John Bruneau's Interview with Cory Arcangel vs The Stefanix of _SWITCH_

This is just a mockup. The interview is part of _switch i19_

&lt;John Bruneau Interviews Cory Arcangel&gt;

John: Can you recall your first video game experience? What was the system? Are you still awe inspired by the same systems in the same way or is it more a nostalgia thing?

Cory: I think my first experience was playing the game "Raiders of the Lost Ark" on the Atari 2600. Actually, I played it on an Intellivision system that had an Atari 2600 adaptor. I was never a big action game fan though. I spent a few summers on "The Bards Tale", but all in all I pretty much gave up on home consoles shortly after the Atari era...

I like these systems not cause of nostalgia, but because they are cheap and easy to work. Also they are the perfect middle ground between analogue and digital video.

How did you get your start? I know this is an over blown question but by this I mean, how did you get the notion that hacking was art? Not just in the general sense but art that curators and others established in the art field would accept as art and want to write about and want to put it in their museums. BEIGe sites FAT BITS as being its first installation. Was that your own first installation as well as the group’s? What all had to come together to make that happen?

Yes, FAT BITS was our first installation. Though I think I had an earlier installation at a gallery called Moving Image Gallery in Chinatown. But FAT BITS happened because we were offered an exhibition by this place in Chicago called Deadtech, and we wanted to make something new for it. About 1-2 year prior BEIGe member Paul B. Davis experimented with making music on the Nintendo Entertainment System right after we finished the 8-bit Construction Set record. So, it took me around a year to catch up with learning how to do the video on the NES, and also how to program for it. So we decided to do a collaboration and FAT BITS was it. I made the video and Paul made the audio. If I remember correctly we finished the cartridge like 2 hours before the show. The show was the first “BEIGe” show. It was nice. It had screenprints by Paul B. Davis, The 8-bit Construction Set record, my video and silkscreens called Urbandale, and FAT BITS by Paul and I.

To answer your other question, I decided that hacking was art when I saw my first “cracker” tag. Meaning the screen a person put on a program they have cracked. After that I was obsessed with computer hacking and spent like a year learning how to program and how to reverse engineer programs. I was learning 68k Motorola Assembly then so I could play pranks on people at my school using Macintosh computers.....
Do you have names for your computers?

No, ...I am far too boring of a person to do anything like that :) 

I am a part time NES scavenger. As the years have gone by, I find it harder and harder to find cartages. I haven't seen anything at a Salvation Army in years. Because obsolete technology has now become classic technology, I find used game prices for the really old stuff to be going up and up. How do you feel about this trend? You mention that part of the reason you create these works is you like the idea of crating something out of trash. Has the recomercialization of retro-gaming changed your creative outlook? How hard is it to find an NES in the trash these days?

Yeah it is getting harder,...but if you have a regular route, you can find one every few weeks or so. A regular route is a few thrift stores you can go to on a regular basis. In Brooklyn I like the Salvation Army on Atlantic, and there is also a great junk store on Driggs in B-Burg. Now my attention at thrift stores has turned to fashion because it is getting harder to get consoles. I just got an awesome Netscape blazer with an embroidered logo.

Regarding Pizza party, I am very allergic to dairy products. I always order my pizza with no cheese. Pizza Party has an extra cheese flag but not a no cheese flag. Is there any hope of a patch or upgrade in the future with a no cheese flag? Its not just me there is the whole vegan and lactose intolerant command line population you have to consider.

Well, I'll have to look into that. Cause Pizza Party, being a hack of Dominos website, can only do the things that Dominos can. I am sure if Dominos would have offered it, Mike and I would have included it....

.....Also I was reading H. Morrow Long's post on seclists.org involving security issues with pizza party. I really got a kick out of it. How do you feel about distributing software with multiple vulnerabilities "resulting in chaos, anarchy and confusion."?

That was the idea wasn't it? Yeah, his post was the best result of that project. It was quite a compliment to have pizza party treated in a legit way like that....the goal of the project was to release a real deal UNIX program.....so we were hoping people would do stuff like that......

I want to just interject a disclaimer here; I hope I don't come off as trying to discredit your work. I have great difficulty defending the validity of my work as an artist, so I am very interested in hearing how you find off critics .

ok....bring it on!!!!!!!

:) 

There seems to be a pretty big buzz in the art scene surrounding Data Diaries. Almost every art critic on the web when discussing your work can't not mention Data Diaries. Discussions it has generated appear all over the web. Reading Rhizome, it seems like the whole debate spun off into a discussion of the art of discussion....but I digress. Some people like Marc Garrette, seem to have mixed feelings, "I personally enjoy Cory's work but I do not like what comes with it, the background noise is far too loud for me and it gets in the way of the work itself.* While others like, Michael Szpakowski, simply don't like it at all. "Take the 'concept"
away and the poverty of the thing immediately becomes apparent." How do you defend it as art… especially to the not technically savvy critics?

For a non-tech person, I would hope that the video itself would be enough for someone to like to work. I would usually never make a work that people would have to know the back story to enjoy. Well, I would try......:

And on the flipside…

In the intro by Alex Galloway he describes its simplicity as part of its beauty, "Every so often an artist makes a work of art by doing almost nothing. No hours of torturous labor, no deep emotional expression, just a simple discovery and out it pops." I think there is some truth to what Galloway is saying but in a way I can see that he is promoting a key aspect of the work that might cause others to dismiss it. To those more technically savvy critics, its simplicity seems to come under fire as a weakness in the work. How do you defend producing a work in which, as Alex Gallaway put it, you are "Doing almost nothing"?

Simplicity is an asset, not a weakness...look at something like the cloud work. that is very simple. The smaller the idea the happier I am.

I want to know more about Naptime. That was the piece that initially got me hooked on your work. I was mesmerized by the continuous dual-pronged onslaught of music and visuals. What drove you to create this work in particular? Was there an initial concept? Who did the music? Was the music developed with the visuals or added at the end?

Paul B. Davis did the music. The visuals were made first, and then the music added at the end. At first I had him dreaming Bobby Brown lyrics. Stuff like "Baby, you know I treat you right", very R+B type stuff. That was funny but there was something kinda un-mysterious about it. I don't know. It kinda quite fit. Then I took some code from an older cartridge of mine, called Video Ravingz, and then took that psychedelic code and pasted it in his dream bubble. Then I liked that better. Then I went through all these old music files my friend Paul had made and I like the RAVE track the best. So, yeah, ...that's it! Pretty easy.

While I was researching your work I ended up downloading "SauceMaster" and "Dollars" as well as Bodenstandig's "In Rock 8bit" and now I'm listening to them constantly while I work. I have always held the music from Megaman 2 and Star Control 2 in high regard. I guess I had a pre-existing condition. What contributed to the formation of The 8-bit Construction Set? What is your all time favorite in-game music?

Well Paul B. Davis and I were going to school at the Oberlin Conservatory. We roomed together. Somewhere along the line he got heavy into eBay right when it started. So our room filled with computers and junk. We were running Beige Records at the time (technically beige records is Paul and Joe Beuckman from St. Louis) and one time when we were getting Paul's record mastered in Detroit we all came up with the 8-bit idea: A record one side Commodore and the other Atari loop on the end of Paul's 12 inch Pretty. Anyway, about 3 years later, we finished it (along with Joe Bonn from Oberlin)

Also, I was never a big fan of video game music actually...I am now...

The 8-bit construction set claims to be the first use of vinyl to
distribute software. What are the implications and ramifications? Is there even a device in existence that can run the code of the record? Or do you have to buy the cassette version of the album and run it off an old tape drive to see the code executed? I hear few have tried and even fewer succeeded.

The software on the Atari side is for the Atari, and the software for the Commodore side is for the Commodore 64. U gotta do it right after you get the record or it doesn't. We did it 'cause we wanted the record to be pretty through.

In your work you are digging up and dusting off these discarded relics of a forgotten era. It seems to me that programming outdated and obsolete technology could almost be considered act of media archeology. Would you consider it as such? How would you define the idea of media archeology in relation to coding?

Ummm.... Yeah it is too bad it is considered archeology. I mean people use guitars from the 60's and nobody complains :) Technology moves fast. I like to explore old machines because it seems the right thing to do. A machine must get lonely in peoples closets for all those years. To turn one on and see what the deal is, is half the wonder. Coding is pretty far removed from this I think because code is code. It is all pretty similar.......There is no wonder for me with code...

It seems like your Nintendo hacks can vary from conceptual like "I Shot Andy Warhol" to just fun and pretty like "Video Ravingz". Is anything predefined when you create, or is the outcome more emergent?

I would say all my work is silly. "I shot Andy Warhol" wasn't meant to be a heavy hitting conceptual work, it was meant as a light one liner, but I really have no set outcome when I make something. I am all over the place. :) I hear Rad Racer is your current hacking target. Do you have a plan of attack? Personally I would like to see some work that requires those old cardboard 3d glasses.

Rad Racer has a 3d mode....Im on it...

True or False: Rad Racer is a misnomer.

Rad Racer is pretty rad.

John: Thanks so much for you time
Cory: Thank u