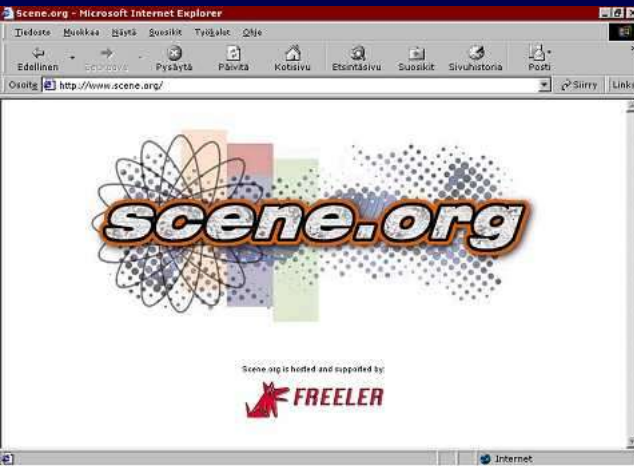


The Demo Scene

Sub or Pop?



What is a 'demo'?



common use of the term: a trial version of commercial software

"A demo is a program that displays a sound, music, and light show, usually in 3D. Demos are very fun to watch, because they seemingly do things that aren't possible on the machine they were programmed on. Essentially, demos "show off". They do so through either the computer's hardware abilities, the creative abilities of the demo group or through the programmer's abilities. Demos are an art form. They blend mathematics, programming skill, and creativity into something incredible to watch and listen to."

What is the 'scene'?

'demo scene' is a **community** which consists of people **making** demos, **attending** demo parties, and **discussing** demos in different forums (home pages, newsgroups, IRCs, etc.)

the scene has **hierarchies**

characteristics: commitment, enthusiasm, grassroots activity

History of the Scene

1st generation PCs in the 1980s

1st demos for the Commodore 64

> Atari ST & Amiga > PC > Java

from 'copy-parties' to 'parties' and
'compos'

cracking software protections; the 'warez
scene'

intros: accumulation of cultural capital

'oldskool' vs. popularisation of the scene

The Internet as a distribution channel

www.scene.org - www.demoscene.org -
www.hornet.org

Origins of the Demo-Species

demos are not arguably a result from the music video phenomenon; computer and television graphics have a considerable 'prehistory' even before the rise of Music Television and the PC
avantgarde cinema, John Whitney Sr
> Video art > Music Television

note: the 'booms' of both music videos and personal computers took place quite parallel to each other in the 1980s

demos as an intermediary form between the 'old' audiovisual culture...
...and the 'new' interactivity; demos as **audiovisual ambient**



From Dadaism to Demoism?

the demo scene has its origins in countercultural pursuits and the 'hacker ethic'; 'cyberdelic' imagery in demos
demo scene as **the digital avantgarde?**

pros: using new technology for one's own purposes; using it in creative ways in order to attain aesthetic & artistic goals

cons: no political agenda, no leaders, no manifestos; no new aesthetic strategies, no self-reflection?

but who cares – not the demoists anyway!

Portrait of the Demoist as a Young Man

Much like in making music with new technologies, deejaying etc., 'it is the **boys** who are playing with the **toys**'

pre-scene computer art: mostly engineers instead of artists

the **mathematical dimension** of art cannot be overlooked in demos

the demoist epitomises the artist as programmer and vice versa

the downside: 'polygon formalism';
'texture is the message'

The Scene as **Sub**culture?

programming identities: the scene as community

what are the scene's subcultural symbols? (other than the demos?)

= the parties

what are the **contradictions and anxieties** the demoists are trying to solve?

Nissen: "mastering modernity and modern technology"

> closer to fan practices and communities



To Sub or to Pop?

Helen Cunningham: 'The young people who grew up playing *PacMan* on their *Atari* games consoles in the 1980s have now entered **club culture**, and are the first generation to view computer technology as a natural instrument on or with which sounds can be created, played and reproduced.'

individual demos and groups'
'demographics' account for similar
'subcultural promotional media' as the
'bedroom mix tapes' of DJs trying to break
into the club scene

family resemblances: hackers, 'the warez
scene', techno & rave cultures

sub & **existence** vs. pop/fan & **leisure**

does avantgardism account for sub?

Conclusions

as an artform & aesthetic strategy: "post-cinema, par-techno"; **techno-folk art**

as a (sub)culture: avant-pop?

today IT skills are what counts;

reproduction of contemporary ethos and society, **affirming its ideologies**, for instance the role of technology as the symbol of progress

... and the headhunters are roaming the demo parties

Demo Over

In the end, I side with the hobbyist; the 'demoist no-one', as does Sean Cubitt:

[T]he hobbyist is more relevant to an understanding of digital aesthetics in the networked world than the professional and the industrialised. To see such engagement as merely personal is to miss both the personal politics of amateurism and the endless creativity of ordinary culture. Because 'everyone' watches Hollywood films but 'no-one' makes embroidery or videographics, to side with no-one is the only realistically eschatological option. The nobody who cooks is more interesting than the everybody who eats at McDonald's. (Cubitt 1998, 143.)