WORD PERHECT

A brief introduction to Tomoko Takahashi's practise. This encounter was first published on gensojapan.org (now offline).

Tomoko Takahashi, 'Word Perhect' Loading screen (2000)

There's scarcely a pause as "Word Perhect" loads. The title and credits flicker past drawn in black marker pen. The initial dialogue box appears, also drawn in pen, and the first thing that you're asked is to select an item on which to write. Having retrieved an item from your imaginary pocket, bag or studio, you can choose to write messily, tidily or hardly visibly. You can choose the size of your writing and you can choose what colour to write in; as long as it's black.

The homepage opens. The next box, a box with a tip of the day appears: "Did you know that cycling on Christmas Day is wonderful if it's not raining?" Other tips are available as well: "Did you know that cheese and apples go together very well, as do pears?" and "Did you know that I usually end up wearing different socks on each foot?" Suitably advised, you are now ready to begin writing.

A scanned image of the item you chose to write on occupies the main part of the screen. Word Perhect's interface is a hand-drawn version of the previously popular word-processing program of a similar name. When you press the command buttons, scribbled messages on note paper and parcel tape appear. These handmade, personal touches are just one characteristic that distinguishes it from its predecessor.

"I don't do that," is written in a message box next to an OK button. It appeared after I asked it to align an object to the right. Word Perhect's responses can be contrary. Delete and Completely Delete offer two kinds of inky stain; blotchy and blotchier still. Word Perhect is unforgiving about mistakes. If you select the Undo button, you are advised "you can't take it back," and are encouraged to "be responsible," instead. Help: "We haven't quite got around to doing this yet". Save: "Sometimes things get lost," is Word Perhect's consolatory reply.

Produced in collaboration with digital arts organisation e-2, in conjunction with the <u>Chisenhale Gallery</u> in London at a time when fast speed internet had barely been introduced in the UK, utilising the internet as a context for an artwork was one of the innovations that led to <u>Tomoko Takahashi</u>'s nomination for <u>Tate's Turner Prize</u> in 2000. As a general theme, Takahashi's work often concerns order and classification. "Word Perhect" parodies a familiar format, deliberately humanising how we assemble meaning from organised preconceptions.