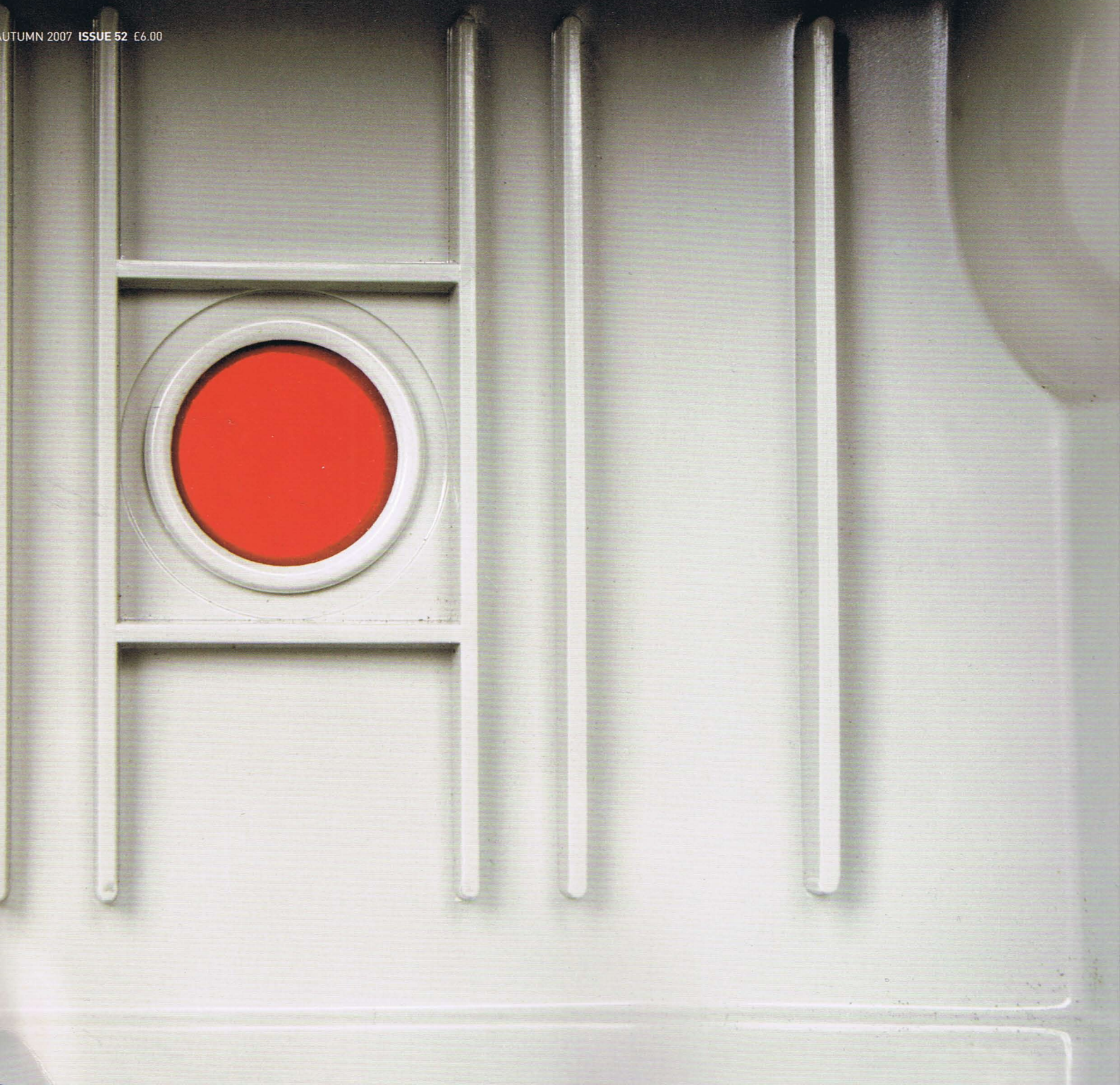


SOURCE

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give us plenty of ways in which to approach Moodysson's dystopic vision of the world around him. E.W.

NURTURING AN AVATAR

Alter Egos: Avatars and their Creators
Robbie Cooper

As sites like MySpace and Facebook continue to grow in popularity, the issue of online identity has moved away from the creation of imaginary selves, and towards a more prosaic vision of the internet as a means of enhancing real-world relationships. In *Alter Ego*, Robbie Cooper revisits the fantasy world of MMOs (massively multiplayer online games) to look again at the complex relationship between players and their avatars – the digital forms that represent them in the virtual world. In a series of double portraits, Cooper reveals the contemporary relationship between real and virtual selves to be far less straightforward than it was even a decade ago.

For some, creating and nurturing an avatar is a deeply personal investment in an ideal self. These self-representations – at times highly incongruous and smacking of self-deception – are among the most poignant in the book. For others, the avatar is a portal into a highly profitable virtual economy where digital assets are bought and sold for real-world currency. Whatever its function, the avatar stands as an indication of the increasingly capricious and permeable border between real and virtual worlds, and a reminder of the importance of play as a part of everyday social relations. E.S.

A DIFFERENT IDIOM

Motherland, Simon Roberts
image: *Luxury Apartments, Moscow*

This collection of photographs of Russia manages to avoid the mocking or unremittingly



gloomy gaze that characterises most visual portrayals. In an afterword, Roberts confirms that he 'wanted to counter some of the photographic representations of Russia that focus on collapse and deterioration... without sidestepping the realities of Russian daily life'. He largely succeeds in this. His photographs chart social and working life in the form of picnics, the sauna, weddings, factories, and the market. Military and industrial Russia are represented by parades and power stations. Some of the most effective images show public interiors: train carriages, drab provincial airport lounges, and bizarrely decorated hotel rooms. Others reveal the social inequalities that result from Russia's voracious appetite for capitalism; for instance, the closing image of a pensioner sitting on a bench overlooking newly-built luxury apartments in Moscow. Similarly, there is a striking contrast between the picture of provincial girls with museum-piece rollerblades and the portrait of Russia's Burton-sponsored champion snowboarder. Roberts also documents recent tragedies in a markedly different idiom from that characteristic of our television news coverage: one unusual and moving image is of cigarette ends laid in a pattern on a chair outside School No.1 in Beslan as a mark of respect for the dead. The strength of the collection, however – its sympathetic and celebratory quality – is at the same time its main weakness. Roberts's desire to avoid representations that focus on decline and disintegration, whilst salutary,

distorts to a degree the reality of a country facing destructive and urgent social problems, among them alcoholism, organised crime, and homelessness. A.H.

A GESTURAL DICTIONARY

Supplemento al dizionario italiano
Bruno Munari
image: 'A Good Idea'

With the advent of the mobile phone, we have arguably become much more accustomed to seeing people gesture vigorously in public places in ways which, only a few years ago, would have been considered either inappropriate (at best) or a sign of incipient madness (at worst). Its coming has perhaps helped to remind us of the fact that language is much more of a visual mode of communication than we might realise. Of course, in other cultures, a well established and sophisticated grammar of gestures has long since taken shape to complement and reinforce the rhetorical tools made available by language, and Italy would be the most obvious example of this. This volume is a faithful reproduction of a work first published in 1958, and originally intended to serve as a guide to the gestures a foreigner might typically encounter in Italy, and in particular in Naples, which emerges as the country's gestural hotspot. A photo of each gesture is accompanied by explanatory descriptions in four languages

