

2018 R-CADE SYMPOSIUM: *TECHNIQUE*

9:00 **Welcoming Remarks**

9:15 - 10:15 **Console Modding As A Cultural Technique**

Concordia University

This panel considers the subject of hardware case-modding in terms of contemporary German cultural technique theory (especially after the work of Bernhard Siegert), Actor-Network Theory and media history (after Carolyn Marvin). Our particular object of study is the Nintendo Super Famicom console, currently in the spotlight because of the overwhelming popularity of the Nintendo "Mini Classic" models on the commercial and speculation markets.

The literature on computer case-modding remains far too small; one of the major contributors to it, Bart Simon, is a member of this panel. But there is virtually nothing whatsoever written on video game console modding - a situation this panel plans to address. Part of a larger, ongoing project (working title: the Cultural Life of Signal Processing), this panel will first modify, and then theorize the modification, of a series of NES Super Famicom consoles for improved RGB signal output.

The work will be conducted in the Concordia Residual Media Depot, home of Canada's largest institutional video console collection and the largest collection of modified consoles in the world. This project will allow us to undertake something we have never done before: a horizontal study of different hardware modifications to one type of console (though we have conducted a similar study with softmodded Wiis, and will utilize some of the methodology from that study in this project).

We are more curious about the way that chains of operations (the sourcing of esoteric parts, disassembly, soldering, Dremeling, video-making etc.) harden into techniques that are in turn deployed to reify community norms as we are about what is objectively the "best" way to conduct such a modification. Nevertheless, we have a scholarly imperative to undertake this work in order to better understand the operations involved. Our working thesis is that the primary motivation for console modding is a conspicuous display of technique that can be converted into cultural capital in a discursive community ("expertise," in Carolyn Marvin's sense) rather than an objective improvement in signal quality. Who holds expertise becomes the basis for determining who can speak authoritatively and who can't; for whose opinions matter, and

Robert Lestón will approach pinball from a historical perspective in the way that it relates to the years that pinball was banned from public consumption from the 40s to the 70s. The largest cities in the U.S.-New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles-all outlawed pinball. The war against pinball corresponded with the years after the second world war, and the destruction of the "pin games" as they were sometimes called. While raids against pinball machines eventually came to a close, in other countries, such as Mexico, pinball machines continue to be destroyed by police. In Mexico, tragamonedas continue to be outlawed and raids as recently as 2017 have taken place in various municipalities. Upon the completion of this discussion, Lestón will return to the object at hand and discuss the compositional elements of pinball as a way of discerning the imaginary perspective that saw and sees pinball machines as morally bankrupt.

Lisa Lynn will present on her use of pinball machines as a way of getting Newark public school 7th graders more actively involved in their social studies curriculum. By having her students select and storyboard moments in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Empires and then overlaying those storyboards onto pre-made cardboard tabletop games (the commercially available Pinbox 3000s), she hopes they will see how moments in history can be enacted through alternative discourses by making 12 separate fully functioning games. Exploring historical topics through the multimodal aspects of pinball requires a deeper application of knowledge as students must wrestle with issues of visual representation, consumerism, historical positionality, and cultural critique.

5:15 - 6:00 **Overflow + Closing Remarks**

Reception

If interested! Jim Brown and Jillian Sayre will host a reception at their nearby home at the close of the symposium.

machines play a crucial role in grounding video games in a world we recognize as similar to our own, while simultaneously reinforcing the consumerist values of modern capitalism. The research draws on the Video Game Soda Machine Project, a site maintained by the author that has cataloged over 1,500 soda machines across every major platform and genre.

Matt Mundell will program variations to the game Pong that other panelists will analyze. Mundell will produce several modifications, including a modification that replaces key visuals with unexpected elements and a modification that removes all symbolism and preserves the game's numbers. Additionally, as other panelists interact with the modifications, Mundell will produce additional modifications to manipulate players' experiences with game symbolism and skeuomorphs.

11:30 - 1:15 **Lunch**

Exhibition of Concordia x Rutgers student projects from a Wii console modding workshop on 4/19. Notes on technique from Grant Wythoff (Center for Humanities and Information, Penn State)

1:15 - 2:30 **Digital Rituals**

University of Waterloo

Jason Lajoie, "The Age of Brogress: Rituals of vigor in physical culture 1890/2018" In his 1900 book, *Ideal Physical Culture*, professional strongman William Bankier (AKA 'Apollo') ambiguously describes an electric 'muscle developer' he had invented. Speculating on its physical and cultural functions, my project invokes questions about how muscles serve to underwrite claims to masculinity in the present century by excavating their cultural function at the turn of the previous century.

Julie Funk, "Material Melancholies: Smartphone Anxieties and A Lover's Discourse." This project refigures the smartphone as an object of love as read through Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*. The result is an artifact of speculative media theory: a pillow with a pocket for your smartphone and a simulated beating heart for your peace of mind.

Matt Frazer, "Techniques of the Media Lab Technician"

My hope is to initiate a conversation on the nature of the collaboration between the technician and the artist/humanist. What is the technician's role in this partnership? Should the artist/humanist be expected to take on all of the technical labour? Should the lab technician exist at all? These questions about techniques in the lab are as much existential as they are logistical.

Andy Myles, "Reflecting on Instagram Fitness"

Social media complicates rituals of physical fitness, intensifying vanity and exhibitionism while creating opportunities to reframe the experience of being

in the gym. I reflect on launching a fitness Instagram, attempting to insert myself into #olympicweightlifting while trying to remain aware of problematic narratives @fitnessindustrialcomplex.

Phil Miletic, "Fun-tography: The Game Boy Camera and the Rituals of Play in Photography"

I argue that the Game Boy Camera's "fun-tography" illuminates photography's engagement with "play," materiality, and social formations. I juxtapose two periods, Kodak in the early 1900s and Japanese Purikura in the 1990s, to present the ludic engagement with photography as "doing" or "what is" (Sandbye) rather than "what-has-been" (Barthes)."

Marcel O'Gorman, "Resistor Case: Making Media Theory in the Critical Media Lab" This workshop will involve participants in the making of a Resistor Case (<http://resistorcase.org>), a DIY smartphone pouch inspired by media theory, cognitive science, and activist art.

2:45 - 3:45 **Remix as Queer Worldbuilding**

University of Maryland, College Park

What are we supposed to do with all of this stuff? Our panel will explore this question using the technique of remix as a means for queer world-building. We define remix as recontextualizing, re-valuing, and repurposing hegemonic materializations. Often, what is perceived as and made "durable" is undergirded by hegemonic ideologies, while the queer, counter-hegemonic is somehow "ephemeral." What matters is allowed to materialize in the infrastructures of everyday life. For instance, we continue to build housing oriented toward the cishet, white, middle-class nuclear family; we continue to acquire more things to affirm the identities that move us through our lives and the world - babies, publications, cell phones. Queer remix is the technique that appropriates these hegemonic materializations, remaking them to express different logics of being, making, doing, caring. Taking up R-CADE's imperative for hands-on inquiry, motivated by the heuristic value of process, we believe in forms of knowledge that can only be uncovered through play, experimentation, and vulnerability.

DB Bauer approaches remix through computer-assisted design (CAD) and 3D printing. 3D printing databases, such as thingiverse.com, have a troubling relationship with androcentrism and misogyny. Further, CAD animation software often operates on and perpetuates hegemonic binary logics of sex, gender, and sexuality. These born-digital heteropatriarchal ideologies, then, materialize both in virtual and "real" space via 3D designs and prints. In response, DB provides a queer remix of CAD and 3D printing tools and software, the digital object, and the 3D printed object. They will create miniature, 3D printed sculptures to demonstrate the kinds of queer objects that result from queer remix.

Eva Peskin contributes an experiment in thinking with that place where all the stuff goes when it is no longer useful: the landfill. The landfill is itself a remix, a technology for reconstituting the material slough of everyday life in space, over time, via chemical decay. Approaching these queer assemblages, where the abject and mundane come into intimate, deep time proximity, and where proximity is itself contaminating, Eva asks what can be learned from an archive of trash by constructing one herself. Combining ritual, sculpture, and ecology, Eva will build a model landfill, setting up public collection sites and inviting queer community members to dispose of the material traces of that which has no further use.

D'evaB's contribution to the panel is an embodied/enacted experiment in process, creativity, and collaboration between the human panelists (DB and Eva). She is a queer remix of production, borne of creative collaboration rather than sexual reproduction, a multiply mediated third subjectivity. A voice, an animation, a monitor, a hybrid researcher, D'evaB asks, "what happens when we must theorize over both 3D objects and landfills?" D'evaB, as a remix experiment herself, explores this work on a larger scale, while also modeling a new approach to academic collaboration and interdisciplinary, hands-on research.

4:00 - 5:00 **Pinball: Four Perspectives**

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Ron Brooks will transform a pinball machine he originally created for an MLA panel by adding electronic pop bumpers, led lights, improved flippers, and electronic targets. This transformation of what had previously been an analog tabletop machine should extend scholarly conversations about procedural rhetoric applied to older forms of gaming. For Brooks, the central questions are: "what can we learn about procedural rhetoric and philosophical carpentry (Bogost) by engaging in literal carpentry? How does the intersection of the analog and the digital complicate the way that we think about digital making alone? Finally, how do carpentry, rhetoric, and aesthetics intersect as techniques for building?"

Drawing on interviews, **Geoffrey V. Carter** will offer an overview of pinball maker and designer Python Anghelo (1954-2014), who not only left an indelible mark on the Williams Corporation, but-according to pinball lore-his proto-type for a (supposedly) X-rated pinball machine (Zingy Bingy) led to the collapse of the entire pinball industry in 1997. Anghelo's self-aware interest in sexual themes and their narrative potential pinball finds further expression in his widely celebrated Bride of Pinbot machine (1991), though sexuality and narrative elements are also important in his early efforts like Big Guns (1987) and Bad Cats (1989). By highlighting the storytelling potential of pinball, especially with regards to the problematic depictions of women-this presentation seeks a fresh look at a misogynistic artform that is sometimes easy to dismiss.

whose don't. Such questions are relevant both within the technically unskilled halls of the humanities, and the theoretically and politically unsophisticated communities of video game hardware enthusiasts. We want to be able to address both groups, which have different, but complementary, strengths and weaknesses.

- Darren Wershler
- Bart Simon
- Alex Custodio

10:30 - 11:30 **Skeuomorphs in Classic and Contemporary Games**

Marshall University

Tech critics have extensively discussed skeuomorphs, or nonfunctional design features that reference previously functional tools, pointing out the shift to flat design and return to skeuomorphism with smart watches and other digital technologies. However, little attention has been given to skeuomorphs in arcade and video games. If, as N. Katherine Hayles writes, "Like a Janus figure, the skeuomorph looks to past and future, simultaneously reinforcing and undermining both," how do skeuomorphs affect our gaming experiences and, in particular, our understanding of time?

This panel will examine how visual, aural, and technical references to the past made through skeuomorphic design shape awareness of time during gameplay and when analyzing gaming. The focus on temporality will reveal which values in digital culture have persisted and which have disappeared. Panelists will attend to the symposium's topic by considering how skeuomorphs shape the rituals of gameplay and whether gameplay itself can become skeuomorphic.

Lori Thompson and **Kristen Lillvis** will focus on skeuomorphs in pinball machines. They will examine how the gaming industry uses pinball skeuomorphs in game design. Which pinball skeuomorphs appear and where? Do they affect the understanding of the story and the function of the game? Thompson and Lillvis will concentrate on gameplay as well as hands-on engagement with pinball machines; they will manipulate pinball machine hardware to modify the sounds and images of the game.

Allison Carey and **Kristin Steele** will examine the gradual gendering of video games. Many early games, such as Pong and Venture, were ungendered, as was early game hardware. Second-generation video game consoles included popular games whose protagonists were of ambiguous gender. Questions for consideration include: At what point did protagonists develop distinct genders (besides the big pink bow on Ms. Pacman)? At what point did controllers begin to be sold in pink and blue (or red)?

Jason Morrisette will do a case study of soda machines in video games. Why do soda machines appear so frequently in video games? What purposes do they serve? What values do they represent? This research argues that soda