simulation against the grain

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by nicolas gourault

Simulation against the grain is Nicolas Gourault's first exhibition in Portugal. Comprised of five pieces, ranging from short films to multimedia installations and real-time computer simulations, this exhibition explores conflict and resistance in the age of "surveillance capitalism" (Shoshana Zuboff). Each piece shares a practical and experimental approach using digital image creation tools. Throughout the exhibition, there is a recurring tension between vernacular images from mass culture - such as found or archive footage - and more advanced technologies that utilise images in a new and more operational way. This way, *Simulation against the Grain* explores the power relations inherent to technology and tries to construct counter-narratives, sometimes ironic or tragic, using testimonies and the experimental creation of images.

Based in Paris, Nicolas Gourault (1991) is an artist and director interested in the process by which digital images are created. His work meanders between visual art and visual culture, linking these dimensions to political concerns through documentary and critical use of new media. Via image production tools, Gourault explores the forms of otherness
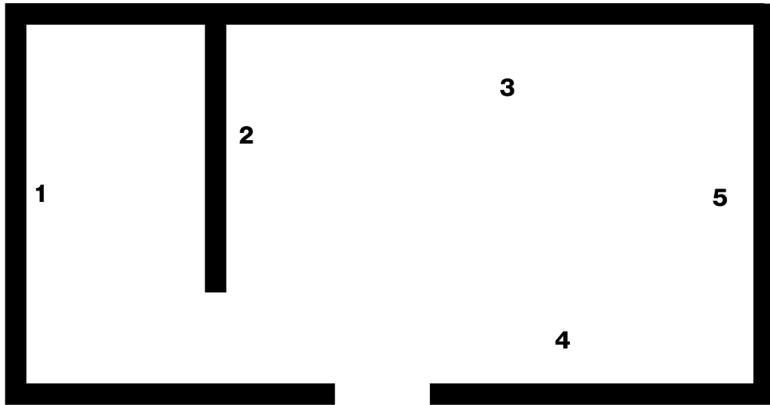
that persist within controlled spaces. His work has been shown at venues such as the Centre Pompidou, ZKM or Ars Electronica, but also at film festivals such as Cinéma du Réel, Festival dei Popoli, or IndieLisboa.

vo (2020)

The development of automated vehicles has fostered a lot of expectations during the past decade as much in terms of technological breakthrough as of financial speculation. Yet, the hype surrounding automation conceals the role of many human workers hired for subordinate and off-putting tasks which proved impossible to automate, be that for economical, technical, or legal reasons. Rather than on the prowess of an "intelligent" car, *VO* focuses on the "irony of autonomy", that is the unexpected twist by which humans who were meant to be replaced by machines are brought back in the loop to monitor them.

  A deadly accident between a self-driving car and a pedestrian sets off an investigation into the role of human workers in the training of driverless cars. Testimonies from Vehicle Operators (VO) guide us through a night shift where the landscape merges with data from the car's sensors.

faces in the mist (2017)

In the Roman religion, augurs were priests whose divinatory practices were designed to capture messages sent by the gods. In *Faces in the Mist*, a facial recognition program is used against the grain to detect meaningful patterns

in a shapeless stream of cloud recorded from live webcams in the nearby area. The memory of the algorithm has been filled with historical figures involved in climate prediction and manipulation, from mathematicians proposing equations to forecast the weather to politicians who wanted to use the clouds as weapons. Compulsively scanning through the clouds, a pareidolic bot reconstructs a choppy and hesitant hall of fame from the faces it is obsessed with.

turba (2021)

Turba (which comes from a Latin word conflating the meanings of both crowd and trouble) hijacks a crowd simulation software to generate digital unrest within still images of commercials. The avatars who make up the digital crowd are taken from archival footage of pitch invasions, a phenomenon that used to be common in the past but has become taboo in today's sports entertainment, where unwanted fans are banned from stadiums. The archive is composed of material gathered online from all publicly available sources and spans multiple continents over the last century. People from all origins throughout space and time are gathered in a shared utopian space.

Turba aims to reclaim the contemporary image of the congregation to bring back those who have been expelled from it.

spoglie (2018)

Spoglie is made of video shared on YouTube by tourists visiting the archaeological site of Pompeii, one of the main tourist destinations in Europe. Spanning all the way from the aristocratic Grand Tour, during the Eighteenth Century, to the rise of mass tourism in the Twentieth Century, the site marked by the volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius keeps on drawing millions of visitors. Nowadays, the pressure of tourism is both a blessing and a curse, pouring enormous amounts of money into the area while threatening to destroy the seemingly everlasting vestiges.

In the archaeological site saturated with visitors, a protocol is set up to get rid of the foreign bodies and recover an idealised image of unaltered ruins. The goal is achieved by misappropriating the same kind of post-production software that is routinely used in the entertainment industry

to erase visual elements. At first, only indirect traces of bodies
are left untouched but soon the invisible mass reappears
by tearing up the images.

this means more (2019)
Images of crowd simulation are confronted with testimonies
from Liverpool Football Club's supporters who recall a tragic
event: the Hillsborough stadium disaster, in 1989, which
changed the nature of the game of football.

    The crowd simulation technology which is meant
to manage crowd flux or to produce images of a docile crowd
for advertising, serves as an archeological tool to explore
the memory of football supporters. Football has always had
a mixed relationship with crowds. Both a public space for
profane culture and a control apparatus, the stadium embodies
this conflicted relationship. At a time when working-class
supporters are being banned from stadiums due to financial
and security pressures, *This Means More* uses a contemporary
visual tool, made for control, to explore the history of this
exclusion. The stadium being a microcosm for society,
its evolution relates to broader social changes that happened
over the last thirty years.