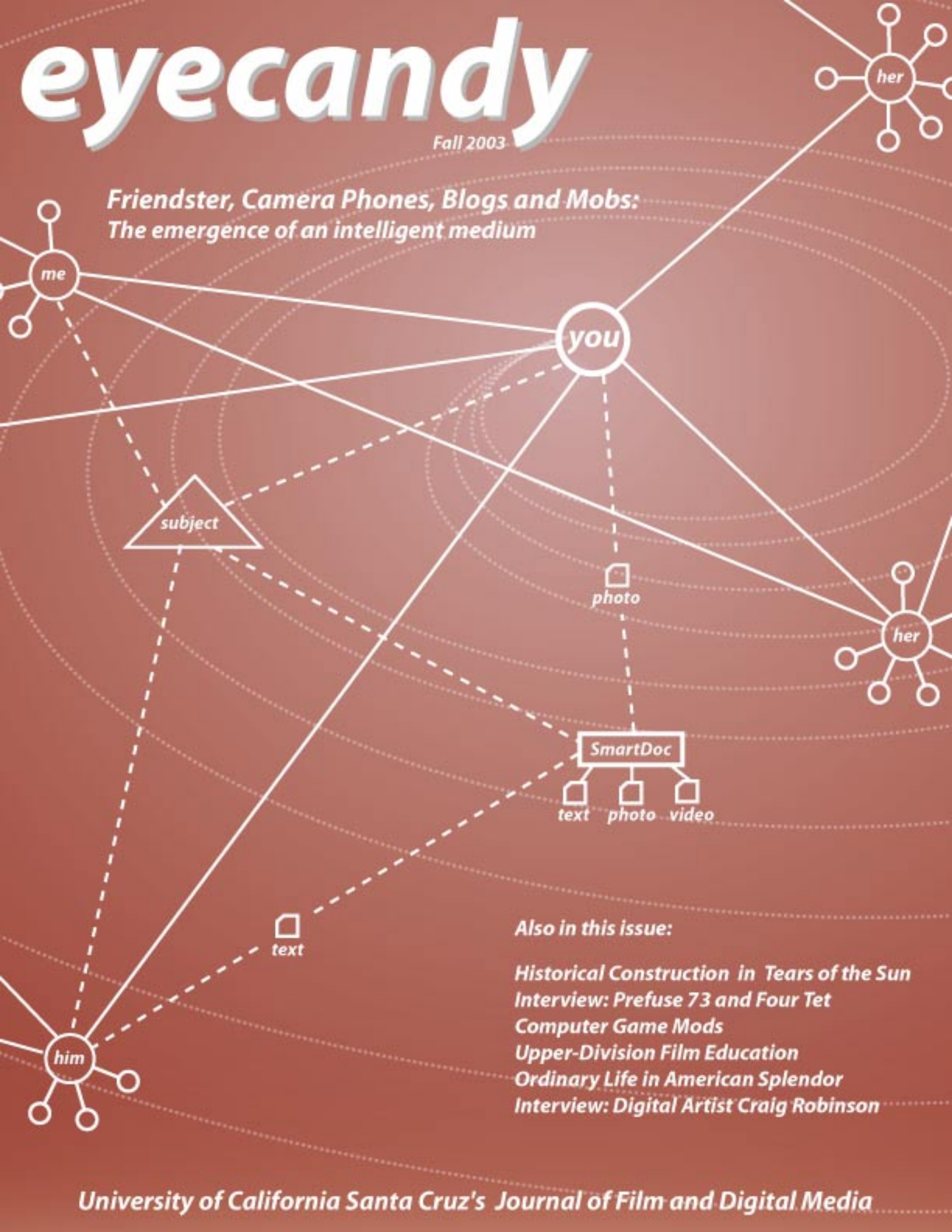


eyecandy

Fall 2003

*Friendster, Camera Phones, Blogs and Mobs:
The emergence of an intelligent medium*



Also in this issue:

Historical Construction in Tears of the Sun
Interview: Prefuse 73 and Four Tet
Computer Game Mods
Upper-Division Film Education
Ordinary Life in American Splendor
Interview: Digital Artist Craig Robinson

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Blurred Reality: Historical construction in Antoine Fuqua's

Tears of the Sun

By Ekaette Akpan

It seems that Hollywood has always found in Africa a locale in which to explore the exotic and the esoteric. One need only reference early films like *Blonde Venus* or more recent films like *Black Hawk Down* to find evidence that the “Dark Continent,” as post-colonial theory terms it, has seemed to the West a conduit through which to uncover in the Other, latent desires that cannot be explored within its own social strictures. This tendency to posit Africa – its people and its histories – as homogenous and easily comprehensible

continues to inform discussions in post-colonial film studies. The following analysis does not seek to investigate the Other as existing within taxonomical binarisms such as Tame | Savage or Sacred | Profane, though it is undoubtedly influenced by such discourses. Instead it is an investigation, though not exhaustive, of the creation, not of history, but of a history. It is an examination of film and its ability to effectively manipulate a viewer's fundamental belief in what separates fact from fiction.

Though many critics have dismissed Antoine Fuqua's *Tears of the Sun* as a clichéd military drama couched in the us versus them paradigm, one must move away from such superficial assays in order to understand the complexity with which the film manipulates reality in order to present itself as a realistic historical account. What makes *Tears of the Sun* worthy of examination is that the film begins to blur the line between fiction and reality from its outset. In its call to the viewer to accept its opening as emerging from a real history, *Tears of the Sun* immediately lays the foundation upon which it is able to construct a very realistic historical fiction.

From the moment the camera's “objective” eye first documented the banalities of its human subject, the newsreel mode attained the mythic distinction of authentic and unadulterated visual truth. *Tears of the Sun* plays on this very myth of “newsreel- as-truth” in order to validate its essentialized history of an Other. *Tears* opens its narrative with jarring archival newsreel footage of what appears to be related clips of street

violence on an unidentified African city street. Instantly the line blurs as the text calls for the audience to refer back to its past experiences with the newsreel mode – in essence, to recall numerous streaming news footage on network news channels claiming to be real footage of African civil unrest. Consequently, *Tears* relies heavily on both audience preconceptions of African socio-political history – it invites the viewer to bring in extra-textual discourse on past African violence and instability – and its willingness to accept the newsreel

as objective and authoritative. It asks the viewer to believe, though falsely, that visuals do not lie. But this is precisely what they do within the context of the film.

Jean Baudrillard defines hyper-reality as the moment in which reality is replaced by simulacra. Here the viewer experiences reality, not as it occurs objectively and unadulterated,

but as a re-formulated mimesis lacking a specific point of origin. *Tears of the Sun's* rapid deconstruction of the boundary between fact and fiction in its opening exemplifies this principle. The visually and emotionally chaotic scene begins with a time-elapsed shot of a blood red sunrise, which quickly dissolves into fragments of shaky news footage in which mobs riot through war-ravaged city streets. For at least several shots, the audience is afforded no indication of spatial or temporal locality, though the grainy news fragments immediately evoke western news reports of contemporaneous African insurgencies. It is only following the imposition of a British news reporter's voice purporting the chaotic fragments to be recent images of ongoing Nigerian political unrest, that the audience is allowed a context for its voyeurism. Images of broken bodies and immolated corpses no longer exist as dislocated pieces of history, as Nigeria is hailed as the site on which the film will interweave these mobile realities to create a highly believable history. From one shot to the next, the audience is violently inserted into the melee, with each image forcing the audience, via its “objective” eye, to experience these very real horrors.

The opening scene thus becomes a visual documentation of the process by which the hyper-real



Bruce Willis (left) and Monica Bellucci in a scene from *Tears of the Sun*.

usurps the real, in effect creating a space in which fiction and non-fiction combat for eminence. At once, *Tears* asks the audience to maintain its belief in the news mode as objective and truthful. This faith in the newsreel is pertinent to the text as its “historical narrative” is entirely predicated on images pillaged from this mode. And still the text goes further, asking the viewer to accept these images as being those of Nigerian civil unrest. But in doing so, the audience must negate the fact that this representation of a chaotic Nigeria is in actuality a compendium of spatially and temporally disparate histories, edited together to create a cogent national story. For example, several archival shots purported to be images of Nigerian rioters are actually images of South African and Zimbabwean political revolutions.

Tears of the Sun creates a fiction so emblematic of the real that, as Baudrillard argues, the line between mimesis and reality becomes increasingly more difficult to discern. Because Nigeria has for decades been a site of civil unrest, the film’s fictionalized socio-political representation of its instability is not at all a far cry from its history. Insofar as Nigeria’s past and present both resemble the precariousness depicted on screen, *Tears’* fictional history emerges as a believable account. But it is nevertheless a false history, ironically, constructed from fragmented actualities. The film, in essence, renegotiates what the viewer is to believe as real, as each shot, itself a part of a separate truth—one shot conveys a Congolese revolt, another a Zimbabwean street riot—becomes a (re)edited leaf in the annals of African history. Where beyond the text, each shot exists as a spatially and temporally locatable fragment of a historical syntagma, *Tears’* decontextualization renders its extra-textual validity as a pre-existing history, inconsequential and reducible. Nigeria therefore becomes the site at which conflated histories and cultures converge to create a monolithic, easily palatable history of an African people. It posits an understanding in which social and cultural individuations are rendered mobile and universal.

In the same way visual elements of the newsreel mode allow *Tears of the Sun* to assert itself as real, the film appropriates—from the same mode—a formal aural structure that ultimately serves to validate the text’s historical creationism. *Tears of the Sun* again plays with the audience’s faith in the newsreel by employing omniscient voice-over narration as a means of influencing and re-directing viewer consciousness.

This aural complexity is evidenced in what is arguably one of the most horrific pieces of footage in the opening sequence. In a medium shot, an adolescent male trembles with fear as he is beaten by a man dressed in military fatigues. The boy’s disheartening pleas intermingle in a cacophonous cocktail of gunfire

and stampeding feet. But his voice, an aural symbol of his corporeal and psychological distress—which exists within the realm of the archival footage—is overrun by a non-diegetic female voice functioning as a narrator. On one level, her voice functions to offer meaning to the disjointed on-screen events—she confirms that the narrative indeed occurs in Nigeria—while on another, it functions as an aural liaison between the world of the diegetic and non-diegetic—the fictive and the real.

The collision between *real* newsreel audio and *fictional* voice-over narration further exemplifies the complex aural construction underscoring the film. The narrator’s voice of authority is posited as existing temporally simultaneously in relation to the archival footage conveyed on-screen, though in actuality, it does not—her voice-over is a post production insert. It is within this “present tense”—these images of Nigeria as directly representative of the country’s immediate state of affairs—that the audience is asked to believe that both the documented events—conveyed via the archival footage—and the reporter’s voice occur. Yet the audience is asked to accept this temporal progression as the text simultaneously flows backwards. The news footage consists of unrelated shots, some filmed several years prior, each existing within in a specific *past* and divorced from the film’s *present*.

Though the newsreel—via its usage of archival footage—is a mode that purports to offer up a document of a specified historical past, its archives are not exempt from manipulation and reinterpretation. The prevailing myth of Africa’s histories as universal is further promoted in *Tears of the Sun’s* historical creationism. The film, as a pillaging text, robs histories from multifarious African nations and reconfigures these histories to create a fiction so real that reality is no longer paramount, or better yet, important. In its intertextuality, *Tears of the Sun* compromises the validity of these histories, offering instead simplistic historical reconcilability and conflationism. The film plays on what the audience accepts as real in order to create a world in which histories become *a history*, and cultures become *a culture*. ■

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Standing on the Cusp of an Elevated Sound: An interview with Prefuse 73 and Four Tet

By Noah Finneburgh

Scott Herren is tired of doing interviews. And with good reason. Herren, who hails from Atlanta, but resides in Barcelona, has been touring the world for the past few months, intensely promoting two of his new releases under his alias Prefuse 73. Herren's latest pair of records, the LP *One Word Extinguisher* and its companion piece, *Extinguished: Outtakes, Alternate Takes & Beats From One Word Extinguisher*, have been garnering rave reviews from the worlds of hip-hop, indie-rock and electronic music. Herren uses his MPC sampler to chop up sampled bits of music and reconstruct them into sonic collages that sparkle with elements of hip-hop, funk, post-rock and jazz — Herren chose the name Prefuse 73 as a nod to the pre-fusion jazz laid to wax between 1968 and 1973, a sub-genre of music he is particularly enamored with. While Herren's music most definitely encourages the listener to get up and dance, it also contains a healthy dose of cerebral elements, with its unpredictable, often experimental syncopation and timbres, both of which contribute to Herren's reputation as one of the most original and creative artists currently working in hip-hop or electronic music.

On tour with Herren is Kieran Hebden, an Englishman who writes, records and produces under the name Four Tet. Hebden uses pirated PC software to sample, edit and sequence music into compositions that marry stuttering electronics and warm organic sounds in a union that is both pensive and danceable. Lately, Hebden has been stretching tracks from his recent LP, *Rounds* into twenty minute plus, live laptop jams that reinterpret the original recordings, a practice Hebden says he drew from the free jazz pioneers of years passed. **eyecandy** dropped in on Herren and Hebden as they prepared for their show together back stage at Bimbo's 365 Club in San Francisco on October 22nd. They discussed the European music scenes, the art of

sampling, the pleasures and pitfalls of listening to their own music, and black market baby peddling. Herren made sure his lack of enthusiasm for interviews wasn't taken personally. "No dis [to you]," he said.



ec: Scott, do you consider your music to be visual in any way? Is there any kind of emotion or picture you're trying to paint?

SH: Yeah, when I make the music there's always a personal meaning behind it that I'm trying to make. It's always there in some way or another.

ec: So do you aim for your music to be — or do you think that it is — more intellectually or physically stimulating, or a healthy dose of both?

SH: I try to keep it both. I don't want to be too intellectual about my music and shut people out because it's intellectual, but then I don't want to make overt dance music.

ec: I think there is a healthy dose of that on [your recent record] *One Word Extinguisher*, where there are a lot of funky beats where you're just getting down to it, but there are also parts where you change up the syncopation, and it draws you out of it and you totally notice [the change].

SH: That comes from listening to jazz music. You want to hear shit switch up. You can do a hip-hop song and have it change to 3/3 and people won't even know it.

ec: Did you grow up with jazz around the house?

SH: Yeah, my mom listened to it.

ec: Did your parents encourage you to go along the path of music?

SH: No, I just did it. I was just like, "This is the only thing I can do well, man." [My parents said to] finish school, and I said, "OK, yeah." But right when I was that close to finishing school I was like, "I quit."

ec: You have said before that you enjoy playing live with people. What do you think the benefits are of working alone in the studio, as compared to working on a track with someone for an album?

SH: When you're working alone you dictate your own environment; you're in charge of everything, so you can probably get stuff done a lot quicker. Kieran [Hebden of Four Tet] actually knows about this more because he's [also] in [the] band [Fridge].

Kieran Hebden: There's no compromising when you work on your own. You just see through your vision. You don't mess around with discussing what you're trying to do with anybody else. You just do it.

ec: Do you prefer working with Fridge or on the Four Tet project?

KH: I like both at the same time. I miss [how] it's quite magical when you *are* working with someone and it suddenly gels and the ideas really work well off each other.

SH: I like both [working together and

alone]. I like making an ill track by myself and then I like to play with people too, where you are totally feeding off somebody and you hear it.

KH: With electronic music, it depends on how you make it. I make a lot of music from the inside out. I start with the main sound of the track or the main idea. The process after is just about adding details.

ec: What do you use to make music?

KH: I just use a computer hooked up to my hi-fi. I use this program Audiomulch. It's free. I use it pretty much for anything. I just use Cakewalk to sequence.

ec: Do either of you know any music theory or do you just play by ear?

SH: I know a little bit.

KH: I don't know any music theory.

ec: Do either of you usually plan out how a song will be? Do you maybe say, "I want to make more of a funk track or a jazz track, or a sadder, or upbeat track," or does it usually just seem to fall into place?

SH: It's pretty random. For me, it's never really premeditated. It just sort of takes its own shape as it goes. But then I'll incubate it. Once I hear it, I can incubate that sound. But I don't set out to go, "This is going to be a sad peace. This is going to be the last track on the album." I can't do that shit.

KH: [For me] it's different every time. Sometimes I have the whole thing in my head pretty much. Sometimes I'll be fucking around on the computer and something will come up that sounds good.

ec: So once you start trying, then you're fucked?

SH: I think it could come out contrived sounding, but that's me speculating. That doesn't relate to someone who approaches music in a

different way. If you were a theory type person you could be like, "I'm going to base this in this minor key..."

ec: Would you guys like to know more music theory?

SH: It wouldn't hurt, but maybe it would hurt. I don't know. That was a really good answer. (laughs)

KH: (laughs) I've got no interest.

ec: How often do you guys go record shopping and what is the process like? Do you scour the used bins, or the bargain stuff for cool covers...?

SH: [Kieran's] a record digger.

KH: I'm making so much money out of IDM (Intelligent Dance Music) now that I just buy shit on the wall when I walk into the shop. It'll say it's got a drum break but it'll be a hundred and fifty dollars and I just hand over the money. (laughs) No. I look everywhere, wherever I care about.

ec: Scott, you don't really dig too much?

SH: I say that, I mean I don't. I don't venture out like these cats [on tour with me] do. Town to town, if there's a record store, they'll hit it. I'll usually be like, "Fuck it." I don't have enough energy.

ec: But usually you're sampling vinyl right?

SH: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I'm really specific about dates and things stylistically...

ec: So you'll sample stuff that you're already a total fan of? You're not going out there for more novelty records...?

SH: I just don't spend as much time doing it really. I'm just as interested in it and I'm interested in finding out about new music, but I'm just as interested in listening to those records and whatever else, getting other shit from it than just samples.

ec: I always wonder when I listen to

anyone who's sampling, whether they go out [to buy records] and just say, "Oh, that's a cool cover," and they listen to hours and hours of horrible music for just that one nugget, that one guitar riff...

SH: I can respect it.

KH: There's something you can sample on every record. If you know what you're doing, you can mess with shit so much once you sample it...

SH: You can sample anything, brand new, buy it blindly, and make it dope.

KH: If you've got to go through a hundred records to find something you can use then you're not very good at what you're doing.

SH: Exactly, you've got a lack of ideas.

ec: So you guys aren't the types who are all about obscurity? Because you know there are those people who think, "This is a big record, I'm not going to sample it. Everyone knows it..."

SH: I would never want to take something that was so obvious. I'm just not into the direct break or sample.

KH: You don't want to cover old ground.

SH: Exactly. You don't want to do a remix of the record, and essentially that's what you'd be doing, and you can get paid doing remixes for somebody else.

KH: I like to sample really weird shit, because I'm not clearing the samples.

ec: How does that work? Have you guys ever gotten into legal trouble or do you usually disguise your samples so much that no one cares, or has anyone ever contacted you [about sampling them]?

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Computer Game Mods: Interactive digital art

By Kiel Olff

Computer games are fast outpacing the cinema as the dominant force in the American entertainment economy. For the past two years computer games have out sold the box office and look to top the 10 billion dollar revenue mark this coming holiday shopping season. With computers only becoming more powerful and user friendly, it would seem that the gap between the cinema and computer game markets is only going to get bigger. The computer game market has such a dominating grasp on the world's pocket books because computer games have the ability to change and interact with the user over a long period of time, not only because on screen characters react to our commands issued by keystrokes, but because we can interact with the actual substance that the games are made of. Cinema does not allow us access to film stock, nor does television allow us to modify the signals entering our homes. However, the numerous files of code that computer games are made of are available to the user for alteration



A scene From *Jedi Knight II* before modification.

and adaptation. When adapted and modified, computer games can be made to fit and fulfill the particular desires of the users.

Modifying computer games is something that has finally become mainstream to the gaming industry. These modifications are files made by users and other gamers (and sometimes software companies) that alter the game environment in some way and are posted on the Internet for download. Computer game mods were first made to expand upon levels and create new weapons or player avatars, but were always a small piece of the computer game puzzle. Their technical sophistication caused them to only be available to and used by a very small market of hard-core gamers. The Internet was still a very difficult place to navigate at the time of the first modifications. Modem speeds were also slow and file sizes were large, causing the gamer to dedicate a considerable time commitment to finding and downloading the mods. The technical know-how required to install and use the game modification files involved rooting around game directories

and editing complicated strings of text. This has all changed in recent years, for now mods usually involve one executable download that will automatically place files and edit others to install the modification to its target game.

Things became more mainstream in 1997 with the release of the real time strategy game, *Total Annihilation*. The game's developer, Cavedog Entertainment, was the first game company to not only create, but also endorse the development of mods by gamers. Cavedog made modification simple by featuring a unit of the week which could be downloaded from their website. These mods were quite easy to install and often worked perfectly, which helped the game retain its market presence years after it debuted. *Total Annihilation* was also the first game to have corresponding mod building tools available to the public at the time of its release. The game designers made a simple program and released it via the Internet so that gamers could develop their own units and full-featured mods for the game.



A scene From *Jedi Knight II* after a total conversion mod has been installed.

The game also shipped with a map and mission creation program that allowed users to use the same technology that the game designers used, to create maps and script the movie cut scenes that play between single player missions. Issuing a developer's pack on a company website in correlation with a game's release is now commonplace.

The most common type of mod is a new skin, which basically changes the look of objects or characters within a game. There are two components to creating a new skin, and usually gamers will work in groups and divide up tasks. The modelers in the group use a 3D modeling program to construct a wire frame for their new creation. Depending on the game, the gamers developing the mod may build jets, tanks, aliens, cartoon characters, or whatever object they desire. Once the 3D model is complete, the other members of the group can start working on skinning the model. These "skinners" create 2D bitmap files to be wrapped around the 3D model to give the new avatars the face, colors, or new look that the 3D modelers were going for. Some game modifications only create new avatars to be transported into the


game world, as this is very simple and enjoyable because it allows players to express some individuality through their unique avatars. Perhaps the most famous skinning modification of all was the infamous "Nude Raider" patch that removed the clothes from *Tomb Raider's* Laura Croft, but changed nothing else in the game. Users went to the files containing the skin for Laura Croft and created new bitmaps that featured her bare chest instead of her usual clothing. Inserting new skins into games has become commonplace as new games appear on the market with this ability already built in. One such game is *Homeworld 2*, which features fleets of ships in space, and allows the gamer to import a picture into the game to be used as the insignia of his or her team on every ship. Developers have seen that users often find their own ways of putting personal touches on various objects in games, and the software companies have responded by building the features into their games which enable users to do so.

While modding a game to insert new skins allows for more individuality in the game world, some mods can change the entire look and feel of a game. After creating new menus and new levels (which is similar to creating new characters), modders can also change the rules and objectives of the game to the point where the modded game can be so different that one might not trace it back to its original version. Creating new rules and objectives for the game world involves rewriting the code of the original game and entails a much longer time commitment for modders. Modifications have made possible the existence of a new author in electronic games, as the mod's developer has inserted his or her own art and structure into the code of the program they are creating. Instead of the software traveling a one-way street to the player's eyes, the player has the opportunity to change what they have been given and to send the line of creation back to the original developers. Software development companies often scan the Internet looking for what is popular among user created files and start to incorporate their findings into their own work. While some may have thought that software companies would not want users toying with and modifying their files and source code, software developers actually often welcome this two-way communication via the software they produce. It allows them to stay abreast of the latest trends and desires within the gaming community, and in the case of the game *Counterstrike*, make some money off of it too.

The most successful mod available is *Counterstrike*, a full conversion modification for the game *Half-Life*, by Sierra. Originally, *Half-Life* was a fantasy game about a portal that opened between galaxies and an army of monsters that swarmed through, presenting the gamer with the role of a soldier who must eliminate them. This made *Half-Life* a run of the mill first person shooter game, dozens of which are made every year. The gamers who created the *Counterstrike* mod for *Half-Life* made it so realistic that it has even been mentioned on the news in conjunction with school shootings, the DC sniper murders and the training

programs for US soldiers in Iraq. After installing the mod, you aren't battling huge monsters, and the hero isn't a giant, unrealistic looking male character. The new characters in the mod are proportioned as normal humans. The game has also become team oriented instead of solo play. Teams are now terrorist and counter-terrorist instead of monster and human. The weapons available are also real weapons such as AK-47's and Desert Eagle handguns. The modders brought about such realism that the real world performances of the weapons are also reflected in the mod. The rounds-per-second meter is true to life, and now, if you are carrying a heavier weapon, your avatar will run slower. The main feature that *Counterstrike* changed was the way health is measured. In many other computer games, players can take entire salvos of rockets and bullets and still survive. Shields and health packs litter levels and allow players to regain health. The games feature these items so players have a greater chance for survival. The *Counterstrike* mod throws these conventions out the window in favor of a more realistic health/damage model. Players can be killed with one bullet if they are hit in the head or chest, while it may take two or three if they are hit in a less vital area. Because of the popularity and demand for this mod – which is a very large download – Sierra bought the rights to it and is now selling it in stores in bundle packs with their *Half-Life* title.

The computer game industry continues to grow because computer games allow developers and players to interact with one another and meet each other's needs. Modified games allow software companies to work with gamers, as the companies design the tools to make whatever changes to the games the users imagined a reality. In return the software companies see what players want and are able to stay atop the latest trends. New models, levels, and avatars enable the games to evolve and create a new mode of authorship for the gamers. The cycle will only perpetuate itself, as the software production companies release more and better equipped developer packs, and along with games, mods will also become more complex. Because of the work of modding groups, computer games are able to stay fresh and evolve over time, helping both gamers and developers see what is needed to advance the genre. ■



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Friendster, Camera Phones, Blogs and Mobs: The emergence of an intelligent medium

By Jose M. Hernandez

In the 70's, 80's and early 90's, computing was about computing. Tech-savvy elites raced to build a more sophisticated calculator, while ordinary people remained largely unaffected. Personal computers were relatively inaccessible until the explosion of the Internet. Emphasis has recently shifted from personal computing to personal mobile and wireless devices such as iPods and cell phones. Today innovators seek to bring more computing power to communications devices, as opposed to the broadband push of yesteryear to bring more communication power to computing devices. We are experiencing a phase of convergence between information and wireless communication (much larger than the Internet itself) that has only just begun to reveal its true potential. The established nature of telephony creates an accessible context for emerging mobile communications devices, broadening the existing ability of non-technical people to communicate. The determinism of convergence is about to start a whole new "digital revolution." Technological groundwork has been laid for a socially integrated and accessible medium ripe for exploration, specifically within the realm of non-fiction.

Recent developments such as Friendster-style social networking, camera phones, blogging and mobs have opened the door to an intelligent hybrid medium. The instant combination of documentation, publishing and social distribution enables individuals to collaboratively construct and interact with a text which is well suited for socially or politically relevant content due to its grass-roots nature, but also adaptable to purely artistic endeavors. Consequently, the potential for entrepreneurs, artists and activists will be vast. The following is a brief overview of some of these emerging technologies, their relations to one another and how people have been using them to evolve a self-extensive hybrid medium – a medium capable of challenging current modes of both documentary and journalism.

FRIEND-OF-A-FRIEND SOCIAL NETWORKS

If you have not yet heard of Friendster, someone you know (or someone they know) probably has. Friendster is a web-based, quasi-dating service that allows people to interact based on friend-of-a-friend connections. Since January 2003, Friendster has grown to nearly 4 million users. Other services such as Tribe and Myspace have emerged to try to cash in on the trend, which has recently gathered millions in funding (remember the dot-com boom?). Inevitably, Friendster has experienced such immense server traffic that it barely functions. The loosely structured organization of friend-of-a-friend relationships is sometimes described visually as a "hyperbolic-tree," which, as opposed to traditional tree structures, has no top or bottom. In other words, every node is at the center of its own universe (see cover), thus subverting any hierarchy of relationships. This runs counter to the autocratic communication structure of traditional mass media, where a clear distinction between sender and receiver impedes any form of constructive feedback. Television news for example, relies on ratings from a passive audience, and thus entertainment

value—as opposed to social relevance and interaction—to measure its own "effectiveness." In a "natural" social network, authority of message is linked to personal trust or reputation (ask Jane if you can trust John, etc.). With friend-of-a-friend connections, users give up online anonymity in exchange for a powerful extension of their offline social network.

Indie developers are already devising a solution to the Friendster bottleneck called FOAF (Friend Of A Friend). FOAF is a markup document type that standardizes and decentralizes the relationship structure, permitting the user to own and possess their personal data as opposed to allowing commercial services like Friendster to dictate its use. The great thing about FOAF is that it is not limited to the web, and can be adapted to cell phones and other wireless applications. Expect to see useful (non-dating) applications of a FOAF architecture in the next few years.

CELL PHONES

According to a report from FutureImage, camera phones are expected to outsell digital and film cameras combined by the end of 2004. This means that most of the world's cameras will soon accompany people wherever they go. Over the next three years these phones will be capable of 2 and 3 mega-pixel high-resolution stills and video, reducing the need for additional cameras.

Cell phones are also becoming more like personal computers. Those enabled with Java can already exchange data (stocks, weather, IM) with Internet servers in real-time. Programmers can quickly develop new interfaces for custom applications as needed, such as a simple data entry system for rating a movie you just watched or documenting a photo you just snapped.

Global Positioning Systems (GPS) are now able to provide precise data about location, allowing for a more tangible interaction between physical space and information. For example, one might document an aspect of a place they visit on some given day and then log the details (which might include their exact location in longitude and latitude and a description and photo) of that experience to a database. The next day, some other person might visit the same place, query their coordinates, and retrieve that information. Already, GPS has been cleverly adapted to weekend scavenger hunt games, in which participants are presented with the task of finding and photographing target locations with their camera phones. In Japan, cell phone users can bring up interactive maps for directions just as Americans do from Mapquest.

Potentially, cell phones could collect other sorts of environmental data such as temperature and weather conditions or the precise angle at which a photo was taken. This could be a tool for scientists looking to extend their ability to collect data about a given phenomenon, or one for surfers looking to exchange tidbits of knowledge with their inner-circle of bros. Spatial or environmental data might also be used to corroborate accounts of a specific event, such as counting heads at a large public gathering



A model dons a wearable computer at a recent cyberfashion show in San Diego.

based on photos and their respective times and locations.

The possibility of proximity-based communications opens the door to a variety of commercial services that are bound to be quickly exploited. Think of walking past a Starbucks and receiving a text message on your phone advertising a coffee pot you don't really need. Alternatively, proximity-based communication could enable ordinary people who would normally remain complete strangers to interact based on what their phones have to say to each other (profile matching based on common friends or interests, for example). At the very least, your phone will be able to transmit your location in the case of a medical emergency.

BLOGS

The word "blog" is short for web-log, the latest trend in personal web publishing. The idea is simple: to publish a basic chronological set of documents without having to know HTML. Blogs tend to be casual and personal. Some take the form of a diary, while others are used for news or collaborative research. Cross-referencing amongst blogs is popular and often promotes dialogues across multiple websites on any given subject. Proponents of a "semantic web" believe this kind of technology will help pave the way for more useful and relevant search engine technologies. More recently, services such as Blogger (owned by Google) and TypePad have simplified the blog process to the point where anyone with a web browser can start their own blog in a matter of minutes. One blog, *Where is Raed?*, followed the recent occupation of Iraq nearly every day, direct from Baghdad. Not surprisingly, Raed's accounts were more personal, descriptive and believable than the constructed and filtered accounts of "embedded" reporters.

A new service, TextAmerica, allows camera phone users to publish pictures and text directly to a blog. The result is a "moblog," or mobile-web-log. One could also refer to the moblog as a photo-journal, which brings into question a relation to photo-journalism. While many moblogs focus on city life and other quotidian subject matter which can be conveyed through low-definition images, others have attempted to document events of social and political relevance.

One web-based service called Myspace has attempted to combine blogging with a FOAF-style social network. This service has also integrated interest groups and several other useful features. Microsoft has a service in development called Wallop, in which they plan to integrate instant messaging with blogging and a social network. AOL has jumped on the bandwagon too, adding its own hybrid of services to the mix. Blog technology has only just begun to boom, but is already very well established as one of the key technologies of future information systems development.

MOBS

If the French had cell phones with text messaging during the revolution, heads might have rolled at several times the rate and much more efficiently. On the other hand, they also could have easily avoided violence in the first place. Enter "mobs," an organized gathering initiated via text-messaging or through some other wireless communications medium. Mobs currently consist of two distinct types: "FlashMobs," which are spontaneous gatherings of individuals for surrealist events, and "SmartMobs," which have social or political functions.

Web-Based Friend-Of-A-Friend Networking

Friendster - <http://friendster.com>

Tribe - <http://tribe.net>

The FOAF Project - <http://www.foaf-project.org/>

Blog, Moblog and Hybrid Services

Blogger - <http://blogger.com>

TypePad - <http://typepad.com>

TextAmerica - <http://textamerica.com>

MySpace - <http://myspace.com>

Microsoft's Wallop - <http://wallop.com>

Mob Movements

Flash Mobs - <http://flashmob.co.uk>

Anti-Mobs - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/antimob/>

FlashBlogs - <http://clearblueskies.blogspot.com>

SmartMobs - <http://www.smartmobs.com>

Cell Phones

FutureImage - <http://futureimage.com>

AirIM - <http://www.airsoftwireless.com>

Blogs and Mobs

Where is Raed? - http://dear_raed.blogspot.com

Southern California Brush Fires - <http://fire.textamerica.com>

The Blackout - <http://blackout.textamerica.com>

Chasing Bush - <http://www.interwebnet.org>

Flash Blaine - <http://flashblaine.co.uk>

FlashMobs have become popular in London, New York and other urban art destinations. One recent event, *FlashBlaine*, involved the taunting of performer David Blaine during his forty-four day starvation stunt. Several hundred participated, organizing the odd event via text messaging. A similar and slightly more bizarre activity is the "AntiMob," where participants are asked to disperse from a particular location, creating a "ghost town atmosphere in a famous public space," according to the AntiMob website. The aim of the group is to "appeal to passive aggressives" and allow themselves to "express their hostility to the world in a safe and indirect way." Mobs have also directed their energies towards websites. "FlashBloggers" coordinate blogging events which involve hundreds of people simultaneously invading the feedback section of an individual blog. These gatherings are less surreal than their real-world counterparts, actually stimulating a functional conversation rather than simply encouraging congregating for fun with strangers.

While FlashMobs may be nothing more than an avant-garde fad, SmartMobs are the future, according to Howard Rheingold, who has published a book entitled *SmartMobs: The Next Social Revolution*. He describes how more than one million citizens of Manila mobilized against the former president of the Philippines, Joseph Estrada, through text messaging, over four days in January of 2001. Rheingold writes, "Bringing down a government without firing a shot was a momentous early eruption of SmartMob behavior." He also mentions how protesters in Seattle used wireless communication to disperse and reorganize during the WTO riots of 1999, a tactic he calls "swarming." Rheingold cautions that there are also malignant possibilities for SmartMobs such as terrorism (but not to worry, for the US military is currently the leading developer of said technologies). On his website, Rheingold hints at the uncertainty of the future of

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Waiting for the Ball to Drop:

Upper-Division film education meets the casual moviegoing experience

By Adam Weinstein

For me, passive movie watching has become a relic of the past. A year of film theory classes has trained my mind to be a lean, mean, semiotic-devouring machine. The moviegoing experience has now become a constant game of trying to see how the White Supremacist Capitalist Patriarchal Democracy is trying to keep all the good boys and girls of the Minority Crew down, and hence, I'm starting to have a real hard time enjoying myself at the movies. The question I have begun to ask myself is whether it's all this theory that's ruined my ability to mindlessly enjoy a film, or whether I've always been this hypercritical, but just not as gung-ho about it.

I know that I was an early detractor of the Muses in Disney's *Hercules*. Something just struck me as wrong when the only dark-skinned people in a movie weren't even part of the story, and instead served as a singing and dancing chorus to the movie's action. I figured they must have been the result of a high-powered Disney executive receiving some sort of focus group decision that the film needed some minority characters. As my theory goes, an unnamed executive pulls together some writers and they all brainstorm about how they can introduce some non-white characters into a narrative from ancient Greece. "Well," one intrepid writer points out, "We have these characters whose only function is singing and dancing."

"Brilliant," says the executive.

"I was joking," says the writer.

"You're fired," says the executive. "The rest of you get to work on giving me some singing and dancing minorities."

What has changed in my movie viewing habits, I have come to realize, is that I no longer wait to look back on movies I've watched to find out how the general public is being led on by filmmakers with sinister motives. Instead, I can't even get through the films themselves without watching for the signs and situations that I now see as the stock trade of the exploitative Hollywood machine. My mind is just drooling in anticipation of being able to recognize how The Man is keeping everyone else down. Taking a look at this past summer's offerings makes me marvel at how I'm still able to go to the movies at all without suffering terminal headaches.

Underworld takes the modern cliché of the beautiful, skinny, and above all pale vampire, and lets us see these creatures of the night wallowing in decadence in a setting reminiscent of the most notorious scenes in *Eyes Wide*

Shut. Then we have the solitary black (African-English?) vampire, who sits alone in his room and plays with his weapons, only being called upon when all the white folk need assistance in killing someone. Token blackness aside, why is it that the lone black character has to be the one whose only role is to provide for more efficient violence?

The targets of this aggression, werewolves, or as the film calls them, Lycans, live in the sewers and plot revenge on the vampires, who are hunting them to extinction. These werewolves are also a bunch of white people and one token black character, but this one at least gets to lead war parties. As head lieutenant of attacking stuff, this character (Raze, played by Kevin Grevioux) is the first one seen in the film transforming into his half-man, half-wolf form, thus firmly securing the image of a black man going bestial in the minds of the audience. Once again, the movie represents the groups' only black characters as the ones everyone falls back on when it's time to get the violence on.



Kevin Grevioux as Raze in *Underworld*.

As the film progresses, we get some back story where we find out that the Lycans were once servants to the vampires, until one of them went and fell in love with the head vampire's daughter, a crime for which said vampire attempted to kill the entire race of Lycans. On the film student mental scorecard we get a "superior" race attempting genocide on a minority slave race because of the fear of miscegenation. This gets topped off with a battle between Raze, the token black werewolf, and a vampire, who attacks him using whips, during which I almost expected the two combatants to break into a scene from *Roots*:

VAMPIRE: What's your name?

WEREWOLF: Kunta Kinte!

VAMPIRE: Your name is Toby!

Thankfully, talking with my friends after the movie, it became apparent it wasn't just my film education that clued me in to these representations, as they also caught on to them. We all decided we hated the movie, but what made my perspective different was that instead of harping about the weak plot and cheesy acting, I instead ranted on and on about how the races were represented and the overall lack of any substantial minority parts other than one token black male on either side. My friends replied, "Dude, what do you expect from Hollywood?"

Maybe I do expect something more from my films, but it's difficult to get that across to someone who's not indoctrinated in the same ways of seeing film as I have

been. The points my friends raised about the movie just seemed like silly rantings to me until I realized that the things they were talking about were also very important. I was just so stuck in my "high-class study of film" mode that I missed seeing how the movie failed on even the most basic levels. Or, knowing how much I like to be right, perhaps I just wanted to choose some reason for hating the movie that no one else could argue against.

The Rundown was surprisingly good, and I had to wrack my brain a bit before I could get at the cleverly hidden meaty bits of misrepresentation, making me wonder whether or not I was just trying too hard to find this stuff. For the most part, *The Rundown* threw small bits of tokenism out that resolved themselves safely, while other troubling aspects flew right by as I was busying my mind with the more obvious stuff.

The film's sexy South American barmaid (Rosario Dawson), who is being pursued romantically by the more-or-less benign force of colonialism (Seann William Scott), turns out to be the leader of the rebel forces fighting against the film's real colonial threat (Christopher Walken). Dawson's character also never ends up kissing, hugging, or even making sexually suggestive banter with the film's hero (The Rock), and instead ends up going turncoat on her American comrades (Scott and The Rock) in the name of helping her people take destiny into their own hands.

Of course, near the end of the film, Dawson gets captured by Walken's forces and has to be saved by our heroes, but while they're busy blowing the crap out of all of the bad guys, her own native forces end up performing the rescue, taking the teeth out of the American rescue mission and scoring a blow against Hollywood misrepresentation. Also, throughout this entire ordeal, we are spared from seeing any exploitation stemming from Dawson being helplessly tied up and subject to the forces of the evil patriarchy.

With Walken's conquering forces safely out of the way, the native population gains control of the situation by taking a native artifact (that otherwise would end up in a museum due to the intervention of Scott's character) and selling it on the black market.

Wait. What?

So the ultimate solution, after all of the ethnographic pitfalls neatly sidestepped by the film, is for the native populace to sell their heritage?

But is it right for me to dictate how these people achieve their salvation, like some sort of missionary? Regardless, I have to go on in my criticisms once I've gotten past how well the film has otherwise eluded the normal mindless exploitation present in action movies. Thus, the following questions run into my head:

Is The Rock's inability to follow in the sexual footsteps of his forbearers due to the fact that he's a non-white hero?

Is there some unsavory reason that the movie introduces combative monkeys right before the native guerilla forces, who fight our heroes in a primitive, almost primate style? If so, is their ability to be led by a "mere" woman a reflection of this primitive status?

One idea I've definitely taken away from my film classes is that the ideology hidden the most successfully in a film has the best chance of seeping into our subconscious's, so while the film trumpeted the success of a strong, independent woman, I continued to feel that there was something wrong going on. Has Hollywood evolved its defenses to the point where it has begun to throw the bone of sexual equality to the film scholars of the world, in order to sneak the rest of its ideological exploitation right by us? Or perhaps *The Rundown* should be applauded for the steps it takes to be a better example for movie audiences. Or is that just what they want us to think so we will all let our guards down while they prepare to throw things back into the Dark Ages, where muscular warriors battle the Great Dark Menace in order to save the scantily-clad damsel in distress, while the minority sidekick Steppin Fetchit's his way into a tragic death meant to allow the hero a brief moment of emotion? Or are these just the paranoid ravings of someone who's been brainwashed by the forces of the intellectual elite as another foot soldier in the fight against the Great Hollywood Machine?

How far is too far, and when isn't far enough? ■

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Another Short Term Goal Accomplished: The glorification of ordinary life in *American Splendor*

By Eric Danch

It is rare when the depiction of a desperately plebeian lifestyle, experienced by a man with severe aesthetic and emotional deficiencies, can ignite questions concerning both life and artistic philosophies. Equally odd, is that this man's seemingly tortured and self-effacing lifestyle can communicate an inspirational and optimistic message about art and life. Thus, for those of us who thrive on self-pity, apocalyptic wit, and criticizing others, *American Splendor* can both further our fluency in these areas, and also teach us to actively reflect upon what these tendencies reveal about the underbelly of our everyday lives. Thus, instead of just acting out these pessimistic inclinations without reflection, *American Splendor* slows everything down and brings every little quail about ordinary life to fruition through art. In doing so, the film argues that even a man bent on expecting fire and brimstone around every corner, can learn to utilize art as a strategy for living a good life. In addition, this art-as-strategy technique is also mirrored by the film itself, via its unique ability to reveal this learning process self-referentially to the viewer. In other words, by calling attention to itself as an art form, subsequently frustrating how we perceive and understand the reality of the film itself, and arguing for art as a survival strategy in the narrative, *American Splendor* ultimately champions the therapeutic practice of highlighting the complexity of ordinary life through art.

So, who is our man? What American splendor do we follow in the film? Who is Harvey Pekar? On the surface, Harvey makes a living as a file clerk in a VA hospital in Cleveland, Ohio. His fellow employees include Toby, a semi-autistic nerd of proportions not previously realized in film, a bitter, elderly African-American man named Mr. Boats, who's not able to understand the changing of the times, and a host of lesser developed characters that reflect any depressing, DMV-esque bureaucracy.

Harvey's love life is also in shambles. He is twice divorced and openly admits he will take whoever will have him. Harvey (played by Paul Giamatti) confirms this sunny disposition towards love during one scene in a pathetic display of desperation, wherein he has lost his voice, and squeaking and wincing become his only means of salvaging one of his relationships. Harvey's love life can also be described as the polar opposite of the Meg Ryan or Hugh Grant, befuddled-yet-apparently-cute format, where every coincidence in the story serves a function. In contrast, Harvey sees an acute absence of function concerning the coincidences that perpetuate his loneliness. In fact, his overall desperation is so intense that he even considers a new relationship simply based on the thought, "Man, she has great-looking handwriting." This is also a man who begins a first date by stating, "I want you to

know that I had a vasectomy."

Harvey's long walks to and from the hospital should also be noted here because they serve a thematic function which compliments the descriptions above. In short, these walks lead us through an environment so overwhelmed by lifeless rusty earth tones that the viewer becomes smothered by a general malaise of hopelessness. All in all, any glimmer of inspiration seems drowned out by the film's careful control over the *mise-en-scène*. However, what we hear during Harvey's walks isn't droll at all. Instead it's Marvin Gaye's classic, "Ain't That Peculiar." What's effective about this choice of music is that it represents the motivation behind Harvey's art, in that there is so much more complexity in the ordinary than meets the eye. And it's this strategy of poeticizing the mundane through the writing of comic books that allows Harvey to better understand and manage the world around him. Directors Shari Bergman and Robert Pulcini add that,

The thing we found as our guiding principle was the love story between a man and his art form, which was, in Harvey's case, comic books. It's about a man who found a life through comic books. He found a creative voice; he found some kind of fame; he found a purpose and a legacy, which was very important to him; he found a wife; he ended up finding a daughter and making a family; and he wound up beating a disease [cancer] — all through comic books.

However, what these words don't reflect is the complexity of how the directors construct Harvey on screen. Harvey *is* an actual person. He *is* a Cleveland native. He *did* work at a VA Hospital with an actual Toby and Mr. Boats, and he *did* create the comic book series *American Splendor*. Yet, this film isn't just a bio-pic. And the film doesn't follow just one Harvey Pekar.

So far we have discussed only the screen version of Harvey, or what will now be referred to as *movie* Harvey (Giamatti), while there are in fact three more versions of Harvey in the film. In no particular order, there is the *animated* version of Harvey as drawn by R. Crumb and other artists who come into Harvey's life, the *actual* Harvey shown in documentary style footage shot during the filming of *American Splendor*, and the *actual* Harvey of the *past*, preserved in archival footage from his appearances on *The David Letterman Show* in the 1970's. This established, we can then ask what these multiple Harveys might accomplish. Why make this so complicated? The answer revolves around self-reflexivity. For instance, the fact that *actual* Harvey can both narrate and interact with *movie* Harvey, while commenting about *past* Harvey, while also talking off-camera to the directors of the film *we* are watching, indicates that the filmmakers want to spotlight their own creative processes in relation to the creative process that Harvey stands for. Thus, having the film call attention to this plurality of Harveys, as well as its own existence as a film, blurs the line between reality and fiction and frustrates our expectations. In doing so, we lose a little control over the narrative and may even feel the need to look around in the theater, hoping to see others equally robbed of their privileged Hollywood blockbuster viewing

position. Resulting from all of this is the fact that we are forced to attempt to regain our sense of narrative omnipotence by identifying with all of the Harveys, and how they eventually discover a form of therapy in art's ability to reflect on the ordinary.

Emblematic of how the aforementioned self-reflexivity and forced investment gets played out cinematically, is a scene where *movie* Toby (Judah Friedlander) explains the delicate nature of jellybeans to *movie* Harvey. Firstly, Friedlander's portrayal of Toby seems so over the top that it's hard to believe that anyone actually behaves in this manner. Nonetheless, the scene suddenly cuts to a sound stage, where during an apparent break in production (complete with snack table) the actors (Giamatti and Friedlander) take five and begin to talk about their performances. Following their conversation, into the foreground of the same frame enter *actual* Harvey and *actual* Toby to revisit their discussion about jellybeans. What this does is not only authenticate *actual* Toby (who arguably transcends even Friedlander's imitation), but also show us that *actual* Harvey and *actual* Toby are comfortable with their fictive counterparts and even become nostalgic while watching them. Thus, having both Tobys and both Harveys in the same frame is neither distancing nor disrupting to the believable fabric of the film. In fact, it sutures us more into the film because our investment in the characters becomes twofold.

At the end of the film, *actual* Harvey tries his best to avoid the happy Hollywood ending by stating that very intention



Actor Paul Giamatti (left) and Harvey Pekar on the set of *American Splendor*.

in a voice over narration. This is no doubt a noble venture, especially since the film has thwarted classical tendencies at every turn up until this point. However, an optimistic message forces its way to the surface. In short, *actual* Harvey narrates the statistics of his life as a form of closure. For example, he's still stuck in his dead-end job at the hospital, his wife is terminally unemployed yet idealistic, and his daughter has ADD. He sums all of this up by stating, "My life is total chaos." So, what does all this translate into? A never ending source of material for his comic books. Granted, it's not a Dorothy's-return-from-Oz happy ending, but it situates art as a means of survival and champions something we can all learn to better reflect upon and poeticize: The complexity of ordinary life. ■

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SH: Yeah, but whatever.

KH: Scott sampled me. I was like, "Fuck Scott." (everyone in the room laughs)

SH: [He came at me] with lawyers [and] his whole entourage. Fuck, man. I'm never going to do it again. Fuck that guy.

ec: (laughs) What do you guys think about the IDM label— Intelligent Dance Music?

SH: I don't think about it too much.

KH: There's a label called IDM?

ec: No, no, no, not a label (laughs), not an actual record label, but as in the term [IDM].

SH: (laughs) We should start a label called IDM.

KH: You only ever hear that [term] in America.

ec: How do you guys feel about the state you're in right now. It seems to me like—

KH: I'm proud that Arnold Schwarzenegger is looking after us in the state we're in right now. It helps me sleep at night.

ec: (laughs) It seems to me that the position you guys are in right now seems kind of ideal for an artist in the sense that you can walk down the street and be completely anonymous, but then you can go to a club and draw hundreds of people who obviously are here for the music as opposed to what *People Magazine* said about you or your image...

SH: *People Magazine* wouldn't say anything. (laughs) It's cool. Yeah. I'm full of good answers. I'm a great interview.

KH: I have a really good life. I wouldn't want to change anything.

ec: Is music paying the bills for you guys? That's kind of a personal question...

SH: As long as I hustle on the side... drugs, prostitution.

KH: Scott sells arms.

SH: I sell whatever. I sell babies.

ec: You sell babies? (laughs)

SH: Yeah, man. (laughs) I just sell whatever I can to keep my life balanced. (laughs)

ec: (laughs) What's the difference between the music scenes in Barcelona or anywhere in Europe [as opposed to America] ?

SH: Barcelona is a budding scene of music. Things are new. I play there with [rapper and fellow Warp Records Artist] Beans— not at a festival, at a club— and people are really excited right now. It's a

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British Humor Goes International: An interview with digital artist Craig Robinson

By Michael DiCenzo

FlipFlopFlyin.com is a series of low-fi serial cartoons, an exhibition of pixel art, and an homage to pop-culture of the past and present. The site was created by Craig Robinson, an Englishman who ditched his day job to go work as a freelance designer in Berlin. **eyecandy** sat down with Robinson for an online interview, so we could discuss the pressures and pleasures of online design, the silliness of British humor, and his recent dreams about owls. Robinson's website will strike a chord with anyone who has yet to fully escape childhood. Its greatest hits include "Minipops" — every band you've ever liked shrunk down to size, Pete and Bob, the owls who make music, and Ralf, a duck on his way to the ocean. While the site doesn't make any great leaps into the digital unknown, it does recall the days of 4-bit graphics, when even invaders from space seemed completely innocent.

eyecandy: Artistically, how did you get where you are?

Craig Robinson: By accident, I think. I always liked the idea of being a shit hot designer, graphics or otherwise, but it wasn't really me, and the thing that evolved from the beginnings of *FFF* (*FlipFlopFlyin.com*) was that I'm fairly good at silly characters who dance a lot, which seems to be the best joke I have, so I keep on using it.

ec: Who are your influences?

CR: Lots of people really. My biggest influence is Brian Wilson [of the Beach Boys] because the music he's made seems so uncluttered by cynicism and irony. I think cynicism and irony are easy things to do, and are done way too much. On the few occasions I've done irony or sarcasm, they end up being rubbish and my least favorite things. I did something about [Donald] Rumsfeld while the war was going on, which was basically the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme in the style of Rumsfeld. It was mildly amusing, but I'm not proud of it, as it's only funny while Rumsfeld is in office, and kind of disrupts the good vibrations that the rest of the site hopefully emits. [Children's book author] Dick Bruna is another. The *Miffy* books, and a lot of other children's stuff that's aimed at pre-school children are good for me. [Children's books] help



Examples of pixel art from Craig Robinson's *FlipFlopFlyin.com*.

me to see what parts of a story are essential. [Regarding the] comedy stuff that exists on *FFF*, I grew up with British humor, and despite *The Simpsons* and *The Larry Sanders Show* and a few other US comedies, I still find that I prefer Brit stuff. There's a silliness about a lot of it that I like a lot.

ec: How did you begin your career in art, and why did you move from working for a firm to working freelance?

CR: I began *FFF* as a hobby, but then after a year or so I got a few offers for freelance work and a bit of press in Britain, so I decided to be brave for once in my life and jack in my office job. Soon after that I got offered a job at a web design company here in Berlin, where I worked for nigh for two years until I got made redundant when the Internet industry in Germany went a bit crap. So I've been freelance again since then.

ec: Has the transition been successful?

CR: Yes, it's been pretty good. It can be a bit stressful, as I'm sure all freelancers know, but I know that when people want me to work for them, they want me because they've seen my site and like the way I do things.

ec: Why do you constantly update a website that has only personal artistic purposes?

CR: Because the ideas keep coming and I genuinely really enjoy doing it. And I like having an audience; knowing that the audience is there pushes me to keep on doing it.

ec: How does the fact that anyone can view your site effect your work?

CR: Knowing that the audience is there

and they "get" it is good. It's like when your parents laugh at something you do when you're a kid [and] you keep doing it to see if they'll laugh again. It sounds syrupy, but I do really like the idea of making people who are at their desks smile for a few minutes.

ec: Does the website also work as a vehicle for marketing your work and getting commissions?

CR: Well, it's a handy way of getting work, but I don't do anything on the site that encourages clients to contact me other than having a portfolio page that shows that I am available for such things.

ec: Do you make a distinction between fine art and commercial art?

CR: Yes. One is for the love of it, the other is for money. If I could afford to do *FFF* all the time, I would. I need some wealthy, mad old Parisian lady with blue hair and 30 cats to let me live in her country cottage rent free, who'll pay for me to eat and buy me CDs and books. Until that happens though, I'll have to keep doing commercial work.

ec: Do you separate the two in your mind?

CR: It's hard not to. For my stuff, I can do what the hell I want. For a client, they want their logo a certain size, they want a certain phrase, there are restrictions on what characters can do, etcetera.

ec: Are you more attached to your personal work or work for a commission?

CR: The personal works come to me not through any real choice. They just happen in my head and then I let them grow up on the "page," so I'm a lot

more attached to them as they grow at a rate that is natural. With commercial work, you have a deadline and the [previously] stated restrictions, so there's already a slightly unreal aura. But I do try to put as much heart into that stuff. I did something recently for a gallery in Sheffield, UK, which was a web-based flyer for an exhibition of old fairground rides and artwork. The subject matter was something I really liked anyway, so it was easy to love that one as much as any of the FFF stuff.

ec: Your work is very low-fi, relying on highly pixilated images. In cartoons like "Boy Meets Pixel," or in the case of the popular "Minipops," you are very conscious of this. Is this style a response to the demands of updating a website constantly – your original intention – or a synthesis of the two?

CR: There was never a decision to do what has become known as "pixel art." "Minipops" was just an idea I had to draw something as small as possible and still [have it] be recognizable, so to use pixels was the only possible way to do that well, as my skills weren't so hot back then. "Boy Meets Pixel" came from a friend of mine commenting on how much I loved my computer, so his

comment mutated a little and became a love story.

ec: It seems when people think of the Internet they mostly think of porn sites, junk emails, and people trying to steal your credit card numbers; there's generally a bad, untrusting feeling about it. There is a very prominent innocence in your work. Is this a response to the medium of the Internet?

CR: It's more a response to the times we live in, where governments want to screw their people and the other countries of the world; corporations have similar objectives; newspapers are only interested in who's sleeping with who; TV only seems to show us real people so desperate to be on telly that they'll degrade themselves to the nth degree to be there. Last night I dreamt I was in a barn and there were some big owls there, about two feet tall, and I was just on the ground watching them. I wake up and see CNN reporting on Michael Schumacher winning the Formula One Grand Prix title, directly followed by a Vodafone (European cellular phone company) advert featuring Michael Schumacher. Of those two things, I'd rather live in a world

where I can look at owls.

ec: Personal websites often seem to be seen as a forum for personal ramblings. Do you think your site could be seen as a bright spot in all this, because while it does contain a lot about you, it really seems to use this information to re-emphasize the lightness of the art.

CR: I like a lot of personal websites and blogs. If someone has a talent for writing or drawing, it's nice to see it. For FFF, it's a matter of enjoying writing stuff, and then enjoying people reacting to the stuff I write. I'm very lucky to be in a position where I have a large number of visitors to the site, and what I do seems to keep the idiots and right wing loonies away, so I just ramble on about whatever's happened in my life and hope that I don't make too much of a fool of myself.

ec: What programs do you use to create and maintain the website?

CR: Adobe Photoshop, Adobe ImageReady, Macromedia Flash, BBEdit, and SimpleText. It's all done on an Apple Powerbook.

For more information on Craig Robinson please visit: <http://www.flipflopflyin.com> ■

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SmartMobs, which are already being hit with legislation in some countries. He writes:

I still believe that we are fighting a crucial battle over the kind of future citizens will experience, over whether we will be active users who shape mobile and pervasive media the way we shaped the PC and Internet, or whether we will be passive consumers, restricted by legal "rights management" and technical "trusted computing" platforms, whose only choice is which pay-per-play brand of predigested content to choose.

P2P JOURNALISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF A SMARTDOC

What happens when the power of blogs, mobs, FOAF-style networks and high-tech cell phones are combined? A new kind of intelligent documentation becomes possible: for lack of a better word, a "SmartDoc." The combination of the aforementioned technologies moves us closer to a model from which an individual can spontaneously initiate and mobilize documentation of an event, person, place or thing with only their thumb. Furthermore, an interactive message shared from within a social network or physical proximity becomes directly relevant to each individual recipient, and potentially a lot more powerful than a generalized one-way broadcast.

Rheingold describes an experiment in what he calls "peer to peer journalism," conducted by students at the University of Toronto, who donned wearable wireless computers, microphones and cameras that "broadcast everything they saw and heard to the web." The students attended a protest that broke into violence. As they dispersed however, their cameras continued to broadcast the event, which a typical news crew would not have been able to do.

This type of collaborative reporting experiment is now possible with cell phones, which are functionally not all that different from wearable computers. The two will soon be interchangeable in this context.

Already, websites have been launched which invite multiple collaborators to contribute text and photos from their cell phones. Two recent moblogs attempted a form of alternative photo-journalism following catastrophic events. *Southern California Brush Fires* and *The Blackout* were launched immediately during the events they chronicled. Each site invited participants to send in their own images of their subjective experiences. Viewers were then prompted to comment on images. Possibly without realizing it, contributors positioned the new medium in relation to older mediums, an example being the numerous photos of live TV feeds people submitted. *Southern California Brush Fires* displayed TV images of a chummy President Bush exiting Air Force One. An image on *The Blackout* displayed a TV news caption that read, "Breaking News: No reports of looting in any affected areas." One viewer commented, "Breaking News: There is no news," emphasizing the inadequacy of traditional media services to penetrate the significance of such a large event, where millions of individual perspectives were curiously changed for a few days.

Journalism is an old tradition. The moblog is formally very similar to photojournalism. While there is a distinction between diarists and journalists, it may begin to dissolve into the larger context of non-fiction. The implied objective authority of large media services will undoubtedly come into question, as countless camera phone-armed individuals weave a more complete text. When video becomes feasible for cell phone publishing,

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SmartDocs will be able to provide an alternative to televisual non-fiction. This will afford the documentarian a whole new tool for the mass aggregation of trusted individual perspectives from which one multi-faceted view might be inferred. This creates a dilemma for the documentary, as well as for broadcast news, which itself relies on a narrow set of perspectives to maintain ideological hegemony.

Major news services may be better suited to content of political significance, but this does not disqualify a SmartDoc from being capable of functioning within this realm. *Southern California Brush Fires* hosts a series of photos documenting Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's visit to the destruction zone, where during a speech, he apparently caught another man who had lost his balance and was falling off of the stage. Would a TV newscast have reported this kind of incident? Some would argue yes, but only if it forwarded the ideological agenda (promoting Schwarzenegger) of that news service. *Chasing Bush* is another example of a SmartDoc featuring political content. This protest site was dedicated to documenting President Bush's every move during his recent visit to the UK. Contributors tracked every aspect of his visit, from the numerous protests he encountered to his daily diet.

This article lays out how recent advancements in technology are converging upon a new ubiquitous medium that will enhance the ability of the public to document and communicate a social

reality. Some of the more interesting consequences of this shift are missing, such as an intensive study of the unique formal aesthetics of the medium. Likewise, an extensive review might include an investigation of political ramifications, the functional impact on journalism, or possibilities for social change. Obviously, the technical limits and potentials of the medium have not yet been pushed. Experimentation might include construction of a customizable Java interface for camera phones, or sophisticated web engines capable of designating tasks and aggregating text, photos and meta-data for presentation and social distribution. Artists might construct a SmartDoc inviting friends to contribute to a documentary about something as pedestrian as man-hole covers, or whatever they were doing at the exact moment they received the message. Sociologists might utilize SmartDocs for a study of behavioral patterns. Activists could leverage SmartDocs for organizing events or documenting pollution or local police activity. Ideally, these new technologies will make it easier for people to collaboratively discover and expose fictions and manipulations of social reality, and provide a new possibility for mediating and overcoming perceived differences amongst peoples. ■

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really good feeling. In London, if people are there, they're there to see you. They're usually pretty down for it.

ec: For both of you, how do you recreate your music live if it's all sample based?

SH: Bring a drummer and a DJ with me, and my MPC [sampler]. [Kieran's] shit is all improvised on the computer. He does different things than I do. He does freak shit.

KH: My music is all out of time and everyone stands there [looking bored]. (laughs) I want to do free jazz types of stuff live. Old jazz guys used to put a record out, and songs would go on the record, but then the music wouldn't die at that point. The songs would keep changing and evolving when they'd go touring after that. I had this idea that I would try to do that with the music on [Rounds]. If people saw me a couple of months ago it was different, and if people see me now it's different, and if people see me in six months time it's going to be different again. [I'm just] pushing the elements of those tracks further and further, to the point where I'm doing twenty-five minute versions

of some of the songs on the album.

ec: Wow. Scott, do you feel that way too about changing it up? Does it get kind of dull to play the same [tracks night after night]?

SH: It *does* get dull, but sometimes I'm stuck having to do it.

ec: For both of you, do you listen to your music a lot after you've released it?

SH: Not after it's released really, but when I'm making it [I listen to it] a lot.

KH: [I'm] the same. Once I've handed it into the record company I'm pretty much done. (laughs) If I ever put it on, it's purely for nostalgia. It's purely just to be like, "Huh."

SH: If I do [listen to the music after it's been released] it doesn't really do much. It doesn't do what it did when you were making it and monitoring it. Because you listen to it a million times when you're making it.

KH: And I always listen to the wrong thing [after it's been released]. You [will be listening] to the track and

I'll be listening to the fucking hi-hat or something...

SH: Exactly, exactly.

KH: ...but everybody else just doesn't even notice that shit.

ec: So for you guys the process of making the music is more rewarding than the finished product?

SH: Yeah, yeah. Totally. Making music is the most important thing.

KH: I've got stuff that I've made a few years on that I can listen to now and I'm happy with. Then I feel proud when I hear it [and I think,] "Fuck, that was a good time in my life. I made a good track."

For more information on Prefuse 73 please visit: <http://www.warprecords.com>

To hear tracks from Prefuse 73's debut, *Vocal Studies + Uprock Narratives*, as well as other mixes, please visit: <http://www.warprecords.com/ography/WARP83/>

For more information on Four Tet please visit: <http://www.fourtet.net> ■



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