

PRESS START TO BEGIN >>

GAMES WITHOUT BORDERS

"The incorporation of virtual camera controls into the very hardware of game consoles is truly a historic event. Directing the virtual camera becomes as important as controlling the hero's actions....[In computer games], cinematic perception functions as the subject in its own right..."

—Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*

You may look around at the screens surrounding you at Games Without Borders and wonder what on Earth is happening. You may wonder about the odd (and occasionally foul-mouthed) little characters—people, animals and robots—and struggle to suspend your disbelief. You may wonder why you're being asked to play, to interact with the screen, instead of simply to view. More pointedly, you may simply ask, "What in the hell does any of this have to do with a film festival?"

Cinema is changing. Rather, it continues to change, as it always has. New technologies and the techniques they suggest have come to permeate the medium of film, from the digital editing suites used by poverty-stricken indie producers to the explosive compositing effects in the money products spewed forth from southern California. None of this is news. You know what The Computer has brought to the art of film. Not always positive results, to be sure, but almost always interesting. The result is usually something that stretches or even shatters the boundaries and borders of the medium (even if we don't always notice). It's something that can expand our expectations of cinema and, on occasion, something which stands scrutiny as "art." Sometimes, the result is even that which might approach "liberation."

The world of digital gaming is not only a world of product and consumption, but also a world of tools. Not only is it an

entertainment industry with a global bottom line approaching an estimated \$11 billion annually, but also a set of practices that can be learned and taken up by anyone with the drive and desire for self-expression...the ambition to build personal worlds and public playspaces...artistic creations and liminal transgressions.

As traditional cinema continues to evolve, so do those forms of expression that stand (by some measures) on its periphery. Digital gaming has evolved from simple, crude playspaces to a medium that invites participation. Whether that participation takes the form of simple playful interaction or instead grows into independent production is entirely up to the individual, her needs and desires. Games Without Borders provides an opportunity for the practitioners to show their wares (don't worry, you'll be able to play them too). Whether it's remixes of classic games, miniature movies emerging wholly from the brow of the engines that drive the medium, or student-built and indie playthings, every one of the digital objects seen at this inaugural Games Without Borders is a bleeding-edge, boundary-crossing, border-running expression of someone's need to redefine both cinema and themselves. We'll even have brilliant people on hand to help explain what it all means (because we certainly aren't venturing any guesses).

Besides, if Lev Manovich can, as he does, use Dziga Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (one of the oldest pieces of thoughtful cinema) as a means of talking about "new media," we can surely use our own examples of the newest of the new to talk about cinema.

You're invited. Come and play.

—Erich Pelletier

Presented in association with IC², the Digital Media Collaboratory (dmc.ic2.org) and the College of Communication.
Special Thanks to Dean Ellen Wartella and Dr. Alex Cavalli.

MISSION BRIEFING >>

MARK DERY: KEYNOTE

Friday, 7:00pm UT Campus [ACES Bldg Room 2.302]

"Mark Dery has a hammerlock on the zeitgeist. He may be the best cultural critic alive."

—Bruce Sterling (*in Bookforum*)

The body is obsolete, declares the cybernetic performance artist Stelarc; he envisions a "pan-planetary physiology" for the spacefaring cyborg, its brawn augmented with robotic hardware, its brainpower boosted with computer chips. Going further, the roboticist Hans Moravec dreams of "downloading" our minds into computer memory and disposing of our dead meat altogether.

Transferred to a deep space probe, a disembodied consciousness could explore the cosmos, drifting lazily into infinity.

Spun from sci-fi mysticism, New Age millenarianism, and human potential pep talk, the rhetoric of escape velocity promises an escape from history, gravity, even mortality. It is a hymn to progress and a transport of rapture—an end-of-the-century deus ex machina that crosses cyberpunk science fiction with the pentecostal belief in an apocalyptic Rapture, in which history ends and true believers are lifted into the parting clouds.

But placing our faith in a cyber-Rapture is a risky endgame at a time when the problems all around us clamor for immediate solutions. Posthumanist visions of the mind unbound and the Earth dwindling to a pinpoint in our rear-view mirror leave social responsibility behind, on the launch pad; they ignore the depredation of Nature, the unraveling of the social fabric, the widening chasm between the technocratic elite and the minimum-wage masses. As we hurtle toward





the millennium, poised between technological Rapture and social rupture, between Disney's Tomorrowland and *Blade Runner*, we would do well to remember that—for the foreseeable future, at least—we are here to stay, in these bodies, on this planet. The misguided hope that we will be born again as “bionic angels,” to quote *Mondo 2000*, is a deadly misreading of the myth of Icarus; it pins our future to wings of wax and feathers.

—Mark Dery; from *Escape Velocity*

Mark Dery (markdery@optonline.net) is a cultural critic. He wrote Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century, which has been translated into eight languages, and edited Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture, a seminal anthology of cybercrit. His essay on guerrilla media activism and disinformation warfare, “Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of the Signs,” is a bona fide Net classic, widely circulated online. His most recent book is the essay collection, The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium: American Culture on the Brink (www.levity.com/markdery/).

A frequent commentator on new media, fringe thought, and unpopular culture, Mark has written for The New York Times Magazine, The Atlantic Monthly (online), Elle, Lingua Franca, Rolling Stone, Salon, and Wired, among others. His column, “Invisible Lit,” ran for several years in Bookforum, and his radio commentaries have been featured on the nationally syndicated program “Radio Nation.” In January 2000, he was appointed Chancellor's Distinguished Fellow at UC Irvine.

Mark is the director of digital journalism at New York University, where he teaches in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication.

START MISSION >>

**HOMEBREW (HOMECODE):
INDIE AND STUDENT GAMES AND MODS****Saturday, 8:45PM UT Campus [ACES Bldg Room 2.302]**

Since the emergence of digital gaming as a popular cultural activity approximately two decades ago, enthusiasts and programmers have worked to create their own homebrewed and homecoded games. More recently, this process was made easier when many commercial games began to be packaged with the software tools necessary for the independent creation of mods (modifications to the original game product). "Modding" digital games allows independent enthusiasts to create their own levels, to insert their own characters, music and art; in effect, to create their own games using the programming inherent in the original game as a basis. As well, the flexibility of visual production software tools such as Flash™ has allowed game artists to create their own mini-games, often with hilarious or socially relevant results. This session will demonstrate the efforts of these independent producers, both those who create mods and those who utilize digital tools in unique ways to create their own games. Student and independently built games will be screened and demonstrated, with details provided concerning their production. This session will also serve as a preview of the independent digital games competition that will act as the core of Games Without Borders starting with next year's festival.



INVADER ZED

In the Spring of 2003, the University of Texas at Austin's Department of Radio-Television-Film inaugurated a course in video game design and production. Three teams worked to create games based on modded versions of the popular PC title *Deux Ex* (Eidos Interactive). *Invader Zed* is the result of one of those team efforts. Zed follows the efforts of one very small and very green extraterrestrial as he attempts to take over the world.

TEXANUS CIRCUS MAXIMUS

University of Texas graduate and Austin designer Ryan Molloy presents *Texanus Circus Maximus*, a game authored in Flash™ as a means of "developing a working methodology for new media." *Texanus Circus Maximus* provides a political satire of university life in which heroic students are limited to ineffectually voicing opinions in the campus newspaper while fighting off hordes of university administrators who attack them in the interest of depleting their tuition fund.

TOMBFALL

Craig Ackley, Eric Myers, Jonathan Ritchey, and Julio Sang present *Tombfall*, their remix of the classic Atari 2600™ game *Pitfall*. In *Tombfall*, players take on the role of Lara Croft, the heroine from Eidos Interactive's blockbuster Tomb Raider series, as she goes back in time to climb, jump, dodge, and fight her way through some very 1980s-era graphics.

NOTE: THIS PROGRAM CONTAINS ADULT LANGUAGE. DISCRETION IS ADVISED.



CINEMATICS >>

MACHINIMA: THE CINEMA OF DIGITAL GAMING

Saturday, 3:00pm UT Campus [ACES Bldg Room 2.302]

Lost in Quakespace the voices emerge as if from a distance...perhaps the aura of the game code they inhabit is affecting transmission. Game engines, they murmur. *Quake III*, they confide. *Halo* and *Half-Life*. We are making films. "Digital video," I ask? "Game engine technology," they reply. "We've assimilated the camera into the code." Seduced by the thrill of discovery my mind races and I find desire in the form of speed. I move to collapse the recombinant cut-and-splice aesthetic of immersive game play onto the temporal space of the cinematic surface and achieve maximum velocity. Have I arrived? The questions creep in.

Blahbalicious, *Anachronox*, *Father Frags Best*. Movies known as "machinima" (or machine animation) made with game engines, distributed via the Internet to a community of thousands. Totally digital, totally independent, totally weird. In this digicinematic underworld, gamers, hackers—filmmakers—conjure (and *Quake*) within virtual environments, building sets and skinning characters in an imaginary world defined by a slightly disturbing—often elementary—World Wide Wrestling Federation-meets-Philip K. Dick aesthetic. Part theater, part film, part computer game, it is the physics of a strange universe recorded in real-time, distributed and consumed via the web. I am hooked but leery of the lingo. Coders, speed runners, skinners...will I ever catch up?

Subtle arguments develop in my mind over the correct application of the term "machinima" to the movies I incessantly download to my desktop. The acronym FPS takes on new meaning for me as frames per second is superseded by the master code of first person shooter. I watch movies starring lumberjacks,

ducks, rebels, and robots—one features a laugh-track; another, an English bouncer with attitude. Ranging from less than a minute to two hours in length, the films reference genres from sci-fi fantasy to sketch comedy to 1950s sitcoms. I become enamored with the sheer elegance of the player-as-producer paradigm and lament the fact that film theory fails in the face of such tweaked-out technology. I read *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* and experience déjà vu. I play. I watch. I rent *Tron* and feel exalted.

—Katie Salen is a freelance game designer and writer interested in the connections between game design, interactivity, and play. She is currently working with the XEN division of Microsoft to develop an animated storytelling experience distributed through Xbox Live! and is collaborating on the design of a massively multiplayer urban game for the citizens of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In addition to working as a freelance game designer for gameLab, she writes a bi-monthly column on games for RES magazine and has recently completed Rules of Play, a textbook on game design co-authored with Eric Zimmerman (MIT Press, fall 2003). She has curated several programs of game-related content for the Walker Museum of Art and the Lincoln Center in New York, and has taught game design at NYU, Parsons School of Design, and N.C. State University.

Katie will present a lecture and screening on some of the world's finest (and strangest) examples of machinima. This is a true melding of digital gaming and cinema, though the result rarely fits either category smoothly. Maybe the technology is trying to tell us something?





In *Red vs. Blue: The Blood Gulch Chronicles*, faintly moronic space marines ponder the meaning of existence, search fruitlessly for headlight fluid, and drive around in a really cool car...all while stuck in the bottom of a box canyon that has no exits. Hilarity and massive firepower ensue.

Red vs. Blue (Rooster Teeth Productions) is one of the Net's most popular machinima series. Members of the production team will be on hand to screen episodes while attempting to field the inevitable barrage of questions.

NOTE: THIS PROGRAM CONTAINS ADULT LANGUAGE. DISCRETION IS ADVISED.

SAVE GAME >>

CREATIVE COMPUTERING 101

A one-day crash course consisting of three lectures, screenings, and computer lab, worth zero credits

Organized by esteemed faculty members Cory Arcangel, Ed Halter and Seth Price

Saturday, UT Campus [ACES bldg]

COMPUTER LAB

Room 2.402

1:00PM-9:00PM (ongoing)

INSTALLATIONS FROM PROFESSOR EMERITUS SETH PRICE

Writer and music industry VIP Seth Price says: "Only hardcore gamers appreciate the true school...they figured out that words pretty much kill pictures. It's like when sound came along and ruined the movies. Or like how *Final Fantasy II* symphonic double-CD sets can't compete with the vicious headache-inducing micro-trax of yore. Math is based on the concept of infinity. I don't claim to be a hardcore gamer—I basically have no credit as a video game person except in this one move, which I'll repeat over and over until I am forcibly retired. So, the lab contains video-game soundtrack music off a CD called *Game Heaven*, which steals the labor of a thousand hackers, and then a projection of *Romance*, a video I helped produce showing "the game that started it all," and also jodi.org's *SOD*—a harsh retelling of the game you might have played in 1984 on an Apple IIe, depicting Nazis."





LECTURES with SCREENINGS and SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

Room 2.302

3.30PM PROFESSOR ED HALTER, S.J.

"War Games: Digital Gaming and the U.S. Military"

Village Voice writer and New York Underground Film Festival director Ed Halter returns to Cinematekas to give this multi-media presentation on the historical relationships between the video game industry and the U.S. military. Topics include gaming's military roots, how real wars have been depicted in commercial games, how the U.S. Military currently hopes to win new recruits through games like *America's Army* and *Full Spectrum Warrior*, and how contemporary artists invoke gaming's role in the new military-entertainment complex through game-related artworks.

5.30PM VISITING LECTURER PAUL SLOCUM

"How to Make A Pop Music Band out of 80s Computer Trash"

Military computer programmer Paul Slocum will lecture on how to create a pop music band using only an Atari 2600 game console, a Commodore 64, a luggage 286 PC, and an Epson dot matrix printer as instruments. The lecture will be followed by a music demonstration.

7.00PM DOCTOR CORY ARCANGEL

"Burgertime"

Brooklyn-based artist and BEIGE programming ensemble member Cory Arcangel will show and explain the side of video games that has almost nothing to do with games. Commodore 64 hobbyist cracking, psych abstraction, chipstyle, pixel graphics, and machinima will all be discussed showcasing ideas and concepts involved in using video game technology to create more than just games. Expect game-bending masters jodi, the freak-out coloraid A.D.D. of paperrad.org, antique commodore 64 demos by people like Fairlight, and Crack Force Omega, internet meme meltdowns, and home-brew madness by all manner of Radioshack-addict soldering heroes. Techniques and tools used to create the work will also be discussed.

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GAME OVER >>

SEE NEXT YEAR'S GAMES WITHOUT BORDERS FOR CINEMATEKAS' FIRST INDEPENDENT AND STUDENT DIGITAL GAMES COMPETITION