



Quick Start Guide



This **User Manual** opens the *SwanQuake* project up to discursive reflection and expansion through its selection of articles and essays. In the first section, the *User Manual* takes you through some of the processes of making *SwanQuake* including sound composition, choreography and computer animation work. Also in section one is a modicum of do-it-yourself instructions and two views on **igloo's** work in relation to the wider field of digital arts practice and culture. In the second section, the *User Manual* broadens the scope of the discussion to include the ontology of game art, analysis of perspective in 3-D spaces, 'uncanny' realism and collisions between game artistry and commerce. This *Quick Start Guide* includes a short introduction to each individual article.

SwanQuake is a unique project involving the ongoing making of an interactive artwork comprising 3-D computer graphic environments and motion-capture driven characters created from a variety of materials and methods by an interdisciplinary team gathered together and led by igloo.

In each of the pieces, using a game controller, the viewer navigates freely throughout the 3-D computer graphic environments. The spaces are comprised of both exterior and interior landscapes, each thematically, visually & sonically distinct where users can interact with avatars to create new performances / performance spaces.

SwanQuake is a surreal semi-abstract inhabited world, home to a series of potential encounters. These may be theatrical and dreamlike, sometimes uncanny perhaps even frightening, at times quotidian and familiar. As an artwork, its primary aesthetics reside in the unique quality of these encounters designed as interactions that inspire curiosity, wonder and the desire to continue discovering and sensing. However, despite the title 'mashup' of computer game **Quake** and traditional ballet **Swan Lake**, there are no targets, health points, wins or dying swans here...

SECTION 1:

In *Pushing Polygons* the dialogue of artists **Bruno Martelli & Alex Jevremovic** gives a glimpse into the difficult and time-consuming process of creating the detailed 3-D environments and characters for the *SwanQuake* artwork - bringing to life the delicate combination of technical skill and artistic creativity that inform this project throughout. Bruno & Alex also provide information about how other creative processes in the project, such as choreography and sound composition, are integrated into their work.

In *DIY 10 steps 10 minutes 1 level*, Bruno Martelli provides a practical beginners guide to make it possible for anyone to create their own environment using the same game editing utility that built *SwanQuake*. This hands-on experience should make it apparent how accessible this technology is; provide some insight into the potential of the materials now available to artists working with game engines and a feeling for the experience, talents and tenaciousness required to create a sophisticated artwork.

In *Choreographing Cycling Anims*, arts researcher **Scott deLahunta** chronicles the various stages of the choreographic process during the making of *SwanQuake*. From choreographing, motion capturing and cataloguing movement material during the early days of the project, to selecting and mapping sequences onto the various characters. He also describes and analyzes the creative transformations that took place as the project choreographers, **Ruth Gibson**

and **John McCormick**, began to focus on the interactive relations between the viewer and the characters as part of an overall orchestration of image, sound, immersion and experience.

Composer and sound artist **Adam Nash** in *Real Time Art Engines 2: Sound In Games* discusses the evolution of computer music/ sound composition in relation to computer gaming. In his work for real-time 3-D environments, Nash says ‘the sonic ingredients all exist within the space ... and the user largely determines how these ingredients are put together.’ In this audiovisual space ‘where the composition and the performance converge’ Nash hopes to consciously engage the user in an awareness of their role in creating the sound.

In his essay *Data Art & Interactive Landscapes, performance and technology* scholar and artist **Johannes Birringer** provides a rich overview of the last fifteen year’s of work by igloo; contextualised within the broad spectrum of contemporary arts and culture with a focus on the digital. Birringer takes us on a journey through and alongside igloo’s practice to consider the background, possible alignments and precedents for it. In summarizing, in relation to their projects with game technologies, he finds their “artistic perspective is clearly one of counter-gaming”; and tentatively positions their work ‘in a larger context of visual art and the new developments in artistic data visualization’.

Media arts curator, **Helen Sloan**, in her essay *Cultural Resonance: participation, audiences and interface*, also examines igloo’s work, but within a specific analysis of the development and role of the ‘interface’ in interactive art. Sloan describes a handful of key artists and early to mid-1990s seminal ‘participatory’ interface based works against which she compares the work of igloo. She identifies a strong direction in their recent practice, as being a concern ‘with landscape and the figure’s role within it’; and makes the intriguing observation that there seem ‘to be parallels with 19th Century (landscape) observers such as Ruskin’. In closing, Sloan suggests that igloo’s ability to make artwork ‘that is beautiful and poetic from a truly interdisciplinary perspective’ positions them to make important contributions to the development of the interface in the future.

SECTION 2:

Media curators and writers **Shiralee Saul** and **Helen Stuckey** from Australia were invited to make a contribution on the emerging genre of game art. Their tightly written and informative essay is a must read for anyone wishing to have a first hand look at this developing art form. They make the point that a number of commentators have attempted to classify aspects of this rapidly changing area of work. However, their own ‘tentative categorisation’, involves the work of over a dozen artists and uniquely emphasizes the ontological grounding necessary for game art to evolve into reflexive practice.

Architect **Steve Turk** is working a series of projects that focus on the critical potentials of contemporary gaming phenomena for architectural design. To Turk, computer games represent ‘complex analogical mappings of the culture in which they are embedded’. With this in mind, his essay draws us into thought provoking contemplation starting from a century ago when artist philosopher Marcel Duchamp announced his withdrawal from the world of painting. In *Quake ‘n Space: Duchamp’s Game 40 Years After*, Turk writes about analyzing one of Duchamp’s artworks through its re-construction in a game level; while layering in references and connections to Satre, Deleuze and Benjamin (amongst others) and the military-industrial complex.

Advances in computation capacity leading to increasingly detailed real-time rendering of animated characters, are rapidly changing the nature of representations we may encounter in virtual environments such as those being built for *SwanQuake*. This led us to include some commentary & critique on these developments specifically in relation to the phenomenon known as Uncanny Valley.

Uncanny Valley is fairly well known hypothesis about the emotional response of humans to increasingly human-like entities (like robots or animated characters); and we have included two contributions to this book related to the theme of the uncanny valley and image realism. In the first, edited by Helen Sloan, three specialists in the fields of computer graphics, medical imaging technologies and computer games design (**Marco Gillies, Harry Brenton, David Surman**) discuss aspects of this theme in relation to their work. In his essay, *Gaming, Uncanny Realism and Technical Demonstration*, David Surman closely analyzes advances in realism in the games entertainment field and makes cogent critical observations regarding games production, uncanny valley and aesthetics alongside 'contiguous media'.

In the final essay, 'My game in your gallery? Professional game developers as artists', game developer **Katharine Neil** delivers a comprehensive and insightful report on the current state of the discussion between designers, developers, marketers, businessmen and other industry representatives on problems facing the computer game community with respect to the relationship between artistry and commerce. She posits that computer game creation is a cultural form currently losing in a struggle with an industry dominated by advertising, massive budgets and frightening competition. Game developers should be 'prepared to fight for what they believe in: their medium.'

THERE IS MORE

With the subtitle *User Manual*, we play, of course, with the notion of utility in relation to our field of information. So, what information does this book give you? The diverse materials and perspectives you will discover inside are intended to provoke thinking beyond any single artist, artist group, artwork or even genre in considering the broad social and cultural implications of gaming culture and gaming art. However, the User Manual should not be read only with the aim of grasping these wider implications. Here, you can also discover what a tired character animator likes to do to rejuvenate and why Julia's 'arse breaking' movement helped to determine certain modelling and choreographic choices. We hope that lying someplace within these diverse contents, ideally linked with the experience of the artwork itself, that you, as the reader / user, visitor / participant / performer, will find sufficient clues and connections to more fully understand the meaning and the making of the infinitely exploreable inhabited spaces of *SwanQuake*.

What I always found extraordinary in driving games was that you are always travelling into the vortex of the screen, but I always wanted to get out of the car and go for a walk. - Ruth Gibson

A new form of science fiction - Johannes Birringer

The  icon used throughout refers the reader to the accompanying on-line version of the User Manual www.SwanQuake.com/usermanual Here you can access all the URLs referenced or endnoted by the authors as well as additional materials.