

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

### Killer Instinct Panel Discussion NEW MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The following excerpt is from a panel discussion moderated by Alex Galloway with guest curator Shamim Momin, from the Whitney Museum of American Art, along with artist, Cory Arcangel, and writer and gaming artist, Anne-Marie Schleiner that took place on December 12, 2003.

**SHAMIM MOMIN:** Knowing that Cory and Anne-Marie are going to speak very specifically about their work, I want to talk about the interest in video games and gaming in a larger cultural context, specifically, around an idea of myth-making in contemporary art. I should probably mention that by and large, I myself am not a gamer, although there are certain games that I'm obsessive about.

I'm interested in why these forms are so resonant, both in contemporary culture and also with artists and have been thinking a lot about the notion of myth. The need to create myth has persisted throughout human history. Myth provides a sanctuary for the imagination where new ways of interpreting reality can be proposed, where delight and complexity can be explored, and where ambiguity permits synthesis. As an open-ended fluent process, myth making is not merely the telling of story, nor is every artificial reality a myth.

The passion and excitement of myth when coupled with an embrace of the irrational can expand one's views of reality. The prevalence of contemporary artists to create mythic worlds reflects a deep craving for these emancipating spaces. At a moment in contemporary culture, still queasy with pre-millennial spiritual malaise, they seem ever more necessary. Myth-making in contemporary culture and in contemporary art draws on the imagining of possibilities engendered by a complex pluralistic notion of the world, and liberates fantasy and play as options for new realities.

Myth provides a vehicle for multiple versions of speech as fundamental communication, rather than language or a distinct form of realization. As Roland Barthes described it, "Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message, there are no formal limits to myth, there are no substantial ones."

Both parallel to, and in dialogue with, a similar impulse in art making, the shift toward mythic forms emerging in popular culture can be read as a response to this problematized desire for community and connection. Enabled by new technologies and an increasingly pervasive visual culture, myth permeates contemporary life as never before. The prominence of previously unvalidated sources such as cyberpunk and science fiction, or the impossible worlds of comic books and video games, coincides with an increasing interest in archaic belief systems, from numerology

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

and the occult to ancient polytheistic religions. Apocalyptic or magical, sensual or baroque, such systems are pregnant with secret knowledge, occult spaces and practices, and elaborate, fulgent aesthetics. Their presence emerges in the popularity of films from Blade Runner to The Matrix and The Lord of the Rings, their whispers heard in the pervasive renewed interest in the paranormal—aliens, vampires, werewolves, and other metaphorical monsters. They can be laughed at in celebrity obsessions with Buddhism and the kabala, and marveled at in the depth of commitment to MUD (multi-user domain) fantasy games on the Internet. And while we grin at the self-aware earnestness of television dramas such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer or The X-Files, like Fox Mulder, we want to believe. All of these forms can be seen to function as new models of myth for a faith-starved world too cynical for the simplicity of the available dominant narratives. These alternate universes provide mythic constructs, a new set of rules that rupture the known in favor of the unknown, in order to produce a better metaphor for our future present.

To a degree, this impulse in contemporary culture and in contemporary art has been a response to a kind of increasing conservatism, an increasing reduction in the kinds of dominant media. Narratives that we're all engaging with in the world. It's a strange kind of contradiction in a moment where our reality is so hyper-mediated. At the same time there's almost a closing down of narrative to a degree over the past ten, fifteen years. You see, as always, a sort of prevalent reemergence of a desire for a fluid and discursive space, creating emancipating spaces within all these new media forms.

This is not something new. This happens historically throughout American history, and, throughout human history: it appears to be a pervasive cycle of repression and exploration. What I think is interesting in this moment is how technology and all these different forms of media enable a reality that creates these imaginative worlds to such an increasing and immense degree that we've never experienced before. It's translated to popular culture at a level that has not been heretofore available to us, either as consumers or as viewers, but also as artists.

I was actually going to show you the video game that is a sort of paradigm of this idea, which maybe you might be familiar with. It's called "Eternal Darkness, Sanity's Requiem," if I remember the subtitles correctly, and it's what I think of as part of this genre of myth-making games. Not all of them fall into this category. They are arguably on different levels. It's based around one original protagonist. Throughout the game, you travel through history via twelve different characters; not all of which are her family members but in some way are related to this discovery. You need to unearth this mystery over time and space, and over both dimensional levels of real space, as well as, this idea of psychological space, which is inherent to the game, in order to achieve and collect all the things. This process brings you to the knowledge and puzzle solving that you will need in order to defeat the ultimate evil, whatever it might be.

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

One aspect that this game shares with certain others is the way in which the idea of it, it being a kind of visual manifestation of a psychological space, is so readily available within the game. By that I mean as you play the game, one of the main elements that you have to keep intact is your sanity. There is actually a sanity meter that monitors what your mental state is, and throughout the game (I just realized I'm going to give away something about the game. I hope nobody's going to be particularly upset with me about that) if your meter becomes too low as you're being attacked by various other characters and sundry monsters, you begin to hallucinate and see different things happening in the space. This happens with increasing frequency as your meter gets lowered. What I think is particularly interesting is the fact that at certain points it transcends the parameters of the game rules, the logic of the game, which I'm going to mention in a moment, and becomes part of your real space.

There is this slippage of the boundary between the real and the immersive space of the game. It's extraordinarily effective as far as I've seen in the chat rooms and for the people I know who play it as well. It's incredibly startling because usually these arenas are entirely distinct. There's something very interesting to me about acknowledging the construct of the game as a separate space, but one that can have this sort of fluidity between the real and the artificial. Things happen within the game that pertain not to the internal logic of the game, but to the logic of you as the viewer and a gamer that sort of trick you into thinking certain things are happening. I am mentioning that partially because I think it's a significant notion or idea, something I had not really seen before, and I can't think of other media that can have that kind of slippage. I argued about this with somebody in relationship to the Blair Witch, because of the larger extension or pseudo-extension into the real, but it didn't have the kind of immediate individual effect that the immersive experience of gaming has.

That leads me to another aspect of it that I think of in relationship to this myth-making impulse, which is again in contemporary art, being the notion of logical structure within an absurd or irrational reality. In a way, it's necessary to have parameters within these worlds that you have to discover and follow. In fact, that's often the point of engaging with a lot of these types of games, as well as, a lot of the artworks that are following this impulse.

To this group of artists, it's not particularly interesting to have absolutely arbitrary imagery or ideas or actions being either depicted or suggested in certain ways. Rather it becomes interesting within this new set of rules that they're proposing, which may or may not have any familiarity to our experience. There you can begin to unpack them as a new rule system in order to understand the ideology or the experience of whatever that work of art might be, whether it's the game or whether

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

it's the media. It could be a painting or it could be a drawing. I'm not limiting this to specific technology.

That again is another element that I wanted to mention in terms of the influence of this idea of myth making and gaming and so on. It's much less to me about a notion of the media itself. Obviously, it's enabled by that, and it exists to a degree by virtue of understanding these structures and different processes that come about by programming and through these games and different kinds of programming structures and so on, but they're far more metaphorically approached in a broader sense by contemporary artists in this moment.

It's much more about a sort of nonlinear narrative, an idea of connection or a broader base. It's like a hypertextual narrative that seems to permeate an artistic approach to a larger degree than it is an obsession with the media for media's sake. I think one of the interesting approaches by the artists who are here, is that they're coming from an idea of underlying structure, of how to insert or change or build from the component parts to a degree, rather than starting on the front end, engaging with the sort of viewer interface. I mean, obviously this all translates through it, but just in terms of an initial impulse. Anne-Marie actually wrote a great piece that I just recently read about gender malleability within video games.

There's a whole other level of these ideas of mythic space. I want to characterize is that one of the characteristics of what I think of as mythic space is some kind of sort of spatial component, whether it be a metaphorical space or an imaginative space. This is why video games tend to provide a sort of perfect analogy to that idea, but within that there needs to be a kind of fluidity or ambiguity of narrative, but also of goal, of focus. One is always trying to achieve some goal. You're always trying to win, presumably. In most of these games, "Eternal Darkness" being one of them, there are multiple ways to get there.

You can win without getting everything right. There are a lot of different modes by which you can achieve it: different identities, different steps in the game, different layers. This is again not true of all games, but true of a certain genre of them, that I think of in this kind of immersive space, mythical world game.

The ones that I've seen as being kind of new games, seem to be moving more and more towards not just ambiguity of narrative, but ambiguity of identity and ambiguity of position. Even where the flux between good and evil becomes a lot more fluid and a lot more interrelated. This is not something new to us. One of our greatest contemporary myths, "Star Wars" presented that ages and ages ago. It's interesting to see how that begins to permeate these spaces in video games where it's about your own individual agency. The fact that you have a physical interactive component, a sort of mental agency, and a certain amount of control over these stories is another aspect of it that I think of as a significant development within that.

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

That idea is being enhanced in newer games. There's one that just came out that's called "Fable". I thought it was kind of fascinating that you can choose to be evil or good, and then as you go through the game, depending on what you do, it changes the way you look. If you choose to fight somebody, you gain a greater warrior look. If you choose to puzzle-solve and to get through that particular one, you look smarter, whatever the hell that means. That's the way they characterize it, where there is this visual manifestation of identity formation, which is a particularly interesting aspect of one of the areas of what gaming offers to a player, whether or not they think about it at all.

Backtracking a bit about the concept of multiple ways to reach a goal, another new game that fits into this is "Two Crimes, Streets of L.A.," where they've actually mapped 240 square miles of Los Angeles, and you're playing in the real streets within the imaginative space of the game. Instead of the normal mode, where when you fail you go back to the last saved point or the last starting point, you actually kind of choose-your-own adventure. In the sense that when you fail, you go off into another story line so that it becomes like this kind of tree branch version of a narrative. This constant need for re-invention of the rules, because of course, no longer is interesting once the boundaries are understood. The logic, that is the point of the game, also becomes its downfall and necessitates this constant re-invention. So again, providing a space in which the sort of discursive fluidity is not just interesting but necessary in order to actually play the game.

Lastly, I'm just going to mention one more that I thought was interesting and pertained to what I was reading about in Anne-Marie's essay. I never played it, but it was enormously popular. The original version, and this is not true of the current version, is played with a helmet on. In it you get points for playing it well, and if you play it with 100 percent efficiency, the great prize is that the helmet finally comes off and you get to see the face of the person underneath, and it turned out to be a woman. This shocked the whole group of those gamers everywhere. The elements, by which this provides whatever small ways of being subversive with gender and identity, can even happen on the outward programmatic level. It's not just via the folks who decide to modify or change it, although that's the majority of the interesting insertions that happen. It seems interesting to me that that was part of the initial programming of the game. I'm hoping that this has set those up as the parameter of an idea of this space. There are a lot of other things I would love to talk about or hear your questions on, but I think in order to let you hear somebody else speak. I'm going to conclude with that and turn it over to Anne-Marie.

**ANNE-MARIE SCHLEINER:** I'm going to show some works on my website, [www.opensorcery.net](http://www.opensorcery.net). In the mid-to-late nineties, I started making my own game modifications as art projects. In the process of doing that, I came across

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

communities of gamers who were exchanging their mods with each other, and also writing their own editing tools for specific game engines. A lot of the game mods that I saw in these communities were more subversive and more wacky and interesting than what was coming out of the commercial game industry.

I thought it would be interesting to organize an on-line exhibit of some of these game modifications coming out of this kind of digital folk art form. I wanted to give the tools for modifying computer games to artists, and then see what would happen if people with art backgrounds would create game mods. I organized this show, "Cracking the Maze: Game Plug-ins and Patches as Hacker Art." For its interface, we used the Doom source code. Doom was one of the first shooter games that started the whole kind of mod-making thing, because their software released their code, and that allowed people to insert their own characters and write modifying tools for Doom. After that, I was invited to do a show at Kiasma Museum in Finland that was focussed more on some of the first game modifications with female characters. A lot of the shooter games only had male soldiers to begin with, but people wanted to play female characters in the game hacking community, and they would make their own kinds of characters.

There was this battle being waged in the community of gamers of what these female characters should look like. Most of the people making them were men, but some, actually this is one of the few, Fem Doom, were made by women. You see her face here, and there are sounds of a woman in the game. There was a kind of battle being waged between people who thought that the characters should look more like this, like Amazon fighters, with naked big breasts and things, and there were the people who wanted more of a moderated, quote "realistic" look to their characters, like Tina Bob. I thought that the game modifying community could effect the commercial game industry. In the first version of Quake, there was only a male character. People were making 2-D skins that were female that could be mapped onto the 3-D character in the first Quake. You would get these kind of big muscley drag queens with female skins but male muscles. In the second version of Quake there was a female character. I think it kind of had this effect where people said, "Oh, people want to play female characters in Quake." In the second version of Quake, more women players were starting to play and forming their own clans. It is called PMS for "Psycho Men Slayers," and there were also other ones like, "Vicious Vixens." One of the things that was interesting to me about this kind of gender hacking was monster friendliness, that computer gamer culture encourages a kind of transgression of boundaries between animal and human, between machine and human, and also between man and woman.

I took another direction, and I became interested in a phenomenon called Kiss. This is a kind of open source at a level above code, art form, and digital art form, in some ways similar to the game modifications. These were digital electronic dolls that were started in Japan on the back of children's comic books as paper

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

dolls, and then someone wrote a digital way to make these paper dolls, and then it got adopted by older people, and spread outside of Japan. There was an adult community of people working with making these dolls, where you can put different clothes on them in different frames. It's a very unique community. A lot of the people involved were also women, which was interesting to me, because you don't find that many women working in erotic art forms. I met Black Hawk, who's here in the audience. He had already been really involved in this community of artists, and he wrote a really nice essay for this online show which is here, "Lucky Kiss." I'm just flipping through these screen shots of some of the Kiss dolls. This is an S&M Pokeman. This is one of my favorite ones. I worked on a game called "Anime Noir" with a friend of mine. In this case, I thought it would be interesting, instead of working with a modification where you are already working within a certain system and genre that's set from the game that you're modifying (like a shooter game or a role-playing game), to start more from scratch, although not entirely, because we did it in Director. It has this kind of Director feel to it. It's a multi-user role-playing game, and you can choose between different characters. It's set in a Japanese Anime Universe. The background story is that there's a female scientist in Japan, shortly after World War II, and she's continued working on this kind of chemical warfare against enemy soldiers, which is supposed to make them incredibly horny and drop all their weapons. Some of it slips into the city water supply accidentally, and everyone in this city becomes infected. We were interested in the way that in a lot of role-playing games, there is a lot of flirtation going, but it's not really built into the game. We wanted to build a game that was hard-wired for flirtation and sex eventually.

You start out in this kind of communal city space, and you can chat with up to maybe twelve, fourteen people. You move through this 3-D map of the city. These are just screen shots again. Then you can decide to go into different rooms. I think there were five different spaces you could go into, like a teahouse and a mochi shop, and interact with different characters with this action pellet that you have.

We beta-tested it for six months and tried to incorporate people's suggestions into the interface design, like this Icebreaker button is from Michael from Entropy 8, He wanted that in there, which will randomly spew out suggestions if your conversation stalls. It's like a conversation starter.

Like a typical role-playing game, it has statistics, like seduction, stamina, experience, and adventure. Just one more thing about it, it was a game based on seduction, so you couldn't force yourself on other players. You had to seduce them. That's why you have these Yes and No buttons here, because you had to say yes or no to every action. While I was working on this, I did this little project on the side, a collaboration between Melinda Klayman and me. I was also doing a game mod workshop in Barcelona, and I met Retro-uge, Joan Leandre, who is one of my favorite game mod artists. We had the idea at the time that the US started

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

dropping bombs on Afghanistan right after 9/11. We wanted to do some kind of anti-war game inside a game engine and some kind of modification. A few months later, I met Brody Condon in San Diego, and he was doing a lot of interesting work with more performative actions inside online games, like Tribes. This project started out as an intervention inside Counterstrike, and we invited people to make spray paints in relation to Bush's war on terrorism, and also the increasing military fetishism in computer games.

They have become more and more, quote, "realistic". The characters use weapons that are based on real life weapons, and there are no longer elements, like in Quake where you had these big oversized kind of crazy queer-looking monsters. Now the characters are supposed to have more realistic body proportions. The environments of course are not set in outer space anymore, but in real life environments like Havana, Cuba. Different maps in Counterstrike mimic real life combat situations. We invited different people to make the spray paints. We had our own in there. These are Brody's eleven series of soldiers embracing and kissing and blowing each other. These are some of mine at the end, which shoot love bubbles, and the teddy bear with an assault rifle. These are some screen shots of how they look inside the game. What else should I show on this site? Maybe a movie to give an idea of what it was like.

We also had these intervention recipes that were kind of like choreographed actions that you could do inside the game to mess up game play, like "make friends with your enemy" or "stand in the shape of a heart with all the members on your team", and "just allow the other team to kill you". Actually my favorite part of this project was the response that we got from the gamer community, both locally and worldwide. There are hostages and military fantasy, and I just died, and now I'm a ghost. I'm going to deliver with my spray paint. To me it was just something I felt like doing and getting out there, but I didn't really promote it that much. It got a big response from people. In America there was anger that my project was anti-patriotic. Then we also had all kinds of e-mails from all over the world because my name sounds female and this kind of domain, military shooter games, has become very male. They thought that of Joan, because his name is spelled J-O-A-N. In Catalan it's John, but people thought he was a woman. So we got a lot of really misogynous hate mails. This is one of my favorite one called Barbie: "Hello, what a stupid initiative. If you don't like the game, just don't buy it. And don't piss off other people with your shit. Just a woman could think of making something like Velvet Strike. If you don't realize that a video game is just a video game, and that it's a fake world, well, then go play with your Barbie." We got a lot of mail, and this is just a selection of them. This one is about how Counterstrike is his way out after 9/11, and he asks to please not take away his toy from him. We also had a forum that got totally clogged by people spamming it and calling us tree-huggers and gay faggots. I'd never hugged a tree before, but after this I tried it. It was fun. We are going to update this with some of the newer hate

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

mails we got. There's one that I got a few months ago from a US marine, which was quite interesting, because he was so polite. He was very polite, but disagreeing with everything we were doing. So I'll just show one more thing.

While I was doing online curating of net art shows, I sometimes would have an idea for a show and feel like there was something missing, and I would do a secret project under a pseudonym. I've kind of come out with this secret artist persona lately. Her name is Apará Nari Couteri, and an example of that is this game mod I made back when I did *Cracking the Maze*, that was supposed to give you epilepsy when you looked at it because of the strobing of the lights.

With this same persona (she's more into music, more formalist as an artist, and also more into kind of aggressive hacking type things than I am) I created my recent project that I'm showing here in the museum, "It happened at Seven Eleven". It's a hip-hop game where two players play the same song against each other, trying to get better scores from how they rhyme. Recently I've become interested in hip-hop and the way it's becoming a global medium for talking about hard issues and politics around the world, but also the way it's being adapted in places like Stuttgart, Germany, where I was doing a residency this last year. This is the hip-hop center of Germany, and it's also the wealthiest city in Germany. In this context music can escape its original sources and be used for different applications.

**CORY ARCANGEL:** I'm going to give an overview of my work. This is a record I started making in 1998 and finally it was released in 2001 called "The 8-Bit Construction Set," and it's a hip-hop battle record. In 1997, I met a group of friends and we started a record label called Beige Records. For a couple years we released anonymous club 12-inch techno records. It was hard, but we did it all ourselves. We pressed the record and distributed it and did the whole thing. It was also the same time that we all started to play around on computers and start to think about computers and how it would be proper or how it would be the best to make work on them. Eventually we ended up with this idea for making this record. I always start with it because it is the first work that threw me off on the couple-year tangent I've been on and still am on in regards to all the concepts and processes that I think about in my work.

It's a hip-hop battle record, which means that it's a DJ battle record. The most famous one is called the DMC battle, and it's just where two DJ's have a minute or two to prove themselves, and they'll be judged. The best DJ wins the DMC. So what a DJ battle record means is that the record starts off with scratch tones. I should also explain that the other part of the battle on the record. We made one side on the Atari 800 home computer, and the other side on the Commodore 64. These of course are alike. Around that time we just got really fed up with newer computers, because we didn't have a lot of money. Also it was (this is the secret)

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

the birth of Ebay. These computers started showing up on Ebay for like \$7 at that time. I don't know if it's a thing or just with my friends and me, but Salvation Army shopping is just a fun thing to do because you could find lots of neat stuff. So we started to find all these older computers in the thrift stores, and we just started programming them because for us it felt a lot better to program for these really simple old machines than it does for newer machines.

The record is organized programmatically, which means each side is basically the similar thing to the other side. It starts off with scratch tones, and these sounds for DJ's to scratch with are very simple. There are infinite loops, which is where the record is pressed in such a way that the needle always skips back to the same place after one resolution, which means it will play four beats infinitely. It's very good for techno, because if you have a bunch of record players, that are all the same tempo, you could have eight records playing at the same time. It was composed in such a way where you could just play eight records at the same time with eight different loops and it would sound all right. The third part of the record is the track, which is just a normal club track, and the fourth part of the record is data, which is like before floppy disks were commercially available for these computer, when people used to store things on cassette tape. These are programs for these two operating systems, which then you could load on to tape and execute into your computer. It's also software on the record. Everyone in the record label was involved with making this record. It's Joseph Beuckman Joe Bonn, Paul B. Davis, and myself. It took us three years to make it because first when we started we had no idea how to work these computers at all, and the further we went on, like the first idea with the record was, "Well, let's just sample the cool video game sounds." We were like, "Well, isn't that just cheating?" We had to learn how to program and write cool programs for them, because we were going to release them on the record. This took three years. The concept of this record was basically that it changed all the stuff I made after it where all of a sudden I was thinking about, "Well, how could you really know a computer?"

If you make something on a computer it's best to work at hardware level because you could really get in there. What I'd like to do now is play a music video from the record. This is the Commodore 64 side called "Dollars," and this is a music video starring Paul Davis, and Joseph Bonn and me. This song is one Commodore 64, which only plays three channels of audio at any one time. There are a lot of tricks in this song to make it sound like a lot more than it actually is. If you listen, the drums never occur at the same time as the bass line because they're on the same track.

**MAN:** This is strangely kind of a rude question. But how old are you?

**CORY ARCANGEL:** Oh, 25. I had a Commodore 64, but I was too young to even know. I remember turning it on and we didn't have any cartridges or anything for

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

it. I just saw the prompt and I was like, "This sucks." I'm too young for the Commodore 64 by a couple years. My first computer was the Apple 2 GS, which was the predecessor to the Apple 2 computer. GS I'd like you to know stood for Graphics and Sound. My first computer had a paint program and an animation program. That's why when we started this record we all had no clue. I had played on computers my whole life. That's why it took us a while to program them. First we learned Basic, then we learned machine language. We did it because we felt we had to. We didn't want to cheat people. We didn't want to sample. We didn't want to fake it. It's kind of nerdy, right? The way it ended up working out is that we just challenged each other constantly or just basically dared each other, like, "I dare you to program that in hexadecimal with your eyes closed." Even to this day I'm afraid to make work, because there's so many rules that we invented for ourselves like, "You can't do that, you can't use this computer. You can't use this mouse."

**MAN:** Where do you get off that sampling is cheating?

**CORY ARCANGEL:** If we sample an 8-bit video game, and then make an 8-bit record where we just plug it into a sampler and pretend it's a video game we think that's cheating. It's cheating to us as media artists. Here's a secret, the record we made before this has sampled Atari on it. I think that if we were to present it like "Hey, we are computer nerds and we know about computers," and then just sample stuff and not tell people that it's sampled, that's cheating. Does that make sense? Maybe all the conceptual threads weren't entirely tied up with this record. When people sample it, often we're like, "I can't believe they sampled it! Why didn't they even ask us?" They're going to steal it. It is fine to sample. This gets into all the hip-hop discussion that I don't think I'm really qualified to discuss. Of course that whole culture is about sampling. We made it for DJ's, and that's what it was all about.

**MAN:** Are you nostalgic about the scene?

**CORY ARCANGEL:** You also have to remember that even though I didn't play on a Commodore 64, I did. I mean those video games hit really hard when I was in third grade. I'm not really interested in the particular systems, but everything I think about is how 8-bit graphics look. It's the best era of video by far. Like everything else I've done since this record has been video. Maybe it's nostalgia, but also it's just that I think it was a really good time for video. What is a video game system but a video synthesizer? It's the dream of all those video artists. All of a sudden everyone has a video synthesizer hooked up to his/her television. After this record I started to get into that idea. You just start modding these games and making all these awesome videos on these cartridges. What we realized after we made this record was that the Nintendo entertainment system, which is the famous Nintendo system, had the same processor as these computers. So since

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

we already knew how to program for them, we could make videos for the Nintendo entertainment system. My friend Paul started making these Nintendo music cartridges. Then I just realized one day that if he could make a music cartridge, I could make video cartridges. So I want to show you one of my newer cartridges and then all of my really newer cartridges in a second. This is documentation of a show from the summer at a gallery called Team Gallery, and this is documentation and explanation of a work called "Super Mario Clouds." It's basically the Mario Brothers cartridge, where I just took everything else away and kept the sky and the clouds. In a second I will have a picture. This is the idea of most of the cartridges that I make now, and especially the one you see in the other room, which is that if you take apart one of these game cartridges.

**ALEX GALLOWAY:** Is it a sort of secret knowledge from a subculture, or is it from a power center or something, some kind of inaccessible knowledge? That to me is something that Cory also deals with, this idea of hidden code and hidden skills or hidden know. I liked what Shamim said about this idea of a visual manifestation of psychological space, taking something that's may be a concept or a way of thinking, and then seeing it on the screen actually printed out or rendered in some way. Anne-Marie, maybe at some point you should say a little bit more about this idea of having code as the interface, like what it means to invert the typical way that code is hidden in the back, and then the representation is interpreted or rendered in the foreground. I like that idea of putting code up front, and also the idea of gender hacking. Maybe a question would be what's really being hacked, because clearly a skin is being hacked or parts of the game are being hacked. Is that it? Maybe there are larger things that are being hacked there as well.

**MAN:** What I'm going to ask deals with the first presentation, and the way that you were talking about fantasy and the kind of use of fantasy in video games, the way that you're talking about certain games, and the stretching in multi-threaded exploration of that. One thing that I've always thought, and you didn't touch upon was the kind of commodification of fantasy in a Hollywood style in video games, because they are kind of experimental, but they're not really that experimental. I've seen some of the ones you mentioned, and they're quite avant-garde in their field. They're still kind of very Hollywood-ized, commodification of a fantasy world.

**SHAMIM MOMIN:** Well, in no way was I meaning to propose that they're thoroughly subversive or alternative in their complete construct. What I didn't say is that many of them still promote certain ideological positions in terms of gender, ethnicity and there are pretty unfortunately tried and true in popular media.

I do think that, by the virtue of just the structure of gaming itself, it has a certain kind of fluid space that still exists, even though the overall mechanism is a commercial construct. You can say that your term "Hollywood-ized" may be

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

referring to the sort of narrative construct, or maybe it's just referring to the look of it, the high end production of some of these things where each one is trying to be more and more "realistic" or slick or fantastical in their own way. I still think that there's space within that, because they are newer genres. It will be interesting to see what happens as time goes on. I really think that it's similar to the way film and maybe even television function, although I haven't really thought about that so much as a new media form, because there is more space for experimentation before certain kinds of like codes of behavior, format or so on are really put into place. I think that video games still have a space for insertion.

**MAN:** Do you think that's like a kind of like you get alternative film festivals or independent experimental?

**SHAMIM MOMIN:** It may well turn out that way.

**MAN:** Because there doesn't seem to be that much in terms of the games environment at the moment.

**SHAMIM MOMIN:** What's interesting to me about it is that a lot of times these communities are in synch with one another as opposed to being in opposition. Speaking of the Hollywood arena for film, and the alternative mode for film for a long time were really defined in opposition to one another. These artists themselves characterized it that way, whereas now, just in terms of the culture, there is a greater slippage between those positions. You can position yourself within that still and find space to create these interventions, as well as, on the outside. I don't know if I think of there being a functional outside the way that I think that used to work.

**WOMAN:** I have a question regarding the content of the mythological games and the origin of that content being discussed in terms of those games like "Lara Croft", that was made into a movie, or the other way around, like the "Matrix" that was made into a video game. Do you think the creators of these games have more of a scholarly background about myth, or is it more of that mythic impulse that you were speaking about that's more of an unconscious thing that Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell talk about?

**SHAMIM MOMIN:** I do think that one state of post-modern culture is just the availability of information that we have, and that there's a kind of mythological knowledge that we have access to with much greater ease. Beyond that the idea of like mythic constructs is again, as I meant to point out, really something that is integral to human history, to the idea of storytelling and investigation of self, to the investigation of your position in the world and so on. I think a lot of those creators certainly do. I think that the freedom with which they mix and match them, and they become these sort of uber-myth worlds or uber-mythic worlds or

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

things like that is a good example of it. This happens a lot in fantasy novels as well, and cyberpunk literature, where the words are semi-suggestive of something you know, of an ethnicity or of a language or of a space in time or so, but not exactly. They're kind of morphed words, morphed characters, morphed like aesthetics essentially, that are mixed and matched together to create new but old worlds simultaneously. "Blade Runner" is a great example of an earlier one. Any of that literature or even the "Matrix" which pulls on a lot of baroque aesthetics that are themselves based in earlier cultures, and so on and so forth, is an example. They do this kind of mixing of things that we associate with an idea of mythological structure a lot. Going back to what you said about video games being made into movies or vice versa is that it really seems only successful to me when films are made into games actually. I can't think of a movie that was made out of a game that made kind of sense. A large commercial Hollywood movie that was made on a video game that was directly developed out of a video game that captures what is interesting to me about the game. It's hard to translate video game characters because they have no emotive depth and subtlety of action or anything like that. To a degree, I think it's also because then you lose a lot of what I was talking about, of first of all the agency of the viewer in creating the story and controlling the space. You lose having some true immersive environment that they're used to in that capacity with the video game. Fluid entry points (the way in which you engage a game is totally different than the sort of linearity of a movie) are lost. It's very difficult to translate on to the other, whereby "Lord of the Rings" video game is actually pretty great. It's like partly because it can take those multiple levels of different worlds into one. Of course, this is like a literary form transferred into film, and then transferred into a video game. There's the multiplicity of media transference going on there, but it makes more sense as a video game actually. It is always about these multiple levels of worlds, so as much as I love the movie, in its structure, there are elements just basic to the imaginative realm that you can have in a video game.

**RACHEL GREENE:** One of the things I've learned from this panel is that the kind of aesthetics of hip-hop and the machinations of hip-hop are, at least for Cory and Anne-Marie, pretty interesting and rich topics. Few of the games we looked at dealt with hip-hop as a sort of topic and as a kind of source for a game. I think that was pretty fascinating. I'm wondering about the formal structures of hip-hop, where there are a lot of shout-outs to other artists, or where there is a kind of dialogue between artists, which happens within the work, and of course sampling. Was that what motivated you to turn it into a game exploration? What is the kind of link between hip-hop and your game, and the structure of your game?

**ANNE-MARIE SCHLEINER:** It was inspired by the kind of combat situations that seemed ideal to turn into a turn-based game. I was really interested in the idea of sampling and how you could start with the same source material, and get a different effect. Each level in the game is a different song, but first one player

## KILLER INSTINCT PANEL DISCUSSION

and then the second player plays the same song over again. You have a chance to rhyme differently and to use different sound effects with the same source material, but get a different result in the end. That's something that's a big part of art in popular culture, whether it's working in music, hip-hop sampling or also in modifying computer games, being that you're working with sampling. You're working with systems that are already there. You're manipulating them, and it's a dialogue between you the active artist or musician and what's already there, and been made before by other artists and musicians.

**MAN:** I'm really interested in your work as a curator. It's sort of a three-part question, I think. First, do you sometimes just initiate curatorial projects of your own accord, rather than doing things in response to some opportunity? Do you see much of a relationship between your curatorial practice and your artistic practice within your work? Do they blur? It seems like there is a strong relationship between what you do and the curriculum Henry Jenkins is developing at MIT in comparative media studies. Have you been involved with that program at all? Are you aware of it?

**ANNE-MARIE SCHLEINER:** I never thought that I would do curating. I studied art. I have an art degree from CADRE Computers and Art Design Research and Education at San Jose State University. It happened intuitively, because there was this gap as far as the game modifications. In a way, I felt like a curator but also like I was tech support. I would give some of the artists who were using the game editing tools, like technical advice on how to use them if I'd used them before, because as an artist I had also worked on these before. There's also something very different about curating for the Internet versus curating for a museum or a gallery. You can do things a lot more, faster. It's more like a kind of filter feeding process, where you are aware of things that are happening online and can focus on a certain topic that seems interesting at the time. I found that as an artist and not just as a curator, I tend to always want to work in collaborations. For example, with "Velvet Strike," it feels sort of like being a curator with my other projects, because lots of people contributed to the project, and contributed spray paints and feedback. With this hip-hop game, different artists made songs for each level. I'm a little confused about where one role begins and where it ends between artist and curator. I'm shifting right now a bit more into the artist role and doing a little bit less writing than I have in the past, which always seemed to go with curating more, being the writing about these trends in popular culture that were happening in relation to art as well.

**ALEX GALLOWAY:** Thank you very much.

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