

17 MAI 2007



[CTRL] : TAS

**TECHNOLOGY : ART : SOCIETY
: POLITICS UNDER FIRE :**

ctrlconference.org :: upgrademtl.org

[CTRL]: TAS : CATALOGUE :

Technology : Art : Society :

// Montréal 2007 //

:: politics under fire ::

[<http://ctrlconference.org>]

[<http://upgrademtl.org>]

editor _ tobias c. van Veen

design _ cato pulleyblank [catop.ca]

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&

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Anna Feigenbaum, tobias c. van Veen & Horea Avram.



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BROUGHT TO YOU BY...

[ctrl] collective

[<http://ctrlconference.org>]

Anna Feigenbaum

anna@ctrlconference.org

Horea Avram

horea@ctrlconference.org

tobias c. van Veen

tobias@ctrlconference.org

The [ctrl] collective develops and supports collaborative events and projects that address, confront and intervene in modes and mechanisms of social, economic and institutional control. Bringing together researchers, artists and activists, [ctrl] fosters spaces for generating imaginative tactics to resist and create alternatives to a control society. :: WE ARE WATCHING YOU ::

UpgradeMTL_ <http://upgrademtl.org> | tobias@upgrademtl.org

The Upgrade is an international, emerging network of autonomous nodes united by art, technology, and a commitment to bridging cultural divides. Launched in 2004 as the third node in the international network, UpgradeMTL has sought to explore the limits of the technology arts through performance, exposition, presentation, installation, nomadism, intervention and cabaret. UpgradeMTL has featured diverse events bridging digital culture and the technology arts, from new media and net-art to electronic music and embodied performance. As a forum for feedback and discussion, the Upgrade has become a space in which to engage political questions concerning technology and the arts in Montréal. UpgradeMTL is supported by The Society for Arts and Technology (SAT) and organised by tobias c. van Veen, Anik Fournier & Sophie Le-Phat Ho.

Thank you thank you thank you —!!— to the following indispensable people who went out of their way to help us in our times of need & peril: Claire Roberge and Alain Ambrosi at Media @ McGill, Jonathan Sterne, Darin Barney & Marc Raboy of AHCS_Faculty, Karin Bourgeois and Susana Machado @ AHCS_Staff, Geneviève Laurendeau and Ug Monfroy @ SAT, cato pulleyblank our Designer, Sol Nagler the Wizard, Brian Carillo @ PGSS, the AHCS_GSA and the False Consciousness, Karl Marx and Public Enemy.

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:: politics under fire ::

A one day symposium on technology, art and society. Organised by the [CTRL] collective, the Technology, Art, Society Symposium features keynote speaker McKenzie Wark (New School, NYU), whom we are pleased to say will be presenting on the 'gamespace of everyday life in the rat race of free-market society'; a panel discussion with local artists and activists on democracy, art and media; and an evening cabaret of video-art, new media and electronic music performance presented by UpgradeMTL. All events are free & open to the public. Events at McGill are in English. Organised by Anna Feigenbaum, Horea Avram and tobias c. van Veen of [CTRL].

:: politique prise d'assaut ::

Une journée de symposium sur la technologie, l'art et la société. Organisé par le collectif [CTRL], le Symposium Technologie, Art et Société (TAS) a le plaisir d'accueillir comme conférencier McKenzie Wark (New School, NYU), qui offrira une présentation sur 'l'espace-jeu (gamespace) du quotidien dans la course effrénée de la société du libre-marché'; un panel d'artistes locaux et d'activistes de la démocratie, des arts et des médias; et une soirée cabaret de vidéo-art, de nouveaux médias et de performances de musique électronique présentée par UpgradeMTL. Tous les événements sont gratuits et ouverts au public. Le symposium ayant lieu à l'université McGill se déroule en anglais. Le tout est organisé par Anna Feigenbaum, Horea Avram et tobias c. van Veen du collectif [CTRL].

Mission. When conducting research into media, ethics and communications, critical scholarship often takes as its object local communities and artistic practices as it studies the effects of technology upon society. It is rare, however, that representatives from community-based technology practices, curators and artists in the technology arts, and scholars in disciplines of communication, information and media have the opportunity to engage each other in dialogue and practice. In the spirit of opening dialogue brought about by the study and practices of media, ethics and communications, [CTRL] proposes to spark a dynamic encounter between these fields by bringing together artists, community members and scholars in a one-day symposium and art event dedicated to Technology, Art and Society. The TAS Symposium seeks to combine artistic, academic and community practices that undermine borders between genres and disciplines. We seek to foster a transdisciplinary, creative environment in which we can construct collective visions for democratizing technology within communities while cultivating the political and ethical potential of artistic practice. At the same time, and in recognition of Wark's introduction of 'Gamer Theory', the question is posed if our time is not the time of 'politics under fire': a time in which reactionary forces abound in worldwide gamespace with devastating consequence.

Mandat. La recherche académique critique, lorsqu'elle porte sur les médias, l'éthique et les communications, prend souvent comme objet d'étude les communautés locales et les pratiques artistique afin d'étudier les effets de la technologie sur le société. Il est pourtant rare que des représentants issus des pratiques technologiques communautaires, des artistes et commissaires des arts technologiques et des chercheurs dans les domaines de la communication, de l'information et des médias aient l'occasion de s'interpeller dans le dialogue et dans la pratique. Afin d'ouvrir le dialogue émergeant de l'étude et de la pratique des médias, de l'éthique et des communications, le collectif [CTRL] propose de provoquer une rencontre dynamique entre ces domaines en réunissant des artistes, des membres de la communauté et des chercheurs lors d'un symposium d'une journée et d'un événement artistique dédiés à la Technologie, l'Art et la Société. Le Symposium TAS a pour but de combiner les pratiques artistique, académique et communautaire qui rejettent les frontières entre les genres et les disciplines. Nous voulons bâtir un environnement transdisciplinaire et créatif dans lequel nous pouvons forger des visions collectives afin de démocratiser la technologie au sein des communautés tout en cultivant le potentiel politique et éthique de la pratique artistique. Toutefois, inspirés de l'introduction du livre 'Gamer Theory' de Wark, la question se pose quant à la possibilité que nous vivions une période où 'la politique est prise d'assaut': une période où des forces réactionnaires abondent dans un espace-jeu global menant à des conséquences dévastatrices.

:: **schedule / horaire** ::

- 10H – 12:00 **GRADUATE SEMINAR WITH MCKENZIE WARK**
Thomson House Room 404, 3635 McTavish St., McGill
Email: seminar@ctrlconference.org
- 12H – 13:30 **SEMINAR LUNCH FOR PARTICIPANTS**
Banquet Room, Thomson House, 3635 McTavish St., McGill
- 14H – 15:30 **DEMOCRACY, ART & MEDIA / DEMOCRATIE, ART ET MEDIAS: PANEL**
Banquet Room, Thomson House, 3635 McTavish St., McGill
With members of / Avec membres du the Levier Project, Oboro, Centre Canadien d'Architecture (CCA), Fair Trade Media & Île Sans Fil.
- 16H – 18:00 **MCKENZIE WARK: GAMER THEORY / LA THÉORIE DU GAMER**
Keynote talk, Adams Auditorium, 3450 University St., McGill
Ever get the feeling that life's a game with changing rules and no clear sides, one you are compelled to play yet cannot win? Welcome to gamespace. Gamer Theory uncovers the significance of games in the gap between the near-perfection of actual games and the highly imperfect gamespace of everyday life in the rat race of free-market society.
/ Avez-vous parfois l'impression que la vie et un jeu dont les règles changent continuellement et les camps sont flous, un jeu qui vous attire, mais dont vous ne pouvez être le vainqueur? Bienvenue à l'espace-jeu ('gamespace'). La théorie du gamer traite de la signification des jeux dans le fossé entre la quasi-perfection des jeux et l'extrême imperfection de l'espace-jeu du quotidien dans la course à rats de la société du libre-marché.
- 18H – 20:00 **TIME FOR DINNER / PAUSE POUR LE SOUPER.**
- 20:00H – 24 **UPGRADEMTL : POLITICS UNDER FIRE / LA POLITIQUE PRISE D'ASSAUT :**
Society for Arts and Technology (SAT), 1195 St. Laurent
Vidéo-art & musique expérimentale / video-art screening & experimental music. Présentation par RYBN, France. Performances par Tara Rodgers, Doug van Nort, Javier Arciniegas, tobias.dj. Video-artists Rozalinda Borcila, Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau, Andrew Lynn and The Vacuum Cleaner.

DEMOCRACY, ART & MEDIA: PANEL / DEMOCRATIE, ART ET MEDIAS

14H – 15:30 _ Banquet Room, Thomson House, 3635 McTavish St., McGill

Free / Gratuit and open to the public / ouvert au public.

The community panel for this Symposium will feature Montréal collectives and organizations working in technology arts and new media. Linking together theoretical frameworks with local curatorial practice, arts production and media democratization, the community panel will seek to engage the ethical and political dimensions of their work. FEATURING:

Devora Neumark, Levier Project [<http://www.engrenagenoir.ca>]

Adam Bobbette, Centre Canadien d'Architecture (CCA) [<http://www.cca.qc.ca>]

Dru Oja Jay, Fair Trade Media [<http://fairtrademedia.com/>]

Michael Lenczner, Île Sans Fil [<http://www.ilesansfil.org>]

Aaron Pollard, Directeur technique, Oboro [<http://www.oboro.net>]

Moderator: **Anna Feigenbaum**, [CTRL] Collective

Our community panel is intended to introduce people to community-oriented projects taking place in Montreal. We are interested in discussing innovative ways that technology is being thought about, used and provided.

We are particularly interested in issues of access – both to technologies themselves and to ways of thinking about their histories and implications. The panel will address questions about democracy and technology and the relationship between technology and creative practices.

The panel will be open to the public. Panelists will give short talks about their current projects as well as their broader interests in these themes. Our aim is to tie together issues raised by the panelists and showcase inventive, socially conscious work being done in our community.

— Anna Feigenbaum

McKENZIE WARK: GAMER THEORY

16H – 18:00 _ Keynote talk, Adams Auditorium, 3450 University St., McGill

Free / Gratuit and open to the public / ouvert au public.

McKENZIE WARK is Professor of Cultural and Media Studies at Lang College, New School University. He is the author of several books, most recently *Dispositions* and *A Hacker Manifesto*. Wark investigates the politics and economies of digital and online technologies and is well known for his contributions to critical net communities such as Nettime. Steven Shaviro writes that “McKenzie Wark’s *A Hacker Manifesto* is a remarkable and beautiful book: cogent, radical, and exhilarating, a politico-aesthetic call to arms for the digital age. [...] If his *Manifesto* has its deepest roots in the Western Marxist tradition, from Marx himself through Lukacs and Benjamin to the Situationists, it also draws heavily on Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of the ‘virtual’, as well as Mauss’ theory of the gift. At the same time, it relates directly to the practices (and the ethos) of the free software movement, of DJs producing mash-ups, and of radical Net and software artists.” / *Professeur de Cultural and Media Studies au Lang College, New School University. Il est l’auteur de nombreux livres, dont récemment Dispositions et A Hacker Manifesto (Harvard UP, 2007).*

[<http://www.ludiccrew.org/wark/>]

KEYNOTE TALK :: GAMER THEORY ::

Ever get the feeling that life’s a game with changing rules and no clear sides, one you are compelled to play yet cannot win? Welcome to gamespace. Gamespace is where and how we live today. It is everywhere and nowhere: the main chance, the best shot, the big leagues, the only game in town. In a world thus configured, McKenzie Wark contends, digital computer games are the emergent cultural form of the times. Where others argue obsessively over violence in games, Wark approaches them as a utopian version of the world in which we actually live. Playing against the machine on a game console, we enjoy the only truly level playing field — where we get ahead on our strengths or not at all.

[<http://www.futureofthebook.org/gamerttheory/>]

Gamer Theory uncovers the significance of games in the gap between the near-perfection of actual games and the highly imperfect gamespace of everyday life in the rat race of free-market society. The book depicts a world becoming an inescapable series of less and less perfect games. This world gives rise to a new persona. In place of the subject or citizen stands the gamer. As all previous such personae had their breviaries and manuals, *Gamer Theory* seeks to offer guidance for thinking within this new character. Neither a strategy guide nor a cheat sheet for improving one’s score or skills, the book is instead a primer in thinking about a world made over as a gamespace, recast as an imperfect copy of the game.

UpgradeMTL :: POLITICS UNDER FIRE ::

20:00H – 24 _ Society for Arts and Technology (SAT), 1195 St. Laurent

Free / Gratuit and open to the public / ouvert au public.

Renegade curators Horea Avram and tobias c. van Veen present works that tackle the social and political dimension of new media, from control and alternatives to control, strategies of democratization and access to creative tactics for confronting mechanisms of power.

/ Les commissaires renégats Horea Avram et tobias c. van Veen proposent des oeuvres explorant les dimensions sociale et politique des nouveaux médias, du contrôle aux alternatives au contrôle, aux stratégies de démocratisation et à l'accès aux tactiques créatives qui confrontent ces mécanismes de pouvoir.

20H30 + présentation "Anti-Data Mining" par **RYBN**, France. RYBN est un collectif transversal, issu des nouvelles pratiques liées au vj'ing, aux musiques électroniques, aux technologies sensorielles et aux logiciels open sources.

/ presentation of 'Anti-Data Mining' by RYBN, France. RYBN is a transversal collective which came out of new practices linked to vj'ing, electronic music, sensorial technologies and open source software.

[<http://www.rybn.org> / <http://www.antidatamining.net>]

21H15 + uninterrupted screening of video art. Featuring video-artists **Rozalinda Borcila, Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau, Andrew Lynn** and **The Vacuum Cleaner**. Curated by Horea Avram.

/ projection continue de vidéo-art. Avec les vidéastes Rozalinda Borcila, Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau, Andrew Lynn et The Vacuum Cleaner. (Commissaire: Horea Avram).

22H30 + live electronic and experimental music. Performances par **Tara Rodgers, Doug van Nort, Javier Arciniegas, tobias.dj**. Also time for drinks.

/ performances live de musique électronique et de musique expérimentale. Avec Tara Rodgers, Doug van Nort, Javier Arciniegas, tobias.dj. Et de la boisson à l'horaire.

UpgradeMTL is a global, autonomous organisation for the presentation of the technology arts. Organised in Montréal by tobias c. van Veen, Sophie Le-Phat Ho and Anik Fournier.

:: presentation: RYBN ::

[<http://www.rybn.org>]

[<http://www.antidatamining.net>]

Founded in 2000, RYBN is a Paris-based multidisciplinary artistic collective specializing in installation art, performance and digital interfaces. In their art, the members of the collective refer to both the codified systems of artistic representation (painting, architecture, counter-cultures) and to human and physical phenomena (such as geopolitics, sensory perception and cognitive systems). Their axes of research include the construction of a "semantics of the convergence" via the coupling, diversion and perversion of writing and tools connected with the technologies of communication, information and the senses (webs, data flows, smell, surveillance, etc.).

Anti Data Mining (2007) is a research project based on the recovery and the visualization of Web-extracted data. It aims to expose, by using Data Mining processing, several social and economic imbalance "phenomena". ADM seeks to identify and visualize these phenomena and tries to establish a global imbalance cartography. The ADM project brings a critical glance at the Data Mining technologies: the role and functions given to Data Mining software is an analysis mechanism of the social consequences triggered by their uses.



RYBN, Anti Data Mining (2007)

:: performances ::

.assembled by tobias c. van Veen.

Javier Arciniegas is a musician and programmer from Bogota, Colombia. He started out writing instrumental music, usually very timbre oriented. Back then, he wrote a few scores for different kinds of instruments and also built a big percussion instrument out of mostly aluminum, copper and iron. He studied composition at Universidad Javeriana in Bogota, and after graduating was invited to IRCAM, in Paris, France, for a course in computer music. Then he went to Mills College, where he obtained an M.A. in Composition and an M.F.A. in Electronic Music and Recording Media. At Mills he started programming full time, working always with the SuperCollider language. Currently he works as Sound Programmer at Ubisoft, Montreal. His music has been performed in concerts in Colombia, the United States, Canada and Sweden.

For this performance I am working with small libraries of instruments to synthesize sound. Each performance has an element of exploration of the sonic space offered by the combination of the chosen synths. I am very fond of music with short sounds and high pitches that are repeated without very strict patterns, there is no sense of beat, it's more like a sustained state with lots of internal activity. In general, I prefer pitched sounds to noise, as I can stuff more little sounds together to create variable shapes, without filling up the space too quickly.

Analog Tara (Tara Rodgers) performed jazz piano for several years in NYC, released house music on compilations including Source Records/Germany and the Le Tigre Remix, and has shown sound and video art internationally. Her work has received awards from the International Songwriting Competition (Dance/Electonica, 2003), the Frog Peak Collective (Experimental Music Prize, 2006), and the International Alliance of Women in Music (New Genre Prize, 2007). She also founded the website Pinknoises.com and is editing a related anthology of interviews with women DJs and sound artists. [<http://www.safety-valve.org/>]

This performance will combine and transform source recordings from various analog synthesizers, including the Moog IIIp, ARP 2600, Roland HS60, and Flower Electronics Little Boy Blue (designed by Jessica Rylan).

Doug van Nort is an experimental musician currently living in Montreal. Through improvisation and composition, his work of late has been concerned with attentive listening within dense sound spaces, and the emergence of structure from sonic textures. He has found much inspiration through his many collaborative endeavors, including a current network-based performance project involving scores of wonderful musicians as well as his longstanding series of collaborations with Pauline Oliveros, through which he has deepened his appreciation for the joy of listening. His research (sound synthesis, perception, etc.) and musical works (inseparable and equally creative practices) have been presented in various venues in N. America, Europe and Asia.

For this performance, I will transform several vocal and instrumental sources - chorals and chorales - into densely layered ambient textures that encourage a warm and casual post-conference atmosphere.

tobias.DJ: engages the art of turntablism, improvisation and experimentation in the deployment and abuse of mixer, turntables and wax and all that comes with bending the rules of the rhythm. Hailing from Vancouver, BC, tobias.dj performed and organised technoculture interventions on the West Coast of North America throughout the '90s. From 1993-2001 he was Direktor of the sonik performance <ST> Collective [shrumtribe.com] and co-founder of technoWest.org and thisistheonlyart.com. Djing since '93, tobias' style is marked by the cut-up & non-linear mixing styles of 3-deck future techno & house: Detroit, minimal, dub, glitch & acid. Spin that through the regional markers of context & the application of concept (masochism, atmosphere, ritual). His DJ sets have appeared on BetaLounge.com, Burn.fm, NoType.com's BricoLodge sublabel and Techno.ca. With DJs Fishead & John Burke he hosts the net.radio mix ControltoChaos.ca. An article discussing his experimental work with turntable scripts appeared in Leonardo Music Journal 13. He has a recent microsound album, *If Not, Winter* with tomas phillips (2005) on and/OAR. tobias has directed conceptual and sound-art events, online interventions and radio broadcasts worldwide, working with STEIM, MUTEK, the New Forms Festival, the Banff Centre, the Video-In, Upgrade! International, the Vancouver New Music Society & Hexagram.

[<http://controltochaos.ca> / <http://quadrantcrossing.org>]



Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau,
Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe (2006)



The Vacuum Cleaner,
Whirl-Mart Ritual Resistance (2003)



tobias.dj, *UpgradeMTL* (2006)

A Few In(ter)ventions in Technology, Art and Society

The selection of the video artists and works for this event was primarily guided by the aim to reflect and stimulate debates around the three generic words of this event: technology, art and society. While keeping art as context, technology as means and society as the beneficiary (or the other way around) the works presented here are all imbued by an astute sense of critique, of creative dissent and political / social / institutional challenge.

The works are representative for the diversity critical-art covers today—diversity in terms of agency and addressability, of visual significance and formal solutions. The works explore social engagement and direct action (The Vacuum Cleaner's video documentation of performative protests); provocative intervention and aesthetic offensiveness in art and media critique (Brody and Paetau's controversial tableaux vivants); counter-surveillance and strategies of disobedience (Rozalinda Borcila's video comments on technology of control); low-tech anti-televisual projects (Andrew Lynn's performance-animations as alternative TV) and innovative and subversive intrusions in online databases (RYBN's data undermining with artistic consequences).

While many times artistic practice with social concerns relies exclusively on ethical effects, the works presented in this selection manage to “satisfy” also any aesthetic requirements. Indeed, good (looking) examples of engaged art, these pieces are at the same time good models of working in-, with-, about- and against technology, media and mediatization. In one way or another, all the artists in the exhibition consider (new) media and (new) technology at the core of their artistic attempts to offer alternatives to control and solutions for open access and collaboration. As subjective nodes of critical implication, the works can function as open platforms for interpretation and debate. That's why the conditions of reception seem at least equally important, and that's why our collective creates a broader framework for reception, in which the community, media, arts and academic peoples and organisms can meet under the stimulating heading of “Technology, Art and Society.”

— Horea Avram, May 2007



Rozalinda Borcila,
Geography Lessons
(2001-to Date)

:: video artists ::

.curated by Horea Avram.

Andrew Lynn

[<http://www.breathingplanet.net/>]

[<http://breathingplanet.blogspot.com/>]

Andrew Lynn is an artist, activist, documentarian, and educator living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Currently he is Education & Development Manager at Manhattan Neighborhood Network New York, NY, where he develops media literacy curricula, organizes an online video distribution among the National Youth Media Access Project network and manages the MNN Youth Channel's education program.

His exhibitions and screenings include: World Carfree Conference, Bogota, Columbia, 2006; Point of Purchase, DUMBO Art Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, 2006; *Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival*, Ithaca, NY, 2006; *Fifth Annual Bicycle Film Festival*, New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, London, 2005; Documentary Fortnight, Museum of Modern Art, NY, 2005; *Other Cinema*, San Francisco, CA 2004; *Rotterdam International Film Festival*, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2004; *Rencontres internationales*, Paris/Berlin, 2003. He has co-produced documentaries including "Independent Media in a Time of War", "Still We Ride", and is now working on the ongoing series "My Survival Kit".



***My Survival Kit* (episodes 2.1 and 2.2) (2006)**

is a "homemade TV", a low-tec mix of animation, archive footage and video performance. Within a culture based on exclusive ownership, authorship, and controlled distribution, this work relies upon remix, collage, cut 'n' paste and "punk" visuality, while offering alternative channels for access and distribution. The *My Survival Kit* series as many other works signed by Lynn and his collective engages with the issues and concerns related to community rights,

political commitment, environmental protection and media alternatives. The tone of the video is equally dramatic, naïve and ironic, but in any of these cases, the work reveals a strong critical overtone, where *diy* aesthetics undermines televisual clichés, official media predictability and standardization.

Ondrej Brody & Kristofer Paetau

[<http://www.brodypaetau.com>]

[<http://www.ondrejbrody.org>]

[<http://www.paetau.com>]

Ondrej Brody and Kristofer Paetau started to collaborate in 2005. The Czech-Finnish, Berlin-based duo's main artistic means are performance, direct action and video; its principal discursive strategies are provocation, subversion and contestation. The tandem's nihilist, anti-art, "dadaist" approach challenges not only the limits of art and of those implied in making it, but it also disturbs the act of art-consumption, the role of (cultural) institutions and their authority. Some of their action-statements include setting themselves on fire, smashing laptops at conferences, vomiting in galleries, or shitting in museums. Highly controversial and openly dissentious, their performances are an efficient tactical and political tool in the realm of art. Their solo and collective exhibitions include: "Pet Painting Salon" 2006, "Artstar" 2005 International Prize for Performance 2006, "Eastern Alliance" 2006, Extra Features Series (1): "Licking Curators Ass" 2005, "The Art Forum Accident" 2005.

***Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (2006)**

The video is a porn parody after Manet's homonymous painting made with Czech XXX actors. The setting and characters' arrangement reproduce formally the famous painting, but this tableau-vivant enacts a bizarre scenario, based on intercourse and absurd French dialogues imitated phonetically. Brody & Paetau's *Dejeuner* challenges modern art—and generally "high art"—symbols, while ironically commenting on the idea of art reproduction and stereotypes of porn. Moreover, since the artists are somehow visible in the chroma-key setting while shooting the video, the work aims at undermining the medium itself.

***Auticko* (2006)**

The video offers a triple perspective on three different interiors where two porn actors are conducted in their irreverent actions by Brody & Paetau through telephone and assistants. While visually the work falls somewhere between web cam sex, porn movies and Big Brother, *Auticko* speaks a lot about pornification, voyeurism and mediation, and about the ways in which established mass media constructs "realities" through manipulation and control.

Rozalinda Borcila
[<http://www.borcila.tk>]

Rozalinda Borcila is a Romanian artist living in the United States; she is currently Associate Professor of Sculpture and Performance at the University of South Florida in Tampa. Her work includes video, installation and performative explorations of the ways in which power is experienced and internalized in daily life. She also works in a number of collaborative and social practices, concerned with developing collective capacities for sustaining critical imagination and action. Collaborative projects include **BLW** (with Sarah Lewison and Julie Wyman), a video performance collective which produces re-enactments of moments in the history of radical media in the US; **6Plus** (with Sama Alshaibi, Yana Payusova, Wendy Babcox, Sherry Wiggins, Mary-Rachel Fanning), a women's collective engaged in a series of projects in the Occupied Territories of Palestine; **common_places** and **the Center for Getting Ugly**, platforms for developing creative dissent through collaboration

Her work has been exhibited in numerous venues internationally, including: Stellenbosch University (South Africa); Watson Institute at Brown University (USA); Museum of New Art, Detroit (USA); Vector Gallery, Iasi (Romania); Khalil Sakakini Center, Ramallah (Palestine); International Center of Bethlehem (Palestine), Institute for Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (USA); Dinamo Artist Run Space, Budapest (Hungary); Nickle Arts Museum, Calgary (Canada); School of Visual Arts, New York (USA); Objex ArtSpace, Miami (USA). However, her work is also situated in non-institutional spaces or outside of established contexts for artistic production, taking the form of critical walking, re-enactments, workshops, interventions and so forth.

GEOGRAPHY LESSONS: Six Landscape Studies (and counting) (2001-to date)

Increasingly, the spaces we navigate are policed through technologies of visualization and information management. The X-Ray machine, racial profiling practices, surveillance devices, scrutiny of documents, fingerprinting etc are meant to make everything, visible or invisible, available for inspection. The condition of security is the coincidence between vision, landscape and power.

This series of small interventions in highly controlled spaces began shortly after September 11th 2001. Using a video camera as a way of looking back, the artist shoots images in airport security zones: inside X-Ray machines, at passport check points, immigration control, baggage claim. *Geography Lessons* (...) is an on-going archive of these video images, interpreted (or queried) in a series of video works. *Geography Lessons: Six Landscape Studies (and counting)*, constructs a stacked, rhythmic sequencing of images shot in 6 different airports (Berlin Tegel, Venice Marco Polo, Tampa International, Newark Liberty, Amsterdam Schiphol, Houston George Bush). The border device (*dispositif*) is constituted through rhythmic / spatial flows as a field of relations between video channels. It is, in visual terms, landscape as crisis.

The Vacuum Cleaner
[<http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk/>]

The Vacuum Cleaner is a Great Britain-based cultural resistance collective of one fashioning radical social and ecological change. By employing various creative legal and illegal tactics and forms, The Vacuum Cleaner attempts to disrupt concentrations of power and reverse the impending ecological collapse of planet Earth. The Vacuum Cleaner has participated with installations, performances and screenings in group shows at the CCA, ICA, The Centre of Attention, Liverpool Biennial, Fierce Festival, Baltic Mills, PSI 12 - Performing Rights, Peacock Visual Arts, Fact Centre (UK), Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Wooster Collective, Version Fest, Select Media Festival (USA), Reinraum (Germany), Digital Arts Laboratory (Israel), Impakt (Holland), Social Movement Film Festival (Hong Kong). The Vacuum Cleaner is a co-founder of the **Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination** and founder of **The Very Cooperative**.

The Vacuum Cleaner - Whirl-Mart Ritual Resistance (2003)

Whirl-Mart Ritual Resistance is a performance intervention that takes place on the first Sunday of each month. Whirl-Mart started in upstate New York before traveling the globe. In the UK Whirl-Marts have happened in every major city. This video documents an artistic-political action performed in the cathedral of consumption, Wal-Mart: empty trolleys are pushed around the store by Vacuum Cleaner members. A gesture of creative refusal, a non-violent rejection of consumerism, a protest act against commodity fetishism, with the means of art.

Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination - Third Experiment Video (2006)

This video was made to accompany an installation in which £500 in 1 pence pieces was given away. The video is made from footage of the first two experiments: a large urban and corporate festival of intervention and disruption in London 2004 and a UK tour and actions leading up to and at the G8, Scotland. By playing with terrorist imagery (covered faces, distorted voices, verdict reading), The Laboratory gives voice to pacifist actions that produce a critical engagement with the dominant structures of power. The Laboratory plays with Islamic clichés while undermining and mocking Western media coverage. Here, the clown is the warrior, a pacifist insurgent engaged in non-violent combat, caught in a game-like utopian world very much dominated by violence. The text is a communiqué that was released in reaction to the situation we found ourselves in as people that play on the edges of the art world and working in galleries of utopia.

Taking Aim.

tobias c. van Veen

Taking on the title of “curator” in the 21C means inheriting all kinds of institutional baggage. When discourses of collectivity, collaboration and free cooperation guide alternatives to institutional structures, to curate means to safeguard a traditional approach to the presentation and dissemination of art. The curator is a gatekeeper and thus the curator determines who’s in, and who’s out — who gets entrance into the space of branded institutions and who gets dropped into shadow. As a decision-maker whose charges can have devastating impact, the curator is a cultural powerbroker.

Or so goes the myth.

In French, *conservateur*, the orientation to the preservation of the past and enclosure of the acceptable is more or less directly encoded in the word; the *conservateur* is one who quite literally conserves. The conservateur is one who acts as a conservationist. And yet, if instead of art we were discussing environmental politics, to be a *conservateur* would be something — at least in the politics of sustainable ecology — commendable and admirable. In the media arts, the conservationist is disavowed in favour of collective organisation or collaboration. The same discourse of collectivity also tends to lend itself to a strange fetishism of new technologies reminiscent of the Futurists (not all of the time, of course, but enough of the time).

Acting as a curator today would seem to be something of an anachronism, at least within the fields of new media and the technology arts. For sometimes it feels that today one never conserves the past; the technology arts curator is always plucking the future-forward projects. While traditional institutions maintain their hierarchy of curatorial positions, curators have all but been eradicated in self-organising environments — from BarCamp and ISEA to Upgrade. Yet their eradication leaves a strange hole for those who nonetheless fill the gap, those who dedicate many hours if not years of their life, behind-the-scenes, pulling the strings, making it happen. And rarely, very rarely, is this operation truly “collective.” While the collective image may garner the glory, it usually comes down to the sweat and tears of a few individuals. Recently such efforts — also rarely compensated and often voluntary — have been recognised in the concept of precarious labour. Precarious labour is the recognition that many forms of work including cultural labour exists in a precarious state. Temporary employment, outsourcing and contract-based work, whatever its form, short-term labour, increasingly mandated under a business or corporate structure that rigidifies the arts, is the dominant paradigm in cultural occupations. In other words, it is rare indeed that the organisers, collective or not, in the technology arts or not, have either job security or adequate compensation. At the same time, an atmosphere of voluntarism reinforces the production of work without compensation. We all work more for less. With the advent of discourses of collectivity, the precarity

of the situation is exacerbated as public credit goes to the collective without recognition of its individual differentiations.

Lest this be something of a swansong to cultural work that is privileged in many ways — but isn’t this supposed glamour something of a myth too? — let me express something else: that operating as a risk-taking curator is increasingly seen as a threat to collective approaches. And that risk-taking concepts are increasingly threatened in a general environment which, even if speaking in the name of the collective, the radical, and the progressive, seeks to disavow the peculiar force to be found in the unpopular renegade. That is, the collective, while it has its many benefits, treads a fine line from the *clique*, where it uses — if not abuses — its power, acting in the name of this or that, to advance its own. And let us be clear that as the first decade of the 21C draws to a close, it will be remembered as a *conservative* one. Collectivity today is not necessarily progressive or radical (tied to what roots?) but interiorizing and excluding; it disavows the peculiar position long-occupied by the artist or curator as a solo force in advancing certain perspectives hitherto ignored. The singularity of the artist or curator risks its erasure in the advent of a smothering if not enforced collectivity — institutional or otherwise.

To be a *conservateur* today, then, might mean to conserve something else: to conserve the *singular* past, to push into the limelight the risk-taking positions that are today all too often eschewed in favour of this or that unthought but much heralded discourse of collaboration and cooperation. The collective all too often muffles and silences the lone, weird voice, the manic laugh, the discordant text. There is another conservative today, and that is the conservative of that weird fire which burns without lapse against the dying of the light.

Collectivity, of course, can embrace all of these characteristics — when a collective is formed that is of the crucial and critical beings which are as evidently suspicious of each other as joyful to share their anachronistic being with others, then one has something of a vehicle which spurs each and every member into a thousand plateaus of that dangerous game. It may be that “free cooperation” can account for such a coming together when it talks of being able to walk away with one’s contribution, but free cooperation already excludes talk of sacrifice.[1] And without acknowledging the sacrifices that come with embracing collectivity, without acknowledging what sacrifices are demanded to make work that rings resonant today and not hollow, without such recognition one whitewashes over the sweat and tears that goes into counteracting the dominant structures which reinforce precarity in every field, in every economy, in every locale.

POLITICS UNDER FIRE is thus a risky proposition and the logo is, according to some, a dangerous appropriation of military design. I would say it is something more than a mere appropriation: it is a sampling, a citation, a theft, a provocation, a risk, a culture jam, and a playful one at that. To be under fire is the state of most of the world today. To exappropriate or incorporate the military symbolic that occupies global movements and discourses is to intervene, infiltrate and implode

the discourse of militarism. Such a logo is deliberately provocative: it poses a question and opens a discourse before overdetermining — pre-deciding in the name of this or that — its field. Such a logo reacts to a media environment and attempts to repeat itself within it. The logo contrasts two vectors. That's Karl Marx under there, subtly winking at us beneath the target. The iconic and bearded Father of Socialism is sublimated to the crosshairs. But these aren't any crosshairs; no, these are the aiming sights lifted from late-80's hip-hop group Public Enemy. Is it Marx who becomes Public Enemy Number One? So does POLITICS UNDER FIRE mean that it is Marx who is the politics under fire? None of us have that answer for you — we present no covert socialist agenda, and as organisers, all three of us here disagree somewhat drastically on the historical and contemporary role of Marx and Marxism. Without even knowing our collective discordances, an ambiguity to this logo echoes in such a way which only an image can conjure in a single glance, and no words here will seek to place its meaning in the name of any careful or complacent discourse. I would rather dream that this text and the texts it may or may not inspire echoes and provokes such discordances, and that any attempt here grants some exposition to the logo only to leave it as precarious as its first sighting. For as McKenzie Wark demonstrates in *Gamer Theory*, the enclosure of the world under the spectrum of the videogame paradigm means coming to terms with those who view the world as nothing but one Great Game. To step into the analysis of the Game risks placing oneself "under fire." At the worst — and one must not forget the worst, for it exists too often for too many — being under fire is a lived experience at the edge of death from the war machine. The artistic and scholarly realms, at least in the West, are removed enough from immediate threat in 2007, yet the threats nonetheless have their effects and amount to placing oneself under position of censorship, accusation and ostracization — from both sides, as it were, from both those whose "conservatism" would align with all the traditional points (Right neconservatism, theism, and so forth) as well as those anti-conservatives who nonetheless advance a "progressive" agenda only by censoring the liminal edges, the renegades and the weird, in order to conserve a heir apparent political purity.

It's one dangerous game, indeed. The perspective of the (video) gamer is infiltrating the ways in which life is acted out — and the ways in which death is dealt.

(The logo and slogan were designed prior to the events at VirginiaTech. Would this have arrested the exploration? But what power calls for the censorship of the question? What this question demonstrates is the relevance of such inquiry and intervention moreso than ever today. One must address and not shy away from exactly these kinds of questions and provocations that bear witness to the tumult of our times. Every question a provocation. Every provocation a question. And art is the place to do exactly thus without fitting its purpose under the recuperative project of this or that politics, this or that discourse, this or that -ism. No defensive discourse. No discourse to defend. Coming together, then, under the crosshairs.)

tobias c. van Veen _May 2007

[1] Net-critic Trebor Scholz writes that "The German media critic Christoph Spehr describes free cooperation as a way of working together in which you remain independent and can walk out with your contribution to the joint action under your arm. I don't know what that would look like" (Empyre, February 2004). Geert Lovink writes in the same discussion that "I can't stress enough the potential, the promise for individuals to transform, while collaborating. This is an essentially different take from the division of labour functionality approach in which the 'brigade' turns into one organism, fulfilling the monumental tasks ahead. I guess we talk about free cooperation because of its open end. It may as well end up in a positive New Age ideology with Christoph Spehr as its Leader. In order not to end up there we need to build in disruptions, empty space, brakes, time for reflection. Otherwise we may start to believe in the cynical reading of cooperation as merely self sacrifice and (self) exploitation." To which Scholz writes: "Online and off we should demand relationships in which we are free instead of forced or enslaved, situations in which we are independent and can negotiate and re-negotiate the rules. And if our 'haggling' does not work out, we withdraw our effort or eventually withdraw from the collaboration. Collaborations need to have incentives, not just risks." What I find is evaded in this discussion is the *experience* and *thought* of sacrifice. Lovink reads sacrifice as apparent cynicism, as if it were a psychological condition. But is it not — a question — inseparable from the "haggling" Scholz describes? The problematic is this: "'Free' cooperation would seem to imply a level of sacrifice which is mutually distributed, or evenly thinned among the members of the co-op to the point of its invisibility, a distribution that would require a kind of pre-agreement *sans* discussion about the very rules that must nevertheless remain in constant negotiation. For cooperation to work, it seems to me that one's relation is only 'free' insofar as one makes the choice to 'cooperate' in a fashion that may be less than free. At a certain point one realises one *should* leave, but if you want something to happen, you just 'grin & bear it'." And second, in response to being able to walk away, "The last resort of walking away, however, is often interpreted as burning bridges and the peer pressure from such a costly move can recreate models of ostracization and moreover, idealities of egoism, martyrdom, 'the underground,' and so on .. 'Free Cooperation' for me sounds like a projected ideal which one could use to combat freeloading and negativity by its brand-like usage. As a practical organisational tool, however, it seems to encounter all the issues which have plagued the relation between the individual and the group (as well as questioned the form of this relation) since time immemorial." Scholz suggests that at stake in such challenges is the role of the chairperson to ensure group momentum. Yet, the inclusion of a chairperson seems to already set in place the organising structure of "cooperation" which already undermines the proviso of *free* and *cooperation*. Why a chairperson? The assumption of a chair or central figure leads to the avant-garde consideration of a short-term totalitarian leader (such as a film director) as being the most efficient structure for producing effective results — which as far as I understand it, would be well-removed from the spirit of free cooperation. Perhaps not? I find the model of the film director particularly undeniable in the arts. When I participated in the discussion concerning free cooperation, it was to disrupt, explore an empty space, produce a break (or brake!) and provoke time for reflection on exactly the concept if not necessity of sacrifice. Sacrifice to the chair, to the leader, to the other(s), to oneself, in coming-together. Can we not think that sacrifice is neither positive nor negative but beyond good and evil, a structural condition of the free, of cooperation? The moment, even, of sacrifice signalling the necessity of madness to jump that abyss of belief — belief in the possibility of free cooperation. I found it thus somewhat ironic that the very disruption Lovink called for was rejected without being given its braking power, its delay, its empty space. Sacrifice is not the language of the 21C, yet it is everywhere, its effects everywhere, as it takes on the shape of martyrdom, complacency, self-destruction, violence in the name of this or that. But also sacrifice as the underlying marker of voluntary precarity. Sacrifice as addiction, motivation, skeleton. Later, when a newspaper publication was being readied for the Free Cooperation conference and event held at SUNY Buffalo in 2004, these interjections on sacrifice were not printed. See the archive of discussion online at: [<https://mail.cofa.unsw.edu.au/pipermail/empyre/2004-February/>]. May the archives be not sacrificed to erasure.

To the Vector the Spoils

McKenzie Wark

01. Suppose there is a business in your neighborhood called The Cave™. It offers, for a small hourly fee, access to game consoles in a darkened room. Suppose it is part of a chain. The consoles form a local area network, and also link to other such networks elsewhere in the chain. Suppose you are a gamer in The Cave™. You test your skills against other gamers. You have played in The Cave™ since childhood. Your eyes see only the monitor before you. Your ears hear only through the headphones that encase them. Your hands clutch only the controllers with which you blast away at the digital figures who shoot back at you on the screen. Here gamers see the images and hear the sounds and say to each other: "Why, these images are just shadows! These sounds are just echoes! The real world is out there somewhere." The existence of another, more real world of which The Cave™ provides mere copies is assumed, but nobody thinks much of it.

02. Perhaps you are not just any gamer. You are the one who decides to investigate the assumption of another world. You turn away from the screen and unplug the headphones. You get up and stagger out of the darkened room, toward the light outside. You are so dazzled by the light that the people and things out there in the bright world seem less real than the images and sounds of The Cave™. You turn away from this blinding new world, which seems, strangely, unreal. You return to the screen and the headphones and the darkness of being a gamer in The Cave™.

03. Suppose someone, a parent maybe, a teacher or some other guardian, drags you back out into the light and makes you stay there. It would still be blinding. You could not look directly at things. Maybe the guardian prints out some pics of your family or maybe a map of the neighborhood, to acclimatize you, before you can look at things. Gradually you see the people around you, and what it is that they do. Then perhaps you remember the immense, immersive games of The Cave™, and what passes for wisdom amongst those still stuck there. And so you returns to The Cave™, to talk or text to the other gamers about this world outside.

04. You communicate to fellow gamers in The Cave™ about the outside world of which The Cave™ is just a shadow. Or try to. Plato: "And if the cave-dwellers had established, down there in the cave, certain prizes and distinctions for those who were most keen-sighted in seeing the passing shadows, and who were best able to remember what came before, and after, and simultaneously with what, thus best able to predict future appearances in the shadow-world, will our released prisoner hanker after these prizes or envy this power or honor?" You bet! The Cave™ is a world of pure agon, of competitive striving after distinction. But suppose you are that rare, stray, thoughtful gamer who

decides to try this new game of getting beyond the game again? Suppose you emerge from The Cave™ and decides to take stock of the world beyond? You find that this other world is in some curious ways rather like The Cave™. The pics of family, the map of the 'hood – seem made of the same digital stuff as your favorites games inside The Cave™. If there is a difference, it may not be quite what it seems.

05. Here is what you observes about the world outside The Cave™: The whole of life appears as a vast accumulation of commodities and spectacles, of things wrapped in images and images sold as things. Images appear as prizes, and call us to play the game in which they are all that is at stake. You observe that world after world, cave after cave, what prevails is the same digital, agonistic logic of one versus the other, ending in victory or defeat. Everything has value only when ranked against another; everyone has value only when ranked against another. Every situation is win-lose, unless it is win-win – a situation where players are free to collaborate only because they seek prizes in different games.

06. The real world appears as a fun park divided into many and varied games. Work is a rat race. Politics is a horse race. The economy is a casino. Even the utopian justice to come in the afterlife is foreclosed: He who dies with the most toys wins. Games are no longer a past time, outside or alongside of life. They are now the very form of life, and death, and time, itself. These games are no joke. When the screen flashes the legend 'game over', you are either dead, or defeated, or at best out of quarters. The game has colonized its rivals within the cultural realm, from the spectacle of cinema to the simulations of television. Narrative is no longer a question of an imaginary reconciliation of real problems. The story just recounts the steps by which someone beat someone else – a real victory for imaginary stakes. The game has not just colonized reality, it is also the sole remaining ideal. Gamespace proclaims its legitimacy through victory over all rivals. The reigning ideology imagines the world as a level playing field, upon which all men are equal before God, the great game designer. History, politics, culture – gamespace dynamites everything which is not in the game, like an out-dated Vegas casino.

07. Ever get the feeling you are playing some vast and useless game to which you don't know the goal, and can't remember the rules? Ever get the fierce desire to quit, to resign, to forfeit, only to discover there's no umpire, no referee, no regulatory body to whom to announce your capitulation? Ever get the vague dread that while you have no choice but to play the game, you can't win it, can't even know the score, or who keeps it? Ever suspect that you don't even who your real opponent might be? Ever get mad over the obvious fact that the dice are loaded, the deck stacked, the table rigged, and the fix – in? Welcome to gamespace, where "we all roll with our fingers crossed."

08. All that counts here is the score. As for who owns the teams and who runs the league, best not to ask. As for who is excluded from the big leagues and high scores, best not to ask. As for who keeps the score and who makes the rules, best not to ask. As for what ruling body does the handicapping and on what basis, best not to ask. All is for the best in the best – and only – possible world. There is – to give it a name – a military entertainment complex, and it rules. Its triumphs affirm the rule of the game and the rules of the game.

09. Everything the military entertainment complex touches turns to digits. Everything is digital and yet the digital is as nothing. It just beeps and blinks and reports itself in glowing alphanumeric, spouting stock quotes on your cellphone. Sure, there may be vivid 3D graphics. There may be pie charts and bar graphs. There may be swirls and whorls of brightly colored polygons blazing from screen to screen. But these are just decoration. The jitter of your thumb on the button or the flicker of your wrist on the mouse connect directly to an invisible, intangible gamespace of pure contest, pure agon. It doesn't matter if your cave comes equipped with a Playstation or Bloomberg terminal. It is all just an algorithm with enough unknowns to make a game of it.

10. Once games required an actual place to play them, whether on the chess board or the football field. Even wars had battlefields. Now global positioning satellites grid the whole earth and put all of space and time in play. Warfare, they say, now looks like video games. Well don't kid yourself. War is a video game – for the military entertainment complex. To them it doesn't matter what happens 'on the ground'. The ground – the old-fashioned battlefield itself – is just a necessary externality to the game. Žižek: "It is thus not the fantasy of a purely aseptic war run as a video game behind computer screens that protects us from the reality of the face to face killing of another person; on the contrary it is this fantasy of face to face encounter with an enemy killed bloodily that we construct in order to escape the Real of the depersonalized war turned into an anonymous technological operation."

11. The old class antagonisms have not gone away, but are hidden beneath levels of rank, where each measures their worth against others in the size and price of their house, the size and price of their vehicle and where, perversely, working longer and longer hours is a sign of winning the game. Work becomes play. Work demands not just one's mind and body but also one's soul. You have to be a team player. Your work has to be creative, inventive, playful – ludic, but not ludicrous.

12. No games are freely chosen any more. Not least for children, who if they are to be the successful offspring of successful parents, find themselves drafted into endless evening shifts of team sport. The purpose of which is to build character, of course. Which character? The character of the good sport. Character for what? For the workplace, with its team camaraderie and peer enforced discipline. For others, work is still just dull, repetitive work, but the

dream is to escape into the commerce of play – to make it into the major leagues, or compete for record deals as a diva or a playa in the rap game. And for still others, there is only the game of survival. Biggie: "If I wasn't in the rap game/ I'd probably have a key knee-deep in the crack game." Play becomes everything to which it was once opposed. It is work, it is serious, it is morality, it is necessity.

13. The old identities peter out. Nobody has the time. The gamer is not interested in playing the citizen. The gamer elects to choose sides only for the purpose of the game. This week it might be as the Germans vs. the Americans. Next week it might be as a gangster against the law. If the gamer chooses to be a soldier and play with real weapons, it is as an Army of One, testing and refining personal skill points. The shrill and constant patriotic noise you hear through the speakers masks the slow erosion of any coherent fellow feeling within the remnants of a national space. This gamespace escapes all borders. All that is left of the nation is an everywhere that is nowhere, an atopia of noisy, righteous victories and quiet, sinister failures. Manifest destiny – the right to rule through virtue – gives way to its latent destiny – the virtue of right through rule.

14. The gamer is not really interested in faith, although a heightened rhetoric of faith may fill the void carved out in the soul by the insinuations of gamespace. The gamer's God is a game designer. He implants in everything a hidden algorithm. Faith is a matter of the ability to intuit the parameters of this intelligent design and score accordingly. All that is righteous wins; all that wins is righteous. To be loser or a lamer is the mark of damnation. Gamers confront each other in games of skill which reveal who has been chosen by the game as the one who has most fully internalized its algorithm. For those who despair of their abilities, there are games of chance, where grace reveals itself in the roll of the dice. Caillois: "Chance is courted because hard work and personal qualifications are powerless to bring such success about." The gambler may know what the gamer's faith refuses to countenance.

15. To be a gamer is to live by nothing but level, which has meaning only in relation to the levels ranked above or below. Identity loses its qualitative dimension. Gamespace leaves its mark on the gamer in the reduction of self to score. Questions of ethnicity, sexuality, gender or race, nation or tribe, even species become purely arbitrary. Play as whoever or whatever you like. Choose your skin. Gamers don't care. It's all an agony of competing abilities, and abilities all have their measure. It all ends in a summary decision: That's Hot! One hopes, or if not, You're Fired! Got questions about qualities of Being? Whatever.

16. So this is the world as it appears to the gamer: a matrix of endlessly varying games, all reducible to the same principles, all producing the same kind of subject who belongs to this gamespace in the same way – as a gamer to a game. What would it mean to lift one's eye from the target, to pause

on the trigger, to unclench one's ever-clicking finger? Is it even possible to think outside The Cave™? Perhaps with the triumph of gamespace, what the gamer as theorist needs is to reconstruct the deleted files on those who opposed gamespace with their revolutionary playdates. Debord, for example, who declared: "I have scarcely begun to make you understand that I don't intend to play the game." Now there was a player unconcerned with an exit strategy.

17. 'Play' was once a great slogan of liberation. Neville: "The new beautiful freaks will teach us all how to play again (and they'll suffer society's penalty)." Play was once the battering ram to break down the Chinese walls of alienated work, of divided labor. Only look at what has become of play. Play is no longer a counter to work. Play becomes work; work becomes play. Play outside of work found itself captured by the rise of the digital game, which responds to the boredom of the player with endless games of repetition, level after level of difference as more of the same. Play no longer functions as a fulcrum for a critical theory. The utopian dream of liberating play from the game, of a pure play beyond the game, merely opened the way for the extension of gamespace into every aspect of everyday life.

18. What then has the gamer seen in that bright world, that gamespace, beyond The Cave™? You see people hunched over screens, their hands compulsively jerking controllers. Each sits alone, and talks or texts to unseen others, dazzled by images that seem to come from nowhere, awash in pulsing and beeping sounds. The enlightened gamer sees how the world beyond the games of The Cave™ seem like an array of more or less similar caves, all digital, each an agon with its own rules, some arbitrary blend of chance and competition. And beyond that? Not much. The real has become a mere epiphenomenon without which gamespace cannot exist, but which is losing, bit by bit, any form or substance or spirit or history that is not sucked into and transformed by gamespace. Beyond gamespace are only the nameless fragments of the real.

19. The gamer arrives at the beginnings of a reflective life, a gamer theory, by stepping out of The Cave™ — and returning back to it. If the gamer is to hold gamespace to account in terms of something other than itself, it might not be that mere shadow of a shadow of the real, murky, formless, a residue in the corners. It might instead be the game proper, as it is played in The Cave.™ There at least the game shadows the pure form of the algorithm. There at least the digital logic to which gamespace merely aspires is actually realized. The challenge is — ah, but even to phrase it thus is to fall back into the game — to play at play itself, but from within the game. The gamer as theorist has to choose between two strategies for playing against gamespace. One is to play for the real. But the real is nothing but a heap of broken images. The other is to play for the game. Play within the game, but against gamespace. The digital game plays up everything that gamespace merely pretends to be: a fair fight, a level playing field, free competition.

20. No wonder digital games are the cultural form of the times. The times have themselves become just a series of less perfect games. Games like those played in the Cave™ present them in a pure state, as a realm where justice — of a sort — reigns. The beginnings of a a gamer theory might lie not in holding games accountable as failed representations of the world, but quite the reverse. The world outside is a gamespace that appears as an imperfect form of the game. The gamer is an archeologist of The Cave™. The digital games the gamer finds there are the ruins, not of a lost past, but of a lost future. Gamespace is built on the ruins of a future it proclaims in theory yet disavows in practice.

21. Of all the kinds of belonging that contend for allegiance — as workers against the boss, as citizens against the enemy, as believers against the infidel — all now have to compete with one which makes agon its first and only principle. Gamespace wants us all to believe we are nothing but gamers now, competing not against enemies of class or faith or nation, but only against other gamers. A new historical persona stalks the earth. All of the previous such persona had many breviaries and manuals, and so what's needed is some primers for gamers. Not strategy guides in how to improve one's score or hone one's trigger finger. Primers, rather in thinking about a world made over as a gamespace, made over as an imperfect copy of the game. The game might not be utopia, but it might be the only thing left with which to play against gamespace.

This is an extract from *Gamer Theory*, Harvard University Press, 2007.

