02 Demo Scene - A Quick'n'Dirty Introduction

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Demo Scene for Non-Sceners

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What are Demos?

Demos are a new type of art which was created in the 1980's. Demos are executable programs which present graphic effects accompanied by music. Modern demos sometimes resemble short films. They tell stories, convey messages or simply demonstrate their makers' skills. Technically demos are rather sophisticated and so demo making requires very good programming knowledge. Especially on technically restricted platforms such as the Commodore 64, coding an impressive demo can be considered a proof of good programming abilities. On more powerful platforms, design is more important; ideas and the talents of the graphicians and musicians matter. Moreover, there are intros - size-limited demos. The most popular intro genres are the 64k and 4k intros with a maximum executable and data size of 64 or 4 kilobytes, respectively. This requires special programming and size-optimizing expertise! Therefore intros are still often made with Assembler as it allows powerful optimizing; for larger demos, mostly C++ is used these days.

What is the Demoscene?

People who spend their time programming and designing demos have formed groups to work together. These groups are in contact with each other, exchange their productions and know-how and organize demoparties together at which the latest demos, intros, graphics etc. compete against each other. The winners usually get prizes such as computer hardware or money. Demoparties take place in all European countries as well as in North America, Australia and even parts of Asia. Currently the largest demo-only party is Breakpoint, which takes place every year around Easter in Bingen am Rhein, Germany. The demoscene is mostly composed by autodidacts, many of whom are working in the software industry, unless they aren't still attending school or studying. Apart from demoparties the Internet is the most important means of communication these days.

History of the Demoscene

The demoscene has its origins in the cracker scene. In the 80's almost every game that was released for home computers was copied and spread illegally. As a consequence the software developers added copy protections to their games, which in turn were "cracked" by the software pirates. Crackers used to add graphical intro sequences to the cracked games; these were the ancestors of today's demos. Nowadays there are still some groups which have both a cracking and a demo department, but the two scenes are mostly separated.

Diskmags

Before the advent of the Internet, remote communication inside the demoscene was mostly limited to mail swapping (exchanging of letters and disks) and bulletin board systems. However, the demoscene also gave birth to a novel type of mass-medium, the "diskmag". As the name says it, a diskmag is an electronical magazine that can be spread on disk. Typically, a demoscene diskmag has its own graphical user interface and background music. The usual contents of a diskmag are news, reports, interviews, reviews, messages, adverts and tutorials. Not always are these magazines only about demos and the scene; often they also contain short stories and poems, among other things. Hugi is a diskmag.

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