

austinchronicle.com

THE AUSTIN

CHRONICLE

# THE FUTURE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

A Comprehensive Guide to the Internet Tubes®

INTERACTIVE SUPPLEMENT  
SXSW  
2011

my god, it's full of bars



# Congratulations!

## You are now the proud owner of your future.

Feeling overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of the 2011 South by Southwest Interactive Conference? We're here to help.

First, take a moment to familiarize yourself with your own operating manual; topics range from obsolescence to the next big thing. Once the conference kicks off March 11, our support staff will be available to guide you through the Festival experience via ongoing reportage from the ground and 24/7 on Twitter and the *Chronicle's* Picture in Picture blog ([austinchronicle.com/pip](http://austinchronicle.com/pip)).

Are you a joystick junkie? "This Week's Waste of Time" columnist and *Chron* Gaming Editor James Renovitch (@renovitch) is your guy. How about a TV and new-media buff? Follow Belinda Acosta @ChronicleTVEye or on her Facebook "TV Eye" page. If free stuff sends your salivary glands into overdrive, then our resident swag hunter Richard Whittaker (@YorkshireTX) has a hot tip for you. For government and social-media issues, we've got Our Man in City Hall, Wells Dunbar (@CityHallHustle). And for the two or three of you still rockin' a Nokia 3210, you'll find a kindred Luddite spirit in Kimberley Jones (@ChronKimJones).

Happy Fest'ing. And remember, the *Chronicle* is standing by.

## Tech Support

### 4 REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Topics covered: **4chan**, **hive mind**, **hentai**, **the WELL**, **DDoS**, **Guy Fawkes**, **bad Eighties pop**, **letting Internet freedom ring**

### 6 OPERATING CONDITIONS

Topics covered: **Monday-morning dread**, **coworking**, **the No Asshole Rule**, **Skype (watercooler) chat**

### 8 TO REDUCE RISK OF INJURY

Topics covered: **IAD**, **a new evolution**, **TV is good for you**, and **so are the Internetz**

### 12 TOOLS NOT INCLUDED

Topics covered: **geotemporal visualization**, **Google Flu Trends**, **PleaseRobMe.com**, **biomimicry**, **FLOR carpet tiling**

### 14 COMPATIBILITY

Topics covered: **gamification**, **the victory condition**, **walking uphill both ways**, **gamestorming**

### 16 SPEAK TO AN EXPERT

Topics covered: **Watson**, **Charles Yu's science-fictional universe**, **sexbots**

### 18 FOR HOUSEHOLD USE ONLY

Topics covered: **food porn**, **from blog to book**, **vegan soup swap**, **an edible dynamic**

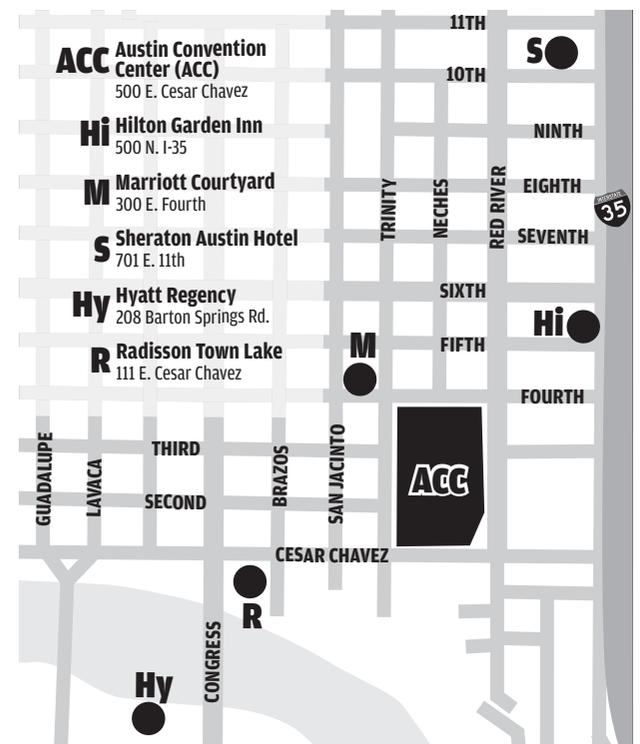
### 20 CHECK FOR UPDATES

Topics covered: **citizen journalists**, **drug cartels**, **WeOwnTV**, **the oral tradition in Sierra Leone**

### 23 CHECK WARRANTY EXPIRATION DATE

Topics covered: **obsolescence**, **Bank 2.0**, **M-Pesa**, **horse-drawn carriages**, **Murphy's nth Law of Computing**

## Venue Map



# WELCOME 2 AUSTIN

# GRAB SOME BUDS



Find us at  [Facebook.com/budweiser](https://www.facebook.com/budweiser)

© 2010 Anheuser-Busch, Inc. Budweiser® Beer, St. Louis, MO 09B

*Budweiser*

ENJOY RESPONSIBLY

# Anonymity: Never Gonna Give You Up

## Is 4chan Internet freedom's best hope?

BY MARC SAVLOV

While Mideast despots domino under the combined weight of seething wetware rage and interlinked online connective tissues such as Twitter, Facebook, WikiLeaks, and the iPhone (the official lightsaber of the oppressed, as it turns out), Christopher "moot" Poole's 4chan site has gone relatively unremarked upon. Which is fascinating for the simple reason that 4chan – a bare-bones image-board website a then-15-year-old Poole started on a whim in 2003 – has since grown by orders of magnitude into one of (and quite possibly *the*) most prolific centers of free and utterly unfettered speech and imagery the world has ever seen. With more than 12 million monthly visitors and some 700,000 posts *per day*, Poole's teenage experiment – and its forthcoming, currently beta-testing iteration, Canvas – is mammoth in scope, influence, and power. Most importantly, it has remained, over the course of its eight-year life, completely anonymous. There are no login protocols, no archiving, no snaky data-mining, no nothing – save ever-scrolling lines of rank juvenile humor, outrageously scatological commentary, LULZ, LOLcats, and porn. Lots and lots of porn.

Ladies and gentlemen (and script-kiddies and phreaks and hacktivists), I have come to praise 4chan, not to bury it. It may seem to some an anachronistic throwback to the unruly Wild West days of the Web – pre-YouTube, pre-Facebook, pre-Twitter – and, of course, it is. But increasingly – in the face of Facebook, the selling of personal online data, and other concerns of individuals' privacy – so is the First Amendment. The right to free speech without censorship (self- or otherwise), minus the current, exponentially expanding dread of seeing your long-ago online rants sifted through and

replayed at some later, far more embarrassing date, is a rapidly eroding given. The right to privacy. The right to be Anonymous. The right to say what you mean – and say it mean. □

"There's been a big controversy going on for years and years about how anonymous people should be able to be," says Austin-based Internet culture expert (and sometime *Chronicle* contributor) Jon Lebkowsky. "Is it okay to have this complete anonymity, and is this anonymity a virtue or a vice? In some cases it's one, and in some cases it's the other.

"On the other hand, you have people who see anonymity as the way to escape accountability. Traditionally, in online communities going back to the WELL [Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link], the concept of anonymity was not allowed. They always made sure the identity of every participant on the WELL was clearly established. In some systems you could be anonymous online but the system itself validated your identity through something like, say, a credit card, the point being that at some point you could be held accountable for your actions and be removed from the system if you misbehaved."

## Registration Required

To crib from *The Amazing Spider-Man* (and why not? This is the anime-mad 4chan we're talking about), with great power comes great responsibility, right? Well, no, not really. Poole's initial "rules" for 4chan have long since been supplanted by "Rules of the Internet", scripted by "Anonymous." They include Rule 1: "Do not talk about /b/" ("b" being the "random board" on 4chan – essentially, as Poole noted in a recent TED speech, the beating heart and soul of the site); Rule 3: "We are Anonymous"; Rule 34: "If it exists, there is porn of it"; and my personal favorite, Rule 20: "Nothing is to be taken seriously."

You'd think that last one would be self-apparent in a context that, as I type this, includes an animated .gif file of a mouthless human organ with the words "Hello Kidney" written in Sanrio's instantly recognizable tweeners cursive below, but no.

When the online hive mind that calls itself "Anonymous" launched a series of distributed denial-of-service attacks on PayPal, Mastercard, and Visa as a means of voicing their disgust with those companies' timidity regarding the acceptance of payments to WikiLeaks, the FBI (along with police in the UK) didn't even bother to smirk. On Thursday, Jan. 27, they executed



COURTESY OF NICK BILTON

Christopher "moot" Poole

**Here's an idea: 4chan is the Burning Man of the Internet. It's the great and secret show where you can be anyone you want to be – anything you want to be – with no social blowback or Monday-morning shame.**

more than 40 search warrants on people suspected of being involved with Anonymous' pro-WikiLeaks DDoS attacks, exhibiting zero comprehension of Rule 20 and even less of a sense of humor than their man at Area 51, Agent Fox Mulder (who, you'll recall, frequently utilized the services of the extremely Anonymous-esque Lone Gunmen). When life imitates art, apparently, real people get their doors kicked down in the middle of the night. And that makes 4chan, the great bastion of fakery, prankery, and anonymity, all the more relevant.

It should be noted here that Christopher Poole and his creation (based originally on a template from the Japanese anime-fan Futaba board, [www.2chan.net](http://www.2chan.net), by the way) have no connection to the group known as Anonymous, other than the fact that presumed members, allies, and those interested in the goings-on of Anonymous frequent 4chan anonymously. (Or *do* they? Mwahahahaha, etc.)

The important point to bring into focus here is that 4chan is as much an ever-growing performance art piece, in real time, as it is a place for pale-skinned, manga-obsessed teenagers to wax enthusiastic about their next cosplay outing. (Let's not get started on the whole tentacular tangent that is *hentai*.) Total anonymity – especially in a political and cultural climate as worm-riddled with future-fear and 24/7 unease as ours is at present – is a powerful, potentially limitless can of social spray paint. Banksy may not be on 4chan these days, but I'd like to think he once was, and that Ken Kesey, Wavy Gravy, and the whole of the Merry Pranksters would surely approve.

There's a revolution going on, people, and as V said (paraphrasing Emma Goldman), "A revolution without dancing is a revolution not worth having!"

Here's an idea: 4chan is the Burning Man of the Internet. It's the great and secret show where you can be anyone you want to be – anything you want to be – with no social blowback or Monday-morning shame. Your boss will not see you dancing naked to the KLF while on DMT atop an RV in the midst of the moonlit, moonlike *playa* that is the Black Rock Desert. Your mom will never find your stash of *Playboys* because, you know, it's *online*, and you're not really you – at least not the you your mom thinks she knows – when you're on 4chan. (And who reads *Playboy* these days, anyway?) You can vent hate speech and love speech in equal measure – if civilization has proven anything, it's that the two tend to cancel each other out eventually – or sit alone in your room, *otaku*-style, and lurk and lurk and lurk (which is, in its own solitary way, a form of performance art in and of itself).

Or, as Lebkowsky puts it, "With a space like 4chan, you go there to be relatively free and be able to just kick out the jams. It's kind of a mash-up of Twitter and testosterone, isn't it?"

Anonymity allows identity to exhale.

Derek Woodgate, chief creative officer of the South by Southwest Interactive über-party Plutopia Productions and famed futurist, concurs.

"What 4chan has done, and given where it came from – a Japanese driver – is remarkable. It's become an integral part of the collective consciousness, and specifically that part of the collective consciousness that *wants* to be a radical, that *wants* to be active and socially and politically aware, that *wants* to be *all the things we want to be* without necessarily everyone knowing about it. Nobody wants every aspect of their being known publicly. And so



Jon Lebkowsky

I think [4chan] is a really strong, necessary thing to have."

Interestingly, the vast majority of the collective consciousness isn't even aware of 4chan's memetic impact. Your LOLcat-loving Aunt Martha would probably implode on sight were she to take a gander at /b/, and how many people watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade actually got the joke when the 4chan-loathed UK Eighties pop mediocrastar Rick Astley "Rickrolled" his way out of the *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* float? (And in case Aunt Martha is reading: Rickrolling would be the meme initiated on 4chan by which users were redirected from whatever they were searching for to Rick Astley clips – which very nearly had the horrifically unwanted consequence of creating an actual Astley comeback.)

□

So that's 4chan: the freedom to be you and me (or Marlo Thomas, or moot). What then, is Canvas? The second coming of 4chan, or something more? We'll let Christopher "moot" Poole, via e-mail, explain:

"[4chan and Canvas are] similar in that they're both destination communities with a focus on sharing images. We want Canvas to be the best place to share, collaborate, and play with media. We're starting with images and comments, but will be expanding it in the coming months."

Backed by some of the biggest names in venture capital – among them Andreessen Horowitz, SV Angel, Lerer Ventures, Founder Collective, and Joshua Schachter – Poole, at the ripe young age of 22, appears poised to take on the increasingly thorny issue of Internet anonymity and identity in a whole new way (that, for now, looks an awful lot like the same old way).

Ultimately, as Poole e-mails, "Anonymous contribution allows for an arguably more authentic conversation. When people are unencumbered by identity, they share in a way that they wouldn't on a site like Facebook. This isn't the only way commenting should be done online, but it's certainly very valuable. My concern is that if we continue to move towards a state of having one or two persistent identities online, we'd lose an important way of communicating."

Here's to divesting ourselves, if only for a little while, of our daily grind identities. With 4chan, and presumably with Canvas as well, all bets are off and all masks are on – including that of Anonymous' beloved Guy Fawkes.

### RELATED EVENT

**Christopher Poole: Sunday Keynote**  
Sunday, March 13, 2pm, ACC Ballroom D

# Flatstock 29

march 16-19.2011 austin tx

Austin Convention Center Level 1, Ballrooms A, B, C

Brought to you by:

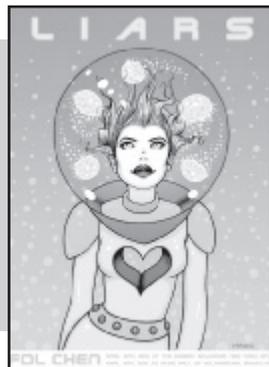


Flatstock 29 will display the works of more than 100 artists from across North America and the globe. All styles, colors and techniques of collectible posters are for sale by the artists who create them. The exhibition is free and open to the public.

About API: The American Poster Institute is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to serving the poster artist community and promoting the art form. The Flatstock shows provide the American Poster Institute with a way to present poster artists collectively while showcasing the breadth of styles they represent.



Douze



Tara McPherson



Adam Pobiak

★ Scheduled Maintenance  
30, 60, 90K  
★ Tune-ups  
★ Transmissions  
★ Exhaust  
★ Collision, Paint & Body Shop

# JEEP Masters

326-3555  
3822 S. CONGRESS AVE.

**YOUR BEST ALTERNATIVE TO DEALER SERVICE**

**WE'VE MOVED!**

[WWW.JEEPMASTERS.COM](http://WWW.JEEPMASTERS.COM)

## Pass the Time with this Twin Liquors INTERACTIVE AD



### GeoLocator

See that star? That's where you are! This print ad can actually pinpoint your location.\* You're in **Twin Liquors'** hometown where we opened our first store in 1937. \*Accuracy: within about 650K sq. ft. Sorry, this technology does not work outside of the Austin Metro Area.



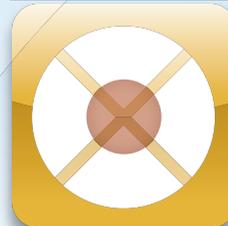
### Direct-O-Scope

Tear out this ad, roll it up and look through one end. Chances are there will be a **Twin Liquors** somewhere off in the distance in any direction that you look. For expert wine advice **go that way.**



### Social Lubricant

Everyone likes to meet people, right? Here's how to **break the ice.** Fill out the form above and pass this ad to the **guy/girl** behind you in line while you're waiting for the panel/showcase.



### NoseKnower

At a party and want to know the name of the wine you've been served? Drip a drop on the X above and bring it to **Twin Liquors** for olfactory analysis by our **Certified Wine Authorities.**



### Old School Map

Remember back in the day when you actually had to follow a paper map to find where you were going? Now you can relive those 8-Bit days with this analog map to our **downtown location.**



### Snap-A-Map

These QR thingies are all the rage, aren't they? Honestly the best way to find any one of our **60+ Central Texas stores** is to visit our **online store locator** by scanning the code above.



**TWIN LIQUORS**  
FINE WINE & SPIRITS

**AUTHENTICALLY AUSTIN**  
[TWINLIQUORS.COM](http://TWINLIQUORS.COM)

# The World Is Your Cubicle

## Making it work, geography of no consideration

BY NORA ANKRUM

Here's a noble cause: finding a cure for Mondays. Sarah Cooke, founder of local consulting firm Fig Strategy, says her "personal mission" since high school has been "to see that as many people as possible Monday morning – when that alarm clock goes off for work – don't groan." As Cooke plans to discuss during her SXSW Interactive panel, *Go Virtual: Save Money, Sustain People and Planet*, technology is allowing companies to break away from traditional ways of doing business, moving many toward a "distributed working" model that can eliminate the office altogether, along with that Monday-morning feeling of dread.

The trend toward long-distance working began as a strategy for "recruiting and retaining talent," says Cooke, as industries anticipated a creative class shortage and the entrance of "digital natives" into the work force. For Gen Y workers, "it isn't about the corner office," says Cooke. "It's more about, 'I want to be able to work from whatever country I'm in because I've got things I want to do as a person.'" But then, she says, "The economic downturn made it about money, because it became about real estate ... a huge bottom-line expense."

From large corporations to law firms to the federal government, organizations are following the trend in droves, says Cooke, because distributed working can save "billions of dollars a year."

Still, despite its appeal, the work-from-whatever-country-you're-in model isn't "all flowers and puppies," as Cooke puts it. Managers often dread the loss of control, others fear the technology necessary to keep everyone on the same page, and most, on some level, mourn the loss of community that otherwise goes hand in hand with proximity. Many of the participants at SXSW this year have dealt with these challenges in some way, including Web developers Jason Lengstorf and Thomas Sturge, who are heading up a panel called *I've Never Met My Coworkers: Running International Teams*.

Lengstorf formed Web development firm Copter Labs with Sturge and three other developers he'd met through social networks and Twitter. Lengstorf plans to talk about "creating a sense of community as opposed to five dudes who chat on the Internet" and will share "the tools we use to keep track of projects – how we make sure that five guys across eight time zones are all on the same page. Though they all live in different cities, they have gone beyond a 'commodity-based' relationship in which I get the project, then I send somebody a task, they complete it, and then I get an invoice, and that's the entirety of the communication," says Lengstorf. Communication was particularly challenging

at first, given the visual nature of the company's work. "Whereas it would take about 10 seconds to point to an image and say, 'This is what I don't like,'" says Lengstorf, conversations instead sounded more like, "Well, the weird blue thing with the border, can you make the border less this?"

The team took a counterintuitive approach to resolving the issue, confining conversations primarily to Skype chat and other texting methods; they now complete most projects "98 percent through e-mail or through various project management software" such as 37signals, says Lengstorf. "We were using the phones as a crutch at first, so we would end up having a lot of conversations that would just wander. ... So we just decided to kind of force it." The sink-or-swim approach forced both clearer writing – because "you don't get the chance to watch somebody's facial expression or gauge the tone of their voice," says Lengstorf – and a better understanding of each person's "communication style," allowing the team to find its own rhythm. Now, he says, he has met some of his co-workers in person, and it "was surprisingly not weird," although, he adds, "part of it is a product of the fact that I'm 25."

## Operating Conditions

Technological hurdles pose more formidable challenges for long-established companies accustomed to doing business face-to-face, but Cooke makes the case that the trade-off is worth it. She points to *The No Asshole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't*, Robert I. Sutton's book about how organizations are affected by people who overtalk, brownnose, or exhibit any number of all-too-



Jason Lengstorf



JOHN ANDERSON

*You Wouldn't Know Her, She Lives in London/  
You Wouldn't Know Him, He Lives in Texas*

familiar negative workplace behaviors. As a happy consequence of new technologies, says Cooke, "What I'm finding is that the asshole behavior can be contained." She points both to simple examples, such as teleconferencing equipment that naturally discourages more than one person from talking at a time, as well as more advanced technologies that change how people subconsciously perceive one another. Some companies, says Cooke, are "working in virtual worlds" where they interact with one another as avatars that can be "taller or be stronger or have a fuller head of hair – those things we react to on a biological level, not necessarily consciously."

In an attempt to explore the biological side of relationships sustained by technology, local theatre maven Beth Burns is taking her decade of improv experience with the Groundlings to a whole new level in her newest production, *You Wouldn't Know Him, He Lives in Texas*. Burns is collaborating with London-based director Mimi Poskitt to put on a play about long-distance lovers – one in London, one in Austin – who sit down for a live Skype session with each other. (See "Long-Distance Theatre," p.7.)

Burns and Poskitt will demonstrate some of their long-distance rehearsal techniques during their panel, *Artistic Collaborations via Skype: Turning Distance Into Drama*, and will talk about the themes explored in the play. "The nature of the theatre piece itself," says Burns, "is about what makes a relationship real ... and also the nature of honesty: What can be revealed, what can be hidden in the technology?" She has confronted the same themes herself, having found, for instance, that she and Poskitt – who met online – both felt unable to commit to the project until they'd met in person. "When you're working on Skype, even if you shove your faces up as high as you can, you can never really make eye contact," she notes. "You can either look at

## RELATED PANELS

### Artistic Collaborations via Skype:

#### Turning Distance Into Drama

Saturday, March 12, 9:30am,  
ACC, Room 18ABCD

### I've Never Met My Coworkers: Running International Teams

Saturday, March 12, 11am, Hilton, Salon D

### Disconnecting the Dots:

#### How Our Devices Are Divisive

Sunday, March 13, 9:30am, ACC, Room 6AB

### The Evolving Workplace: Environments, Methods, Trends and Management

Sunday, March 13, 12:30pm,  
Marriott Courtyard

### Go Virtual: Save Money, Sustain People and Planet

Monday, March 14, 12:30pm,  
ACC, Room 5ABC

the camera or you can look at the face, but you can't really do both." Admittedly, she says, "I think it's a false sense of security that you get from meeting somebody in person, but we'll go with it – intuition and all that."

"Having a beer with someone is still one of the most connecting things you can do," agrees Roy Christopher, a communication studies doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin. Still, he says, "the nature of being human is having technology." Christopher is currently writing a book about human relationships with technology, which he'll discuss in his panel, *Disconnecting the Dots: How Our Devices Are Divisive*. "Every new technology falls on a continuum between obstruction and augmentation," he says, and as such it poses unexpected paradoxes. For instance, "Everyone says 'location doesn't matter' – but it makes location all the more important because you can choose to be anywhere."

## LONG-DISTANCE THEATRE POSITION OF THE SPEAKERS MAY AFFECT THE QUALITY OF THEIR OPERATION

BY ROBERT FAIRES

It all started when I submitted a Facebook friend request to Elizabeth Watson. Minutes after accepting, she sent me a note wishing me and my wife a happy belated Valentine's Day. Since then, I've followed this London resident and her Austin-based sweetheart, Ryan Peterson, as they've eyed each other's profile pictures, swapped YouTube videos, and traded the kind of lovey-dovey messages that only people in the early throes of romance proclaim in public, in anticipation of a party they're throwing with her in the UK and him in the States, where both sides communicate in real time via Skype.

But here's the thing: Elizabeth Watson isn't really someone I know. In point of fact, she doesn't exist – and neither does her Lone Star boyfriend or their long-distance dalliance. They are the fictional protagonists of *You Wouldn't Know Her, She Lives in London/You Wouldn't Know Him, He Lives in Texas*, a work of theatre that hauls the ancient art form into the Age of Connectivity with videoconferencing technology and social networking. In March, small audiences in Austin and London – only 20 people per location for each show – will be able to interact simultaneously with these characters and one another through a live video feed, but before that, they can immerse themselves in the characters and their backstory by friending them on Facebook. In the words of Beth Burns, co-creator of the piece and artistic director of the Hidden Room, "The show begins now."

"I want to examine the nature of what makes a relationship real," says Burns. The couple in this show is a couple "because of the Internet. They've met in person. He's visited her, she's visited him, but the vast majority of their relationship take place via Skype. So does that make it a real relationship or not? I'm collaborating with somebody I met through the friend of a friend, and we talked via Skype. Does that make our [working] relationship any less real? How do you define a relationship? When I go out of town, I tell my daughter, 'Just because you can't see me

doesn't mean I'm not here and doesn't mean I don't love you.' We're forcing an audience to engage in these relationships whether they like it or not."

To realize this trans-Atlantic project, Burns needed a counterpart on the other side of the Big Pond and found one in Mimi Poskitt, co-artistic director of Look Left Look Right, a London theatre company that does documentary work. But though the project's premise is rooted in electronic connections, Burns learned early on that "it's very hard to have a good working relationship without looking somebody in the eye." So she and local actor Judd Farris – the project's Ryan – jetted to London for a week so the collaborators could all be in the same room and develop a level of trust with one another, and so Farris and English actress Rachel Watkinson, aka Elizabeth, could feel comfortable enough with each other "to really be vulnerable." At famed London theatre the Roundhouse, Burns led improv workshops with everyone, since the hourlong performance involves mostly guided improvisation with the audience, who play the friends of the lovers.

However, you don't have to be in the room with either Ryan or Elizabeth to be part of the audience for *You Wouldn't Know Her/Him* .... The performances will be live-streamed at [www.roundhouse.org.uk](http://www.roundhouse.org.uk), and questions may be submitted during the shows by Twitter – #TexasLondon – or Facebook chat.

"We always talk about community-building and those sorts of buzz words. Well, why does the community have to be limited to one city when we have something like Skype? When we learn so much from new artists that come into the fold, why are we limited to just the people we're lucky enough to live with or who happen to come into town for a minute? I'm looking at this as worldwide community-building when it comes to the arts." ■

*You Wouldn't Know Him, He Lives in Texas/You Wouldn't Know Her, She Lives in London* runs March 5-13, Saturdays & Sundays, 2pm, at the East Village Lofts, 1200 E. 11th. For reservations, call 310/243-6426.

Liz Elam is attempting to address that paradox through her Austin company, Link Coworking, which provides a workspace – with ample coffee, parking, meeting rooms, and ergonomically conscious furniture – for those who need a break from the home office. "I've sat in the cube farm in corporate America," she says, "and just watching corporations shutting down a lot of business space and people being sent home." That trend "has left a kind of void in society that co-working is filling," she says. Elam spent two years studying co-working spaces all over the U.S. before she opened her own, and the experience taught her about forming communities. Through partnerships with other businesses, she offers members access to

discounts on project management software and health insurance, and she hosts book clubs and speaker series as well. "I call myself a curator," she says, "because I'm constantly introducing members to other members."

"It's certainly an interesting time that we live in where we can explore the opportunity to have relationships with people we never would have dreamed of meeting in our entire lives," says Burns. Technology is "turning heroes into mentors, turning people on the other side of the world into collaborators, into friends, into connections," she says. "There they are; their face is right there – and if they are generous enough to look straight into the camera rather than looking down a little bit, it feels a lot like a proper connection." ■

# FREEB!RDS WORLD BURRITO®

PRESENTS

# THE LONE STAR MUSIC STAGE

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL  
1327 S. CONGRESS AVE. AUSTIN, TX 78704

IN PARKING LOT OF S. CONGRESS & GIBSON

MARCH 17-19 ★ 4-8PM

BRING THIS AD INTO ONE OF OUR 6 AUSTIN LOCATIONS FOR

## FREE CHIPS & DRINK

MAKE IT A MEAL FOR FREE WITH PURCHASE OF ENTRÉE

\*Offer valid at Austin locations only, with any purchase. Limit one coupon per customer per visit.

Cannot be combined with any other coupon or promotional offer. Void if reproduced, altered or expired. Coupon expires March 19, 2011 © 2011 Tavistock Freebirds, LLC 110145



ART INSTITUTES . EDU / AUSTIN  
TOLL-FREE: 866.583.7952 | LOCAL: 512.691.1707

101 W. LOUIS HENNA BLVD. SUITE 100 • AUSTIN, TX 78728  
The Art Institute of Austin is a branch of The Art Institute of Houston.

**Ai** The Art Institute of Austin  
A Branch of The Art Institute of Houston

THE INTERNATIONAL CULINARY SCHOOL™  
at The Art Institute of Austin

CREATE TOMORROW

# The New Evolution

## Is technology providing the ladder to the next stage of human consciousness?

BY JOSH ROSENBLATT

If you happen to be roaming the halls of the Austin Convention Center during South by Southwest, you'll be forgiven for wondering if all the constant exposure to technology on display doesn't indicate some kind of serious pathology. If needing to be engaged with a BlackBerry or an iPhone or an iPad or an iPod or a Kindle or a laptop or a MP3 player or a digital camera (or all seven) at all times isn't just as unhealthy as needing a cigarette, a beer, a needle, or an orgasm (or all four). Doesn't any compulsive, pathological behavior (you might ask yourself) imply addiction?

There are some in the world of medicine and social science who would say "absolutely." For them, the argument is simple: How can you spend 10 hours straight playing online video games or 12 hours straight surfing the Web or all day updating your Facebook page or all night checking your e-mail and not be considered sick? How can it be healthy to need constant contact with anything? These advocates call the condition Internet addiction disorder.

There are others, though, who say there's no proof that all this seemingly compulsive behavior is actually doing us any real physical, psychological, or emotional harm, that Internet addiction is merely an anecdotal condition.

University of Texas associate professor S. Craig Watkins, for one, told me that obsessive Internet use, though problematic, simply may not meet the criteria for an American Psychiatric Association definition of addiction. "Addiction is behavior that causes some type of injury – physical injury, physiological injury, economic injury," Watkins says. "The extent to which the Internet leads to those types of outcomes in a widespread and recognizable way, that I'm not convinced of yet."

While researching for his 2009 book, *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games, and Anytime,*

*Anywhere Media Means for Our Future*, Watkins says he looked closely at what he calls some young people's "problematic" relationships with the Internet and other media but determined that much of the talk about Internet addiction, and its sinister byproducts, may, in the end, be nothing but talk.

"What I see in terms of young people's use of the Internet and social media is that they're not – like some people worry they are – using social media as a substitute for interacting face-to-face with peers and acquaintances," Watkins says. "We don't see people using Facebook to the point where they have to drop out of school or where they're fired or put on probation at work because they can't function."

For Watkins, who has spent the last five years researching young people and their relationships to technology, the concern isn't really about addiction. He says the real challenge facing social scientists curious about the effects of technology on the brain – not to mention society at large, which is in a constant state of panic about what youth are getting mixed up and messed up by – is not addiction but attention. Or rather the *lack* of attention.

## To Reduce Risk of Injury

"By constantly engaging with media, and often more than one piece of media at a time, are we cultivating behaviors and norms that make it difficult to maintain a certain amount of focus and attention on one central or primary task, like lectures or homework or our workplaces?" Watkins asks. "Are we cutting down on productivity and quality of work because we're losing the ability to pay attention?"

Here you have a generation of people, Watkins says, which has portioned out its attention to several different things simultaneously for most of their lives: writing an e-mail while watching TV while reading a tweet while driving a car. You'd have to be naive not to wonder if that kind of sensory-overload approach to information intake could lead to an inability to focus.

But isn't there a flip side to that coin? Aren't human beings who are raised from birth in an environment that demands handling multiple sources of information and interaction at once simply capable of different things – ways of learning or even ways of being – than those who aren't or weren't? Isn't there a trade-off between not being able to concentrate on one thing and being able to concentrate on several things at once, especially in a world that has rapidly become a swirling eddy of excess stimulation, multitasking, and rapid-fire interaction?



S. Craig Watkins

JOHN ANDERSON

Could it be that all this seemingly obsessive, potentially addictive immersion in constant stimuli is actually making us smarter?

These questions make me think of an April 2005 article I read in *The New York Times Magazine* (one that, not for nothing, my editor was able to find for me with a just a few simple, practiced clicks of the mouse) called "Watching TV Makes You Smarter" by Steven Johnson. In it, Johnson argues that today's television shows require far more cognitive engagement and effort from viewers than those made 20 years ago, that we have been trained and have trained ourselves to be capable of understanding shows with longer narrative threads, larger casts, and more involved dialogue than anyone would have thought possible when television first appeared.

"For decades," Johnson writes, "we've worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a path declining steadily toward lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the 'masses' want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies try to give the masses what they want." In fact, the opposite is true: To appreciate shows like *The Wire* and *Lost*, audiences had to keep dozens of interwoven story threads in their heads. They had to be comfortable with a script that doesn't concern itself with easy answers, immediate resolution, or even clarity. They had to resign themselves to story arcs that could take entire seasons to unfold.

"Think of the cognitive benefits conventionally ascribed to reading: attention, patience, retention, the parsing of narrative threads," Johnson writes. "Over the last half-century, programming on TV has increased the demands it places on precisely these mental faculties."

And the human brain has responded to those demands by becoming different, and better, than it was before. More able to deal with layered storylines and less willing to suffer the glacial tedium of the single-thread narrative. The human brain has responded by evolving.

Johnson's claims are in stark contrast to those of Nicholas Carr, whose 2010 book *The*

*Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brain* has become the hub of around which the pro-Internet/anti-Internet debate seems to turn, at least in intellectual circles. Carr worries that the Internet, along with its promise of immediate and overwhelming access to information, is stripping us of the ability to concentrate and think with any real depth. He fears the kind of rapid-fire sensory collecting we do on the Web is turning us into "chronic scatterbrains," unable to even read a book for more than a few minutes at a time.

In a recent online interview for the website Big Think, Carr said: "[W]hat the web seems to be doing, and a lot of the proponents of the web seem to be completely comfortable with, it's pushing us all in the direction of skimming and scanning and multitasking, and it's not encouraging us or even giving us an opportunity to engage in more attentive ways of thinking. And so, I think losing those abilities may – we may end up finding that those are actually the most valuable ways of thinking that are available to us as human beings."

But where Carr sees intellectual and mental erosion, others see the ability to build and understand entirely new landscapes. In Johnson's television world, this new thinking is necessary to comprehend what he calls "multi-threaded dramas." Watkins speaks about "multitasking" and "multiplatforms" and "multimedia." What they can all agree on is that this brave new world is a hydra. What we choose to do with it and how we are able to adapt to it will make the difference between sinking or swimming, between addiction and evolution.

So, is it possible that words like "pathology" or "addiction" are just a pejorative for an older generation to describe an evolution that the younger generation is going through? Is it possible that 50 years from now our success as individuals will be dependent on our ability to sit for 10 hours a day engaging with multiplatform social media and video games? Is today's addiction disorder tomorrow's road to success?

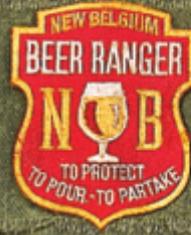
CONTINUED ON P.10



Daniel Hope

TODD V. WOLFSON

# RANGER IPA



NOW AVAILABLE  
IN PACKS OF 12

RANGER IPA IS BREWED BY NEW BELGIUM BREWING FORT COLLINS CO.

EXPLORE ALL  
THINGS RANGER



NEWBELGIUM.COM



To put it in evolutionary terms, there might be an argument to be made for the idea that we have reached a point where technology outpaces evolution and that the things a young person deals with daily are changing the brain physically and forcing it to do things brains 50 years ago would never have been able to do.

It's a common idea in media studies. Neurobiologists and social scientists and new-media theorists are always stumbling upon new evidence they say proves that the Internet and video games and cell phones are changing the actual physical structure of the brain, creating new neural pathways that make us capable of handling faster, more all-consuming virtual interaction. Carr sees this and wonders what all this neural sleight of hand is doing to our ability to contemplate the world with anything approaching nuance.

"You may grow new neurons that are then recruited into these circuits, or your existing neurons may grow new synaptical terminals. And again, that also serves to strengthen the activity in those, in those particular pathways that are being used – new pathways," Carr said. "On the other hand, you know, the brain likes to be efficient, and so even as it's strengthening the pathways you're exercising ... it's weakening the connections in other ways between the cells that supported old ways of thinking or working or behaving, or whatever that you're not exercising so much.

... As we adapt to that information environment, so to speak, we gain certain skills, but we lose other ones."

These "other ones" – "contemplativeness, reflection, introspection ... solitary ways of thinking" – are the means by which Carr believes we build "a rich intellectual life."

Watkins, meanwhile, takes a slightly less dire approach to the discussion, choosing to see the physiological effects the Internet has on the brain not as degradation but as an evolutionary step forward. "We are steadily evolving into a unique and distinct type of species, based in part on the ways in which we are using technology," he says. "And our excessive, very intense, very robust engagement with technology will inevitably lead to a different brain, different circuitry system, different functions."

Somewhere in the middle of this debate sits Daniel Hope, an Austin-based counselor and life coach who focuses on the effects social media have on our relationships. He is hosting an Interactive panel this year called Why Everything Is Amazing but Nobody Is Happy to try and decipher whether social media is throwing off the balance between technological curiosity and spiritual meaning.

"Social networking has such a powerful emotional effect on people that I believe there are ways that can be used in a positive way just as easily as it is abused or could misdirect us away from important things like relation-

ships," he says. "The rules of life are simple: They come down to gratitude, economy, commitment, and if we're not pursuing them and instead we're pursuing the next iPad or the next touch screen or the next video game – if that's where we're getting our sense of meaning from – then we're going to be miserable, by definition."

## RELATED PANELS

### Why Everything Is Amazing but Nobody Is Happy

Friday, March 11, 3:30pm, ACC 5ABC

### Can the Internet Make Us Happy?

Sunday, March 13, 9:30am, Hyatt, TX Ballroom 5-7

### I'm So Productive, I Never Get Anything Done

Monday, March 14, 11am, ACC 10AB

### Felicia Day: Monday Keynote

Monday, March 14, 2pm, ACC Ballroom D

So where does Hope fall on this question of technology and the development of the species? Is it providing the ladder to the next stage of human consciousness or the quicksand for us to sink into emotionally, spiritually, even morally? To quote Hope, is social media "ushering us into the next stage of human evolution or is it just making monkeys out of us?"

Here, the life coach has no firm answer. "The picture that comes to mind is someone hunched over a computer where their eyesight is failing, their muscles have atrophied because they're not going out and doing things. That does not seem like the model of an evolutionary upward trajectory," he says. "But at the same time, I think that we find ourselves right now in the most overwhelming and most stimulating environment in the history of human existence, and I think that we're learning right now how to live with all of these stimulants in our lives, all of this constant stimulation."

Maybe there is such a thing as Internet addiction disorder, but if there is, it might actually be the necessary condition for our next great leap forward. Maybe to become that "unique and distinct type of species" Watkins described, we all need to become media addicts. There's a good chance we are all already there. Surely all 20,000 of this year's Interactive attendees could be diagnosed with Internet addiction. As could you, I'm guessing. As could anyone who spends more than a few minutes a day staring at a computer screen or talking on a smart phone. God knows I could.

But diagnoses lose meaning when they're handed out to everybody. And at some point, doesn't pathological behavior become simply behavior? And doesn't addiction become simply ... the way we are now? ■

Create Merchandise • Promote An Event • Market Your Brand

# We've got you covered with custom printed:



T-SHIRTS



STAGE SCRIMS



DRUMHEAD STICKERS



HEADWEAR



BUMPER STICKERS



POLY-BANNERS



ZIPPER HOODIES



POSTCARDS & FLIERS



AMP COVERS



POSTERS



Call 877.246.3132

Save up to \$75

on all your marketing and merch  
Visit [jakprints.com/sxsw](http://jakprints.com/sxsw) for details.



WINES · SPIRITS **SPEC'S** FINER FOODS

# BEER PEER: HOW AUSTIN SHARES.

Beers from around the world, no passport required. Best of all, our very competitive prices are always close to home.

CHEERS TO SAVINGS



(512) 280-7400 · [specsonline.com](http://specsonline.com)

**8 AUSTIN AREA LOCATIONS**

ARBOR WALK · ROUND ROCK · AIRPORT BLVD · BASTROP  
BRODIE LANE BEE CAVE · SOUTHPARK MEADOWS · TEMPLE

Dry Cleaning  
Special: Any  
Garment \$2.39

**10 PIECES FOR \$20 • 20 PIECES FOR \$38**  
**MEN'S LAUNDERED SHIRTS \$1.69**

DRYCLEAN GARMENTS ONLY. PREPAID PLUS TAX.  
NO LIMIT. LIMIT ONE COUPON PER DAY.  
WITH COUPON ONLY.  
EXPIRES 3/3/2011.

[www.ricks-cleaners.com](http://www.ricks-cleaners.com)



Regular everyday low price \$2.39

## 15 LOCATIONS NEAR YOU

4005 W. PARMER LANE, UNIT C, SILVER CREEK CENTER **452-2200**

5324 CAMERON RD. (Texas Thrift Store) **452-2200**

110 NORTH I-35, STE. 250 ROUND ROCK **512-244-4363**

3652 BEE CAVES RD. (Same center as Twin Liquors) **327-6846**

13492 RESEARCH BLVD. (183 & Anderson Mill Rd.) **258-8181**

920 B. N. AUSTIN AVE GEORGETOWN **512-930-0666**

11126 JOLLYVILLE RD. (at Balcones Woods Dr.) **346-8845**

13011 SHOPS PKWY #200 (Shops at Galleria) **263-1588**

3810 GATTIS SCHOOL ROAD #102, 78664 **244-3733**

850 N. BELL #304 CEDAR PARK **512-258-4990**

8400 BRODIE LANE #101, 78745 **291-1588**

409 W. FRONT ST. #100, HUTTO **759-4300**

7435 BURNET RD., RICHCREEK **454-7425**

600 WILLIAM CANNON **462-3868**

12218 NORTH 620 **257-0057**

# ROCK OUT, THEN ROCK HIM.

THIS SXSW, IGNORE THE SOUND ORDINANCE.  
FROM SEXY LINGERIE TO TANTALIZING TOYS,  
CINDIE'S HAS EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KEEP YOUR  
PRIVATE AFTER-PARTY ROCKING ALL NIGHT LONG.

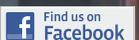
## Cindie's

number one in fantasy and fun!

SOUTH LAMAR  
2100 S LAMAR

BEN WHITE  
600 E BEN WHITE

NORTH AUSTIN  
14106 N IH-35



# Some (Re)Assembly Required

From mapping to extrapolating, recontextualizing the data we've been given

BY WELLS DUNBAR

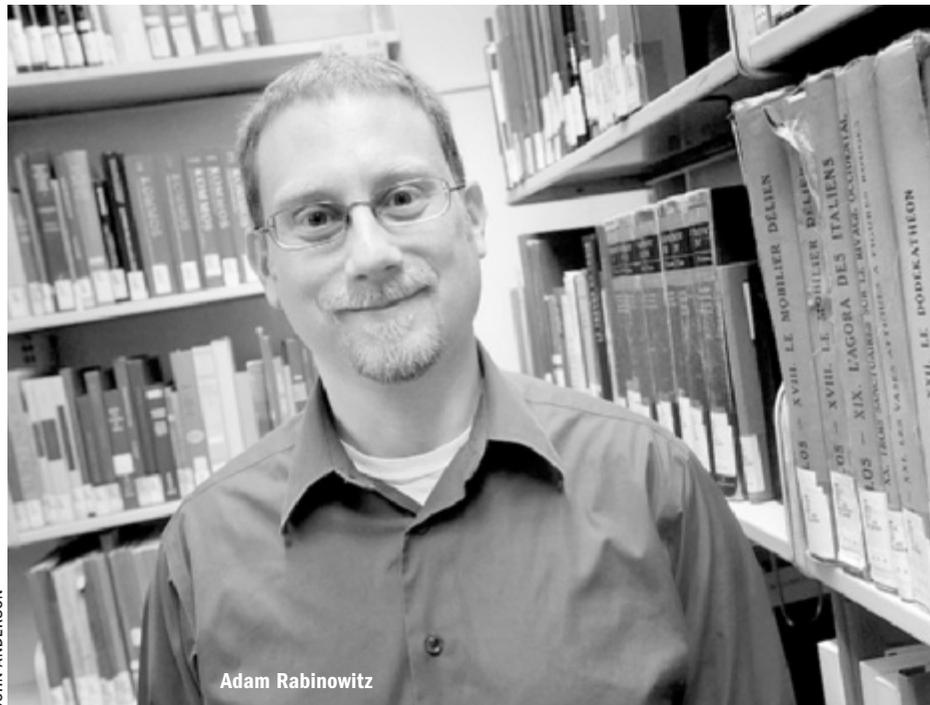
Increasing food shortages. Rising commodity prices. Tightening rare earth exports. Signs everywhere point to material scarcity. But the same doesn't go for information in our data-choked age, right?

Maybe. In our overheated, retweeted 21st Century Schizoid world, finding a useful, discrete data set is like looking for a needle in a server farm full of haystacks. Ask anyone scanning their social networks for relevant updates. Or better yet, ask the Department of Homeland Security. Maybe what we need is a pared-down focus, drawing out everything we can from some of our most essential elements: time, space, and nature.

One of these constructs – geotemporal location, which adds the missing dimensions of time and movement to digital maps – begins, for our purposes, millennia ago. The ancient world is one studied by Adam Rabinowitz, an assistant professor of classics and assistant director at the University of Texas' Institute of Classical Archaeology as well as the organizer of the SXSW Interactive panel Time Traveling: Interfaces for Geotemporal Visualization. Rabinowitz credits two reasons for his interest in the subject. Firstly, a class he was teaching on classical architecture: "There was this huge space in this very long period of time, and the students were absolutely lost almost all of the time." Moreover, the way historical information's usually taught – "boiling down" a few civilizations' greatest achievements to a recognizable handful – "really obscures a lot of the cross connections," Rabinowitz says. So with that, he began exploring "a way to visualize those connections – visualize interactions in the same time period but across space, and interactions in the same space but across different time periods."

The second inspiration was equally applicable. Rabinowitz is also a field archeologist, and he notes that the discipline experienced a "turning point in the late Nineties when [Geographic Information Systems] became a real important part of field archeology. ... But we haven't gotten to the same point with time," he notes. "The increase in the richness of spatial data, and the issues related to time and space and architecture, had me thinking about how we might represent those things, how we might visualize them in a way where we could see patterns more easily."

With the help of his brother Nicholas Rabinowitz, Adam set out to build that. Mashing up ancient timeline data with Google Maps, the brothers created GeoDia, which allows users to overlay ancient cultures, regions, and time periods, offering rich supporting data from the specific time and place. "If I'm in Athens in the fifth century, what's



going on in Persia? What do things look like over there? Where are the sites? And how far away is it?" That said, Adam Rabinowitz notes, "I'm not an evangelizer for this particular combination of a timeline and a map – and I think that other members of the panel are going to have different ideas about how to deal with space and time together, and whether we should."

## Tools Not Included

Another panelist, Irene Ros, a visualization research developer at IBM Research's Visual Communication Lab, says her group "is currently thinking about ways to visually represent history, specifically history as a shared experience of the crowd. Geography and temporal overlap are two of many ways to link historical data. During the panel discussion I will be sharing some examples of how we propose to present historical data, incorporating geotemporal visualization aspects. This project's motivation has been to help people broaden their perspectives on history, and we see time and geography as two dimensions by which people can relate to each other and each other's history in new ways."

There's seemingly limitless potential bundled in geotemporal applications – for example, with a rich enough data set, there's potential predictive power. One example is Google's attempts at flu tracking, plotting flu-related queries by area – as in, "Is green phlegm bad?" – to try discern trends, similarly to other public health and safety initiatives. Less heady uses can be seen in the rise of

location-based social-networking services – Gowalla, Foursquare, and Facebook's Places application, where users can check in at businesses and receive rewards once they're there, in addition to being targeted by advertisers at the right place and the right time. "The immediate issues will have to do with advertising and selling stuff, because that's what drives a lot of the social side of things," Rabinowitz predicts. But location-based tech, particularly if coupled with time, raises privacy questions anew. Ros notes: "The privacy discussion is a great one to have in this context. Certainly, Web applications such as PleaseRobMe.com" – a no-longer-updated website which publicized tweets and check-ins from users away from their houses in order to raise privacy awareness – "try to bring this issue to light."

Privacy aside, Rabinowitz is looking at two overarching issues: standardizing data so it can be easily shared and crunched across platforms, and moving "beyond the time slider" for new interfaces in mapping time and space together. "I want to figure out [an interface] ... that is not animation-based, which has been the traditional way to do it. But it's static. You can watch it from beginning to end, maybe you can pause it, maybe you can scroll it back. But you can't change the parameters, you can't change the input, you can't ask it to show different things. And that, I think, is what the challenge is – [to] find a way we can manage temporal data sets, place them in space, and manipulate them."

As with most emerging tech, whether geotemporal mapping will facilitate greater community and openness or more advertising and intrusion remains to be seen. Striking an

*As with most emerging tech, whether geotemporal mapping will facilitate greater community and openness or more advertising and intrusion remains to be seen.*

optimistic tone, Ros is hopeful that "geotemporal visualizations can help us become a more connected society, not just in the same manner social media does (where we can easily find more people similar to us) but through our common existence in time and space."

Aside from time and space, there's no broader commonality than nature, one that's being recontextualized in disparate fields from architecture and design to business management. That's the topic at hand at the panel "It's Nature's Way": Innovative Tech Design Through Biomimicry.

Panelist Chris Allen is the CEO of the Biomimicry Group, which offers for-profit business consulting and nonprofit work with institutions of higher learning. Biomimicry is a subject the University of Texas Business School grad admits he somewhat stumbled into while working at a Bay Area recycling and resource management company. "How are humans going to develop economic value in the future as we're looking at finite systems?" he asks. "These were the things that were right in front of me in terms of my job. ... It's an elegant and exquisite idea to think about drawing on biology, where all this evolutionary research and development has been going on for 3.8 billion years."

Granted, drawing inspiration from nature is as old as the arts and sciences themselves. What's changed is the rigorous approach that can now be taken. Allen says biomimicry's application is best expressed by "looking to nature deeply and being able to extrapolate from organisms and systems what we call deep principles, or deep patterns, on why those organisms have been successful for hundreds of thousands of years. What can we learn from them in our design challenges?" Allen cites different scales at which biological principles can be gleaned and applied: from a basic shape or structural level, all the way to high-level "megasytems – big ecosystem-scale things. Depending on the design challenge," he says,

### RELATED PANELS

**"It's Nature's Way": Innovative Tech Design Through Biomimicry**  
Saturday, March 12, 11am, ACC Ballroom A

**Time Traveling: Interfaces for Geotemporal Visualization**  
Saturday, March 12, 12:30pm,  
ACC Ballroom B



his group “can draw design knowledge, skills, and technology” from the relevant area.

The clients Allen has worked for range wildly, as do the projects he’s been a part of. While the influence and inspiration of nature can be reflected in undertakings as large as city-building, it’s also applicable to projects as comparatively small as carpet patterns. Allen recalls his firm’s work with carpet company Interface’s Flor carpet-tile system. In such modular systems, individual squares can be replaced if stained, instead of a whole carpet; however, creating a pattern that could be easily matched “led us to the forest floor, where you have all these random patterns of

leaves, sticks and dirt – very interesting patterns of color and line, but pleasing to the human eye.” The result was a design where any tile could be freely switched out without worry, since “it doesn’t really affect the patterns because it’s all random to begin with.”

Harnessing that chaotic, disruptive model can have a positive impact, Allen says, as it shakes up stagnant thinking. But the deeper principles informing biomimicry (drawing on the natural world for solutions) and geotemporal visualization (looking to yesterday to find tomorrow’s patterns) should certainly be called upon as we map an uncertain future. ■

**Haul of FAME** local fashion discoveries

BUY SELL TRADE

**Buffalo EXCHANGE**  
New & Recycled Fashion

AUSTIN: 2904 Guadalupe St. 512-480-9922  
 NEW SAN ANTONIO: 145 W. Olmos Dr. 210-832-8838  
 For Houston & Dallas locations call toll-free 1-866-235-8255

BUFFALOEXCHANGE.COM

# EAT LIKE A LOCAL



26 locations around Austin

[www.thundercloud.com](http://www.thundercloud.com)

# Gaming the System

## Applying the mechanics of play to the everyday

BY JAMES RENOVITCH

Tech trends live and die by a combination of buzz and substance. Too little of either component and what's considered a game changer at the beginning of the year gets the passé treatment in the December 2010 issue of *Wired*. Gamification spent 2010 climbing the trend charts and begins 2011 perilously on the verge of either becoming the subject of a *Saturday Night Live* skit or the panacea for what ails our rapidly evolving society now and in the future.

The first Gamification Summit came and went at the beginning of this year in San Francisco. The accompanying fanfare may have been muted, but the very fact that the concept garnered a conference speaks to its growing impact. However, the concept pre-dates its new trendy moniker. If you've ever been graded in school or rewarded yourself for doing some unpleasant chore, well, you've been gamified. That's likely the vast majority of people on this planet, so it's no wonder that the trend of gamification is being touted as nothing short of a societal shift. A shift that ideally makes the world – including academia, the workplace, the Internet – a more engaging place to exist.

The exhaustive and business-jargon-laden gamification encyclopedia ([www.gamification.org/wiki/encyclopedia](http://www.gamification.org/wiki/encyclopedia)) defines the trend simply as “the concept that you can apply the basic elements that make games fun and engaging to things that typically aren't considered a game.” These “basic elements” are referred to as game mechanics and include badges (e.g., a letter grade in school), rewards (frequent-flier miles), and progression (progress bars on websites) among a slew of others. All of these practices are used to obtain a wanted behavior from users or participants – be it product loyalty, increased time on a website, or self-improvement. Additionally, if you follow Gamification.org's logic, there's the somewhat unsettling idea of a game mechanic for every personality. Online social butterflies, competitive cutthroats, self-motivators, and curious minds all have numerous mechanics tailored to their personality group's penchants. Perhaps it's the negative connotations of simple trickery and psychological warfare that explains the omission of the word “gamification” in the descriptions of the many SXSW panels devoted partially or wholly to the subject (see below). Or perhaps it's just time for rebranding.

Enter panelist and Get Satisfaction Inc. Chief Technology Officer Thor Muller, who tweaks the parameters of gamification to move from a competitive mode to something cooperative. Muller's company specializes in adding social elements to websites that maximize users' combined talents. He contrasts his approach with Yahoo Answers' competitive approach, which involves voting for the most helpful answer to a question until one answer sits atop the heap as the “most helpful.” Muller prefers a system that recognizes each user's strengths, saying: “You have experts who have knowledge, and you have connectors who may not have all the answers but ... they're really good at connecting a question to an answer. And you might have a copy editor who can improve the title of a question so that other

people can discover it.” Throw in programming that identifies participants' strengths and weaknesses and crunches the numbers, and the unwitting team's best answer comes out the other side. Putting it in gamification parlance, Muller adds, “That's the victory condition for everybody.”

The team sensibility of gamification extends to fitness via HealthMonth.com. The need is certainly there, because while there may be those who treat their bodies like temples, there are many more who treat them like trash compactors. The concept is as simple as making “players” part of a weight-loss and exercise team. If you don't spend enough time on the elliptical machine that week, you're not just letting yourself down – you're lowering your teammates' chances of victory. “They're really, really small things,” says Brynn Evans, chief experience officer at GoLocal, addressing the big dividends of well-applied game mechanics. “Add just a little bit of structure, publicly declare a couple of rules, and get on a team.” Voilà, a healthier America ... in theory.



## Compatibility

In the pantheon of things we humans dread, just below hitting the gym is attending meetings at work. “This would be a prime place for a little bit of fun, a little bit of motivation, a little bit of everyone on the hook, and a little bit of awarding of prizes for jobs well done,” says Evans of the workplace.

Dave Gray, co-founder of XPLANE, can help. He's literally written the book (see *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers and Changemakers*) on the subject of gamestorming, which incorporates elements of play to ensure that meetings are less about not getting caught doodling and more about engaging the attendees for maximum results.

Standard meetings go around the room looking for ideas, which lets everyone but the first employee off the hook and able to say, “Oh, me? I like what she said.” That's not going to fly for Gray. He adds sticky notes, a makeshift game board, some simple rules, and before you know it, iPhones are put down and snores are replaced with the sweet sounds of aggressive brainstorming.

Gray puts an emphasis on what he calls game artifacts. Like pieces on a game board, artifacts help people visualize a meeting's progress. “By putting the information out into the space just like you would on a game board, people have to spend less mental energy tracking what's going on,” says Gray. “They can spend more energy on what you want them to focus on.” In other words, a meeting without gamestorming is like *Monopoly* without the houses, hotels, chance cards, race cars, or deeds. Both artifacts help simplify a complex process.

Muller sees game mechanics advancing so far as to create new economic models. At first click, Kickstarter, the Internet's hotspot for grassroots project funding, doesn't play like a game, but closer inspection reveals the underlying impetus for the site's success. “It has all the aspects of a game in that



Thor Muller

**“If you have a crap product and you add game mechanics thinking that's going to increase your engagement,” warns Thor Muller, “that's the equivalent of polishing a turd.”**

for each project there is a victory condition which is raising the minimum amount of money,” says Muller. “You can also level up to different rewards.” In this way gamification can be the extrinsic amplifier for people's intrinsic desire to support friends and good causes. “We'll see more things like that,” Muller continues, “not just for creative projects like Kickstarter, but for education, for fundraising, for new businesses, non-profits, and so forth. That's where the exciting stuff is, not another social game on Facebook.”

The curse of hot-trend status is the accompanying increase of jumpers onto the bandwagon. “If you have a crap product and you add game mechanics thinking that's going to increase your engagement,” warns Muller, “that's the equivalent of polishing a turd.” The predicted expansion of gamification into nearly all aspects of life breeds conjecture about the long-term effects of everything being fun. What about walking uphill both ways to school? Isn't there something character-building about a struggle, something hard-earned? Will the gamification generation be a bunch of namby-pamby twerps who quit the moment something – technology or a task – doesn't go out of its way to engage them? “We're going to get increasingly literate when it comes to game mechanics. So we'll know this is a manipulation of our motivations, but we'll want that outcome, so we'll suspend disbelief,” Muller says. “[Game mechanics] allow us to think differently than we would without them. And when it aims for an objectively good goal, that's inspiring. If the goal is purely time-wasting, that's where the critiques have some merit. If it's just about breeding compulsion, then it's potentially dangerous.”

At the Gamification Summit, tech firebrand and SXSW Interactive mainstay Jane McGonigal debuted her book, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. Gray mirrors the book's sentiments, saying, “People say those kids are just going to expect things to be engaging and they are going to face the real world and be disappointed, but perhaps they're going to face the real world and they're going to change it.” ■

### RELATED PANELS

**Gamechanging: Turn Your App Into a Cooperative Game**

Friday, March 11, 2pm, ACC 12AB

**Beyond Check-Ins: Location Based Game Design**

Saturday, March 12, 9:30am, ACC 12AB

**Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better**

Saturday, March 12, 12:30pm, ACC Ballroom D

**Game On: 7 Design Patterns for User Engagement**

Monday, March 14, ACC Ballroom C

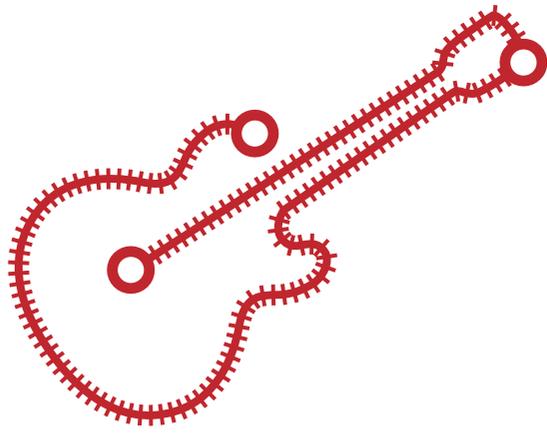
**Gamestorming**

Tuesday, March 15, 11am, Hilton, Salon C

**1Up! Games for Change**

Tuesday, March 15, 5pm, ACC 6AB

Follow us!  



## METRORAIL. IT'S MUSIC TO YOUR EARS.

Put MetroRail in your weekend plans. The train runs every Friday night in March, and all day on Saturdays, March 12 and 19. The last train leaves downtown at 11:30 p.m.

Your time. Your ride.  **METRORAIL**  
[www.capmetro.org/metro rail](http://www.capmetro.org/metro rail)

# BEST OF TEXAS

Robin Cheers   Jill Pankey   Olga Porter   Maxine Price   Ethan Diehl



Kathryn  
JD Miller   Watts Martinez   Ash Almonte   Ray Donley   Brad Ellis

MARCH 1 - APRIL 9, 2011



**RUSSELL COLLECTION FINE ART**

1137 West 6th St. Austin Texas 78703(512) 478-4440  
[russell-collection.com](http://russell-collection.com) Gallery Hours: Tues - Sat 10am - 6pm

Greetings from Oregon, fellow fanatics.  
We paired a huge IPA kick with an unlikely malt soul  
for a true force of nature. This being Texas, we left  
the small stuff home. Deschutes. Bravely Done.

THE HOPS  
**SLAP YOU**  
SILLY. THE MALTS  
**ASK**  
FORGIVENESS.



BRAVELY DONE

**meebo**  
TAKE MEEBO  
★ WITH YOU ★  
ACROSS THE WEB

CONNECT AND SHARE THE WEB WITH FRIENDS  
CHECK IN ACROSS THE INTERNET AND  
DISCOVER COOL CONTENT FROM PEOPLE LIKE YOU

WWW.MEEBO.COM/DOWNLOAD

SEARCH FOR BANDS, BROWSE BY GENRE, LISTEN TO MP3S,  
COMMENT ON YOUR FAVORITE ARTISTS, VIEW UPCOMING SHOWS

**MUSICIANS REGISTER**  
austinchronicle.com/musicreg

HEY BANDS:  
UPLOAD YOUR  
MP3s

# The Fiction Writer as Futurecaster

Charles Yu is keeping his eye on the robots

BY AUDRA SCHROEDER

With IBM's supercomputer Watson winning *Jeopardy* a few weeks ago, we humans have a right to be a little concerned. Charles Yu's debut meta novel, *How To Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe*, imagines a world in which we are the minority, and it's up to a time machine repairman (named Charles Yu) to define life in the space-time continuum. According to Yu, who is also a full-time lawyer, the Watson uprising is in full swing.

**Austin Chronicle:** Why did you decide to call the protagonist Charles Yu?

**Charles Yu:** I was stuck for a name, and I put it in there as a space filler until I could come up with a better name. Before I knew it, it had turned into this self-referential meta thing, and I couldn't just yank the name out at that point without causing a bunch of other pieces to fall out, sort of like Jenga. I used certain emotional experiences from my childhood and adolescence to seed the story during the writing process, but from there they grew into very fictional things, so although much of the book has, at its core, a connection to something that started off from a place very dear to me, where it ended up isn't really all that close to anything in my real life or my family's lives.

**AC:** Do you have a background in engineering?

**CY:** My background in engineering is that I took two engineering classes my first year in college and found out that I would not be a good engineer! My father has a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering and worked in the field for 30 years and, even now that he's retired, is still making and designing things, receiving patents for his inventions. I have the highest admiration for engineers, and if I'd been smart enough to be one, I wouldn't have to write about fake engineering in my books.

**AC:** Does the thought of being trapped in time with just a piece of machinery like *Tammy comfort or terrify* you?

**CY:** The idea of being trapped in time with *Tammy*, the neurotic and beautiful operating system, seems comforting to me, but in a really depressing way. It probably wouldn't be all that different from being trapped with my television, which I do all the time on purpose. The character Charles Yu has definitely

adapted to this kind of living, but he knows it's not a healthy thing, because *Tammy* is, in effect, a kind of psychologically absorbent material, taking what Charles gives her, mixing it up a bit, and giving it back to him. He's interacting with himself in a way, and all of the emotions – regret, anxiety, fear of failure, missing his family, knowing he hasn't exactly risked much in his life – all of that is swirling around inside his little TM-31 unit, like

recirculated air. It's a closed system, and he knows it's not a healthy environment. That's what the book is about, really: Charles breaking out of a succession of boxes that he has put himself in.

**AC:** Some of the supporting components – like the time loop your mother lives in – do you see that as reality one day? I mean, *sexbots* are pretty much a reality ....

**CY:** Some of it's pretty far-fetched, but I could see versions of some of that tech becoming real in the near ... wait a minute, did you say *sexbots* are a reality?



## Speak to an Expert

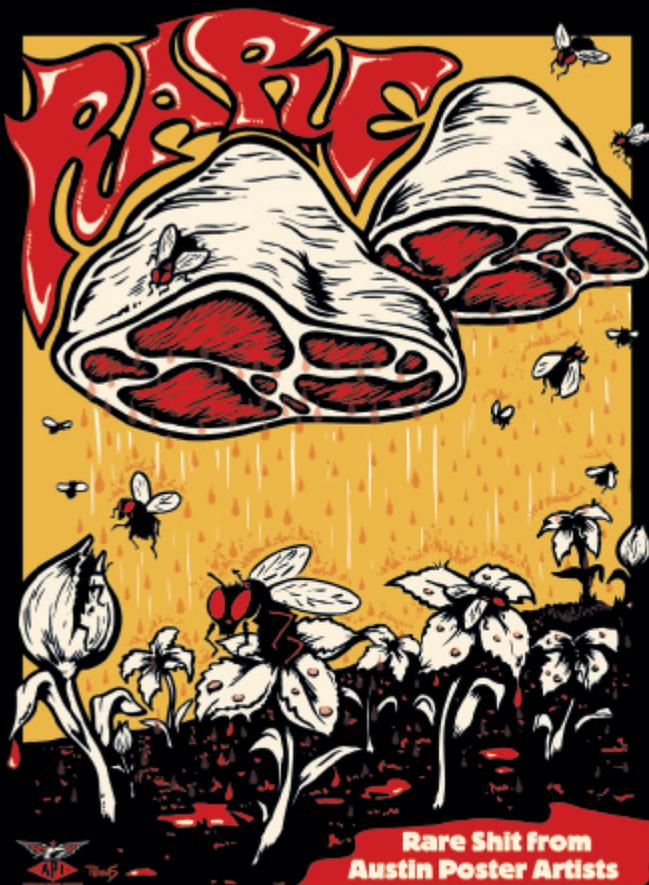
**AC:** Well, yeah. Don't you foresee a robot takeover in your lifetime?

**CY:** I think the robot takeover has already happened. I have no idea how my phone works. Or an iPod. Or, really, my refrigerator. I think computers have done all the hard work already, which is making us completely reliant and at their mercy. All it's going to take is for some massively parallel processor at Bell Labs or IBM or someplace like that to boot up one morning and be like, "Oh hello, sentence." On the one hand, I feel like we're about this close to being in a fight with our appliances and technology. We'll be the ones bringing rocks to a gunfight. On the other hand: "What is leg?" That [answer Watson gave] on *Jeopardy*? It cracks me up, although I shouldn't admit that, because *Watson* is probably crawling the Internet for all mentions of its name and now I'm on its "humans to kill" list.

### RELATED EVENT

**How To Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe**  
Sunday, March 13, 12:30pm, ACC Ballroom G

South Austin Popular Culture Center and API present



Rare Shit from  
Austin Poster Artists  
March 12 - April 16

**SOUTH AUSTIN POPULAR CULTURE CENTER**

Opening Reception March 12th at 7:00pm • Drummers/Idle Dancers at 7:00pm

**URANIUM SAVAGES 8:15-10h**

Gallery hours: Thursday - Sunday, 1-6pm or by appointment and chance  
1516-B South Lamar Blvd., Austin, Texas 78704 • tel: 512.440.8318  
samopc@gmail.com • www.samopc.org

Bobby Dixon  
Mark Pedini  
Farley Bookout  
Mig Kokinda  
Geoff Peveto  
Paul Fucik  
Christian Helms  
Billy Bishop  
Billy Perkins  
Jared Connor  
Rob Jones  
Kerry Avn  
Jim Franklin  
Danny Garrett  
Henry Gonzalez  
Guy Juke  
Micael Priest  
Sam Yeates



This project is funded and supported in part by the City of Austin through the Cultural Arts Division and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.

**Hatbox**  
A Modern HABERDASHERY

CELEBRATING 25 YEARS  
OF SERVING  
SOUTH BY SOUTHWEST  
FILM, MUSIC, & INTERACTIVE.  
HATBOX HAS THE  
HAT FOR YOU!

115 East Sixth St., Austin, TX  
Across from the Driskill Hotel  
512.476.1203  
WWW.HATBOX.COM

**More Choices. More Value\***

**Canon**  
\*All Canon Cameras include Canon USA one-year limited warranty.\*

**EOS 60D** 18 Megapixel, 3" Vari-angle Monitor, 1920 x 1080 HD Video, SDXC & SDHC Compatible  
Body Only Reg: \$999.99  
-\$100 Instant savings  
**Now 899.99**  
60D Instant Rebate 2/27-3/19/2011

**PowerShot Instant Savings Thru 3/12/11**

**\$50 INSTANT REBATE**  
Canon PowerShot SD3500  
14.1 Megapixel, 5X Zoom, 1280 x 720 Video, 3.5" touchscreen LCD  
Regular: \$279.99  
-\$50 Instant savings **229.99**

Canon PowerShot SX130 Regular: \$249.99  
12 Megapixel, 12X Zoom, 1280 x 720 Video, Pop-up Flash, 3" LCD  
-\$30 Instant savings **219.99**

Not responsible for typographical errors.

**\*FREE**  
**2-HOUR PHOTO CLASS** **\$30 WORTH OF DIGITAL PRINTS**  
with new camera purchase.

3810 N Lamar Blvd - Austin 512.467.7676  
Mon-Fri: 9-6; Sat 10-6; Sun 1-5  
Photo Lab Classes Film Processing Rentals Custom Frames  
www.precision-camera.com/facebook

Locally Owned for 34 Years  
**PRECISION**  
CAMERA & VIDEO  
www.precision-camera.com

Long before the world wide web, there was The Continental Club...  
Slow down & get a taste of how things used to be.

**A Texas Legend Since 1955!**

1315 S. Congress Ave  
Austin, Texas 78704  
512-441-2444

3700 Main St  
Houston, Texas 77002  
713-529-9899

Continentalclub.com • facebook.com/group/Continentalclub • twitter.com/ContinentalATX

# Will Blog for Food

New stories – and problems – arise as foodie blogs proliferate

BY MELANIE HAUPT

The Internet has created a democratic space for recipe sharing, restaurant reviews, and writing about food with innovative results. Take Epicurious, the free online clearinghouse for recipes published in *Bon Appétit* and the late, lamented *Gourmet*. Readers can post reviews of the recipes on the site, bringing the phenomenon of cookbook marginalia and adaptations into the era of digital writing. Online social networking has also generated the phenomenon of “twecipes,” recipes disseminated via Twitter and necessarily condensed to the circumscribed 140-character limit.

And then there are those for whom eating and dining out are where it's at. Those folks can be found registering their opinions of the food and service at their favorite eateries at Urbanspoon, the much-maligned Yelp, and the local boards on Chowhound. The truly dedicated can post photographs of their meals on Foodspotting alongside their reviews. Of course, these developments in the melding of foodie and Internet cultures reveal all sorts of tensions and ruptures, as well as opportunities for engendering community; a few panels at this year's Interactive Conference help to define the dimensions of this phenomenon.

There's that old saw that says that you eat with your eyes first, hence the emphasis on making food visually appealing in restaurants, grocery stores, and advertising. But the ways in which this is translated to the Internet are of particular interest to Stacie Capone, who organized and will moderate SXSW Interactive panel *The Moguls of Food Porn*, featuring Nadia Giosia of the Cooking Channel's *Bitchin' Kitchen* and Nick Evans of the blog *Macheesmo*, as well as other foodies whose unique approaches to visual representations of food incite that Pavlovian response to things you didn't even know you wanted to eat.

“Over the past few years, in the midst of the great recession, all these bloggers and upstart media stars started making money by creating content around food,” says Capone of the inspiration for the panel. “It reminded me of the dot-com crash in the Nineties, when all those investors in Web start-ups found out that the only sites that were profitable were porn sites. And it struck me ... food is the new pornography.” The panel will explore the connections between that cupcake and its online simulacrum and the people whose photographs can send your salivary glands into overdrive. But what if you're only in it for the articles?

Perhaps the most fertile ground in the marriage between the Internet and writing about food is the food blog. Tens of thousands of

food-centered journals populate the blogosphere, and their themes run the gamut from regional focus and special dietary needs to restaurant reviews and recipe testing, sometimes even providing a platform for photography, travel, and activism. Others have turned a food-blogging hobby into a professional pursuit: Clotilde Dusoulier of *Chocolate & Zucchini*, Deb Perelman of *Smitten Kitchen*, Lisa Fain of *Homesick Texan*, and Molly Wizenberg of *Orangette* have all reaped book deals from their blogs, which marry luscious photography with recipes and narratives from the authors' personal lives. Seattle-based Wizenberg, whose blog-borne memoir-cum-cookbook *A Homemade Life: Stories and Recipes From My Kitchen Table* was met with quiet critical acclaim in 2009, will be featured in *So I Started a Food Blog*, a Q&A with Emily Farris, freelance writer and casserole maven ([www.casserolecrazy.com](http://www.casserolecrazy.com)). Says Wizenberg: “I'm not interested in talking about how to get more traffic or how to make money through your blog or how to develop your brand or any of that stuff that comes up in a lot of conference discussions about blogging. I've never believed the conventional wisdom about blogging – that you have to post every day, if not multiple times a day; that you've got to have strong branding; et cetera. I'm much more interested in having a discussion about why we blog, what a blog can do, what matters about food anyway, and why any of us should write about it.”

## For Household Use Only

Along those same lines is the question of who should be writing about food. Perhaps the most provocative and potentially divisive panel is *Bite Me – Are Ethics Gone in Food Criticism?*, which contends with the increasingly blurry line between marketing and pay-for-play. There's a growing tension between the industry-vetted food writer and the amateur but aspirational blogger who maybe thinks she's a bit more legit than she actually is. Local James Holmes, executive chef and owner of *Olivia*, will be on hand to offer his thoughts on the uncomfortable place the restaurateur finds himself in when everyone's a critic. “We have a lot of bloggers who come in and ask for a comp meal for their food blog,” he says. “To start a blog, you don't have to be accredited. Anyone can start a blog.” Additionally, moderator Ben Leventhal, who founded *Eater* and now runs the *Feast*, will lead fellow journalists (both online and traditional) in a discussion on food



Chef James Holmes of Olivia

journalism's new ethics, which in some cases aren't very ethical at all.

Of course, for every shady blogger out to cop a free lunch, there are five who are committed to using their powers for good. There are more than 200 food blogs in Austin alone, and a core number of them have formed a friendly, loose-knit community; recent gatherings included a potluck and baby shower for a well-known local blogger, a tour of East Austin food trailers, an intimate cocktail gathering in honor of visiting cookbook author Joan Nathan, and a food swap in which attendees – bloggers and nonbloggers alike – bargained for and exchanged items as diverse as homemade marshmallows and vegan soup (see “DIY 2011,” *Food*, Feb. 18). Exchanges such as these allow foodie bloggers to teach and learn from one another as well as offer support beyond the kitchen. In many ways, the Austin food-blogging community is representative of what's taking place on a national and international scale.

“It's about connecting with other people in your city who have similar interests for the greater good of the community at large,” says Addie Broyles, organizer of *Building Community in a Blogger-Eat-Blogger World*. “My intention is to inspire other bloggers to feel like they can bring the blogging community in their city together to make some change. The thing that links us is that we blog; the fact that you blog means that you are going above and beyond what everybody else who happens to enjoy that particular niche [is doing].”

Broyles, a food writer and blogger for the *Austin American-Statesman*, is a bellwether for the Austin food-blogging community and has taken on an active role in bringing Austin's foodies together in real life. “I think that it goes beyond helping other people who blog. For instance, mommy bloggers, rather than picking fights with each other online and tearing each other down for the way they choose to parent their kids, they could create niche groups that could be support groups for new moms or something. With food, the gluten-free bloggers get together and create a support

## RELATED PANELS

**Building Community in a Blogger-Eat-Blogger World**  
Sunday, March 13, 3:30pm,  
Hyatt Ballroom 5-7

**Bite Me – Are Ethics Gone in Food Criticism?**  
Monday, March 14, 11am,  
Hyatt Hill Country AB

**So I Started a Food Blog**  
Monday, March 14, 12:30pm,  
Hyatt Hill Country AB

**The Moguls of Food Porn**  
Monday, March 14, 3:30pm,  
Hyatt Hill Country AB

group that meets once a month at a restaurant that supports gluten-free eating, then anybody who's struggling with that can come and connect with other people who are going through the same thing, even if they don't blog. So this is applicable to all kinds of bloggers, not just food bloggers.”

In 1989's *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry*, a groundbreaking survey of the '60s countercultural food movement, Warren Belasco writes, “Food would have to be viewed not merely as a commodity to be rationalized or a set of nutrients to be metabolized, but as a medium of communication, a symbol of a whole way of life, an *edible dynamic*.” Food is a universal experience. Not everyone has equal access to high-quality, well-prepared food, nor do they have the same tastes or values regarding what they put in their mouths for sustenance. But food has the power to bring people together, whether it's warring nations at a state dinner or out-of-town friends topping off a night of drinking and music with decadent doughnuts bought from an Airstream trailer. The way we prepare, talk about, and take action regarding food within the context of the Internet is a reflection of our culture, an edible dynamic for the Digital Age. ■



**JOIN US TODAY FOR**  
 Drink Specials  
 Food & Appetizers  
 Pool Tables & Big Screen TVs  
 Happy Hour  
 Karaoke & Live Music  
 Free Nacho Bar Every Day!

**Happy Hour Prices All Day During SXSW Week!**

Open Mon - Sat 2pm -2am  
 & Sun 10am - 2am  
 Live Music Thur & Fri  
 DJ on Sundays  
 Karaoke on Wednesdays

3595 RR 620 S., STE 300  
 Bee Cave, TX 78738  
 512.215.8243

[www.donjuanscantina.com](http://www.donjuanscantina.com)

## BRAISE

[braiseaustin.com](http://braiseaustin.com)  
 2121 E. 6th St

Elegant, modern  
 American dining with a  
 chef driven cuisine.



THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE  
**restaurant guide**  
 THOUSANDS OF RESTAURANTS  
 SEARCHABLE BY CUISINE  
 TYPE AND AREA OF TOWN  
 CHRONICLE  
[austinchronicle.com/guides/restaurant](http://austinchronicle.com/guides/restaurant)

## FRANZETTI

MASTER **JO** JEWELER



Austin Bat Necklace

[www.franzettijewelers.com](http://www.franzettijewelers.com)  
 (512) 450-1121  
 3707 Kerbey Lane  
 Austin ★ Texas 78731



Killer Sushi  
 Killer Drinks  
 New Austin Location

Mention this ad and receive a  
 complimentary Wasabi Crusted Salmon roll  
 Limited time only



207 San Jacinto Blvd, #202  
 T: 512.473.8775

Hours:  
 Mon - Wed: 11:00 - 10:00  
 Thurs: 11:00 - 11:00  
 Fri: 11:00 - extended hours  
 Sat: 12:00 - extended hours  
 Sun: 12:00 - 10:00

[www.piranhakillersushi.com](http://www.piranhakillersushi.com)



  
 Cantina LAREDO.  
 gourmet mexican food

## SIP THE FINEST MARGARITA...

Experience the gourmet side of Mexican cuisine  
 Taste guacamole made fresh at your table  
 Savor fresh seafood and steaks with authentic sauces

3rd & Colorado - 2nd Street District  
 201 West 3rd St Austin 512.542.9670  
 follow on Facebook & Twitter [cantinalaredo.com](http://cantinalaredo.com)

serving  
 breakfast  
 tacos  
 till 11am  
 mon-fri  
 till noon  
 sat & sun

**the screaming**  
**goat**

tacos y cerveza  
**477-GOAT**  
 900 W. 10th St.  
[thescreaminggoat.com](http://thescreaminggoat.com)

# Reporting From the Front Lines

## New media in troubled lands

BY BELINDA ACOSTA

The attack on CNN's Anderson Cooper as he covered the Egyptian uprising was for many the first – or at least the most public – indicator that the “peaceful revolution” had a dark side. Soon thereafter, news of the brutal sexual assault and beating of CBS news correspondent Lara Logan broke, followed by reports of attacks on other, lesser-known news gatherers. It was a sobering reminder that journalists are also casualties of war.

As editorial director of *El Siglo de Torreón* in Coahuila, Mexico, Javier Garza and his colleagues live with the constant threat of violence. Drug cartels have not only disrupted daily life in parts of Mexico; they have explicitly targeted journalists and news organizations that have published reports they didn't like.

“Yeah, sometimes I think, ‘This is a great story – too bad we can't publish it,’” Garza said in a Skype interview from his office in Torreón. The safety of his reporters is Garza's first concern. There is also the ongoing issue of how to get sources to speak on the record. “Reporting has become so complicated,” he said. “Secrecy [caused by fear] makes it hard to get to the bottom of something, but if we can't confirm, we can't publish. And if we feel that something is going to put us



## Check for Updates

in danger, we don't publish. I think the public has come to understand that.”

New media – Twitter, Facebook, blogs – may provide a solution. “Blogs don't have mastheads,” Garza said. “Nobody can go shoot a Facebook page.” However, new media is not without its complications. On the plus side: immediacy, as well as the opportunity to broadcast information that conventional media may have overlooked. The downside? Misinformation is easily spread by anyone not following basic journalistic standards. And it's not only citizen journalists using social media. Tweets by cartel members announcing a shoot-out in one part of town may divert attention from criminal activity in another part of town, while also encouraging a culture of fear.

Garza thinks the jury is out regarding the full impact of social media in Mexico, particularly since the country is not fully wired.

“We're just now coming to terms on the usefulness of new technology [in regards to the] news,” Garza said. “Positive or negative, it always depends on the user.”

In West Africa's Sierra Leone, the user age is skewing younger and younger. Scarred by a 10-year civil war, Sierra Leone is home to a lost generation for whom the passing down of personal history has been lost due to family deaths. It was these gaps that filmmaker Banker White wanted to address when he helped launch the WeOwnTV Workshop for Sierra Leone youth in 2009. The project was an offshoot of his 2006 award-winning documentary film, *Sierra Leone's Refugee All Stars* (co-directed by Zack Niles), about a group of musicians who keep music and hope alive while living as war refugees.

The project's purpose is to educate Sierra Leone youth, enabling them to use new-media tools to document their personal stories. White is awed by how workshop participants have taken to learning the new technology, and even more so by how they truly value it.

“I have not yet seen African youths excitedly talking about that ‘crazy video’ on YouTube from last night,” he writes. “But they are getting organized to post their new videos – even if that means sleeping all night by a computer at an Internet center to wait out the long upload times.” Perhaps it's simply the novelty of it all, but White thinks the success of WeOwnTV is steeped in something deeper.

“They were not taking the workshop lightly, nor the opportunity to have their story told,” he said. “There is a strong oral tradition in Sierra Leone and West Africa, and they are master storytellers. Truth be told, I have learned a lot from them.” ■

### RELATED PANELS

**The Impact of Social Media Tools in Mexico**  
Saturday, March 12, 11am, Hilton Garden Inn, Sabine

**This Is Our Generation: WeOwnTV Sierra Leone**  
Monday, March 14, 3:30pm, Hyatt, Hill Country CD

# ZAX

RESTAURANT & BAR

CASUAL UPSCALE DINING FULL BAR PATIO DINING  
HAPPY HOUR SPECIALS WEEKEND BRUNCH 11-3

## 20 craft beers on tap

An American bistro  
at the corner of Riverside and Barton Springs  
481-0100 • www.zaxaustin.com



### Ecstatic Dancing in Austin Texas



Sunday morning- 9:45am / Wednesday- 7:45pm / Friday-7:45pm  
at Galaxy Studios 1700 S. Lamar, Suite 338 (in rear of the Business Plaza)  
www.DancingTogether.org

### MUSICIANS REGISTER

UPLOAD  
YOUR MP3

[austinchronicle.com/musicreg](http://austinchronicle.com/musicreg)

# SOLID GOLD

clothing  
accessories  
bath  
home  
vintage

1601 e. 5th st.  
no. 102  
east austin, texas  
512.473.2730  
[rolidgoldacademy.com](http://rolidgoldacademy.com)



W H O  
W H A T  
W H E N  
&  
W H E R E



## AMDB

AUSTIN MUSIC DATABASE

AUSTIN  
CHRONICLE  
.COM/

AMDB

THE AUSTIN  
CHRONICLE

# Drink Local

★★★★★  
HANDMADE IN AUSTIN, TEXAS  
BY TITO BEVERIDGE

THIS SPRING, TITO'S HANDMADE VODKA BRINGS YOU OUR FIRST EVER

### ★ ARTS EXCHANGE PROGRAM! ★

This year's programming brings together over 75 artists to showcase collaborative works using 8-bit technology as inspiration for art, dance, theatre and film works. Look for event announcements throughout March, April and May and come celebrate the creative spirit with us!



Wine Enthusiast RATINGS -  
SCORE OUT OF 100 POINTS

**TITO'S**<sup>®</sup> **95**  
HANDMADE VODKA  
**USA** PTS

**Ketel One**<sup>®</sup> **89** PTS  
HOLLAND

**Grey Goose**<sup>®</sup> **84** PTS  
FRANCE

**Belvedere**<sup>®</sup> **84** PTS  
POLAND

**Absolut**<sup>®</sup> **84** PTS  
SWEDEN

☰ SCAN THIS CODE! ☰



SEE VIDEOS ABOUT THE REAL  
STORY BEHIND THE VODKA.

Don't have a QR Code Reader?  
Just go to [titotalks.com/ad](http://titotalks.com/ad)  
on your mobile browser!

★ [TITOSVODKA.COM](http://TITOSVODKA.COM) ★ Handcrafted to be savored responsibly.

As a distilled spirit, Tito's is **GLUTEN-FREE**. Distilled and bottled by Fifth Generation, Inc. Austin, Texas. 40% alcohol by volume. © 2011 Tito's Handmade Vodka.

YellowRoseAustin.com

Discover The Worst  
Kept Secret In Austin

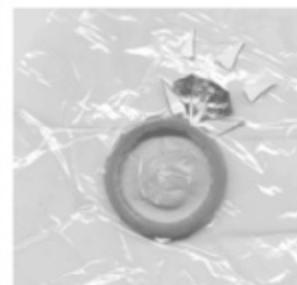
the **YELLOW ROSE**  
GENTLEMEN'S CLUB  
6528 North Lamar 512.458.2106

FREE LIMO SERVICE NIGHTLY - RESERVATIONS 512.431.5277  
FREE FRIDAY FEAST BUFFET FROM 11am - 2pm (with this ad)  
AWARD WINNING KITCHEN SERVING TILL MIDNIGHT  
PAY NO COVER WITH SXSW WRISTBAND!

**MARDI GRAS** **24** HOURS **SEVEN** DAYS  
**EROTIC SHOWS** **NOW HIRING**  
**SEXY STAFF** **10600**  
**PLATINUM SUITES** **N. IH-35**  
 WEST SIDE OF IH-35 between Broker & Rundberg  
**832-8858**



**VOLUNTEER** AIDS Services of Austin provides quality volunteer opportunities to anyone considering a role in the fight against AIDS. Volunteer where people from all walks of life give of their time and talents to make every aspect of our work possible. To get involved visit our website at [www.asaustin.org](http://www.asaustin.org) or call 512.458.AIDS (2437).



PROTECT THE  
**FAMILY JEWELS.**

KEEP THEM IN A  
**SAFE PLACE.**

**Planned Parenthood** For smart answers to all your questions about sex, birth control, STDs, pregnancy, and HIV. Confidential sexual health services for men and women of all ages and income levels.

CALL: 800.230.PLAN

[WWW.PPAUSTIN.ORG](http://WWW.PPAUSTIN.ORG)

**NO COVER WITH  
SXSW WRISTBAND/BADGE**  
STATE TAX NOT INCLUDED

**ST. PATTY'S PARTY MARCH 17**  
W/ LIVE BAGPIPERS - CELEBRATING MANAGER DENNIS' BIRTHDAY

**\$5.50 DAILY LUNCH SPECIAL**

**NO COVER MON-FRI 5-8PM**  
WITH GREAT HAPPY HOUR DRINK SPECIALS

**EXPOSE**  
**THE MEN'S CLUB**  
3615 SOUTH CONGRESS 447.5353



*No  
Cover*  
with *SXSW*  
wristband/badge  
*Stripper Idols*  
*Thursday Nights*  
*\$5.95 Daily*  
*Lunch Special*

501 Ben White  
445-6655

**PALAZIO**

Full Bar  
Gourmet  
Kitchen

*Austin's most elegant men's club*

# When the New Thing Is Old News Already

Call it Murphy's nth Law of Computing:  
'Any given program, when running, is obsolete'

BY RICHARD WHITTAKER

If you bought an iPhone 4, you did so knowing that the iPhone 5 will likely be on sale before your current contract expires. That's what obsolete means to most people, and they are used to it: After all, it's only a phone or a laptop or a Blu-ray player. But what if that definition of "obsolete" is, well, obsolete? What if "obsolete" means that a whole way of thinking or doing – whole industries, even – are headed for the scrap heap?

Take personal checks: These good old-fashioned paper promises of payment have been around since possibly as early as the Roman Empire. Yet the clock is ticking toward their demise. Most Scandinavian countries have already abandoned them in favor of electronic transfers, while UK banks plan to dump them completely by 2018. To an outsider, the American dependence on checks – for wages, for shopping, for rent – is alien and antiquated. According to Brett King, author of *Bank 2.0: How Customer Behavior and Technology Will Change the Future of Financial Services*, it's about to become a thing of the past for Americans, too. Due to mobile technology, he said, "My daughter, I'm sure she'll never write a check in her life."

It will not be the debit or credit card that finally kills off checks. Instead, it could be near field communication. King explained: "I can say, 'I'm going to send you 50 dollars,' and I either put it in my phone or I get your e-mail address or I touch my phone to your phone. It's suddenly a whole lot easier." It's not new technology, nor is it untested. Payment by phone is common in Japan, and it's huge in Africa, where much of the population has bypassed desktop and laptop computers and gone straight to smart phones. Kenyan telephone company Safaricom only launched its phone-based banking network M-Pesa in 2007, but, King said, it already handles more money transfers in a month than Western Union does in a year. "The big four banks in Kenya that run most of the market, between them they have 3½ million customers," he said. "[M-Pesa] has 12 million."

Under this new banking paradigm, there's little difference between a prepaid, reloadable transit pass; a prepaid phone account; and a debit card. "They are functioning as a bank would," King said. "They're taking a deposit, and they are enabling payment." After centuries of operating basically unchanged, whole sections of the modern financial sector may find themselves outmoded due to

out-of-industry technological innovations like online peer-to-peer lending. "[The concept] that banking can undergo a disruption of this scale is foreign to bankers."

It's not just the technology that banks need to worry about: It's the way technology allows people to behave and shapes their expectations. The data-rich, real-time, all-the-time online experience of a smart phone allows someone to check e-mail or check in for a flight. King said, "If your bank can't get your account balance to a mobile handheld screen, you'll think, 'C'mon, this is pretty basic stuff today.'" To make the jump from a physical presence, like checks and bank branches, to branchless, paperless banking will be tricky, not least because the retail bank executive in charge of branches is usually the person with the biggest budget. When the fight to truly embrace virtual business comes, King said, "[The retail bank executive is] going to fight that with his last dying breath, because the cash that he gets gives him the power in the organization."

The problem is that when firms are faced with the challenge to innovate or die, some die. Take the horse-drawn carriage industry in New York. In the 19th century, it was a major employer, with spin-off industries of hay sellers and dung collectors and horse-meat vendors. Then someone invented cars, and all horse-drawn carriages do now is carry tourists around Central Park. The smart people turned their stables into gas stations. The rest were left with empty stables.

## Check Warranty Expiration Date

The recent buzz has been about how brick-and-mortar video-rental chains like Blockbuster and Hollywood Video were crushed by Netflix. (Blockbuster's late-to-the-game attempt at home delivery and streaming trends were just that – late to the game.) Yet their demise is just market correction compared to what happened to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. After more than two centuries of publication and worldwide distribution, it seemed invulnerable, doing around half a billion dollars in sales annually in the early 1990s. Then in 1996 the company was sold for a reported (and piddling) \$15 million. "How can that happen? It was *Encarta*," King said. Of course, by 2010 Microsoft's encyclopedia-killer was also gone, its CD-ROM format pushed into irrelevancy and insolvency by Wikipedia. King



Brett King

blamed that kind of obsolescence on "organizational inertia around 'This is the way we've always done this business,' and they just can't change quickly enough."

An obvious litany of content providers – software companies, music publishers, film studios, newspapers – has faced technology-based obsolescence with varying degrees of success. Yet Mike Masnick, founder of Techdirt, sees the same wave bearing down on almost every industry, from pharmaceuticals to manufacturing. It's not that the technology itself has changed; rather, it has changed underlying ideas. Economics has always been about what Masnick called "the study of scarcity." Now that people no longer depend on brick-and-mortar banks that are only open 40 hours a week or a record store that's closed on Sundays, the economics are increasingly about abundance. "That's the thing that has been most difficult for most people who are used only to dealing with scarcity," he said.

Masnick called the entertainment industry's battle over copyright and patents "an early warning system" for other industries. Since modern copyright law began in 1709, it has become a backbone of commerce because of one key idea: that people will stop innovating if their ideas are not legally protected. "There's certainly questions to whether that's true," Masnick said. "But copyright law as it stands today is based on the premise that it's true of all content." As the music industry has found to its great detriment, dragging copyright violators and illegal downloaders through the courts has not protected its profits or killed off pirate sites. Instead, Masnick said, "As the laws fight more and more what people want to do, people respect the laws less and less."

So banking is changing forever, and you can't even trust the idea of copyright: How can anyone escape becoming obsolete?

Well, that depends on how you define "obsolete." William Charnock, chief strategy officer of digital advertising agency R/GA, called that "the question of the age." Obsolescence, as Blockbuster proved, can strike almost instantaneously, and firms are starting to realize that

## RELATED PANELS

### Banks: Innovate or Die!

Saturday, March 12, 11am, Hilton Salon F/G

### What Would Copyright Look Like If Created Today?

Sunday, March 13, 12:30pm, Hilton Salon C

### Congratulations! Your Brand Is About To Become Obsolete

Sunday, March 13, 11am, ACC Ballroom F

technology is not the tool of their downfall, but the reason for it. He said, "Digital has changed the nature of what it means to be successful, how you manage success, how you think about success, and how you get there." In the past, he added, "brands managed their success essentially by buying the distribution and blocking others out. ... Now they have to earn their success."

It's that dreaded paradigm shift again. For centuries, the definition of success has been about flat-out market domination, and obsolescence was warded off by building a commercial bulwark. Now success is about maintaining customer interest. The big danger for firms is to flail from one big product launch to another, confusing a new serial number with true innovation. Andrea Ring, R/GA's planning director, described that as counterproductive. True innovation, she said, is about "really figuring out who you're engaging with and what's interesting to those people."

Charnock and Ring say their more successful clients get that: When R/GA first started, what companies wanted from a digital marketing firm was a cool website and online marketing tactics. Now they want strategies to deal with digital natives. For Charnock, that means they're grasping that the only way to avoid obsolescence is to keep moving. He said, "The point at which a brand is at its most successful, when it has its big critical mass, is the point when people have to innovate the most." ■

# BEER FOR THE PEOPLE

SOUTH X SOUTHWEST • MARCH 11-20 • AUSTIN TEXAS



GET ACCESS AND INFO FROM THE OFFICIAL BEER OF SXSW.



★ SCAN AND DISCOVER ★  
DOWNLOAD THE FREE APP AT GETSCANLIFE.COM



GREAT PILSNER TASTE



TRIPLE HOPS BREWED

GREAT BEER  
GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

©2011 MILLER BREWING CO., MILWAUKEE, WI

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Open to residents of AR, LA, MS, NM, OK or TX, 21 or older at time of entry. Void where prohibited by law. Promotion begins at or about 12:00:01 AM (CT) on 02/01/11 and ends 11:59:59 PM (CT) on 03/20/11. Log onto [www.thebeerforthepeople.com](http://www.thebeerforthepeople.com) to enter and for official rules and odds of winning. Sponsor: MillerCoors, LLC, Milwaukee, WI.