafman's video work *A Man Digging* (2013), a work that examines how video game space has affected the way we understand what we see in images.

Jon Rafman engages with 3D video game images in order to interrogate how they affect the nature of vision and memory. These two ideas are central to a contemporary understanding of the photographic. This can be understood with reference to Lev Manovich who describes visual forms, such as the video game image, as a "...general way used by the culture to represent human experience, the world, and human existence..." (Manovich, 2001, p. 215). In this work Rafman directly engages with the technological structures that construct the video game image. He does this to interrogate how the way we view the world is constructed by these virtual spaces, as well as how they might have been born from and function similarly to lens-based photographic representations of the world.

Figure 5 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 5:** Jon Rafman, Still from *A Man Digging*, 2013, single channel video, 9:06 minutes

Rafman's work *A Man Digging* (2013) is a key example of how he examines the ways that 3D video game images generate specific emotional conditions in their players. The work is a digital video which runs for 9 minutes and 6 seconds. It has been presented in online contexts, such as on DIS Magazine, and in exhibition contexts. *A Man Digging* first presents a series of images of 3D generated virtual worlds from the Playstation 3 game *Max Payne 3*. These images mostly depict the aftermath of an in-game conflict with corpses strewn across the environment as different locations flash across the screen. The work includes images of slums, train carriages, destroyed clubs and corporate interiors. These images use the visual language of contemporary documentary war photography to aestheticise and make static these scenes of violence. Throughout the video a narrator speaks about "time being fragmented" (Rafman, 2013), and about recollecting the past. This device implies that the scenes are memories of the narrator, told from a first-person perspective.

The screen blurs in this flash of images that are punctuated by cuts to black. The black screen gives way to lingering scenes of snowy streetscapes and ominous hallways, absent of human figures, providing a moment for contemplation. The narrator then says he is "travelling back to the edge of [his] memory" but the images he sees are "layered with nostalgia" (Rafman, 2013). As the sequence continues the work contains images of an empty airport. In

some scenes the corpses from the beginning of the video reappear. The narrator states he has reached “the far edge of the real” (Rafman, 2013). At this point, the work displays the interior of a train carriage with windows broken and seats destroyed from a recent gunfight. The narrator says he “couldn’t stomach reality” and has “traded it in for stories” (Rafman, 2013). The narrator looks back at these “stories” or images, the corpses and shattered windows, and recounts how he must dig into his memory as a means of experiencing his world. Towards the end of the sequence there are images of a Brazilian favela, where corpses lie contorted against ramshackle buildings. The narrator says that he has trained himself to “get lost” in this virtual world and would “stop often to look at the scene before [him].” (Rafman, 2013). The narrator treats these sites of digital violence as landscapes to be gazed upon, sublime vistas of romantic significance. The work then displays a nightclub in disarray, blood and bodies covering the surface of the floor. The narrator tells us that “memory is the medium of experience, just like the Earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried.” (Rafman, 2013). The work ends with a view out of a luxury apartment’s window, onto a cityscape where a lone helicopter drifts into the sky.

*A Man Digging* is an example of an artist using machinima; a filmmaking technique where a video game is recorded to a video file as it is being played. The act of playing is important in Rafman’s video, although playing itself appears to be absent. Usually in the course of playing a video game there are objectives to be met, enemies to be killed and obstacles to overcome. However in Rafman’s work these familiar elements are missing. To film these virtual environments, which seem still and serve as anchors for the narrator, Rafman had to first play the game and kill any hostile characters in that area. Without doing so the narrator would have been interrupted by constant gunfire. The action of this violence is not carried out visibly in the work; instead, its presence is seen in the aftermath. In most scenes there lie dead bodies, contorted in ways that only digital approximations of people can be. This violence is also hinted at in the presence of laser-sights and intermittent gunfire. By not showing these actions Rafman suggests that in order to take stock of how these 3D

images might affect the player they must first stop playing; there is no chance for meaningful understanding if restricted by the game's structure of play.

Figure 6 has been removed due  
to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 6:** Jon Rafman, Still from *A Man Digging*, 2013, single channel video, 9:06 minutes

This method of critically engaging with the technological structures that create these 3D images is central to understanding Rafman's mode of critique. Flusser's argument for a critical engagement with "technical images" (Flusser, 2011) can be seen to take place in Rafman's work. Flusser identifies that "technical images" are images that are mechanically made. Their production is hidden within a technological apparatus or "black box", hidden that is from both operator and audience. For Flusser this obfuscation of the production of images denies any potential for critical engagement with the images themselves, creating what he calls a "global image scenario" (Flusser, 2011). Flusser calls for a dialogical or playful engagement with the apparatus to interrogate and overcome what he calls the "totalitarian circuitry" (Flusser, 2011) inherent in the technical image. Rafman's strategy of playing of the game and screen recording or filming this process is the kind of "dialogical engagement" that Flusser calls for. Rafman uses the technical structure of the video game image to work against the "global image scenario" it contributes to.

This critical strategy has been further developed by the writer Marcel Rene Marburger who examines how artists engage with technical images and the apparatuses that create them. Key to Rafman's practice is Marburger's call for "the use of existing technology against itself" (Marburger, 2013). Rafman's playing of the game allows the logic of the video game software to compose the work. This is the way in which Rafman uses the technology against itself to reveal the ways in which it constructs images. By employing Flusser's idea of a playful engagement with the apparatus by literally playing, Rafman reveals how the construction of images in 3D video game images might "restructure reality" (Flusser, 2000). Rafman's use of machinima is not merely an act of fandom or play, as many examples of this genre are. Instead, Rafman's use of machinima is a deliberate creative and critical strategy aimed at unpacking and understanding how 3D video game images are constructed and how these 3D images have similar affective, symbolic functions to photography.

Typically, machinima requires the use of other software and incorporates hacking to remove extraneous features of the game, such as 'Heads-Up Displays'<sup>5</sup>, or allows filming from camera angles outside of what is possible in the game's regular use. Rafman subverts these conventions by leaving the player-character's 'health' visible on screen. Between each cut the character's health, portrayed by the character's silhouette, jumps up and down, suggesting a violence being done to the narrator. The entire film is seemingly shot from the narrator's perspective, reminiscent of a first-person shooter game. This is in contrast to the actual game itself, which is played from an 'over the shoulder' camera angle, where the viewer sees the virtual world as if they were floating behind the protagonist. Rafman here reveals the photographic foundation of 3D images, showing how our experience of these scenes is able to be manipulated, transferring us between different "camera" positions, which are otherwise invisible to the player. Rafman subverts the audience's usual perspective in this 3D image, taking them, perhaps, from disembodied viewer to complicit participant. By centring the audience as the viewer of these images Rafman

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<sup>5</sup> A Heads-Up Display or 'HUD' in video games refers to an overlay or status bar which indicates different kinds of information for the player including a character's health, their remaining ammunition or the amount of progress they have made.

begins to reveal the technological foundations of these 3D, technical images as being photographic, privileging a lens-based perspective, a medium that is perhaps more familiar, less inaccessible.

In the chapter 'Free Fall', from her book *The Wretched of the Screen* (2012), Hito Steyerl charts how two-point perspective has been used to sculpt "space and human consciousness using ideology masked as objective reality." (Steyerl, 2012, p. 6) Steyerl goes on to discuss how contemporary, technical images have shifted the construction of space and visual consciousness by disembodimenting our gaze and outsourcing it to machines and other objects. Rafman plays with this shift in *A Man Digging*. The perspective of the work is indebted to traditions of Renaissance perspective, however the camera floats above the surface of the world in Rafman's work. The work outsources this perspective to the narrator and the software he exists in. In Rafman's work this outsourcing of perspective, the way that we experience the 3D image, is made visible. Rafman's work reveals that this shift in perception is not present only when we are immersed in these images but it may also slip over into our experience of the real world.

The media theorist Lev Manovich also examines how 3D imaging has affected visual perspective. He writes "...Although 3-D computer-generated images are usually rendered in linear perspective, they are really collections of separate objects, unrelated to each other." (Manovich, 2001, p. 257). This speaks to Steyerl's idea that 3D images have escaped "(t)he tyranny of the photographic lens, cursed by the promise of its indexical relation to reality, has given way to hyperreal representations—not of space as it is, but of space as we can make it—for better or worse." (Steyerl, 2012, p. 26) The multiplied perspectives of these 3D spaces open new ways to consider social and political futures. In Rafman's work this argument is complicated. The access to the alternative perspectives promised by 3D images is denied. It appears that "the tyranny of the photographic lens" (Steyerl, 2012, p. 26) might still reign. As 3D imaging technologies are built upon a model and the language of photographic process



this perspective is still the prevailing mode of representation both in-game and outside of it.

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to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 7:** Jon Rafman, Still from *A Man Digging*, 2013, single channel video, 9:06 minutes

The places depicted in *A Man Digging* are important in understanding how Rafman engages with the relationship between 3D images and photographic representation. The setting of the game *Max Payne 3* occurs in Hoboken, New York and Sao Paulo, Brazil. The locations in the game are not exact replicas of these cities but fictionalised approximations of them, generated and sampled from photographs of their real-world counterparts. As Manovich notes, "...what computer graphics have (almost) achieved is not realism, but rather only *photorealism* - the ability to fake not our perceptual and bodily experience of reality but only its photographic image." (Manovich, 2001, p. 200). Rafman, in meditatively lingering on these photorealistic approximations, suggests that although computer graphics cannot fake our perceptual and bodily experience of reality, they might fundamentally alter it. In other words, these 3D images are so readily investible with emotion because they are grounded in a photographic understanding of the world.

In her seminal text *On Photography*, Susan Sontag explores how photography has fundamentally altered an understanding of the “real” (Sontag, 1977). 3D imaging’s technological foundation in photographic terms and processes indicates that the 3D image has a similar relationship to the “real” as the photograph. For Rafman’s narrator the 3D images of the video game have “anaesthetised” him to his experience of the world; his memories and emotional connections to the “real” are found only in the video game images he shows us. Sontag writes “To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate.” (Sontag, 1977, p. 20). The narrator can only remember his experiences in the form of images, but his responses lack compassion, as Sontag describes. In the narrator’s constant digging for these images, he anaesthetises himself against the suffering we are shown, the images of broken bodies and decimated buildings. Rafman’s work draws a line of consistency from Sontag’s theories on the photograph’s relationship to the real to video games and 3D images. Rafman’s work reveals how 3D images can construct realities and how these realities can produce affective resonances, even if they are stripped of compassion.

According to the art critic Galit Mana, Rafman’s focus on photorealistic 3D images “emphasizes the ‘real world’ origins of digital products” (Mana, 2013). Mana also writes that Rafman is “Critical of real and virtual worlds, the artist sees both as limited and deterministic. Whether heavily programmed or controlled by socio-political structures, for Rafman neither world offers greater freedom.” (Mana, 2013). This understanding of the 3D image, as offering no more or no less freedom than the photographic, is central to understanding the link between the two. We are left to dig through images of these photorealistic worlds that ultimately offer no emancipation from the violent images that haunt us. We are unmoved by them, instead left to contemplate the static violence as one might in a work of documentary photography.

*A Man Digging* serves as an important example of how the apparatus of 3D technology might be deconstructed, manipulated and reconstructed to reveal

how these images have intense affective properties that echo our relationships to photography. The kinds of emotional intensities that are invested in these 3D images are fed back in Rafman's work as cold, detached and disinterested affects. This approach, this re-deploying of the video game image's affective resonance, is found in other creative practices which examine the relationship between the 3D image and photography, such as in the practices of Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, which are discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3: The life and death of the 3D image: Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe's *No Ghost Just A Shell*

This chapter examines the work of Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe, in particular their collaborative project *No Ghost Just A Shell*, also known as the Annlee project. This chapter examines the strategies they employ, through the writing of W.J.T Mitchell, Flusser and Bazin, to draw conclusions about how Parreno and Huyghe explore the affective relationships of images. These insights are applied in examining how desire and vitality is manifested in the images produced by 3D, video game fanartists and how it might be possible to redirect and redeploy these affects through a photographic engagement.

Parreno and Huyghe are French artists whose individual practices cover a wide variety of media, including film, installation, performance, sculpture, and text. While both artists engage with a number of different themes and ideas, their practices find similarities in the way they explore the productive potentials of collaboration. Their approach to the agency of the image in the *No Ghost Just A Shell* project demonstrates an example of the ways that artists can adopt and adapt fanartist strategies to critically engage with the potential photographic potency of computer-generated images.

*No Ghost Just A Shell* began in 1999 when Parreno and Huyghe purchased a stock manga character from the company Kworks (Huyghe, Parreno, 2003). Nameless and given only an ID number, this character cost the artists only 4600 Yen. The character was not supplied with a complex background, skills or psychological profile (as 'primary' characters are) and was intended to exist only as a background character. Supplied with a simplistic sketch of the character, Parreno and Huyghe worked with filmmaker Anna-Léna Vaney to transform it into a 3D object which could be copied, distributed and manipulated by other artists. Huyghe and Parreno named this character Annlee and supplied this sketch and 3D model to a number of artists, asking them to interpret the

character as they saw fit. These artists included M/M (Paris), Pierre Joseph & Medhi Belhaj Kacem, Joe Scanlan, Liam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, François Curlet, Richard Phillips, Angela Bulloch & Imke Wagener and Anna-Léna Vaney. The works these artists created using Annlee's likeness ranged from wallpapers and posters to short films to a set of toys. Huyghe and Parreno, at the conclusion of this project, formed a company, chaired by the lawyer Luc Saucier, named *ANNLEE*. A contract was drawn up by the chair of the company to transfer all copyright of Annlee, the production and use of her likeness, to this company. This effectively meant the character Annlee retains all legal rights to their own image and its reproduction.

While all of these works created through this project are of interest to this project, because of the different ways they engage with the agency of Annlee's 3D and photographic image, this chapter will focus specifically on Parreno and Huyghe's contributions to the project – both individually and collaboratively – as well as Joe Scanlon's. This chapter also examines the implications of the concluding act of the project whereby the rights to reproduce and represent Annlee were returned to the image itself. This project is a key example of how artists might re-imagine and redeploy the 3D image to reveal how their photographic foundations create intense affective relationships with their viewers.

Parreno's initial contribution to the Annlee project is titled *Anywhere out of the World* (2000). Running for 3:24, this video displays Huyghe's and Parreno's 3D reinterpretation of the original 'sign', as Huyghe and Parreno refer to the sketch of the unnamed character that would become Annlee. Annlee addresses the viewer directly, appearing out of the darkness and standing against a black background. Annlee's eyes are large, empty, matte grey surfaces wide-set on the character's large face. Annlee sways and paces across a blank space, reminiscent of a photographic studio, recounting the story of her origins and how she came to be redesigned and animated. Throughout the work Annlee describes how her image may have been used before her 'liberation' from the marketplace she was supposed to fill. The flat, empty, detached affect of the

work, Annlee's monotone voice and blank stare, is a purposeful redirection of the affective resonances she was designed to create. Affective resonance refers not only to the affective power of the image (in this case, of Annlee), but also to the complex, dialogical interplay of affect and emotion that occurs between two or more subjects. Rather than merely experiencing an emotional state brought on by viewing an image, this term recognises that images and subjects are shaped and shape each other through affective responses. Instead of being a romantic foil or even a simple, filler background character Annlee is a cold, impenetrable surface. This redirection of the spectacular affect of the 3D image is a strategy also seen in Rafman's work, as discussed above, and in my own practice.

Figure 8 has been removed due  
to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 8:** Philippe Parreno, *Anywhere Out of the World*, 2000, Beta digital video, 4 minutes

Parreno's animated film is short and simple. Annlee's appearance is designed closely to her manga origins and is the sole focus of the video. While Annlee's

movements are human-like she doesn't quite look human; she still very much appears to be an animation in a style familiar to Japanese anime. While Annlee doesn't look to be 'realistic' the photographic foundations of the 3D imaging software used to animate her imbue her with photo-realistic qualities, Annlee appears to be of this world. Vilem Flusser writes of the technical or 3D image: "Instead of representing the world, they obscure it until human beings' lives become a function of the images they create." (Flusser, 2000, p. 10) Parreno's video, with its 3D rendered character and the void of the background, resists this idea. Rather than obscuring the world Parreno has allowed part of the world, Annlee, to speak back to the humans that have created her image, to resist the affective projections they might place upon her.

Annlee states: "I belong to whom is ever able to fill me with any kind of imaginary material. Anywhere out of the world. I am an imaginary character. I am no ghost, just a shell" (Parreno, 2000). Annlee, like the characters and images which fanartists manipulate, is given 'life', and filled with meaning only by being filled with the desires of the artists that animate and imagine her. Parreno says in an interview that Annlee "...a sign around which a community has established itself and which this community also established. Unlike a logo, it's a fragile sign without autonomy; it has that ability to become plural and complex." (Parreno, Huyghe, 2003, p. 17). Parreno's assertion that the sign or image is worthless without the community that helps to produce it parallels the relationship that fanartists have to the characters they manipulate and image.

This relationship is so powerful because the 3D image is built around a framework of the photograph, constructed through the terminology, models and processes which are fundamentally photographic. It stands to reason that we are predisposed to accept the power and apparent reality of the 3D image as we do of the photograph. This understanding of the photographic image is reflected in Andre Bazin's foundational text 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in which he writes:

“In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.” (Bazin, 1960, p. 8).

Bazin describes how this causal link, or index, to the thing being represented is what gives photography the power to affect its viewer.

This “transference of reality” (Bazin, 1960, p. 8) to the 3D image is foregrounded in Parreno’s work *Anywhere out of the World*, where Annlee is shown holding a representation of a photograph of her original form as a simple sketch without any distinguishing details. Annlee says “Look. That’s how I used to be and this is how I look now. It’s like when you point out an old photo.” (Parreno, 2000). The relationship between Annlee and this photograph suggests a “transference of reality”. We are “forced to accept as real” the existence of Annlee. The specific use of 3D software, and the photographic foundations of this technology, means that fanartists’ relationships to the characters and images they produce are “photographic” that this “transference of reality” vitalises their images. Martin Lister writes that in the “...aspiration of computer graphics to be photo-realistic, the photographic image is newly valued as the very sign of reality at the same time as chemical photo-technology is displaced in the technical production of the image.” (Lister, 2009, p. 331). In other words, the 3D, computer-generated image, is as much a link to the real as any photographic reproduction that Bazin considers in his text.



Figure 9 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 9:** Philippe Parreno, *Anywhere Out of the World*, 2000, Beta digital video, 4 minutes, installation view

The writing about this project often argues that Parreno and Huyghe wanted other artists to “bring her to life” (SFMOMA, 2002). The idea that some images might ‘live’ is explored in W.J.T Mitchell’s book “What Do Pictures Want?”. Mitchell writes “We have an incorrigible tendency to lapse into vitalistic and animistic ways of speaking when we talk about images. It’s not just a question of their producing “imitations of life” (as the saying goes), but that the imitations seem to take on “lives of their own.””(Mitchell, 2005, p. 2). Mitchell’s analysis of images unpacks how images are understood and the contradictory ideas that are projected onto them. In particular, his discussion on what pictures “want” or “desire” and our “double consciousness” about images illuminate how Annlee is encountered as an animated, living sign. Annlee lives for Parreno and Huyghe only through her plurality, her capacity to be the carrier of each artist’s will. Images, worlds and characters in fanart exist in the same way. Fanartists reconfigure, re-enact and reimagine characters, objects and environments from video games to not only fill them with their own desire but to have that desire reflected back at them, by a representation that, in its plurality, has life.

Mitchell's conception of this "double consciousness" can be described as the paradoxical understanding of images as both alive and dead, powerful and powerless. Mitchell writes that we simultaneously understand images in two ways, "vacillating between magical beliefs and skeptical doubts, naive animism and hardheaded materialism, mystical and critical attitudes..." (Mitchell, 2005, p. 7). In other words, we are critical of images and the way they image reality, but we also behave as if we believe they are of the real, and that they have the power to affect us. Although viewers are critical of 3D images, understanding they are of the real, Mitchell argues that the viewer still thinks and talks about them as having powerful, magical attributes that are affective and powerful. Mitchell also writes about how images can be understood to "live" by breaking down how a living being is defined. Mitchell comes to the conclusion that "... the best definition of a living thing is a straightforward dialectical statement: a living thing is something that can die." (Mitchell, 2005, p. 52). To further develop these insights into how Huyghe and Parreno play with this understanding of what it means for an image to be alive, I will now discuss Joe Scanlan's contributions to the project, as well as Huyghe and Parreno's creation of the *ANNLEE* company.

Scanlan's works *DIY Or How To Kill Yourself Anywhere In The World For Under \$399*, (2002), and *Do It Yourself Dead On Arrival (Annlee)*, (2002), are among the final contributions to the Annlee project. In *DIY Or How To Kill Yourself Anywhere In The World For Under \$399* Scanlan recreated an IKEA instruction manual for a DIY coffin, pieced together from various different IKEA products. Replacing the featureless character of the standard IKEA instruction manual with an illustration of Annlee, Scanlon's 112 page, illustrated book gives Annlee some degree of autonomy, outside of her predetermined purpose. Annlee goes about building Scanlan's DIY coffin in a number of illustrations, her large, sad eyes vacantly surveying the generic flatpack pieces she is assembling. Giving us a guide to author our own burial Scanlan's book serves not only to liberate the consumer from the limits of commerce but also to liberate Annlee from the burden of her own vitality, the burden of being filled with the desire of the artists involved in her creation. The detached, melancholic affect of this work, echoing

Parreno's animation discussed above, confronts the audience with their complicity in Annlee's death. Even though this 3D image has been filled with affective power it gives nothing in return.

Figure 10 has been removed due to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 10:** Joe Scanlan, *DIY Or How To Kill Yourself Anywhere In The World For Under \$399*, 2002, book, offset on paper, 21 x 14.9 x 0.8 cm

Scanlan's book and the completed coffin, titled *Do It Yourself Dead On Arrival (Annlee)*, were presented in the same room as the legal contract, pertaining to the rights of Annlee's image in the exhibition of *No Ghost Just A Shell*, at the Kunsthalle Zürich in 2002. This contract outlined the forming of a company, named ANNLEE, which would act in the character Annlee's interests. Huyghe and Parreno then sold the rights to Annlee's image to the company with the proviso that Annlee's image may never again be reproduced or used. This essentially prevents the circulation of new forms of Annlee, preventing Annlee's plurality and killing Annlee herself. Presented in the exhibition, the contract sat in a space similar to a funeral parlour. The installation included two funeral bouquets, Scanlan's manual, depicting Annlee's construction of the casket and the coffin from Scanlan's book, constructed from an IKEA BILLY bookcase. At the inauguration of Art Basel Miami Beach, Huyghe and Parreno presented the work *A Smile without a Cat (Celebration of Annlee's Vanishing)* (2002), which

consisted of a fireworks display that formed the shape of Annlee's image. This event sealed Annlee's 'life', a celebration of her passing. Referring to Mitchell's statement that "... a living thing is something that can die...." (Mitchell, 2005, p. 52) the validity of Annlee's vitality, her existence as a living image, is consolidated by these two deaths. Firstly, her legal death, where her image may not be reproduced, her shell filled with life, and secondly, her visible death, where her image was lit up in the sky and then sealed away in a makeshift coffin, to be buried and memorialised.

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to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 11:** Joe Scanlan, *Do It Yourself Dead On Arrival (Annlee)*, 2002, BILLY bookcase parts (IKEA), 'DIY' manual, funeral bouquet, installation dimensions variable

The *No Ghost Just A Shell* project navigates and interrogates the complex relationships between 3D images, the autonomy and vitality of images and the shifting nature of photographic representation. For Huyghe and Parreno, Annlee is the ideal vessel to explore these ideas, serving as an 'empty sign' that can be filled with the desires and ideas of the artists who animate her through images. In adopting strategies from fanart practices Huyghe and Parreno develop a complex, critical response to this field of mainstream media content. Parreno and Huyghe redirect the affective relationships fanartists have to the characters

and images they manipulate, returning only a cold, melancholic affect that ends in the death of the image they've invested so much in. Huyghe and Parreno's images seem to assert Annlee as an autonomous, living being, due to the photo-realistic aspirations of 3D imaging technology and our shifting understanding of the photograph and the 3D image's connection to the photographic form. Although Annlee is modelled after the cartoon illustration of her original design, the rendering of the character in 3D imaging technologies imparts necessarily photo-realistic characteristics to her. This suggests that, because of the 3D image's photographic foundation, Annlee is as 'real' as any other photographed subject.

There are a variety of strategies that artists use when engaging with 3D images and photographic representation. Huyghe and Parreno have tapped into Mitchell's concept of 'double consciousness' in this project, the plurality of Annlee's image reflecting the practices of fanartists and the relationships they have with the images they create. While in this project Annlee is not 'photo-realistic', the creation of her image in 3D technologies imbues them with an inherently photographic nature, giving Annlee 'life'. Annlee's subsequent deaths suggest that our affective, narrative and symbolic relationships to 3D images should not be so quickly overlooked, and instead, that an examination of them, and how they connect to our experience of the photograph, might reveal that we are more invested in and affected by them than we might first think.

Figure 12 has been removed due  
to copyright restrictions.

**Figure 12:** Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, *A Smile without a Cat*  
(*Celebration of Annlee's Vanishing*), 2002, fireworks display at the inauguration  
of Art Basel Miami Beach.

## Chapter 4: Emotional diversions: critically re-directing the affect of the 3D video game image in creative practice

This chapter examines my artistic practice and charts how I have explored the technical and affective connections of photography and 3D images and redeployed this affect in a critical direction. Over the course of this research project, I have produced numerous bodies of work with a variety of exhibition outcomes. Through this artistic investigation, I have developed greater understandings of the creative processes, approaches and methodologies that can critically engage with the affective potentials of photographic and 3D images. The ideas discussed above have developed in concert with the development of the artworks I will discuss below; the theory and practice overlapping and intersecting throughout the research. The following bodies of work have all engaged with 3D video game and fanart images in discrete but connected ways, employing a number of different material processes to examine different emotional and symbolic elements of these images. My most recent exhibitions are perhaps more closely reflective of the above discussion on the 3D image's reliance on a photographic visual paradigm, however all of the works discussed below illustrate how these conclusions have been reached and chart how these ideas might be explored in different material and visual forms.



**Figure 13:** Installation view of ~, 2016, Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney

Prior to the commencement of this MFA research project, I had been exploring the potentials of 3D imaging technologies and video game images in my practice. This was initially borne out of my ambivalent feelings towards video games, that when I played them I would experience conflicting feelings of excitement, boredom, attraction and disgust. As a precursor to this MFA research project, my exhibition ~ in 2016 at Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney, contained three cyanotype prints, two digitally printed photo-collages, three 3D printed sculptures and an ambient sound work. Responding to Flusser's call for a dialogical or playful engagement with the apparatus, these works were all constructed from 3D models as well as audio and image texture files that were all hacked from the Playstation 2 game *Final Fantasy X* (Square Enix, 2001). Like Rafman's work discussed previously, this process required me to play the game while using open source software to extract these proprietary assets. These assets were reconstructed in software ranging from Adobe Photoshop to Maya (a 3D imaging and animation software). These reconstructed image assets were then collaged to recreate speculative symbolic motifs from this video game world, and then documented in cyanotype images and



reconstructed in 3d printed, full colour sandstone. The audio work was composed using fragments from the game's soundtrack and recomposed to resemble a hymn that reverberated throughout the space. Part of the conceptual motivation in this exhibition was to create a kind of pseudo-scientific cataloguing or archaeological unearthing of a video game environment.



**Figure 14:** *Bevelle Fragment*, 2016, toned cyanotype, 77x55cm

This exhibition was an early attempt at investigating the potential for working with 3D video game images to generate affective responses in audiences. To this end, the ambient sound work was specifically designed to envelop the audience, providing an immersive, meditative experience one might experience when playing a fantasy roleplaying game. The botanical cyanotypes and archaeological 3D prints aimed to build a collection of images, one that might "...be used to make a substitute world, keyed to exalting or consoling or tantalizing images." (Sontag, 1977, p. 162). While this exhibition was an early experiment in combining 3D digital processes with analogue photographic processes. This exhibition was an important point of development in assessing how particular modes of display can be leveraged through 3D video game images to generate meditative, contemplative and mystical affective resonances

in an artwork. Although this exhibition was realised well before the beginning of my candidature it has been an important foundation for my practice, establishing the conceptual and methodological processes by which I engage with the 3D video game image and photography.



**Figure 15:** *Gagazet Fragment*, 2016, 3D printed, full colour sandstone, acrylic, 20x20x90cm



**Figure 16:** *SADNESS*, installation view, 2017, Tributary Projects, Canberra

Extending on from ~, and marking the beginning of my candidature, I exhibited in the artist run initiative Tributary Projects, in Canberra. This exhibition, titled *SADNESS*, included a number of cyanotype prints depicting a range of video game characters in various states of anguish. Appropriated from video games and fanart<sup>6</sup>, this exhibition looked to examine the agency and vitality of these representations, questioning what W.J.T Mitchell calls our “double consciousness” of images. The motivation for this exhibition was to explore how and why there seemed to be a widespread compulsion to proliferate and add to this category of ‘crying video game characters’. This exhibition sought to harness and emphasise the affective resonances of the source material. The installation of the exhibition had these crying characters covering the walls of the gallery. This leveraged the sadness depicted in these images to create an imposing and sinister collection of anguished subjects. The motivation for this exhibition was again my own ambivalence to video game images, the conflictly numbing and emotionally stirring affect these images had on me. In

<sup>6</sup> The images used in this exhibition came from popular fanart forums and websites such as DeviantArt.com and video game concept art resources such as creativeuncut.com

this body of work, I used cyanotype processes to also connect with the history of photography in the recording of archives or catalogues of images, from Anna Atkins' historical, botanical specimens (Saska, 2010) to its more recent use in architectural and product design blueprints. I also used 3D printing technologies to construct a bust of the video game character Princess Peach, a perpetual damsel in distress in the Mario video game series. I deployed this use of 3D printing as a kind of pseudo-photographic process, capturing the image of the Princess from an in-game model and materialising her distorted, saddened form.

In my own work, I am drawn to source material which undermines the usual, spectacular affects of the video game image. In this exhibition the proliferation of these heightened, intense, emotional displays serves as a nullifying or 'anaesthetising' force, sadness then seems mundane in the video game image. This is a strategy which I have identified above, in the practices of Rafman, Huyghe, Parreno and Scanlan, and which I have developed and employed in a number of ways throughout this and subsequent exhibitions. This redirecting of affect, from the immersive, exciting, titillating experience of the video game, to the cold, detached and troubling affect of these photographic images, reveals how these fields contribute to a contemporary "global image scenario" (Flusser, 2011).



**Figure 17:** *SADNESS*, installation view, 2017, Tributary Projects, Canberra

The installation of this exhibition was designed to highlight the proliferation of the crying character trope in video game media and consequently fanart production and to position this particular expression of heightened emotion as central to both video game fanart and photographic practice. For fanartists 'reality' seems to be what they are shown by video games (Sontag, 1977, p. 161). This category of images seems to proliferate because fanartists are looking not to photography, but instead to video games, to find and construct their own affective relationships to the world. In creating a 'collection' of these sad characters, this exhibition interrogated how a photographic materiality might reveal hidden affective and symbolic resonances in video game images.





**Figure 18:** *Big Game Hunting*, 2017, installation view, Bus Projects, Melbourne

My next exhibition involved a collaboration with my colleague Finn Marchant. Titled *Big Game Hunting* at Bus Projects in Melbourne, this exhibition included a large-scale, 3D printed dragon head, extracted from the video game *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare, 2009), along with a large photographic print of the flattened texture image file associated with the 3D model. An interactive sound work played ambient wind noise extracted from the fantasy roleplaying game *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt RED, 2015). These ambient sounds were triggered as the audience moved throughout the space, replicating the kinds of immersive and generative soundtracks that these games use.

Marchant and I explored in this exhibition, how these appropriations, which serve as digital readymades, can potentially reveal the way 3D video game images are constructed. By extension, we wanted to tap into and reconfigure the ways they construct desire, emotions and fantasies. Importantly these images have been taken from fantasy role-playing games, which demand an investment of tens of hours from their players. By materialising forms from a

video game world, this exhibition engaged with Flusser's conceptions of the apparatus and technical image. These 3D imaging technologies, including 3D printing, were repurposed 'against' themselves and the owners of this intellectual property. In the inkjet print *c\_dps\_phoenix\_d* the texture file of a 3D model was flattened to reveal the peculiarities of its construction and in the 3D printed sculpture *cdr\_highdragon\_ancient\_all\_d* the spectacle of the 3D model of a mythical dragon was materialised and made static, revealing the fragile, polygonal structure of the fearsome, in-game beast. This exhibition looked to reveal how the "photographic universe" (Flusser, 2005, p. 71) within which the 3D video game operates contributes to the "automatic reprogramming of society." (Flusser, 2005, p. 70).



**Figure 19:** *cdr\_highdragon\_ancient\_all\_d*, 2017, 3D printed PLA plastic, virtual chrome paint



**Figure 20:** *Ruins*, 2018, installation view, Kudos Gallery, Sydney

In developing strategies to leverage the affective potential of the 3D image I held an exhibition at Kudos Gallery, Sydney in 2018. Titled *Ruins* this exhibition extended the experiments and material concerns I had been developing for the first year of my candidature. This exhibition further developed many of the conceptual and material threads of my previous work. In particular, this body of work allowed me to focus on colliding 3D imaging technologies with specific photographic genres, such as portraiture and archaeological documentation, to explore the affective potentials of these images.

Consisting of fifteen black and white, gelatin silver photographic prints and twelve colour, digital inkjet prints, this exhibition also used the appropriation of fanart strategies, tools and methodologies as well as black and white, darkroom photographic techniques. This combination has been particularly important in developing deeper understandings of the affective power of 3D images, and represents my specific contributions to this field of contemporary art practice. Many analogue and digital processes are strategically connected in my practice,



the shared foundation of the way these apparatuses produce emotional responses is both obscured and revealed.

This exhibition included analogue photographs of digitally rendered characters and objects and inkjet prints of 3D rendered video game environments which have been reconstructed and altered in commercial 3D modelling software. These images are constructed using freeware, such as the Xnara posing studio, which is commonly used by fanartists. These rendered images are then photographed on film. The black and white photographs in this exhibition are analogue prints developed in the darkroom on a range of different papers, ranging from expired bromide papers to contemporary resin coated papers. The colour photographs in this body of work are digital inkjet prints. The photographs here deliberately refer to images from a range of photographic sources, including photographs of antiquity, memento mori photographs and museological photographs of relics and artefacts. The way that the depicted characters are posed in 3D software refers both to Victorian-era post mortem photography and pornographic fanart imagery. The fanart practices from which I appropriate strategies and visual references often produce images that are sexual in nature, ranging from the erotic to the pornographic. This field of fanart often reinforces the heteronormative politics of the video games they are fans of and of the 'gamer' subculture.

By pushing images through the latest digital processes as well as traditional analogue ones, my work reveals how 3D images and photography inform each other. Rather than being distinct, separate technologies of imaging, they are deeply intertwined technically and affectively. This is an approach that is integral to overcoming what Flusser calls the "totalitarian circuitry" (Flusser, 2011) of the technical image, where operators and audiences might find space outside of the automatic reprogramming of the apparatus. This approach involves breaking open the 'black box' not only of the 3D video game, but also of traditional photographic processes.



**Figure 21:** *Memento Mori*, 2019, Gelatin Silver print on Ilford Multigrade IV RC Warmtone Paper, 51 x 41cm



**Figure 22:** *Ruins*, 2018, installation view, Kudos Gallery, Sydney

In the photographs of objects I have used vintage, decorative darkroom mask frames in specific images, and the small scale of some of the photographs also reference memento mori photography. These choices echo the painstakingly intricate and delicate decorations that surround examples of memento mori photographs including dried flowers, strands of hair and embroidered designs. Photography theorist Geoffrey Batchen writes that through these decorative elements “...this skillful act of remembrance, this labor of respect, history is made personal, and an otherwise banal portrait made to seem like a sacred relic.” (Batchen, 2004, p. 87). In evoking a sense of the memento mori, these works seek to connect with the immense amount of time and effort that fanartists put into extracting and then posing and rendering these characters. In this way, their labour can be considered another kind of “skillful act of remembrance”, with fanartists attempting to “...replace living, emotive memories with static and historical images.” (Batchen, 2004, p. 94). The appropriation of these motifs and compositions calls on familiar photographic tropes to evoke a sense of history in the objects depicted, harnessing the emotional intensities and potencies of photography. The emotional resonances are redirected in my work as emptiness, sadness and melancholy, in contradiction to the usually spectacular, life-filled and exciting affect of the video game. The anachronistic, digital subject matter serves to complicate this investment, deliberately confusing the affective resonances of the photographic object.



**Figure 23:** *Ruins (ii)*, 2018, inkjet print on Canson Art Rag paper, 51 x 66cm

The digital inkjet prints of video game environments are composed with reference to photographs of antiquity, particularly mid-1800's documentation of Mediterranean and Egyptian ruins. This visual reference highlights the technical and affective connections between photography and the 3D image. The environments found in video games are constructed to fulfill particular narratives and generate specific affective relationships with their players. The emptying of these environments and the 'photographing' of them in these works heightens the constructed nature of these images. In making these, once interactive, worlds into static documents I again redirected the affective potential of these images into a flat, melancholic scene. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak writes that photographs of antiquity are "archaeological site(s) and, at the same time, an artifice..." (Szegedy-Maszak, 2006, p. 4). The same can be said of these images of video game worlds, serving as an idealised construction and a site from which intense affect might be unearthed.



**Figure 24:** *Ruins*, 2018, installation view, Kudos Gallery, Sydney

The installation and interspersing of these different images in the exhibition sought to encourage new connections and narrative relationships between the images in the series. These new narrative relationships subtly disrupt the covertly sexist and violent origins of the images, at times heightening the sexual nature of the portraits or highlighting the absence of the figure or its trace in the environments. The distorted faces and bodies of the figures, the menacing and dark lighting and the close up, low shot angles of the portraits are used to complicate the way we usually engage with these characters in the spectacle of the video game. This sequencing aims to complicate the emotional and affective resonances of these images and looks to reveal how photography and 3D images more broadly might generate a limited or highly controlled range of affective functions.

## Masters Exhibition

The exhibitions discussed above have each approached the question of how 3D images generate meaning and affective responses through a photographic paradigm or framework in a number of different ways. In these exhibitions I have materialised the video game image in 3D printed forms, built collections or albums of sad fanart, visualised speculative worlds built from fragments of video games and combined digital 3D and analogue photographic techniques to find ways of redirecting the affective resonances of the video game image. Each of these exhibitions have revealed how 3D images are capable of producing intense emotional connections in their viewers and how this is achieved through the 3D's photographic foundations. These exhibitions have also explored how these affective connections can be redeployed, taking the immersive spectacle of the video game and creating melancholic, cold, horrific, erotic and disturbing images.

The concluding exhibition to this practice-led research project, features a body of work that brings together the different approaches that have been employed in the previous bodies of work described above. In developing the work for this exhibition, titled *Fragile Fantasy*, it was important for me to reflect on these previous exhibitions and analyse how the materials, processes and layouts developed certain affective resonances. The intense affective and contemplative properties I sought to create in these works seemed dulled by the range and number of works in these exhibitions. What has developed from these exhibitions has been a deeper understanding of how the material nature of the works and the collision of this with the photorealistic 3D image has the potential to redirect the symbolic resonances of these images. The black and white, gelatin silver portraits that disguised the digital origins of the image, where disintegration and high definition are co-present have become the motivating force behind this final exhibition. What emerged from these previous works was a sense of piecing together of these elements in a familiar narrative. They evoked and referenced a cinematic horror narrative, with the anguished portraits

floating in deep black voids. This tendency, for the creation of narrative, has been central to the development of this final exhibition and the placement, selection and material choices made in these works are all designed to complicate familiar or expected narrative connections.



**Figure 25:** *A Lurking Danger*, 2018, Gelatin Silver Print on Foma Fomatone Paper, 28 x 36cm





**Figure 26:** *Come With Me*, 2018, Gelatin Silver Print on Foma Fomatone Paper, 126 x 108cm



This exhibition is comprised entirely of analogue darkroom prints. These photographs range in scale from 8 x 10 inches to 50 x 42 inches. There are also a number of different traditional, analogue, photographic techniques that have been used in these works, such as hand tinting and colour toning. As in previous works, the figures in these images have all been extracted from a number of roleplaying video games using freeware tools and software. They have been 'posed'<sup>7</sup> in computer programmes that are commonly co-opted by fanartists, such as XNALara, and rendered photorealistically in Maya to reference traditional genres of photography such as Still Life and Victorian post-mortem photography. These references are designed to deliberately encourage ambivalent emotional and affective resonances in order to question photography's and the 3D image's role in reinforcing the cultural and affective modes these genres contribute to.

The objects depicted in this exhibition range from weapons to flowers and unidentifiable fragments. Some of the objects are tools of violence, while others are romantic keepsakes and symbols of passion. These choices refer not only to the kinds of affective and symbolic relationships of 3D video games, but also to familiar genres of photography, from the vernacular, to still life to archaeological evidence to pornography. The choices of these objects, and their specific interspersing among the portraits, are designed to encourage particular affective resonances. Swords and mushrooms appear next to portraits of anguished and darkened faces, however roses and crystals interrupt the expected, violent associations of these pairings. In this way, this body of work seeks to create a space where emotions of desire, horror, nostalgia, and a self-conscious awareness of how we project these powerful characteristics onto images are all intertwined.

The titles of each of the works are appropriated from soundtrack titles from various roleplaying video games. The titles have been chosen not just to highlight the image's origins in the spectacle of the video game or as obvious

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<sup>7</sup> In the program XNALara character models are posed with reference to a kind of skeleton consisting of 'bones' and 'joints'. Operated via a graphical interface or a set of sliders these characters can be posed in all manner of realistic and distorted configurations.

connections to the content of the work, but to emphasise the concurrently romantic and sinister essence of the works. The titles range from the nostalgic *Recollection of a Petal*, which depicts a mass of crushed, disintegrating rose petals, toned in a deep, melancholic blue, to the erotically ambiguous *Come With Me*, a large, closely cropped portrait depicting a female character, open mouthed and obscured by darkness. These titles also give the viewer another opportunity to build narrative connections between the images, questioning who is being addressed in these titles and what it is that these photographs, in the words of W.J.T Mitchell, might “desire” (Mitchell, 2005).



**Figure 27:** *Awakening*, 2018, Gelatin Silver Print on Foma Fomatone Paper, 61 x 51cm



**Figure 28:** *Flowers Blooming*, 2018, Hand tinted Silver Gelatin Print on Foma Fomatone Paper, 25 x 20cm

Through my techniques of selection, posing, composition, hand printing, toning and tinting this exhibition condenses and refines many of the methodological approaches I have experimented with over the course of my candidature. In particular, this body of work specifically focuses on the affective dimensions of the 3D images I source, and their potential manipulations through photographic processes. In employing Flusser's call for a "playful engagement" (Flusser, 2011) with the apparatus, this body of work complicates the symbolic functions of photography through the combination of these specialist digital and traditional analogue processes. This conflation of the digital and analogue, the photorealistic and the photographic, ask the viewer to consider what they expect from these kinds of images and what these images might "desire" (Mitchell, 2005) from them.

In this chapter I have elaborated on how the works I developed throughout this project experiment with and interrogate the 3D video game image and its relationship to photography. I have discussed how different material and methodological processes have allowed for a creative and critical engagement with 3D video game and fanart images. In each of these exhibitions my own ambivalent feelings towards video game and fanart imagery have been explored in order to interweave conflicting affects into the work, such as emotions of longing, lust, disgust and fear. This motivation has led me to unpack how 3D video game images generate normative affective conditions and how an artistic practice can find ways to reconfigure and re-deploy these emotional, symbolic and narrative relationships.



**Figure 29:** *Recollection of a Petal*, 2018, Blue toned Silver Gelatin Print on Foma Fomaspeed Paper, 126 x 108cm

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have explored how the 3D image is constructed and understood within photographic frameworks. The technical structure of computer-generated 3D video game images draw directly from photographic technologies and their distinct drive towards photorealism. This link to photorealism produces not only 'photographic' images but also reproduces affective, symbolic and narrative responses that are found in specific photographic forms and genres. This practice-led research project has been concerned with how this understanding of the 3D image can enable artists to deconstruct the technical framework of images to redeploy and interrogate their emotional and affective potentials. While heightened, photographic interactions with the 3D image are commonly found in video game fanart, there is a timely and serious need for critical and creative reflection in contemporary art contexts on the power of these images. As 3D image technologies allow for increasing levels of photorealism, and as these images become more ubiquitous in visual culture, it will be crucial for artists and audiences to understand the relationship between the technical and affective qualities of computer-generated images.

Throughout this thesis, I have identified a range of technical, material, and conceptual connections between photography and the 3D image. I began this thesis by outlining the scope and central concern of the research project. By locating my work and this project in the field of expanded photographic practice in contemporary art contexts, I have been able to draw from a diverse range of theorists, as well as analyse how a number of contemporary artists have highlighted and problematised the technical and affective dimensions of 3D video game images. In the first chapter, I outlined the relevant conceptual and contextual fields for this research project. By identifying fanart as an important, related area of cultural production I examined how their creative strategies can be adapted in contemporary art contexts.

The first chapter also outlined the theoretical field through which these images and imaging technologies have been analysed and interrogated. Drawing from

Manovich's understanding of the 3D image as inherently photographic, I argued that not only is its technical foundation photographic, but so too is its affective power and potential. In discussing this affective power, I examined Elkins' and Sontag's respective descriptions of the kind of "flattening" and "anaesthetising" power of photography (Elkins, 2011) (Sontag, 1977). By considering the 3D video game image as a photographic image, these insights have been used to argue that 3D images function in similar ways to create affective resonances. In looking towards how these complex technologies might be appropriated and redirected in artistic practice I considered Flusser's conception of the technical image. Flusser's understanding of these technologies as "black box apparatuses" that construct a self-perpetuating "universe of technical images" is central to understanding how artists might work against the way they construct a specific, normative field of representation (Flusser, 2011).

The next chapter provided more in-depth analysis of key contemporary artists working in this area. Jon Rafman's *A Man Digging* is an example of an artistic use of machinima to explore how the 3D video game image reveals its photographic foundation. This "dialogical or playful engagement" (Flusser, 2000) with the apparatus allows Rafman to interrogate the ways these technologies create and manipulate certain emotional states such as nostalgia, emptiness, and alienation. The attempts by Rafman's narrator to piece together a coherent image of their life through the scenes of violence and of the video game world recalls Elkins' articulation of photography as a "...flattened object in which wrecked reminders of the world are lodged." (Elkins, 2011. p.17)

Chapter 3 examined Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's collaborative project *No Ghost, Just a Shell*. With reference to W.J.T. Mitchell's conception of our "double consciousness" (Mitchell, 2005) of images and the mystical, vitality of images, this chapter unpacked the kinds of relationships fanartists have with the images they produce, and the potential for contemporary artists to critically engage with and redirect these strategies. Although Huyghe and Parreno's artistic strategies centre around the plurality of Annlee's image, and the kind of vitality and investment this engenders, the rendering of Annlee in 3D imbues her

with a photographic realism. By nature of the 3D's photographic framework, this instils in Annlee an undeniable, photographic link to the 'real'. By examining the 'death' of Annlee, and the complication of Annlee's existence through 3D and photographic images, I argued that our affective, narrative and symbolic relationships to 3D images should not be dismissed, and instead, can be productively and creatively harnessed in artistic contexts to reveal new symbolic, narrative and affective resonances.

The final chapter then examined my own artistic research and production in relation to these frameworks. This chapter charted the development of my own investigation into how the technical and affective dimensions of photography and 3D imaging are inextricably intertwined. This was interrogated through the use of analogue photographic materials, such as cyanotypes, black and white gelatin silver prints and vintage masks, toning and tinting techniques and their collision with high-end, specialist 3D imaging software. The work that was developed through experimentation over the project have explored potentials for activating affective resonances. This exploration was borne out of my own ambivalence to video game images and was developed through the theoretical and creative research conducted throughout my candidature. In my most recent exhibitions, the thread that connects all the work is the combination of specialist, digital imaging technologies and traditional, darkroom photographic techniques. This combination blurs the distinctions between these fields of imaging in order to generate heightened emotional responses such as horror, eroticism, nostalgia, romance and disgust. These conflicting emotional responses aim to highlight the manipulability of the 3D image and our "double consciousness" (Mitchell, 2005) of images, that they are simultaneously powerless and powerful.

The next steps for my practice and research will be to continue to unpack the technical structures of the 3D image and to apply the insights and processes discussed above to different photographic genres and conventions. Addressing genres such as the still life, archaeological and museological documentation as well as others, I will continue to seek ways of redirecting and reimagining the



affective and cultural power of these fields of representation. My practice will continue to critically examine the 3D image to discover strategies in which I might deconstruct the technical framework of these images and redeploy the emotional, symbolic and narrative potentials of these images.

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