

A counterfactual
retrogame history

Jordan

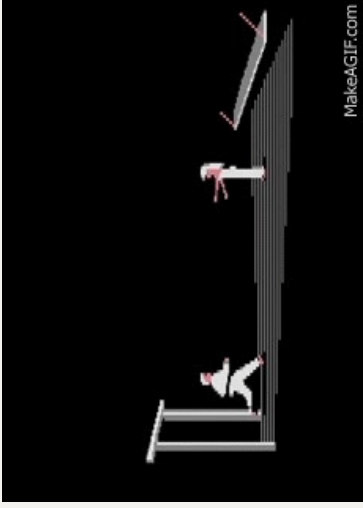
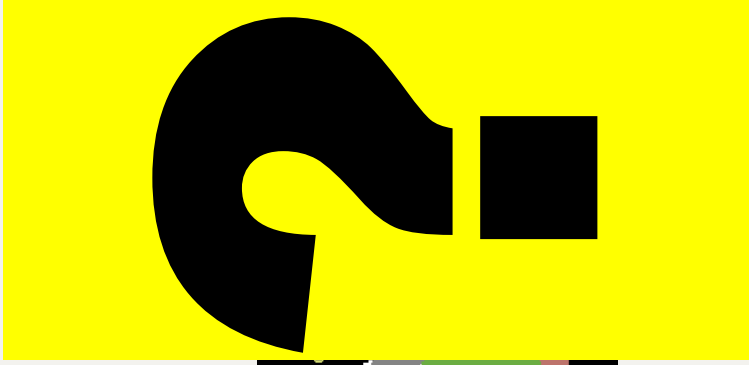
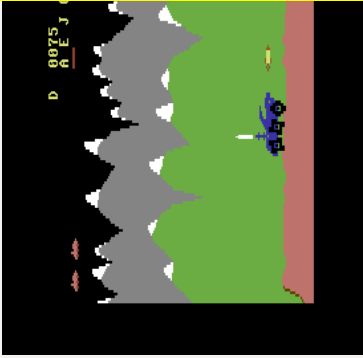
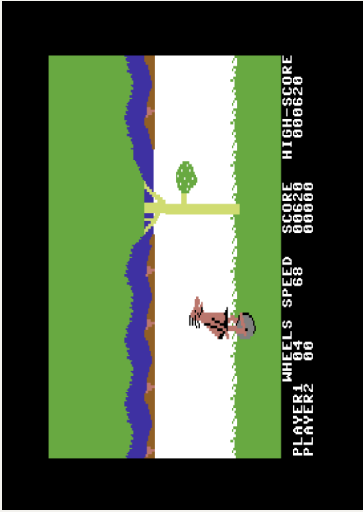
Mechner's

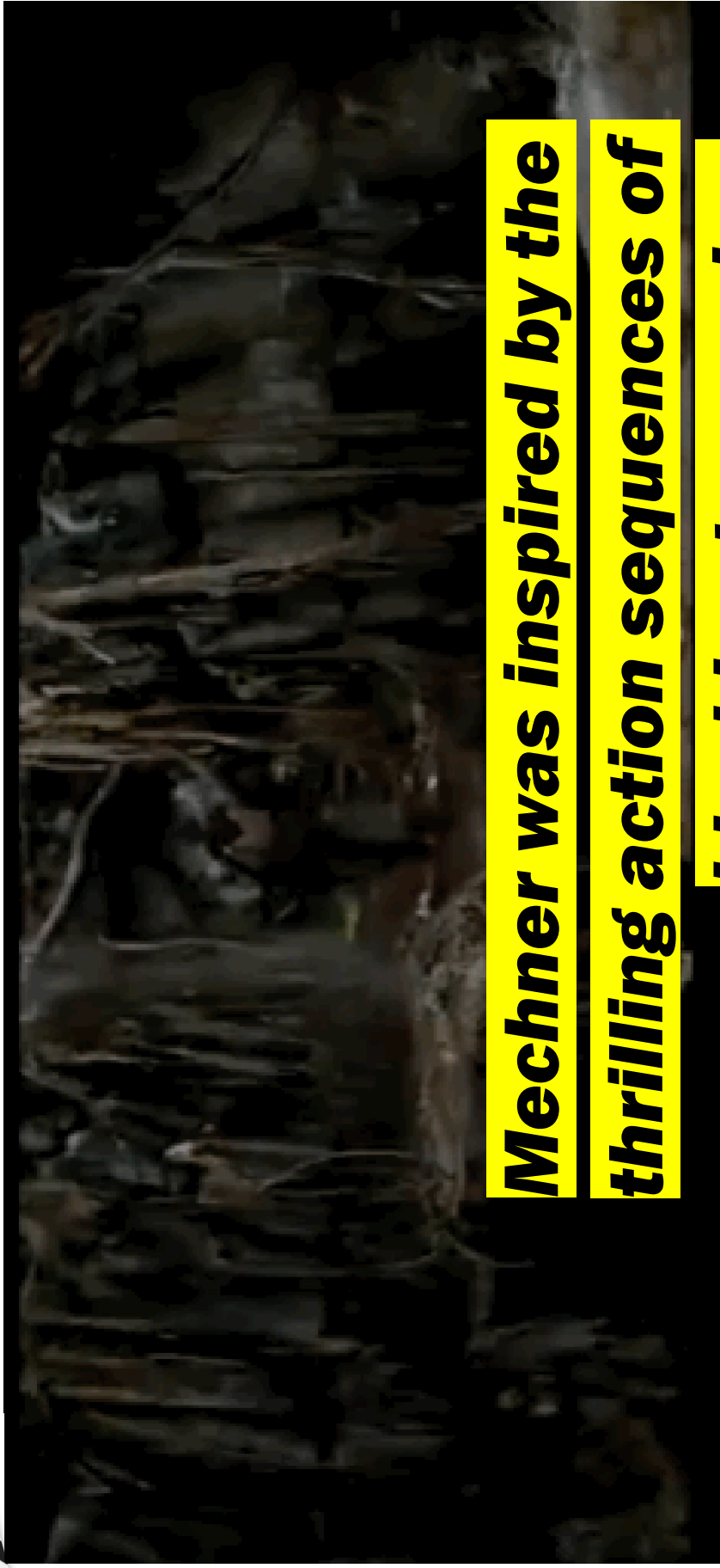
Canabalt



In 1989, a game was released that challenged film's exclusive grip on the cinematic, bringing a fluidity of real-world motion and a shimmer of aliveness into video games. Jordan Mechner's *Canabalt* drew from embodied performances inspired by cinema's great action sequences, painstakingly translated by videogame auteur Mechner from the real world to the Commodore 64 computer.





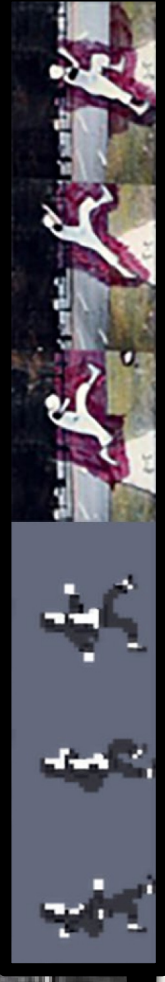
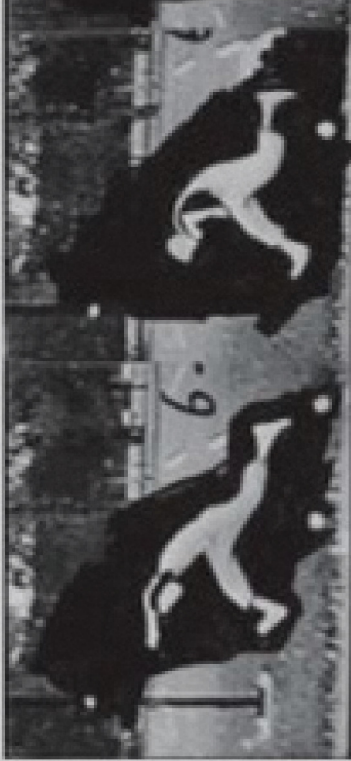


Mechner was inspired by the thrilling action sequences of blockbuster movies.



**Its fluid character movement
created through a motion
capture technique called
rotoscoping...**

**...Resulting in a "frame-heavy"
run cycle that pushed the
memory limits of the C64.**





[1]

Counterfactuals / lost futures

[2]

Platform studies

[3]

New materialist rhetoric


[1] Mooney, Laine, and Tega Brain. "A 'Speculative Pasts' Pedagogy: Where Speculative Design Meets Historical Thinking." *Digital Creativity* 30, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 218–34.

[2] Bogost, Ian, and Nick Montfort. "Platform Studies: Frequently Questioned Answers," December 12, 2009; Anable, Aubrey. "Platform Studies." *Feminist Media Histories* 4, no. 2 (April 1, 2018): 135–40.

[3] Gries, Laurie. *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*. 1 edition. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2015.



**Prince of Persia (Jordan
Mechner/Broderbund,
1989). Original platform
Apple II.**



Canabalt (2009) is a game jam game that was developed into the first break-away hit for the Apple iPhone.

It is credited for popularizing the indie-darling “endless runner” genre in the 2010s.

In 2012 it was one of 14 games acquired as part of the MoMA’s architecture and design collection.

C64anabalt

(Paul Koller, 2012)

C64anabalt is an official conversion of Adam Saltsman's *Canabalt* (2009). Credited as Adam Atomic. SID chip conversion of original music (Danny Baranowsky) by Mikkel Hastrup.






Design imaginaries

**If “Jordan Mechner’s Canabalt” could
have existed, why didn’t it?**

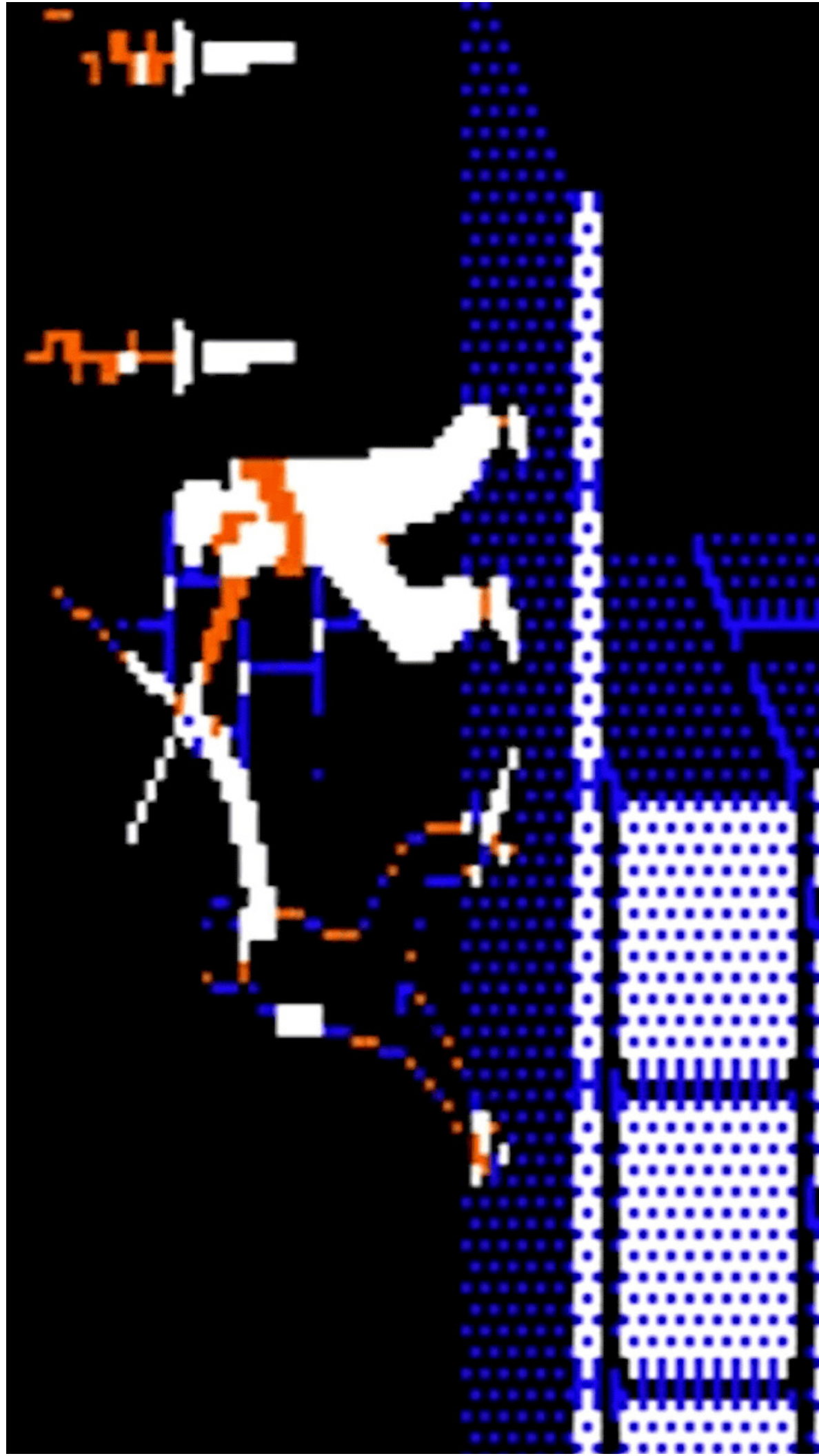




Like Mechner, Saltsman was inspired by cinematic action sequences of the day.

Canabalt spun out of a retro game and pixel art indie revival peaking in the 2010s.

Indie games of the era often self-imposed limitations to instead foreground gameplay experimentation.







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HS 808183878F7FBF
.HS FFEFCFBF0E0C0
.HS 00800080008000
.L.hs 80008000800080
.FTH .HS 61616262636364
.RYH .HS 6465666666666767
TINT .HS 8182848890A0C0
BUFFER .HS 0008
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: -1 = tran
: 60 : COLORS: 0 = black
: 970 : 1 = red
: 1980 : 2 = blue

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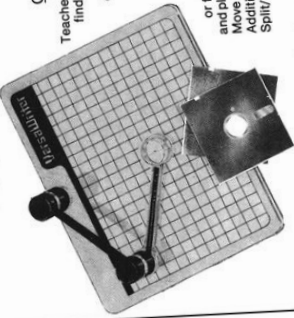
Assembling



capture (1)

VersaWriter

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EXPANSION PAC II - Adds 10 powerful graphics commands to **VersaWriter** including: Shrink, Magnify, Fast Picture Color, Combine Two Screens, Color Inverter, and Mirror & Upside Down Functions. Mix functions to create unusual effects. **\$39.95**

EXPANSION PAC III - NEW! To be released this Fall - Animation Tool Kit. **\$49.95**

*Requires VersaWriter

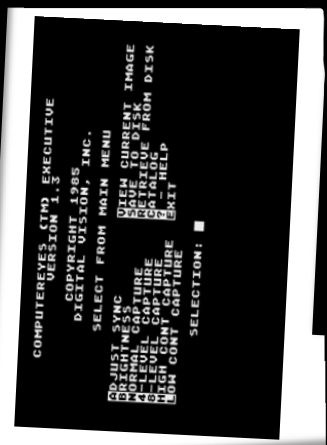
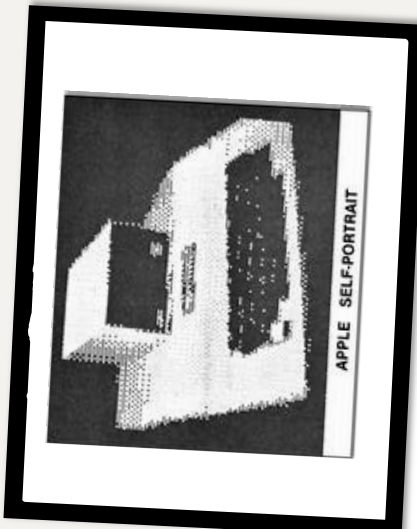
Released this Fall - Animation Tool Kit. **\$49.95**



VERSA COMPUTING, INC. 3541 Old Conejo Rd. #104 • Newbury Park, CA 91320 • (805) 498-1956

No. 65 - October 1985

MGRO



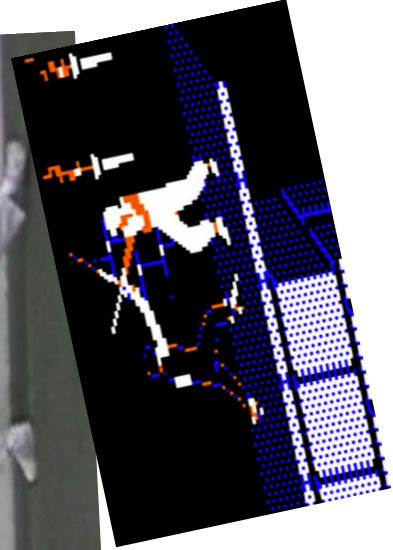
'Digitizing'

for the Apple II

(circa 1985)

Assembling

capture (II)

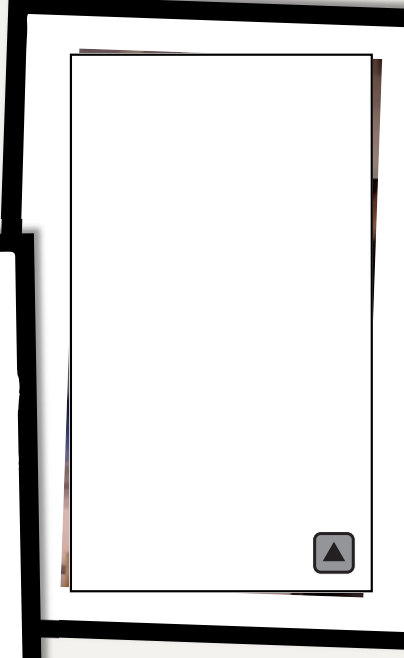
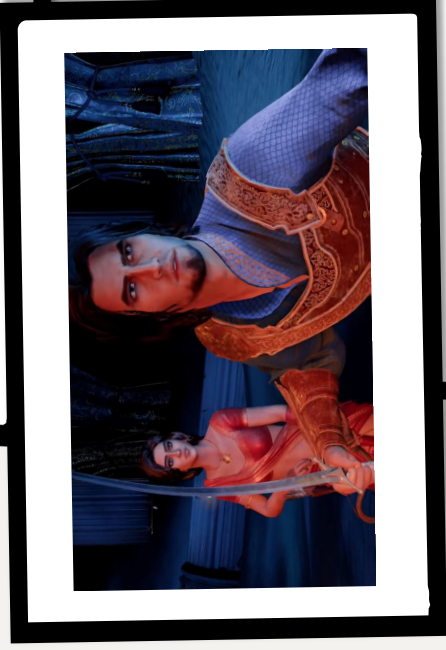


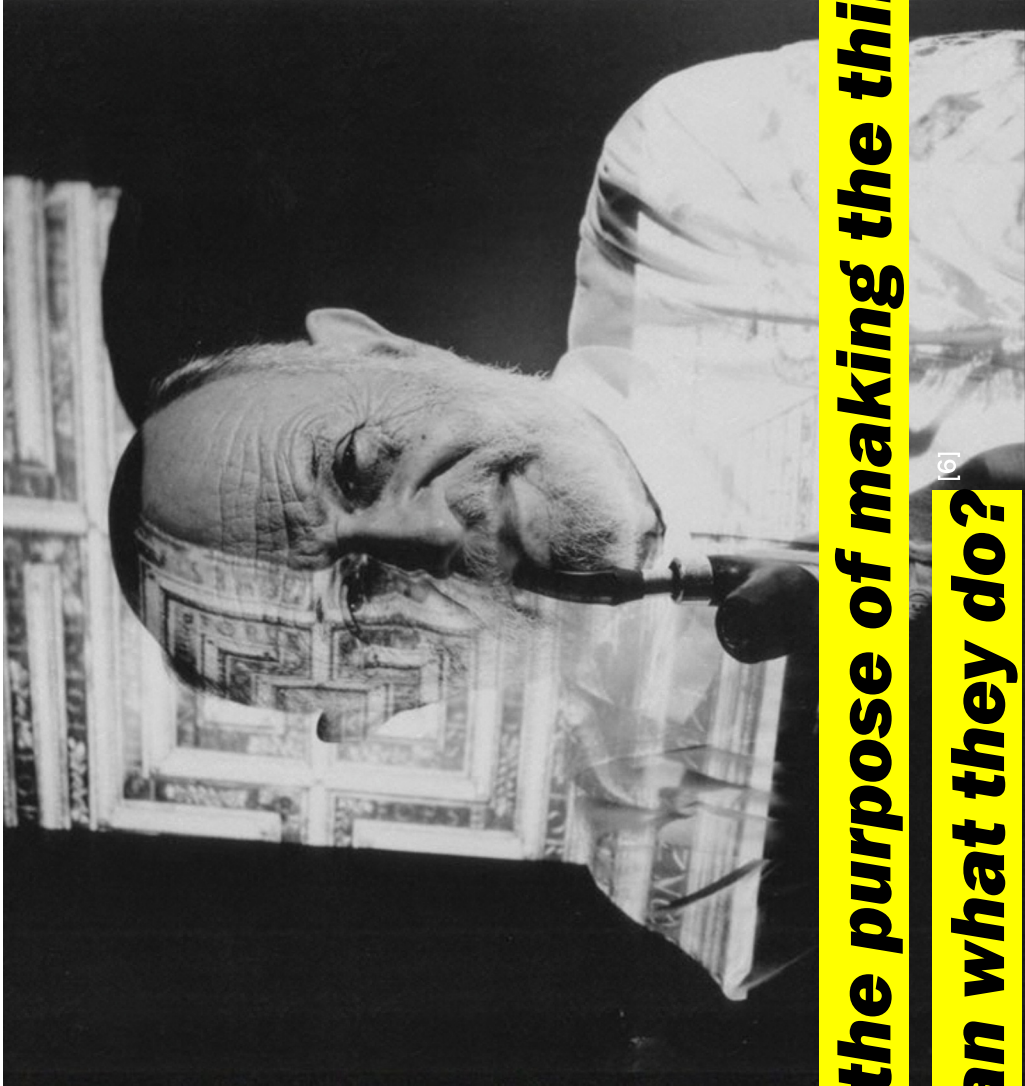
Rotoscoping

Reference Video

Motion Capture

Performance Capture





**(W)hat is the purpose of making the things they
show mean what they do?**

[6]

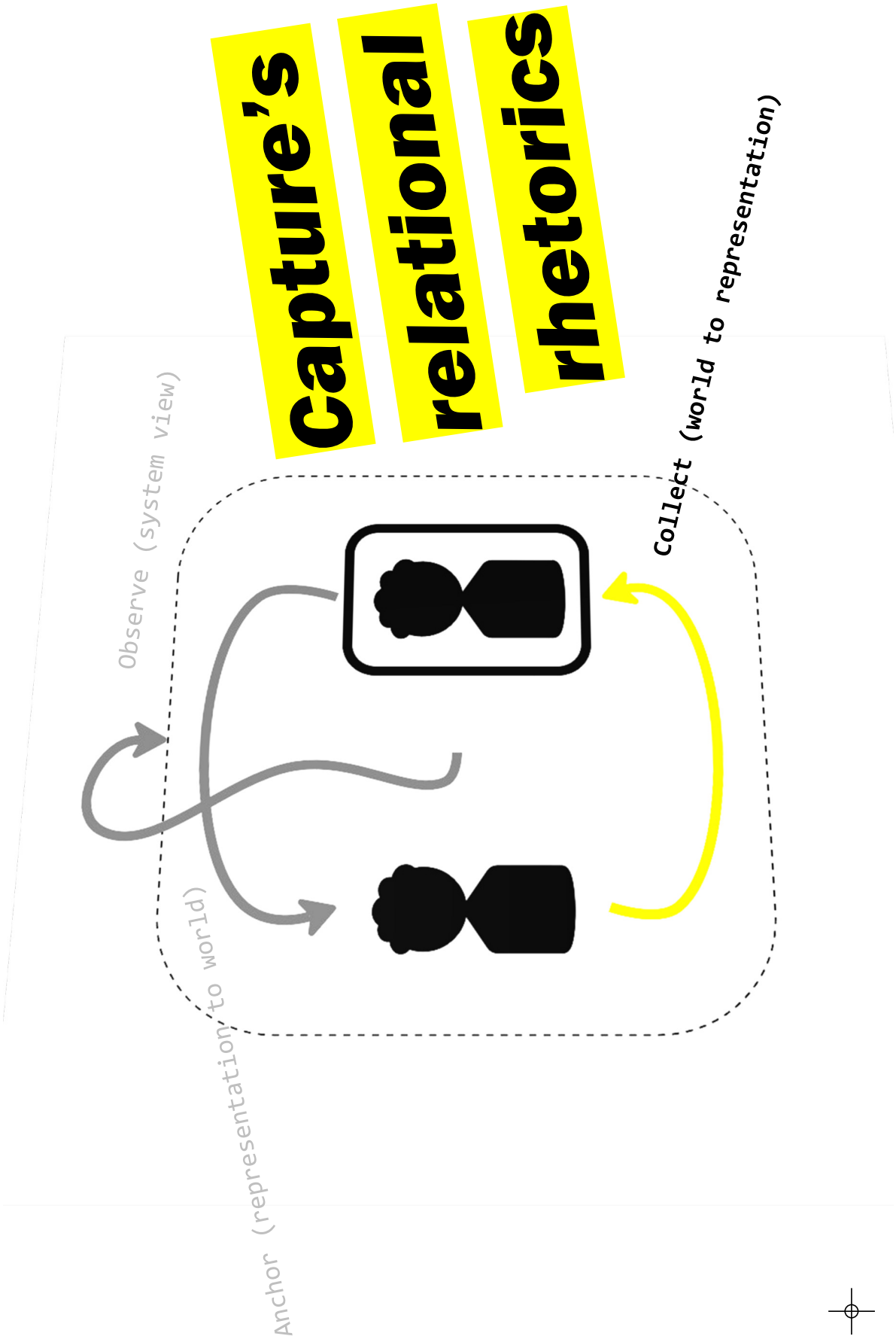
[6] Flusser, Vilém. Into the Universe of Technical Images. Trans. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. Org: Ins Universum der technischen Bilder. 1985.



“I have faith that, when the frames are run in sequence at 15fps, it’ll create an illusion of life that’s more amazing than anything that’s ever been seen on an Apple II screen. The little guy will be wiggling and jittering like a Ralph Bakshi rotoscope job...but he’ll be alive. He’ll be this little shimmering beacon of life in the static Apple-graphics Persian world I’ll build for him to run around in.” ^[1]

— [7] Mechner, Jordan. *The Making of Prince of Persia: Journals 1985 - 1993*. s.l.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011.

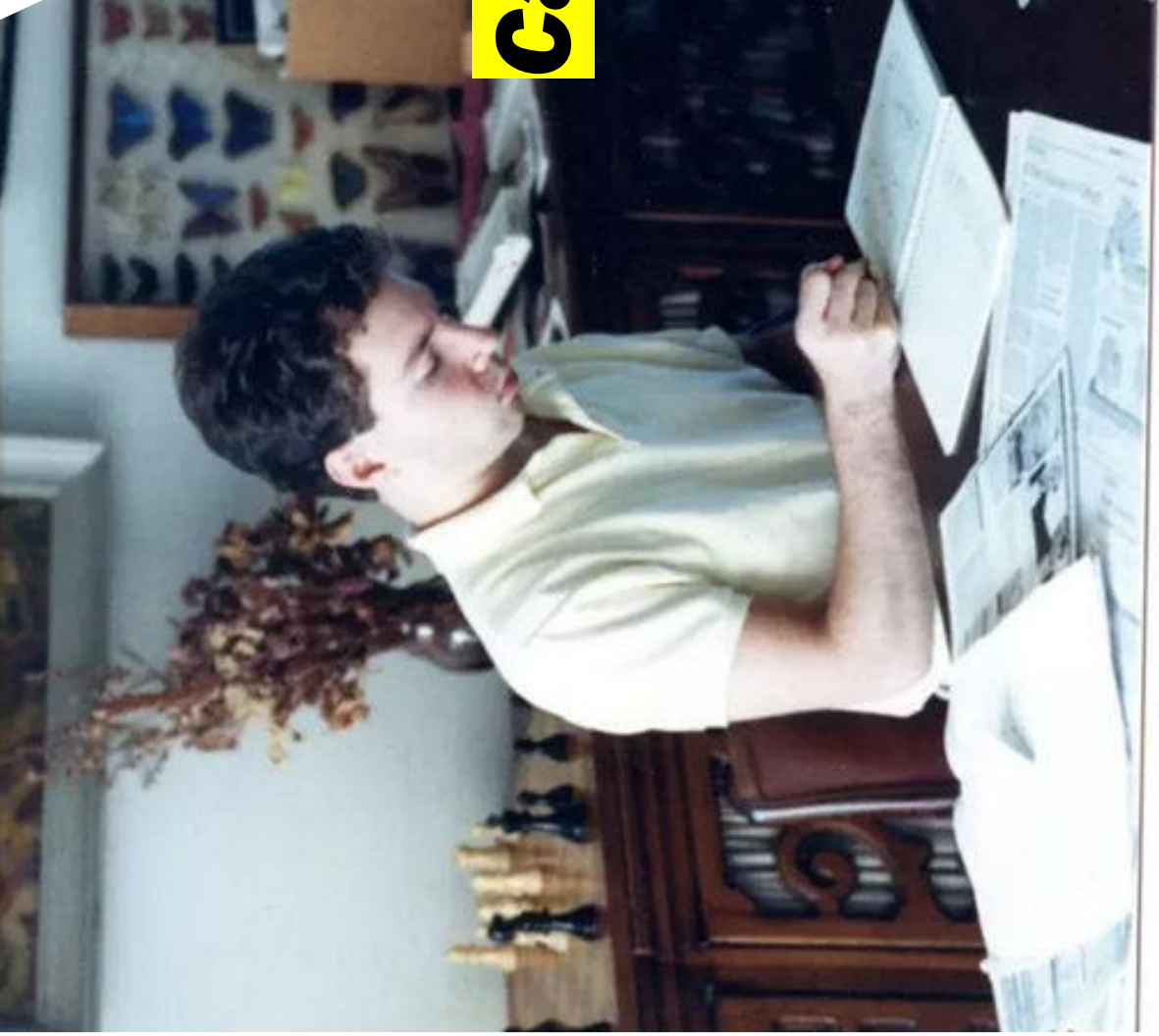
Capture's relational rhetorics



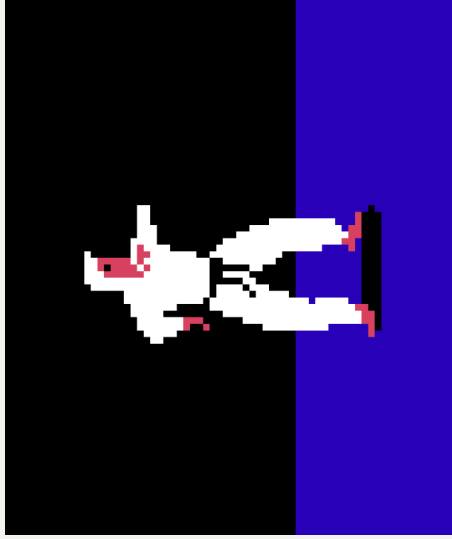


“The moment I finally saw the character running across the screen, I got chills. As rough and pixel-y as it was, I recognized my brother's way of running, his physical personality.”

[7] “How The Original ‘Prince Of Persia’ Changed Video Game Animation.” Accessed June 9, 2024. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sethporges/2017/12/19/how-the-original-prince-of-persia-changed-video-game-animation/>.



Capture Auteurship



Thank you

I will be at the Strong Museum of Play in July. What early capture examples should I pull from their archives?

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