



**"We Went Digital, Where Were You?"** may have been the title of this year's New York Video Festival's conference on digital video, but "Come Together" would have served just as well. The exciting thing to come out of the conference, held at the Film Society of Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater, was how media are merging to form a hybrid audiovisual experience. The films shown at the festival digitally merged still photography, graphic design, text-based information, animation and video -- to startling effect. If you think you've seen the future of filmmaking at the multiplex -- you probably haven't. It may be that the real future is taking place in small studios -- or bedrooms -- with an Apple computer, copies of After Effects and Premiere and a bucket-load of multidimensional thinking.

The digital conference, jointly chaired by the NYVF's Graham Leggat and RESfest head Jonathan Wells, brought four digital filmmakers together to show examples of their work and discuss the impact of digital technology on modes of creation. Eric Henry demonstrated his cool, text-intensive "Wood Technology in the Design of Structures." The credits for "Wood" said, "Written, captured, designed and animated by Eric Henry," which set the scene for the discussion about media morphing that followed. Elizabeth Dagger presented the laid-back, graphics-intensive "Zero Point," which featured a Ry Cooder-ish soundtrack. Producer-director Tommy Pallotta showed the startling "Snack and Drink," a series of conversations with an autistic youth, which was rotoscoped to look like a hybrid of live-action and animation, and was emotionally resonant to boot. Rod Ascher, from the West Coast-based Directors' Bureau, manipulated still photography for his DV work "Alfred."

The range of source material used by those working in digital video begs the question: Are they filmmakers, videomakers or DV artists? This salient point was addressed by RESfest's Wells. He wondered if DV should now be considered a medium of its own, a new creative category outside of film or video. (Indeed, this question may be giving some film festival programmers a headache.) Not only do DV works have a unique production process, they have a different set of aesthetics, too.

The panel preferred to view DV in the broad context of visual media as a whole. "I like to think of them all as similar," Pallotta said. "When you're directing (with traditional means), you'd ask a character to walk across a room. (Working with DV), you can do it by clicking a cursor. It's just a different way of getting something to happen." In fact, it became clear that the DV artists wanted to avoid marginalizing both the medium and their skills by locating DV in a space too far removed from traditional media: "Our skills are transferable," Pallotta said. Lower costs are a hallmark of DV, but needn't be, he added: "If you have highly paid stars in your film, you start eating up money (no matter the format)." The fact that many DV makers preferred to have their work transferred to film for projection also was mentioned, with panelists pointing out that the transfer process, if done well, can add new qualities to the work.

Still, the works exhibited at the conference looked radically different from anything produced either in film or in the more "traditional" areas of experimental video. Traditional experimental video makes use of "collaging," whereas these DV artists merge media so that it becomes too synthetic to be called a collage.

Henry's "Wood Technology," an After Effects college project that explored the notion that "Life is always elsewhere, there is always something missing," combined video and animation with a strong typographical element. Yet there wasn't the sense of fragmentation and dislocation that collaging tends to evoke -- the work appeared fully formed. "With new technology, you can have material on call from various sources," Henry explained. "It just seems natural to recombine

things. Technology does tend to suggest that route, and it goes hand-in-hand with experimental film and video. In 'Wood Technology,' I repurposed a piece of found text and gave it an artistic spin. I found a book on swimming and search-and-replaced the word 'swimming' with the words 'wood-eating.' "

Dagger's sultry "Zero Point," made on a Mac with Premiere and After Effects, reflected her background in graphic design. "The look comes from being immersed in that medium, and from the way I use the text in the work," she said. "Breaking up the screen into different components is something that software enables you to do. And with After Effects and Premiere you can work with a lot of layers -- even more than with an Avid."

Ascher's "Alfred" made use of still photography. "I worked on some still photographs in After Effects," he explained. "Doing something like this allows you to make things that don't look like other things. You can take a variety of clips and excerpts -- still photography, clip art and images from CDs -- and the tools allow you to be flexible in the way that you use them." Ascher also used Photoshop to work on the stills.

"Mixing things together in this way is becoming part of a new culture. I want to see everything come unglued, collapse and collide," Pallotta said.

Pallotta brought the much-ignored issue of interactivity and expression into the debate by pointing out how gaming engines such as Quake can be used to create films. Pallotta

co-authored an article in RES magazine (Vol. 3/2) that told how gamers were using the powerful Quake engine to experiment with Quake movies. "In 1996, a Quake clan, the Rangers, ushered in the age of Quake movies with their 'Diary of a Camper,'" wrote Pallotta and Katie Salen.

"They conceived the idea to record a game demo that exploits the software's built-in moviemaking capabilities. Quake players were transformed into actors on the virtual movie set."

"We're developing new ways to express ourselves. We're working on computers, making work that is intended to be viewed on computers," Pallotta said at the conference. "The engine that drives Quake III, for instance, is incredibly powerful. It creates an immersive world. But can such great technology only be used for one thing? I wrote an article about people taking these engines and using them to create narrative films. Eventually, people will take these over and use them to interact with one another -- narratives will be created from that interaction. It's becoming a different world out there."

A different world -- and a less-expensive one. Talking about the relatively low cost of digital tools, Henry said new technology allows the artist to bring the privacy of a novelist to the usually communal art of filmmaking. "I probably wouldn't have made 'Wood Technology' without a computer," he said. "Although friends helped me, it was essentially a private process. I didn't have a lot of confidence then. The technology allowed me to build my confidence as I crafted this thing, noodling away in my bedroom. I guess that I could have made it with non-digital tools -- I was a student, and had access to equipment. But digital tools allowed me to make it a more-private affair."

The new thrust of DV was summed up by Pallotta: "It's about thinking in more dimensions," he said.

## The New York Vidfest Digital Conference

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August 23, 2000

-The sources for this article are 2-pop and Creative Planet-

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from Creative Planet's MediaTechnology.com

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<http://www.zonezero.com/magazine/articles/vidfest/vidfest.html>

