



October 2 – November 3, 2001

by Kristin Lucas and Joe McKay

University of Illinois at Chicago

GALLERY 400

College of Architecture and the Arts
School of Art and Design

Welcome to *The Electric Donut!* We hope you plan to stay a while. There's coffee, tea and hot chocolate for your drinking pleasure, comfy places to lounge, games to play, images to look at and ways to keep tabs on your fellow Donut visitors. So, grab a coffee and don't be shy about joining in the games. You can play alone or with others.

By transforming the gallery into a video game arcade and café, Kristin Lucas and Joe McKay recreate the structures of a video-game arcade—lights, sounds, action, refreshments and all. Don't be completely fooled, though, because they go a step further, inverting, recasting and reordering those structures. In interactive computer programs and fully functional video games they make evident the limitations of computer interactivity and the physical and psychological effects of our interactions with the machine systems we have created.

In McKay's *Progress Clocks* (2001), for example, the bars we scroll across give us the current US Central Time as measured from a zero point for each measure of: days, months, seconds etc. The bars recall computer program task bars that fill up with color until the moment the task is done. As we mouse over the bars, we realize that McKay's computer is clocking up the time although the bars have no connection to how the computer calculates time. And yet, it is often this meaningless bar that we anxiously await as computer users.

Describing similar effects in her work Lucas says, "Because of the integration of computers into our lifestyles, we are more likely than ever to be following paths that have been predetermined for us. (Turn on computer, use pull down menu, double click on icon...)"¹ In Lucas's work interfaces between humans and machines are layered into videos such as *Watch Out for Invisible Ghosts* (1996) or built into the structure of the games *BLAM!* (2001) and *Electromagnegligence* (2001). In *...Invisible Ghosts* Lucas portrays both a player and a character. Shifting between a player operating the joystick and a figure-in-action, Lucas' image is literally layered

into games such as Pac-Man and Defender. But more than physically occupying the game, Lucas is emotionally tied in as well. Shifting between player and character guises, she expresses elation, anxiety and sadness as the game action progresses. The game lives both on the screen and in her head.

In the *Surveillance Café*, *BLAM!* and *Electromagnegligence* we visitors are submitted as image and voice into the action around us. In *Electromagnegligence* hitting key icons (clue: the video camera is one of three of these secret icons) with electro-waves will trigger images sent into the *BLAM!* screen. Texts submitted to *BLAM!* can be sent back as responses. The cameras sprouting from the *Surveillance Café*'s tables continuously send your image to a monitor hanging where all can see. So, watch what you do!

As the electro-waves of *Electromagnegligence* suggest, the electronic devices that surround us—from ATMs to cell phones to video games—emit electromagnetic signals, the effects of which we are just beginning to understand. The *Simulcast Mobile Kit #1* available in the *Simulcast Vending Machine* is designed in a low-tech way to "moderate the flow of competing and conflicting energies generated by the emissions of electronic devices." (Kit Brochure) A protective and interventionist possibility, the *Simulcast Kit* playfully mocks our high tech fetish fantasies at the same time that it points to real effects in our increasingly electronic world.

Playing and played, pictured and quoted, controlling and controlled, we visitors are absorbed into the realm of *The Electric Donut*. It was Robert Smithson who said in the early days of video art, "I'm interested in the apparatus I'm being threaded through." *The Electric Donut* makes clear that we are more than threaded through technological apparatuses. Hooked into, interfaced with, pre-programmed by, networked within, and even automated by technology, we are interpenetrated by its proliferation around us.

—Lorelei Stewart, Director, Gallery 400

1. Lucas in "Kristin Lucas, Online" by Beatrix Ruf in *Temporary Housing for the Despondent Virtual Citizen*, J. K. Center for Contemporary Art, Linz, Austria 2000, p. 14.

artists bios

Kristin Lucas

Since 1996 Lucas has participated in numerous festivals and exhibitions in the US and abroad, including *Young and Restless*, The Museum of Modern Art, NY and the *1997 Whitney Biennial*. She has had one person exhibitions at ICA, Philadelphia; O.K. Center for Contemporary Art, Linz, Austria; and Postmasters Gallery, NY. In August 1998 Lucas launched her first web project, *Between a Rock and a Hard Drive* with Dia Center for the Arts at <http://www.diacenter.org/lucas/>. A second site <http://www.simulsite.com/> was initiated in 1998. Her work in various media is documented on her sites <http://www.inch.com/~klucas/works> and <http://www.eai.org/involuntary/index.html>.

Joe McKay

A recent graduate of the Whitney Independent Study program, McKay has exhibited his work at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Sculpture Center, NY; and YYZ, Toronto. He has also published numerous artists' books through Printed Matter in NYC, including *Fuck Off* (1999) and *A Month of Jeopardy* (1993).

Credits

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