How to Accommodate Grief in Your Life

By Francis Summers

Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Dr Francis Summers
Co-researcher:	Louisa Minkin (University of the Arts London)
Name of Output:	*How to accommodate grief in your life*
UCARO link/s:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/3303/
Output Type:	T – Other; multi-component output comprising journal paper that includes creative writing (poem), and a video artwork
Year and mode of dissemination:	JOURNAL PAPER Francis Summers and Louisa Minkin (2016) 'How to accommodate grief in your life', *Philosophy of Photography*, 7 (1-2), pp.83-113, ISSN 2040-3682 VIDEO ARTWORK *How to accommodate grief in your life* video artwork exhibited at Overpr!nt, Ag!tate, Act!vate, Centre de la Gravure et de l'Image Imprimée de la Fedération Wallonie-Bruxelles at La Louvière, Belgium, 6th - 29th July 2018
Key Words:	Photography, online relations, 'griefing', computer game culture, 3-d imaging, spam, photomontage, Second Life

Synopsis

How to accommodate grief in your life is a multi-component research output comprising a video work and journal article with poem, co-created by Francis Summers and Louisa Minkin. This collaborative piece has been completed through field research with online Second Life communities, as well as digital media practice research with media archaeology and photogrammetry. It draws on histories of trolling, spamming and grief-play in online games.

Griefing is a subcultural activity within computer game culture that derails 'normal' play in online situations. This subculture has generated particular behaviours, 3-d environments, visual aesthetics and languages that Summers and Minkin explore. Summers and Minkin investigate how the trope of griefing, along with its visual and textual aesthetics, points towards alternate or subcultural online culture that refuses formatted play, community defined through likeability, and rejects propriety, accommodation or adaptability.

The project addresses digital photography practice and theory, developments in new media art, and experimental writing, exploring these subjects through academic and creative writing and video practice. It is an extension of Summers and Minkin's research and artistic collaboration around online aesthetics and the contemporary expression of antagonism, which is part of a larger, ongoing, arc of work within the project *DEAD END*. Both researchers contribute equally to the development of written and practice works.

The article was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Philosophy of Photography*. The video work was screened at the Overpr!nt, Ag!tate, Act!vate exhibition curated by Jean Pierre Muller at Centre de la Gravure et de l'Image Imprimée, La Louvière, Belgium, 2018. This portfolio of supporting information provides further explanation of research methods, processes and insights, a range of visual material from the research (including links to the video work), and the article.

Still from Louisa Minkin and Francis Summers, Would you die for me? 2016

In this section, 3-d models the artists have created from Second Life avatars of the griefers are situated within the online world and members of the griefing community are interacting with them. The purple figure is an 'active' avatar who is sitting looking at the 'sculptures' that have been created.
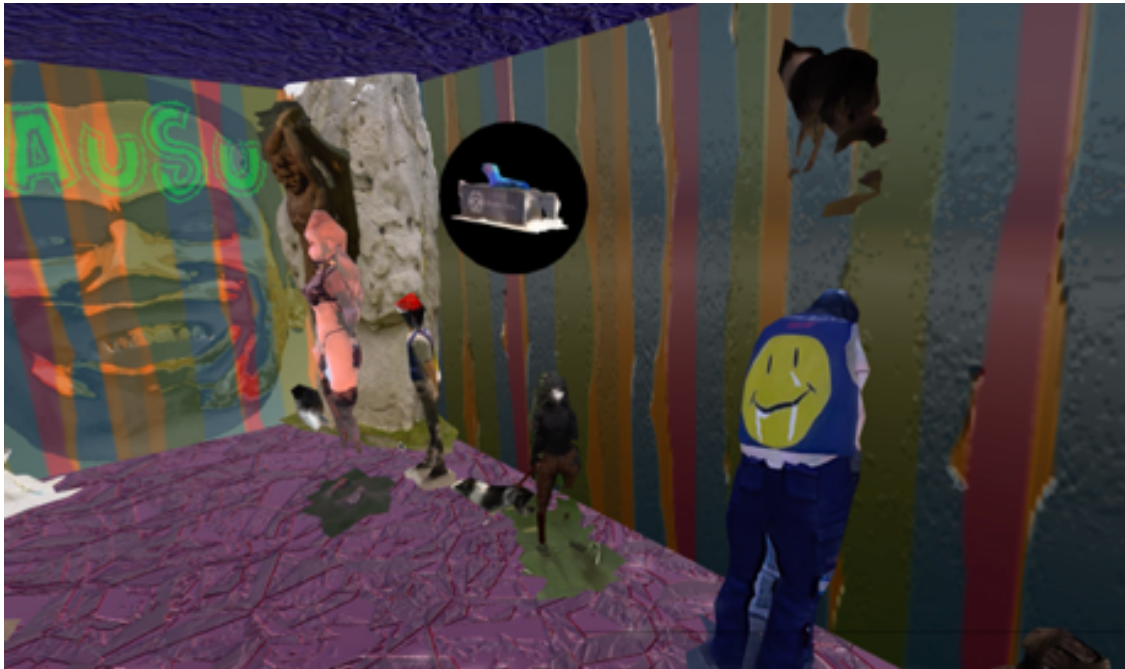
Screen recordings of Second Life, 2016

In this section, 3-d models the artists have creat-ed from Second Life avatars of the griefers are situated within the online world and members of the griefing community are interacting with them. Sculptures of the avatars and pages from note books have been incorporated into a Second Life where a house party is being staged.

Context

How to accommodate grief in your life builds upon a long-standing collaboration between Summers and Minkin. Their collaborative working practice has developed around online aesthetics and the contemporary expression of antagonism, as in *Common Conduct* (2013), *FTW (For the Win, Fuck the World)* (2012) and *Preliminary Notes for Moving Between Desert and Occupation* (2012). Minkin's other research includes 'Out of our skins' (2017, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*), a collaborative essay with Ian Dawson on digital modelling and productive mis-applications of photogrammetry. Summers' other research includes addressing post-Fordism and play, questions of appropriation and property/propriety, and writing on online pornography (in his chapter 'What a body can do...' (2018) in Burbridge & Pollen (eds), *Photography Reframed: New Visions in Contemporary Photographic Culture*).

How to accommodate grief in your life is part of Summers and Minkin's ongoing project *DEAD END*, which incorporates articles, poems, digital videos and gifs, visiting the image dump of online virtual game worlds to engage with the communities of griefers who dwell there. These themes are developed within *How to accommodate grief in your life* with a focus on the emotional life of online technical images, a subject in which Hito Steyerl's writings form an important context. The context to writing about trolling and other 'deviant' online behaviour includes work by Gabriella Coleman (2012) and Whitney Phillips (2011).

The context of artmaking and experimental writing includes net.art (such as that of Olia Lialina and VNS Matrix) and post-internet art (such as the tours of Second Life by Jon Rafman). It is also informed by the entangling of poetry and artwork in the Bernadette Corporation's *The Complete Poem* (2011), the letters of Claire Fontaine, the montage style of Ezra Pound (which proceeds through reference and intertwined citation of authoritative sources and cruder vernacular speech), the entwining of her/history with experience in the poems of Adrienne Rich and Bertolt Brecht's notion of realism whereby the present's 'bad new' technologies are best suited to represent the present's antagonisms and sites of contradiction. Summers and Minkin's journal paper utilises multiple voices within a philosophical text, an approach informed by Georges Bataille, whose collected writing in *Guilty* (1944) moves between diary entries, philosophical tracts and poetry, and the aphoristic style of Friedrich Nietszche. Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882) is introduced by a number of aphorisms presented in rhyme, one of which is relevant for this context: 'better a whole hearted feud / than a friendship that is glued'.

These methods around voice and citation frame concerns in new media theory that address protocol and cybernetic systems of control. In particular, the research is informed by Seb Franklin's *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (2015), especially the concern for programmed objects versus narrated subjects, and writings in the second issue of *Tiqqun* (2001) on apparatus and reticular capitalism such as 'Cybernetic Hypothesis' and 'How is it to be done?'. Polyvocality, anonymity, and ambiguous conflictual address within the online world – rather than community-building or ideas-sharing – is a key concern.

How to accommodate grief in your life addresses narratives of the online networked self through gamer aesthetics and practices that demonstrate the shearing of distance between play and formatted experience/work. Using these practices and the griefers' own avatars, 3-d builds and behaviour as a framework in which to place issues of cybernetic governance and networked behaviour, the research explores new ways of representing the present, inclusive of its innovations and problematic contradictions.

Key academic texts:

Coleman, G. (2012), 'Phreaks, hackers and trolls: the politics of transgression and spectacle', in M. Mandiberg (ed.), *The Social Media Reader*, New York: New York Uni. Press, pp. 99–119.

Franklin, S. (2015), *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Phillips, W. (2015), *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Steyerl, H. (2011), 'Digital debris: Spam and scam', *October*, No. 138, pp. 70–80

Questions and Aims

Research questions:	How can the online relations existing within Second Life and other online forums be understood within contemporary media theory?
	What use is made of particular language types in online situations? (Types include 'urban' slang, hacker 'l33t' speak, spam tactics (so-called 'copypasta') and online trolling at the intersection with hate-speech).
	How can methods developed from media archaeology, disorientation through 3-d spam, and documentation of online spaces and avatars be used to explore and develop video artworks, collages and writings, situated somewhere between net.art and postinternet art?
Research aims:	To explore the innovations in online practice (textual and visual) that occur within online griefing communities.
	To situate this exploration in a wider account of image-making within online behaviour in order to creatively and critically approach social photography and communication as existing within powerfully formatted conditions (in terms of presentation and emotional tonality).
	To make creative interrelations between the production of an artwork and an artist text.
	To produce work where essay and artwork both sit within a creative and generative constellation, so that the text does not merely narrate the artwork.

Research Methods and Process

Summers and Minkin took elements of online vernacular imagery and modes of speech and investigated these in both a video work and a journal article. These outputs stemmed from a single research process and are formally linked, as the article concludes with a poem which is also present in the video work, read by members of the online community that is the subject of the research. Each element of the research process was carried out jointly by each researcher.

The research was based on interactions with the Second Life griefer community named 'Young Cumbois'. Summers and Minkin developed the project through participation with this community in Second Life, visually recording elements of their online builds and behaviour and generating interventions into the online space. They utilised innovative digital photogrammetry to record the online avatars used in Second Life worlds, exporting these 3-d models into their own game-worlds and virtual spaces. They also left the digital models in the griefers' game space to be re-used and re-modelled. The videos of the *DEAD END* research arc, including the video work in *How to accommodate grief in your life*, are montages of the 3-d models along with screen recording of 3-d builds by the griefer community. Summers and Minkin utilised scripts provided by the griefers to create their own visual blockades and spam, and recorded these as part of the video work. The video's sound-track is a poem written by the researchers and read out by members of the griefer community, incorporating improvised sections around hate-speech.

The journal article recodes Summers and Minkin's creative interactions with the griefer community drawing on secondary research in academic texts on online practice and photography. The research with the griefer community and the creative interactions with it are put into a wider context, situated within a patchwork history of imaging technology in relation to the networked self and its pathologies.

Stills from How to accommodate grief in your life, 2016

In this video, the avatar, whose user is 'away from keyboard', has been 3-d captured using virtual photogrammetry. This model has then been rotated on top of footage from different spaces and scenarios captured within Second Life. The voiceover to the piece is a poem written by the artists, read by one of the griefer community (Dead Horsely).

Still from How to accomodate grief in your life, 2016

In this still, the avatar is superimposed on top of a griefer 3-d build within Second Life. This is innovative use of digital imaging and contemporary photography, utilising an affective aesthetic of the poor image.
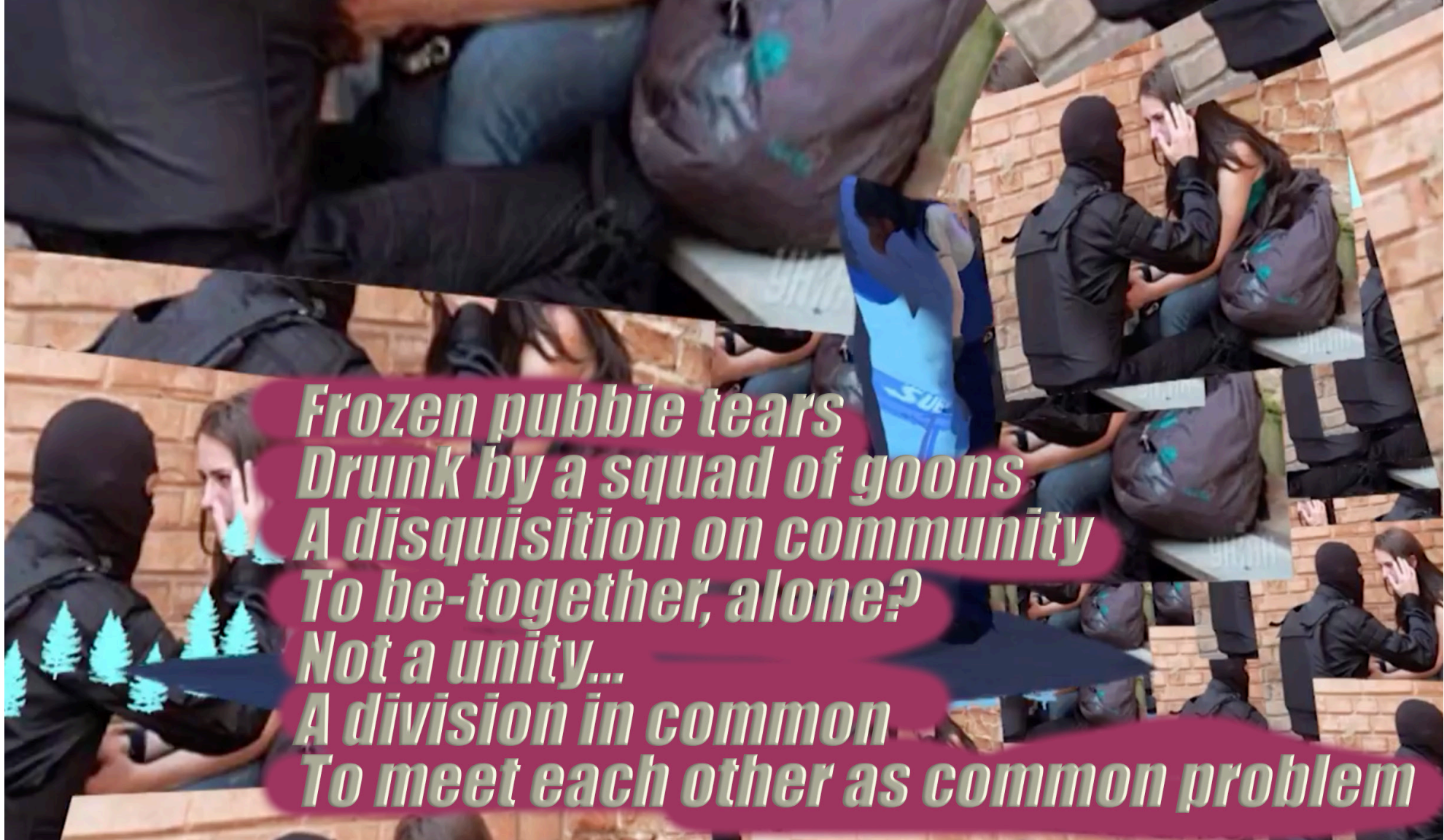
Research Contribution and Insights

In the context of its field(s) *How to accommodate grief in your life* contributes new knowledge by expanding understanding of contemporary notions of photomontage, incorporating Second Life griefing, interventions into Second Life virtual space, and the documentation and re-situation of images, avatars and spatial environments. It does this by:

- revealing the multiple modes of online behaviour and the complexity of the aesthetic and social behaviour of grief play – such as scripts that blockade network logistics and complex uses of avatars and virtual space.

- generating language, photomontage and video editing models that develop from the particularities of contemporary online imagery and language, through the framework of post-Fordist theory, theories of technology and poetic strategies.

- generating innovative relations between voice and image / montage through video work.

It thus generates novel insights into photographic theory and practice by exploring creative approaches to communication, reflected upon in an academic essay.

Frozen pubbie tears
Drunk by a squad of goons
A disquisition on community
To be-together, alone?
Not a unity...
A division in common
To meet each other as common problem

Still from How to accommodate grief in your life, 2016

In this still, the background effect is generated using a griefer script used to disorient players (the avatar is surrounded by a cloud of images). The researchers understand this to be an innovative development within spam and/as photomontage.

Research Dissemination and Recognition

|	
Dissemination	Francis Summers and Louisa Minkin (2016) 'How to accommodate grief in your life', *Philosophy of Photography*, 7 (1-2), pp.83-113, ISSN 2040-3682
	Journal issue launched at a live research event on 24 March 2017: http://annihilationevent.com/Shadow-without-Object
	How to accommodate grief in your life video work, exhibited at Overpr!nt, Ag!tate, Act!vate, Centre de la Gravure et de l'Image Imprimée de la Fedération Wallonie-Bruxelles at La Louvière, Belgium, 2018 (https://www.centredelagravure.be/fr/exhibitions/17387-overprnt---congoverprnt)
	Video work available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQ6r5rtRgQQ&t=26s
	Blog record of research available here: http://www.lmfs.co.uk/p/dead-end.html
Follow-on-activities:	The project has developed into a further video work (in progress) that incorporates the poem 'Conflictual Circulation' that ends the academic essay. This piece follows the previous structure of utilising avatars and spaces recorded from the Second Life griefers with a member of the griefer community reading the poem.
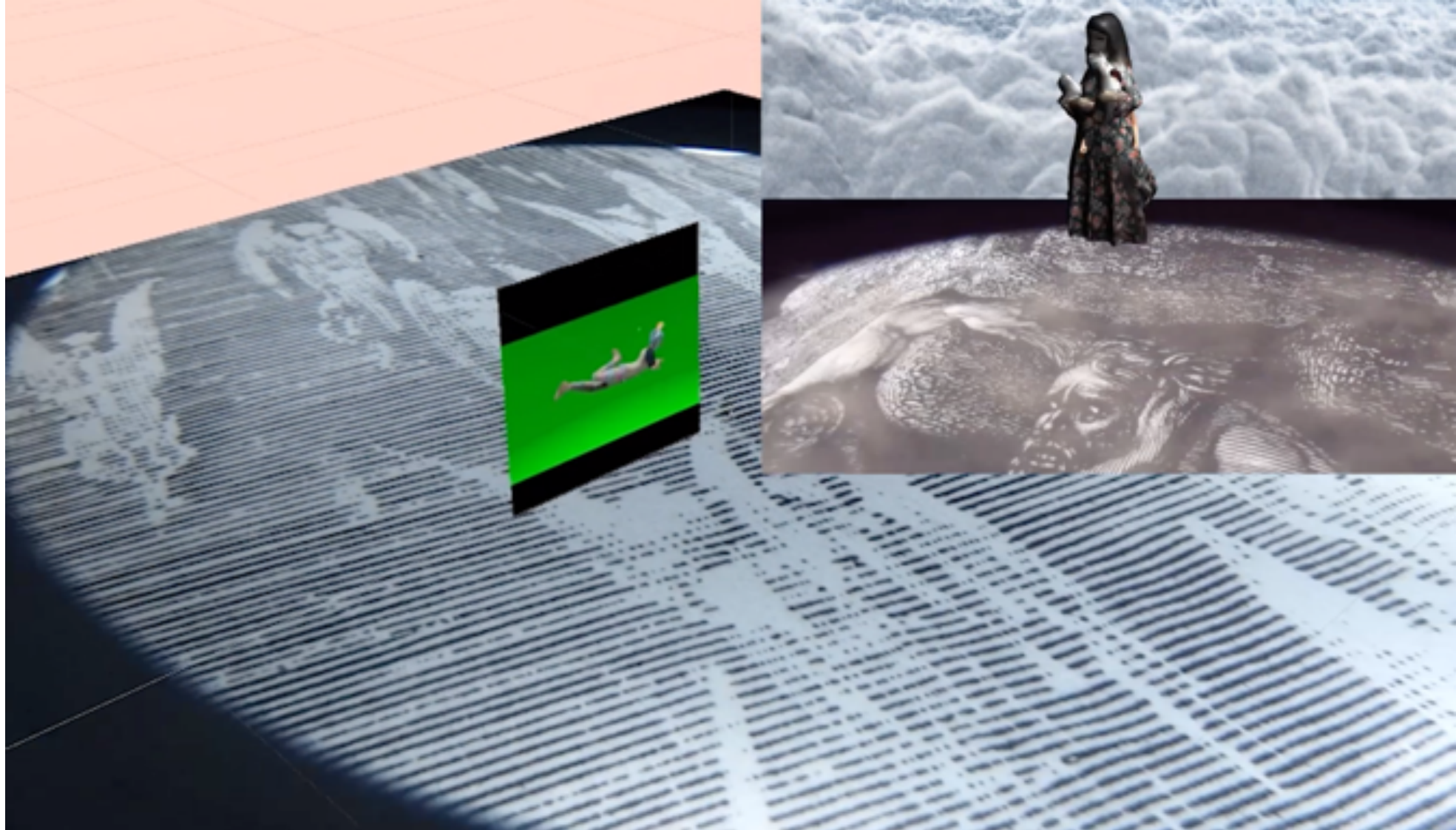
Still from video work to accompany poem Conflictual Circulation.

This poem concludes the How to accommodate grief in your life *academic essay and is also the basis of this ongoing video project. In this still, avatars from Second Life have been reconstructed within 3-d modelling software and situated within photographs of gravure illustrations of Dante's* Inferno *(in particular the figures who have been decapitated to then look back upon their bodies: an allegory of head-less self-surveillance in our contemporary moment).*

University for the
for the
Creative Arts

University for the Creative Arts
Research Portfolios

Graphic Design: Studio Mothership

The dead ends of possibilities.
To accommodate grief in your life.
To attend to separations,
Internets and srs-nezz.
A narrative of filtration.
An outside, gone viral. A camp, camping.
An epic history of nothing.
Ephemeral exchanges, refused communications.
Caught jerkin' it, you mili-furry animal!
Low expectations as continual revolt.
A party of cum.

Pro-recreational hazards.
I weep. For my possibilities.