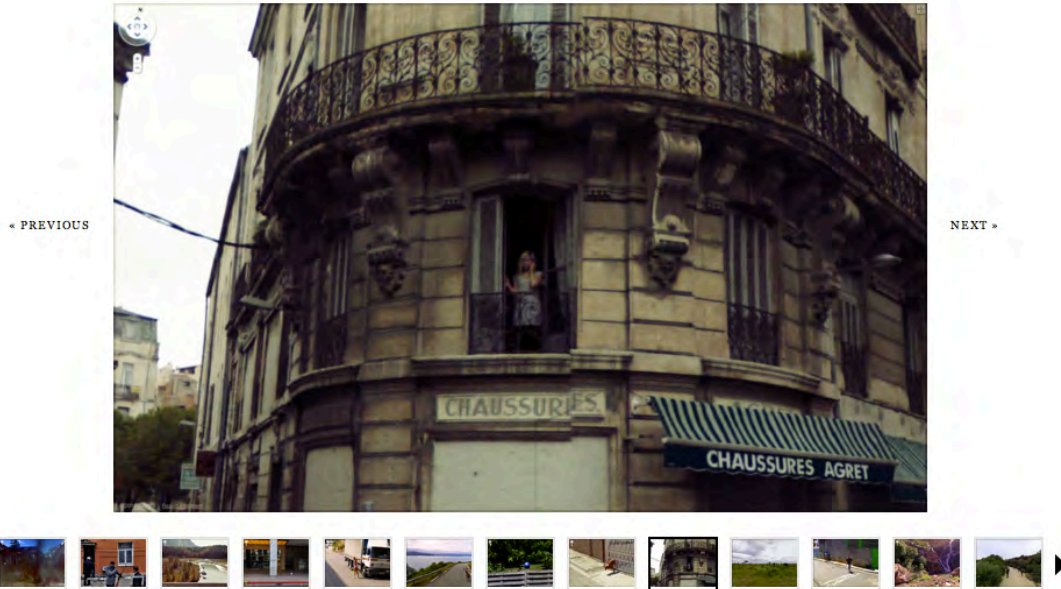


## Jon Rafman's Google Street Views

MAR. 7, 2011 By JIMMY CHEN




**Jon Rafman** is a lucky man for at least two reasons: (1) his priceless sensibility is a veil through which he sees a more beautiful world, a precious one that reaches such a state through the very aesthetic of non-preciousness; (2) he, through scouring the near infinite territory of Google street views, is statistically even able to consistently find universal moments of “condensed being” which would make the greatest haiku poet weep.

Under the auspices of conventional photography, these images — a dog struggling to transgress a gate whose holes are barely larger than its own skeleton; an infant crawling alone in front of a seemingly “fake” Gucci store; a derelict horse gnawing away at urban detritus for food — point to a kind of surreal alienation incurred, unconsciously, by a negligent modern world. These Lynchian moments are informed by their very verity, beyond cinematic or narrative agenda generally imposed by the invoked director, or those like him. The idea of art somewhat cheapens this enterprise.

The lazy and easy answer is that God, his canvas our flesh and the space between us, is a great artist, perhaps a stunning genius so misunderstood that half the world despises him. This is a lesson in entropy, the soft arbitrariness of life, that when finally punctured by a sudden moment, oozes meaning. And yes, our friends at Google may have something to do with this, but their voice is muted, neutral, and merely incidental. Their camera is blind, even glib, in their profit-fueled survey of the known world. And God has yet to sign the gallery consignment, so this leaves us with you, me, and dear Jon, polishing these turds of absurdities into shiny diamonds.

One motif we see over and over again is the prostitute between solicitations, just standing half-naked by a truck, her face blurred out. Such illicitness lends itself to the power of Jon's either somber or enthralled voyeurism. It is difficult to read Jon, his sense of humor, sadness, cynicism, or irony; perhaps he is merely presenting us a version of a world as a journalist might. The unmarked story, if we are to engage ourselves with these prostitutes, is the explicit trade of sex. The invisible money shot only visible between the two participants. Our role, here, is to not see. But it is not just these whores whose faces are obscured, but everybody's, as if simply being human is a derogatory act. These photographs, or I should say curation, are less about seeing than imagination, fueled, ironically, by the boring empiricism of life. We understand perfectly the preceding and subsequent moments of each image. A man crashes his car and lol calls his cell phone. A dog pisses legs raised on a wall, cognizant of and shamed by its non-humanness. A man vomits next to a pay phone, barely missing his shoes. The formal compositions of the photographs barely matter, and after a while, the subjects — the unwitting representatives of our race — seem to blur into one. All the drama — the car crashes, the indignant moonings and middle fingers, the near or imminent deaths, the police arrests, the mysterious fires — are slowly taken for granted, soon to reside in a shallow past, a pool in which we put our own shady memories.

But I never want to forget that butterfly, the orange winged floating period that could end this sentence, if only this sentence marked my end. But I'm still looking, grateful for everything and everyone who might be responsible for this: Jon, God, Google, the butterfly, and maybe even me. People are ugly to one another, yet life, in its ultimate punkdom, is quietly beautiful. It's

ridiculous if you think about it. An OJ-esque white unmarked van with a 360° aggregated view drives around the world to visually dictate the flayed mark of road, passing whores, car crashes, kids on bikes, misguided animals, punks with guns, dying great wide landscapes — passing it all with a billion dollar budget right under our noses, in order to make a timeless appointment with a butterfly, who as a pair of floating lips, was able to muster a silent smile for me. 

## Picture of the Day: The Oval Office, in the Style of Jasper Johns

*By Chris Good*



Since 2010, [Jon Rafman](#) has been digitally reimagining objects and settings in the styles of famous artists for a tumblr blog called [Brand New Paint Job](#). (See the [Edward Hopper Buick Station Wagon](#) and the [Franz Kline Starbucks](#)).

Here, he gives the Oval Office a new paint job in the style of Jasper Johns





OUT THERE

## TAKING IT TO THE (VIRTUAL) STREETS

"I have to mentally prepare myself before I go Street View surfing," says Jon Rafman, one of several new-media artists who are harnessing Google's visual-mapping technologies to make fine art. "The process requires intense endurance and concentration. Once I'm in the groove, I enter a trancelike state." Rafman trawls Google's archives to locate digital shots capturing dramatic moments, which he then blows up, in some cases to nearly 6-by-10-foot formats. When hung in a gallery, the enlarged scenes take on a significance not conveyed on the computer screen: "The degradation that occurs gives them an almost painterly quality," he says.

Given that Google technology is available to anyone with an Internet connection, it's not surprising that other artists have exploited the creative potential of Street View and Earth. Michael Wolf, who lives in Hong Kong, trains a tripod-mounted camera on the images on his computer monitor; Andreas Rutkauskas, in Montreal, produces richly detailed virtual mountain landscapes using Google Earth; New York's Hermann Zschiegner rephotographed Ed Ruscha's 1967 *Thirty-four parking lots in Los Angeles* using Google Earth satellite shots.

Google artists herald a new stage in the evolution of appropriation art. Zschiegner makes this explicit in his book *+walker evans +sherrie levine*, a collection of all 26 images of Allie Mae Burroughs, Walker Evans's most famous subject, which turned up in a Google Image search on the names of Evans and Sherrie Levine (an earlier rephotographer of Evans's work). With this new evolutionary stage comes a new crop of thorny intellectual-property issues. Since the artists using Google technology have obviously not produced the digital source material they're employing, how can they claim the work they make as their own? "The part of the process that makes it 'my' work is in framing and re-framing the images," Rafman asserts. "By reintroducing the human

gaze, I reassert the importance, the uniqueness of the individual." Michael Wolf—who started photographing Street View shots of Paris while living there—agrees. "It all boils down to what I notice and how I crop the image," the artist says, noting frequently seen details that he tends to fixate on: "extreme Google face erasures," the company's watermark hiding in clouds, urban pigeons.

Recently Rafman has been editing together stills plucked from Google Street View with swooping Google Earth aerial shots of iconic locales like Machu Picchu and Stonehenge for a digital film, *You, the World, and I*, which pays homage to the French filmmaker Chris Marker. The appropriated images illustrate a story about seeking lost love around the globe, told by a poetic narrator. "Each Street View was a sphere," he intones. "Each little sphere contained a potential memory, the possibility of finding her." Like artists such as Eva and Franco Mattes, with their interventions in Second Life, Rafman lands an emotional punch using a technology that seems horribly ill suited to earnestness.

The narrator of *You, the World, and I* is able to find but a single low-res Street View capture of his beloved, standing naked at the edge of a body of water. When he later returns to the same coordinates, the fickle currents of Google technology have swept away even that: "This image is no longer available." —SCOTT INDRISEK

**JON RAFMAN,**  
58 Lungomare  
9 Maggio, Bari,  
Puglia, Italy, 2009.  
Digital C-print,  
45 x 72 in.

*Jon Rafman's photographic and video work using Google technology will be showcased at the ARS Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria, September 2-11, and at the Fotografia Festival in Rome, September 23-October 24. For an online roundtable discussion of Google-based art, visit [artinfo.com](http://artinfo.com).*



## Calling From Canada: Virtual Reality Bites

December 20th, 2010 by [Raji Sohal](#)

80 people

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"Maybe the Internet is for me what Paris in the 20s was for Joyce, Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein or New York in 50s was for Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg." — Jon Rafman

Canadian new media artist [Jon Rafman](#) may be best known for his [Google Street View project](#) and his clever and poignant web art series [Brand New Paint Job](#), in which recognizable 3D objects (and entire rooms and scenes more recently) appear to be wrapped in famous paintings as though the paintings themselves were wrapping paper. Because of the easy, crude techniques used to produce some web art, along with its reproducibility and disregard for the original copy (but we'll leave that Pandora's box for another post!), web or net art is still finding its sea legs in the fine art world. However, as a conversation with Rafman maintains, and as his live virtual tour project [Kool-Aid Man in Second Life](#) (see promo video [here](#)) in particular reveals, these conceptual works are as relevant as art gets today: they arise from our decentralized Internet age and draw attention to how contemporary subject formation is increasingly co-constitutive of the virtual, the actual, and the real.



Jon Rafman, "Kool-Aid Man in Second Life," installation view, 2010. Courtesy the author.

I caught Rafman's presentation of a live virtual tour of Second Life as it was delivered to an audience at Montreal performance venue, *Il Motore*. The presentation, which has happened in numerous cities now (and received much [press](#)), entails Rafman's live navigation of Second Life with his avatar, Kool-Aid Man, as in *The Kool-Aid Man* — that exaggeratedly large jug of toxic-colored "drink" whose weird deep-voiced proclamations of *oh yeah!* and penchant for jumping through brick walls you may remember from marking commercial breaks on Saturday morning cartoons in the eighties. According to Rafman, Kool-Aid Man is identified with a specific demographic, one which grew up before the Internet age. Kool-Aid Man also represents an empty signifier from the decade that defined excess: "you can inscribe whatever you want onto Kool-Aid Man." Much like Second Life itself, the reappropriation of Kool-Aid Man here, is both a source of ironic humor and a place for self-conscious critique: what is he and what does he represent, if anything?



Source: <http://koolaidmaninsecondlife.com/>



Rafman refers to the project as “virtual ethnography.” The tours are interesting as anthropological studies and sociological vignettes into today’s subcultures too. Rafman’s Kool-Aid Man mingles with [furrries](#), medieval fetishist avatars, and every kind of kitsch reference imaginable in Second Life. Teleporting from one [NSFW](#) scene to another, audiences don’t know whether to mock what they see or take it seriously. After all, behind each avatar and each fabricated scene in the virtual online world exists a human being, probably on a home computer or in a cubicle at an office. Hypothetically, you and I could sign up to Second Life any time and navigate in the privacy of our own homes, but Rafman’s virtual tours’ re-presentation of this phenomenon occurs in a special context: a public group setting. The group setting pushes people’s understanding of Second Life. The audience amplifies the social awkwardness, self-consciousness, and curiosity of the themes explored in Second Life, leading one to wonder, how real is virtual reality? At one point an audience member sitting by me referred to the “fake fantasy: we were exploring on Second Life tour, to which Rafman retorted, “But it *is* real. I mean, this is actually happening.”

According to Rafman, it is the live navigation of Second Life that constitutes “the performance,” which goes down something more like an experiential, group lecture that favors extroverted participants. It is Rafman who navigates Kool-Aid Man; however, he asks attendees for their input on what to do, where to go, and what to say to other avatars while perusing the program. Like a physical tour with an informed tour guide, Rafman invites the audience to ask questions throughout the tour. During the performance, we stumbled upon virtual parties, orgies, dystopian wastelands, and the most bizarre social encounters occurring between other avatars. Rafman warned us, “if you can imagine it, it exists in Second Life.” At one point, another avatar even discovered that Rafman was giving a virtual tour of Second Life to our group and allowed us to interview him. He also told us about some cool places to check out in Second Life and teleported with us to a few of them. Chance and improvisation are the opportune words in this performance. Neither Rafman nor the audience knows what will happen when the artist logs in Kool-Aid Man. What ensues for sixty or so minutes raises myriad questions that deal with how we live and where agency lies in virtual reality — can the web, and a virtual game specifically, have agency?

If Bruno Latour’s [actor-network theory](#), in which he postulates the agency of objects, is extended to include the net and the web, then living online with different and various selves – through Second Life and other social networking programs and applications – is to be given more credence. Latour states:




For the thing we are looking at is not a human thing, nor is it an inhuman thing. It offers, rather a continuous passage, a commerce, an interchange, between what humans inscribe in it and what it prescribes to humans [...] What should it be called neither object nor subject. An instituted object, quasi-object, quasi-subject, a thing that possesses body and soul indissociably.

This is the very philosophical stuff we're grappling with in our digital era now, and that art is being made to draw some of these connections together. To provokingly represent them through recontextualization is exciting to me.

With net art gaining popularity, it is becoming clearer that virtual reality cannot be reduced to being phony nor fake, insofar that it is happening; it occurs, it occurs in the virtual realm, and the virtual folds into the actual, although sometimes through subtler manifestations. Take, for example, how virtual-reality has been experimented with in healing burn victims in physiotherapy; the victim watches an ice cold scene on a screen which in turn, actually lowers his or her body temperature. In this case, the incorporeal event is virtual *and* actual (in the actual is changed because of the virtual). Too heady yet? Bear with me. This idea stems from philosopher Constantin V. Boundas's idea that "the virtual is the real that has not yet been actualized." In the realm of Facebook and avatars, subjectivity is the constitution of dynamically constructed virtual and actual aspects creating reality as we know it. Fifty years ago, this notion would be some far-out scene in a Kubrick flick. But Rafman's recontextualization and presentation of one aspect of the virtual web world brings it home.

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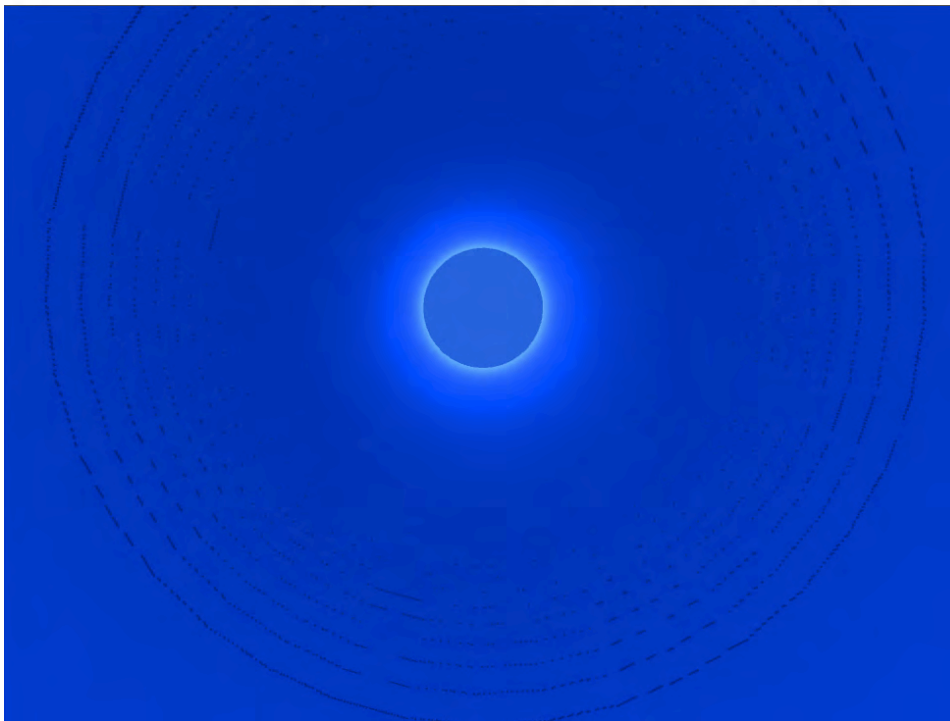
# ARTINFO

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

## IMAGE CONSCIOUS

FEBRUARY 9, 2011, 4:30 AM

### Featured Review: Lauren Christiansen on Jon Rafman and Tabor Robak's Bnpj.exe



Should you find yourself on [the website of Philadelphia-based gallery Extra Extra](#), you'll be prompted by a cryptic text to ingest the synthetic resin making up Yves Klein's signature [International Klein Blue](#). Appearing similar to a conversation found on a role playing game emulator, the text incites its viewer to download *BNPJ.exe* and charge down a hallucinatory rabbit hole into a virtual environment designed by new media artists [Jon Rafman](#) and [Tabor Robak](#).

The gallery's first web based release, *Bnpj.exe*, combines past projects of both artists, notably Rafman's [Brand New Paint Job](#) series and Robak's [Mansion](#) project. For those unfamiliar, Rafman's Brand New Paint Job pairs computer generated 3D renderings of objects with the signature aesthetics of art historical greats. Robak's *Mansion* is a nearly inescapable, theatrical digital environment reminiscent of a haywire screensaver. *BNPJ.exe* invites the viewer into the combined habitat of Rafman's renderings and Robak's immersive and seemingly infinite Mansion project, mimicking the user functionality of a Y2K era role-playing game such as Counterstrike. Distinct from such-role playing games, *BNPJ.exe* allows for little to no user interactivity, perhaps spare knocking over a chair or witnessing a wayward military tank. In the absence of interactivity, the pair has produced an engrossing virtual world, maintaining the aesthetics of a videogame without the clear objectives usually incited through interactive narratives.





Turning the viewer into participant and art's history into immersive visual environments, the multi-level interactive project feels like a contorted inversion of the [Google Art Project](#). Creating digital walls out of paintings rather than digitizing environments out of walls, Google Art Project coincidentally was released only hours earlier the same day. The result is an illusorily self-determined investigation, with the participant left to explore each environment until they find the next hidden entrance. A disorienting series of IKB corridors opens into a vortex of Ellsworth Kelly's *Spectrum Colors Arranged By Chance*. After a free fall through space filled with blimps patterned in Kelly's works, Jackson Pollock's *Number 31* follows the contours of a mountainous seemingly militarized zone. Using arrow keys to navigate, the next level is found through traversing the sharp peaks and scaling a ramp into a sci-fi portal (a "stargate" specifically) with yet another environment framed in the history of modernist painting found through the threshold. As the environments mutate participants become more mentally — and almost physically — immersed in the digital environment. The virtual tunnel vision subsides only after participants find themselves at the bottom of an IKB well with no exit and the final phrase from the prefacing text becomes prescient, "As though in a trance, absorbed into the static blue all around you, swallowed like a ghost into its thick haze, you are no longer able to determine how much time has passed, how quickly it is passing, and how long you will be trapped here..." Slowly regaining critical consciousness it becomes apparent that Robak and Rafman lived up to their warning. BNPJ.exe swallows participants whole and leaves them in a virtual purgatory with no clear escape.



Perhaps trapped in the blue abyss, just before consciousness returns, BNPJ.exe most clearly executes its ability to diminish one's physical self in exchange for its virtual surround. But for all its potential to lure the participant into an artificial environment through their computer screen, BNPJ.exe refuses to entertain. While its pretty necessary to understand the vernacular of videogames in order to navigate from room to room, the project does not offer the entertainment features its chosen medium often facilitates.

What looks and feels a lot like an allegorical techno phobic scenario from a mid '90's movie about the dangerous encroachment of cyberspace into our daily lives may not be such a nostalgic one liner as it may first appear. Being trapped in the bottom of a virtual well evokes an undeniably sincere sense of disorientation and panic. But this sense of psychological entrapment seems to imply something greater, pointing toward the politics surrounding the digitization of aesthetic experience. BNPJ.exe shouldn't be mistaken as a billboard for the collaborators' technological know-how and proclivity for Modernist painting, though it remains dubious that the painting referents bear any relationship to the objects they inhabit.

Outside the spectrum of the computer screen, the hypothetical ingestion of IKB's seminal component, Rhodopas (whose title seamlessly blends sci-fi with art history), seems to indicate BNPJ.exe's underlying implications. Hot on the heels of Google Art Project, its clear that art distributed through the web has already offered its rebuttal to those fearful that digitization implies the loss of our true ability to experience art. While we may not be at a point where we can re-imbue whatever is lost from art's history digitally, BNPJ.exe proves the experiential in art is not lost with technological advancements, its more real than ever before.

*Editor's note: Lauren Christiansen is a guest contributor to Image Conscious*





Published on *Time Out Chicago*

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**Issue:** 299

**“The Age Demanded,”** Golden Age <sup>[1]</sup>, through Dec 10.

Art review

By Jonathan Kinkley

Jon Rafman roams Google Street View like a contemporary Robert Frank, discovering in street photos a rich narrative of life around the world. *Nine Eyes of Google Street View* snatches screenshots of Irish toughs flipping off the camera and of a naked woman standing on an Italian beach, personalizing Google’s all-seeing eye. By emblazoning the Street View navigational tool and Google’s logo on each print, the Montreal-based artist nods to the images’ coproducer. Yet he also reminds us that we can use this tool for purposes other than Google’s. Many new-media works look outdated fast. Rafman’s work is much more substantive: He’s the rare digital native who’s cognizant of the artist’s role in the world and of art history. Though his experiments involve the latest technology and Web trends, such as crowdsourcing and viral memes, his attempt to celebrate and humanize digital media has staying power.

Adept at making machinima (videos shot in virtual worlds), Rafman created *Woods of Arcady* in Second Life, linking pastoral scenes of real-life ancient statues and monuments that have been transformed into rudimentary virtual 3-D models. A Yeats poem lamenting the end of the classical era and the beginning of the modern narrates the piece, ironically, given that modern technology made this digital arcadia attainable.

It’s a shame that Golden Age’s tiny quarters require Rafman’s work to be sandwiched between bookshelves and hung in a hallway. But this solo show breathes life into so many different aspects of online culture it could speak for a wide swath of new-media artists.

**Publish Date:**

11/17/2010

# The New York Times Magazine

CONSUMED

## Global Entertainment

By **ROB WALKER**

Published: December 30, 2010

Part of what's different about this version of map-based enjoyment is that technology has brought it into a realm that occasionally crosses the border of voyeurism. It's one thing to speculate about distant lands; it's quite another to zoom in for a better look at a random pedestrian in Taipei. (Street View blurs faces and license-plate numbers.) And as the artist Jon Rafman has demonstrated with his astonishing ["The Nine Eyes of Google Street View"](#) project, which culls compelling images that the company's roving cameras have unthinkingly captured, Street View produces images that are as unexpectedly beautiful, beguiling or disturbing as those of any traditional street photographer.

# The New York Times

## Tragedy and Comedy, Starring Pac-Man

By **SETH SCHIESEL**

Published: July 15, 2010

The Game Play festival has something for both adult gamers and children. At one extreme: on Saturday evening the new-media artist Jon Rafman led a somewhat boozy crowd through a guided tour of some of the exotic sexual subcultures in Second Life, the popular virtual-reality system (which insists that it is not a game).



# The New York Times

## Art In Review

By Karen Rosenberg

### A Show Is All Cyber, Some of the Time



**ART REVIEW**  
**KAREN ROSENBERG**

It may seem like a stroke of morbid journalistic humor that the New Museum's "Free," a show exploring the Internet as a public art space, coincides with another exhibition titled "The Last Newspaper." On the third floor, artists are toiling in a makeshift newsroom; on the second, they're dismantling the last traces of print culture. In reality, the shows offer similar experiences — lots of reading, supplemented by video, photography, performance and multifarious conceptual object-tweaking.

Certainly the organizer of "Free" — Lauren Cornell, the executive director of Rhizome.org and an adjunct curator at the New Museum — deserves credit for thinking off-screen. "Art engaged with the Internet does not require it to exist online," she writes in her essay in the virtual catalog.

So sculptures that make use of objects found on eBay, by Hanne Mugaas and Amanda Ross-Ho, are fair game. So are Rashaad Newsome's collages of Web-based images, though these don't feel substantially different from the print variety.

Meanwhile, some significant platforms go ignored; none of the 50 works on view engage Facebook, YouTube (for that, you'll have to go to the Guggenheim — see Roberta Smith's review of "YouTube Play" on Page 29) or Twitter. (Tumblr, a Twitter competitor, does play a significant role.) These omissions feel like a missed opportunity.

In many ways "Free" is most interesting as an exercise in open-source curating. In her essays and labels, Ms. Cornell makes frequent references to the Creative Commons co-founder Lawrence Lessig's 2004

one and he'd set up social links, Facebook together with a single page from a home-site link.

Other artists directly connect the Internet to online content. In a video titled "Rhizome.org," the artist, who is also an author, discusses the site's history and its role in the digital art world.

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book “Free Culture” and the artist Seth Price’s 2002 [essay](#) “Dispersion.” Mr. Price’s “Dispersion” is particularly relevant because it talks about the Web’s superseding of physical public space.

“We should recognize that collective experience is now based on simultaneous private experiences, distributed across the field of media culture, knit together by ongoing debate, publicity, promotion and discussion,” he writes.

True to its argument, “Dispersion” exists in multiple forms — one of which is a screenprinted-polystyrene wall sculpture titled “Essay With Knots” (2008).

But the art in “Free” doesn’t always rise to the level of the dialogue. It’s also darker and more cynical — or maybe it just looks that way, weeks after a Webcam prank made one teenager distraught enough to jump off the George Washington Bridge.

“LEAVE ME ALONE” says a giant T-shirt by Ms. Ross-Ho, despite the mellow associations of its tie-dyed rainbow spiral. The message is reinforced by three Northern Irish teenagers making an obscene gesture to a Google Street View camera, in one of several images painstakingly recovered and isolated by Jon Rafman.

Even projects rooted in creative problem-solving have a way of becoming dystopian. At last year’s “Seven on Seven” conference, initiated by Ms. Cornell, artists were paired with Internet entrepreneurs and asked to innovate under strict time limits. The Internet-video artist [Ryan Trecartin](#) teamed up with David Karp, founder of the microblogging platform Tumblr. Their brainchild, “River the Net,” is now projected on a large screen in the museum. Essentially it’s a stream of video clips uploaded by visitors to their site, with tags that allow the viewer to toggle from one 10-second clip to the next. In an interview on an art blog, Mr. Trecartin described it as “a movie made by everyone and the plot arc is the life of a tag.” With its attention-deficit pacing, it shares some of the qualities of Mr. Trecartin’s own [videos](#). It also looks a lot like the site Chatroulette, and has some of the same problems — becoming, at times, a vehicle for pornography. (The museum version, like the Web site, isn’t censored.) But the real thrill is in the often odd coupling of words (each clip has three tags) and moving images.

An intense desire for communal experience underlies many of the works in “Free,” whether or not they exist or were produced on the Internet. Aleksandra Domanovic’s “19:30,” a split-screen video installation, combines introductory graphics from local news programs from the former Yugoslavia with footage of techno-raves.

Similarly, Lisa Oppenheim’s series of slide projections, “The Sun Is Always Setting Somewhere Else,” mines the Flickr posts of United States soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan for postcard-worthy photographs of sunsets. The Flickr images, printed out and held up to actual skies, transcend banality with a nagging sense of homesickness.

Other artists cleverly subvert the protocol of online communities. Using Yahoo! Answers, Joel Holmberg aims profound, existential inquiries at an audience more accustomed to supplying practical knowledge. It’s amusing to see people struggle to field questions like, “How do you occupy space?”

Martijn Hendricks, meanwhile, infiltrates an online forum on the video of [Saddam Hussein](#)’s execution. His “Untitled Black Video” (2009) shows the comments only, in white text at the bottom of a dark



screen. Some cheer and others express outrage, but a sizable number simply complain about the poor video quality.

Technical difficulties inspire Andrea Longacre-White, who repeatedly reshoots low-resolution photographs of car accidents until the images themselves become blurry wrecks. Working in black and white, she's a [Weegee](#) for what we used to call the information superhighway.

Not everything in the show is gloomy, suspicious or sinister. The tone of Alexandre Singh's "School of Objects Criticized," a quirky and compelling sculptural tableau, is defiantly antic. Using spotlighted pedestals and a soundtrack, he transforms toys and household items into characters in a lively comedy of manners (after [Molière's](#) "School for Wives").

A feminist Slinky toy and a "neo-post-Marxist" bottle of bleach, among others, engage in dinner-party discussions about Duchamp, [Woody Allen](#) and other cultural touchstones. On paper it's childish, but in practice it skewers the chattering class and shows off Mr. Singh's excellent ear for dialogue (also flaunted in his lecture-style performances).

"School of Objects Criticized" has a room to itself, at the end of the show, and in many ways it stands apart. It doesn't seem to have much to do with the Internet, or "free culture"; in fact, an analog tape recorder is among the anthropomorphized items.

That's the problem with "Free," in general. It's a conversation and an exhibition that aren't quite on the same page.

"Free" continues through Jan. 23 at the New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince Street, Lower East Side; (212) 219-1222, [newmuseum.org](http://newmuseum.org).

## The Portraits of Google Street View

Nov 9 2010, 2:22 PM ET By [Alexis Madrigal](#)



[The New Museum](#) in New York has a fascinating exhibition up through January called *Free* that takes "explores how the internet has fundamentally changed our landscape of information and our notion of public space." The catalog from the show is [online for all to see](#).

My acquaintance Joanne McNeil wrote an essay for the book that I love. She looks at what several works from the show say about how we see our collective future. Jon Rafman's *Selections from 9 Eyes of Google Street View* underpin her analysis. Rafman culled unintentional portraits of people going about their lives as the Google van rumbled by. He found the art embedded inside this decidedly prosaic mapping exercise.

McNeil, for her part, thinks hard about Google's project through the years. She projects a time when the image quality of Google's technology will plateau. Without timestamps or physical markers of their era, the site "will achieve a perfect atemporality."

Time is just another thing to scramble and remix on the Internet. Now Google is in the process of reshooting everything in higher resolution, creating the possibility of an enormous geomatic



archive if they continue the project. There are reports that the company intends to "refresh" the data every year. Eventually the quality of Street View photography will peak and the website will achieve a perfect atemporality. The image quality of 100 Oak St in Google Street View in 2015 will look no different from a 2025 representation. Date is then determined by reconditte indications of the landscape and architecture transforming. No sepia tone, no lens flare occurs to sort these images into their respective moments in history.



Her conclusion about the networked world is not unlike Bruce Sterling's. [We live in atemporal times](#), he's been telling us. The real world of the future has, in the important senses, frozen in our imagination, McNeil says.

The future was once represented in fantastically romantic ways: white spacesuits, buildings infinite in height, interplanetary travel, alien interactions, an abundance of wealth, and robot servitude. Now the future is represented as something more compressed and accessible. The future is on the Internet, in those screens we glance at intermittently at all waking hours of the day. Our expectation is the "IRL" world will look not much unlike what we see today. It is a future of gradual changes, incorporating familiar aspects with new but not too crazy updated technology. What is in abundance is not wealth but information.

The idea of the future is now a distorted mirror. It is the future of screens. Like the daguerreotype, screens contain memory and reflection, as well as an unknown difference only discerning eyes can see. We are overfutures. We've reached the point where the past, present, and future look no different from one another.

## Art: Best of 2009

### Jon Rafman

Undoubtedly the strongest net artist without representation today, Jon Rafman describes himself as a storyteller. It's an apt description, though I'd add that he's a bit of a digital wanderer as well. The countless hours spent in Google Street View collecting screenshots are a testament to this, as is his Second Life Tour, given by none other than the Kool-Aid Man. Undoubtedly my favorite, zany aspect of this video is the amount of time Kool-Aid Man spends underwater without losing any of his ice cubes or colored drink.



## Art & Design

### 10 Best Art & Design shows of 2010 in no particular order

By Lauren Weinberg

"[Jon Rafman: The Age Demanded](#)," Golden Age, Oct 29–Dec 10. TOC contributor Jonathan Kinkley believes Rafman roams Google Street View "like a contemporary Robert Frank...[His] attempt to celebrate and humanize digital media has staying power."



[Views]

# SEARCH AND DESTROY

From a series of Google Street View images collected by Jon Rafman at [googlestreetviews.com](http://googlestreetviews.com) (top to bottom): "526 7th St., Rapid City, South Dakota," "Eagle Point Dr., Sherwood, Pulaski, Arkansas," and "2104 S. Lamar Blvd., Austin, Travis, Texas."





# KULTUR

LEIPZIGER VOLKSZEITUNG

## Kandidaten-Rennen um MDR-Chefredakteur

zu vereinen. Eine Kommission unter Leitung von Hörfunkchef Johann Michael Möller tagte und überlegte, aber kam wohl letztlich zu keinem wirklichen Ergebnis. Außer, das gespart werden sollte.

So läuft das Rennen um den Chefredakteurs-Posten nun mit zwei Kandidaten: Thomas Braune, Regierungssprecher von Ministerpräsident Matthias Platzeck in Brandenburg, und Tim Herden, Leiter des MDR-Studios in Berlin. Die größeren Chancen dürften bei Herden liegen, da Intendant Reiter zuletzt im-

mer die Hauslösung gesucht hat. Da müsste dann also die Wahl auf den 45-jährigen Herden fallen, der Ende der 80er Jahre in Leipzig studierte, noch beim DDR-Fernsehen begonnen hatte und von Anfang an zum Mitteldeutschen Rundfunk als Reporter und Redakteur gehörte, bevor er 1999 ins ARD-Hauptstadtstudio wechselte und dieses Jahr als Autor mit dem Hiddensee-Krimi „Gellengold“ debütierte.

Im Fall von Thomas Braune könnten leicht Diskussionen über die Nähe oder

Ferne von Politik und öffentlich-rechtlichem Rundfunkauftrag aufkommen, obwohl der 51-jährige Hallenser als DT 64-Macher, Redakteur und Moderator des Ostdeutschen Rundfunks (ORB) alles andere als ein Fachfremder ist.

Da das Abschiedsdatum von Wolfgang Kennemich im Herbst liegt, bleibt Intendant Reiter eigentlich noch einige Zeit zum Abwägen. So wird, nach Auskunft von MDR-Sprecher Dirk Thärichen, der die Namen als reine Spekulation bezeichnete, davon ausgegangen, dass die Entscheidung Anfang bis Mitte 2011 fällt.

Norbert Wehrstedt

Wer wird es? Rätselraten um das Personalkarussell, das beim Mitteldeutschen Rundfunk (MDR) weiter dreht. Nachdem Ende September die frei werden Chefjobs (Fernsehredirektor, Landesfunkhaus-Chef Dresden) der Dreiländeranstalt neu besetzt wurden, gibt es jetzt noch eine offene Stelle: den Chefredakteur. Wolfgang Kennemich geht nächstes Jahr in Rente, da muss Intendant Udo Reiter nun also noch einen Posten neu besetzen. Wobei im Laufe des Jahres immer mal eine Überlegung durch den Sender geisterte, die Chefredakteure von Fernsehen und Hörfunk in einer Person



„Wahrhaftigere Dokumentation des Lebens“?: Aufnahmen von Google Street View, die Jon Rafman für sein Kunstprojekt „Nine Eyes“ auswählte. Fotos: www.9eyes.tumblr.com

# Eine Welt voller Schnappschüsse

Der 29-jährige Jon Rafman macht aus Google Street View ein Kunstprojekt

Seit Google Street View gestartet ist, wird die Debatte von Begriffen wie Privatsphäre und Datenschutz beherrscht. Der 29-jährige Jon Rafman aus Kanada allerdings wählt ein anderes Wort für die im Internet veröffentlichten Fotografien von Straßenzügen, Städten und ihren Bewohnern: Kunst.

Von NINA MAY

Neun Augen hat die Kamera, mit der Google durch die Straßen der Welt zieht. Alle zehn bis 20 Meter macht sie eine Aufnahme, ein automatischer Archivar des Augenblicks, Dokumentation nach dem Zufallsprinzip. „Nine Eyes“ nennt Jon Rafman sein Kunstprojekt, das im Internet zu sehen ist (9eyes.tumblr.com), bereits in Österreich gezeigt wurde und zur Zeit in New York ausgestellt wird.

Ein Auto, das in den Graben gefahren ist, eine Prostituierte, die aus einem Lkw steigt, Verhaftungen, aber auch stille Momente offenbaren diese Bilder: Hund und Frauchen, die gemeinsam aus dem Fenster schauen, ein nackter Rücken am Meer oder einfach schöne Naturbilder von Pinguinen auf Schneefelsen oder eine Möwenschar, die an Hitchcocks Film erinnert. Viele Stinkefinger und einige nackte Hintern tauchen auf, aber auch Menschen mit dem Plakat „Wir lieben Street View“. Meistens aber nehmen die Porträtierten das Google-Auto mit der Kamera nicht wahr.

Manche Bilder haben eine so klare Botschaft, dass man sich erst wieder bewusst

machen muss, dass hier nur eine automatische Schaltung den Auslöser bediente: ein alter Mann im Rollstuhl auf einem leeren Parkplatz mit „Bus“-Kennzeichnung etwa. Vielleicht hat Rafman recht damit, wenn er im Projekt eine „wahrhaftigere Dokumentation des Lebens“ sieht. Schnappschüsse, so sagt man, zeigen oft das wahre Gesicht, und Google Street View offenbart eine ganze Welt davon: Ein pummeliger Junge, der gerade im Begriff ist, über einen Zaun zu klettern, ein Straßenarbeiter, der ein Stoppschild wegträgt, ein Eisbär, der eine Pflanze über die Brüstung seines Geheges streckt. Ein Ausbruchversuch? Doch die neun Augen sind schon weitergezogen.

Für sein Kunst-Projekt surfte Rafman Stunde um Stunde im riesigen Datenpool von Google Street View – nicht ohne sich zuvor mit Sporttraining auf den Sitzmarathon vorzubereiten. „Ich habe tagelang nur geklickt. Durch die ständige Wiederholung

verfiel ich in einen trance-ähnlichen Zustand, der etwas Spirituelles hatte.“ Er reiste an Orte, die er gerne mal im richtigen Leben besuchen wollte oder wählte

**Jon Rafman: Die Angst vieler Menschen, Google Street View stehle ihnen ihre Privatsphäre, ist Ausdruck der Illusion, das einzelne Leben sei so unglaublich interessant, dass jeder darin herum stöbern möchte.**

sein Ziel einfach zufällig mit der Maus auf der Landkarte. „Ich suchte nach Bildern, die archetypisch entscheidende Momente festhalten, die Essenz einer Handlung. Oder die eine nostalgische Geschichte erzählen, oder einfach eine schöne Licht-Komposition haben.“

Damit setzt Rafman der Zufälligkeit von Google-Street-View die bewusste Selektion von Aufnahmen entgegen. Er ist sich im Klaren, dass er so zum Manipulator wird. „Erst durch meine Auswahl werden die Bilder zu Kunst. Zuvor sind sie nichts als Information. Sie brauchen einen Rahmen, um Kunst zu werden, das meine ich sowohl im übertragenen wie im wörtlichen Sinne.“ Die Spannung zwischen dem roboterhaftem Blick der Google-Kamera und dem Verlangen des Menschen, Geschichten zu

erzählen und so Bedeutung zu erzeugen, sei symptomatisch für die moderne Welt, in der jeder Einzelne ständig danach strebe, seine Wichtigkeit zu bestätigen. „Die Angst vieler Menschen, Google Street View stehle ihnen ihre Privatsphäre, zum Beispiel ist Ausdruck der Illusion, das einzelne Leben sei so unglaublich interessant, dass jeder darin herumstöbern möchte.“ Tatsächlich seien aber die meisten Aufnahmen auf Google Street View schlicht banal. „Aber das gilt schließlich auch fürs Leben.“

Hat sich durch die Arbeit seine Wahrnehmung der Wirklichkeit verändert? „Nein, Street View hat mir eher schon unbewusst bekannte Dinge vor Augen geführt. Die Menschen sagen immer, dass Technologie unsere Art zu denken verändert. Ich glaube eher, dass sie sich längst verändert hat und dass deshalb Technologien populär werden, die dieses Denken bestätigen. Street View etwa zeigt die Gesichter der Menschen verschwommen. Und wenn wir durch die Straßen gehen, nehmen wir die meisten Menschen, um die wir uns nicht scheren, auch nur als Schemen wahr. Diese Trübung der Gesichter sagt deshalb viel über uns aus.“

Rafman sucht stets im Internet nach Inspiration, über diese Plattform sieht der in Montreal Lebende sich mit der ganzen Welt vernetzt. „Ich habe Freunde in Berlin, es fühlt sich so an, als seien sie direkt neben mir. Wir Internet-Kinder sind alle im Dialog miteinander.“

@ www.9eyes.tumblr.com



Künstler Jon Rafman inszeniert sich selbst gern in medialer Umgebung. Foto: Privat





23/10/2010 À 00H00

## Avec view sur la vie

L'artiste canadien Jon Rafman puise dans Google Street View la matière à l'élaboration de ses fictions.

Par **MARIE LECHNER**

«Je n'ai pas une seule photo d'elle, alors que nous avons passé notre jeunesse ensemble, à parcourir le monde.» Le narrateur du film *You the World and I*, qui se déploie sur le globe virtuel Google Earth, déplore n'avoir aucune trace de cette amie qui refusait obstinément de se laisser prendre en photo. Puis se souvient que, lors d'un séjour sur la côte italienne, la voiture Google était en maraude. Il sillonne comme un forcené Google Street View et finit par la trouver. Une photo floutée d'une jeune femme de dos, face à la mer, qui rappelle ces clichés de famille passés, empreints de nostalgie. L'image qui a inspiré cette intrigante fiction, l'artiste montréalais Jon Rafman l'a effectivement trouvée sur Street View. Ces photos prises automatiquement par des voitures Google le fascine. En 2009, Rafman a collectionné une étonnante série de captures d'écrans extraites des vues panoramiques de Street View pour le blog Art Fag City, intitulé «Nine Eyes of Google Street View». «Au début, j'étais attiré par l'esthétique amateur de ces images brutes, écrit Rafman, Street View évoquait cette urgence que je ressentais dans la photographie de rue ancienne. Avec son regard supposé neutre, la photographie Street View a une qualité spontanée qui n'est pas altérée par la sensibilité ou les arrière-pensées d'un photographe humain.» Une vraie photographie documentaire, donc, capturant des fragments de réalité débarrassés de toute intention culturelle. Tous les 10 à 20 mètres, les neuf appareils photo enregistrent automatiquement ce qui passe dans leur champ puis un logiciel assemble les images pour en faire des panoramiques, d'où Rafman extrait différentes sélections, faisant référence à l'histoire de la photographie ou critiquant le mode de représentation de la vie moderne formaté par Google. Certaines captures évoquent le réalisme brutal de la vie urbaine, réminiscence du travail des photographes de rue américains (comme cet homme armé d'un fusil d'assaut dans les rues d'une ville du Dakota), des scènes de crimes, des incendies mais aussi des instantanés façon carte postale, tel ce baiser volé rue de la Huchette à Paris, qui évoque Doisneau, capturant ce que Cartier-Bresson appelait «l'instant décisif». Ou encore cet homme entraperçu par la porte entrebâillée d'une pissotière rue du Faubourg-du-Temple, qui rappelle à Rafman les mises en scène du Canadien Jeff Wall. Sa collection recèle des vues inespérées, tel cet arc-en-ciel formant une arche autour d'une route déserte de l'Iowa ou ces paysages psychédéliques provenant d'erreurs de caméra.

Si Street View propose une variété de styles, c'est dans une grammaire visuelle qui lui est propre, dictée par le mode de production de l'image : les visages floutés (façon photos volées de paparazzi), la texture numérique et une perception faussée de profondeur, analyse Rafman. Par ailleurs observe-t-il, si nous avons une chance égale d'être photographié par la machine, en réalité, ce sont souvent les pauvres, les marginaux, les prostituées qui tombent dans l'œil de Google. Cet œil intrusif provoque d'ailleurs, à son passage, des doigts d'honneur quand ce ne sont pas des culs, des mains qui recouvrent le visage et des têtes qui se baissent.

«Bien que l'image soit obtenue par un appareil photo automatique, estime l'artiste, le spectateur ne peut s'empêcher d'interpréter l'image, et d'y chercher du sens.» Or Street View enregistre tout sans accorder de signification à rien, observant le monde d'un regard détaché et indifférent. «Nous sommes bombardés d'impressions fragmentées, noyés sous les données, mais souvent nous voyons trop de choses sans rien en retenir», constate l'artiste qui questionne la prétention impérialiste de Google à ordonnancer l'information pour nous, fixant le cadre de nos connaissances et perceptions.

[YoutheWorldandI.com](http://YoutheWorldandI.com)  
[GoogleStreetViews.com](http://GoogleStreetViews.com)



# RAI AT SPORTS

contemporary art talk

## A CONVERSATION WITH JON RAFMAN (NSFW VIDEO)

May 12, 2010 · [Print This Article](#)



Jon Rafman and I had a chance to catch up in Second Life last week and do a series of interviews that culminated in the above video (which contains NSFW graphic imagery near the end). We discuss his recent work and its relationship to cinema studies, as well as talk about how the work digests contemporary Modern experiences.

I suggest that projects like Brand New Paint Job and Woods of Arcady operate as a kind of collision between High Modernism and amateur consumer technology, and that these fusions provide a unique critical comment on nascent mash-up cultures that exist online. Jon and I also discuss how his inclusion in jstChillin's Avatar4D show in San Francisco, and involvement with that emergent netart community, has influenced his artistic process. Jon comments on how his discovery of nasty nets rekindled his artistic sense of inquiry and how the mobility and quickness of blogs and surf clubs fostered a dialogue that he found absent from contemporary art circles he had participated in up to that point.

Later in the interview, I ask Jon if he finds that his new found sense of discovery of working online manifests itself in his (now highly popular) Kool-Aid Man tours in Second Life. The initial location for Jon's journey and participation within these virtual worlds comes from the joy of spatial exploration and subsequent need for spatial mastery within 3D environments. We wrap up our conversation by discussing how working with Second Life, and developing real meaningful relationships within that environment, has led him to invest in the ideas of multi-user experiences as a means of engaging and analyzing multi-layered artistic paradigms within networks.

Jon's Google Street View project will be part of the opening festivities tonight at the FUTUREEVERYTHING festival in Manchester and will remain open until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. You can also visit his site for more information: <http://jonrafman.com/>

# BOMBLOG

ART LITERATURE MUSIC FILM PERFORMANCE OUT & ABOUT PODCASTS

## ART

### REVEALING JON RAFMAN

By Lindsay Howard Jul 8, 2010

**Netartist Jon Rafman's Kool-Aid Man avatar is one of his primary characters, taking appointments and leading tours through Second Life worlds both utopian and fetishistic, as well as starring in still images and films directed by Rafman himself, which humorously contrast the avatar's round red body with the super-sexy alter egos more commonly seen in Second Life. He speaks with Lindsay Howard about his work. Featuring an original Kool Aid Man in Second Life video!**



Jon Rafman, KOOL AID MAN IN SECOND LIFE, 2009.

via [Kool Aid Man in Second Life](#).

"People make crush art about you all the time, don't they?" That's the first question I asked Jon Rafman one month ago after he discovered I was embarking upon an ongoing multi-media performance inspired by his work. Our conversation provided my first hint into Rafman's process. He wanted to know what I'd done between the time I left work and the time I arrived at home, the name of the office building, where my roommate was born, the details of my relationship to certain net artists, and a host of other very specific questions which I later saw as part of his process for, and reverence toward, the construction of one's personal narrative. The truth, though he wouldn't admit it, is that Jon Rafman is one of the net art community's most respected and beloved figures. This prestige, it seems to me, relates to his ability to position himself in shamanistic roles, as director, storyteller, and tour guide, as the middle man exploring essential concepts of modernity/contemporary experience, and then processing and framing them into narratives. His work is concerned with virtual worlds, self-identity, and the collapse of high/low art. He is the artist/curator behind [Googlestreetviews.com](#) and the cartoonish internet *flâneur* directing tours through Second Life as [Koolaidmaninsecondlife.com](#).

Rafman's Kool-Aid Man avatar is one of his most primary characters, taking appointments and leading tours through Second Life worlds both utopian and fetishistic, as well as starring in a collection of stills and films directed by Rafman himself, which humorously contrast the avatar's round red body against the super sexy alter egos much more commonly found in Second Life. The tours are primarily directed between virtual avatars, however Rafman also performs the tours live, inviting audience members to directly interact and inform the journey, as he subtly contextualizes and frames the experience. The Kool-Aid Man avatar, as it relates to Rafman's body of work as a whole, is an externalized representation of Rafman's honest and committed artistic struggle to construct and examine self in virtual culture.

When Rafman agreed to do this BOMB interview, our collaboration began with a series of ideas and links shared over g-chat conversations, emails, late-night video chats and Skype calls. We discussed constructing a short film inspired by Jean-Luc Godard's interview of Woody Allen or designing a text interview where every word or phrase hyperlinked to another obscure place on the web (à la the early papperad website). Ultimately, I confessed that my true intention for this interview was to reveal "the real" Jon Rafman. Our discussion over Skype (transcribed below) proposes that perhaps "revealing the real" is... well, I wouldn't want to give away a story right at the very beginning.



**Lindsay Howard:** Do you think about Kool-Aid Man as an extension of yourself? Is there an evolution there toward the fragmented virtual self and physical self? How are you considering that?

**Jon Rafman:** I think underlying that question is the unease consisting of where, how, and what is my physical self when I am in a social relation in cyberspace.

The Kool-Aid Man avatar relies on me to exist. If I don't log into Second Life, he is not out there somewhere in the world. He makes it clear to me that it is not necessary to have a computer chip implanted into your brain in order to become a man-machine. To fully connect physical existence with digital existence, it is not necessary to alter one's body. Perhaps Kool-Aid Man is a cyborg in the fullest sense in that he is combination of computer programming and human agency.

Even more important is that the cyborg/avatar demonstrates there is no such thing as a pure physical self. What we take as the most fundamental aspects of self are mediated through the lens of culture. I don't think identity is bound to our physical composition. How we feel and perceive ourselves, the roles we play are all socially mediated.

The internet includes social worlds in which an avatar is required in order to navigate and interact with other people. In these virtual worlds, be it Facebook or Second Life, our avatar is our social representative. What we choose reveals many ways in which our physical or 'real' self is constructed. So perhaps choosing an avatar makes manifest our fragmented and multiple selves.



Jon Rafman, KOOL AID MAN IN SECOND LIFE, 2009.

via [Kool Aid Man in Second Life](#).

Although, having an avatar in Second Life need not change your understanding of selfhood. After all, we are always inhabiting or sending forth avatars in our day-to-day lives. I definitely feel, however, that the way the internet is transforming how we construct our identities deserves more attention. I think the notion of even going on stage has changed with the many varied vehicles the web has provided us.

To me, what is even more important than a fragmented self is, how does this lack of physicality in interaction affect us? Like, what is the impact of the lack of the tangible touch?

**LH:** I want to read a J.G. Ballard quote that I've seen you reference before:

"I believe that organic sex, body against body, skin area against skin area, is becoming no longer sufficient... What we're getting is a whole new order of sexual fantasies, involving a different order of experiences, like car crashes, like traveling in jet aircraft, the whole overlay of new technologies... These things are beginning to reach into our lives and change the interior design of our sexual fantasies."

I'm curious to know whether or not you agree with him, and how you're thinking about this subject as it relates to your experiences in Second Life.

**JR:** I agree to a certain extent. I definitely think that our engagement in cyberspace can be seen as an erotic act. An extreme metaphor and example for this is the fetish known as [Vorarephilia](#), or "vore" for short. Vore is a condition wherein one is sexually aroused or obsessed with one living being devouring another. On one of my tours, I showed my friend, Matt Wiviott, a thriving Second Life vore community. Matt subsequently wrote a fascinating article in which he devotes some time to analyzing the fetish. He argues, and I totally agree with him, that despite vore being a marginal fetish in Second Life, it is helpful in understanding the nature of virtual existence and digital mediation.



The fetish can be compared to the desire to return to the womb. The desire to be consumed entirely, to be completely engulfed by a totalizing feminine body is fundamental to the desire to inhabit cyberspace. Making the voyage home into the womb and analogously the process of being swallowed alive is powerful metaphor for the process of fully immersing oneself on the internet.

The state of being in the womb, however, can be considered one of bliss, but also simultaneously one that very closely resembles death. Still, there is a strange comfort in this form of death. Like the cyborg, the act of losing oneself in cyberspace evokes both dread and desire simultaneously.

Technology has given us many new symbols to play with, and our fantasies are becoming more and more divorced from our physical bodies. But I think that, at the core, there are certain impulses and drives that have not changed and are simply expressing themselves in new ways.



[Kool-Aid Man in Second Life – tour promo 2010 \(excerpt 1\)](#) from [jonrafman](#) on [Vimeo](#).

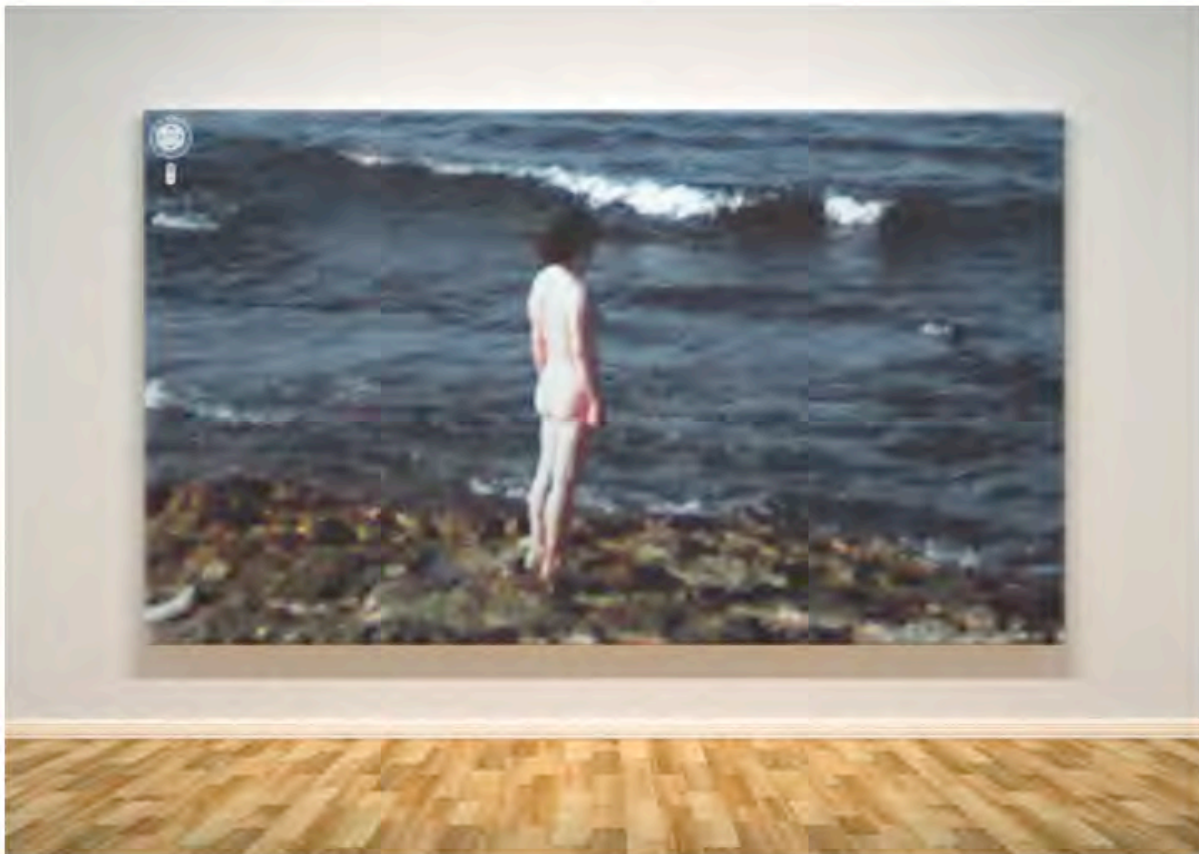
**LH:** I'm thinking about your internet experience and the different worlds that you inhabit on the web. I guess I'm thinking about them in terms of neighborhoods: there's the Second Life world you inhabit, then there's the net art community where you're a social figure interacting with others and others are interacting with you, then there's the accumulation of items from the deep internet that you bring to the social sphere through mediums like your del.icio.us, tumblr, or Facebook, and then you have your artist site, which essentially functions as a business card. How do you consider the relationship between these neighborhoods? What are your goals for each?

**JR:** The initial joy at finding two successive virtual worlds to explore (Google Street View and Second Life) led inexorably to my critique of the real world in which we are trapped. At times I adopt the role of a member of the community at other times I just re-frame what I find, if not so much in liberating us but in revealing the conditions of our enslavement.

**LH:** Your work is often presented through the voice of an authoritative (if at times unreliable) narrator, whether you are giving a tour in Second Life, directing a film, writing an essay, or performing live. How did you find this role?

**JR:** I was influenced by literary and essay models, but mostly I am drawn to exploring the relationship between memory and identity, both historical and personal. The mix of authority and the faultiness of memory has a particular pull.

Memory is both the basis and the confirmation of selfhood, but it is also unreliable. I am interested in how self-narratives are used to construct the self, but I am also struck by the variety of ways memory seeks the narrative form and fails.



Jon Rafman, 58 LUNGOMARE 9 MAGGIO, BARI, PUGLIA, ITALY. 2009. Installation in the artist's studio.

via [Google Street Views](#)

**LH:** Kool-Aid Man in Second Life necessitates a relationship with your audience, whereas with a lot of net art, or art in general, the audience doesn't have to be so specific. How does the requirement of a participatory audience impact the way you consider and construct a story?

**JR:** There is a more direct conversation going on with audiences and other artists because of the internet. I very much value the immediate feedback I get when I exhibit something online, post a video to my [Arcade Hustla youtube channel](#), or give a tour in Second Life, compared to the endless waiting when submitting films to film festivals or grant applications to government agencies, etc. This new directness is energizing. I feel even more motivated to make work.

**LH:** How do you see net art existing in the marketplace, and how do you reconcile that with your personal artistic goals?

**JR:** Good question. I don't really have an answer to that. In its original spirit, putting something up on the internet meant making it accessible to all which nonetheless raises the question of how the artist is to live.

I think that artists using any form, medium, or technique in its early infancy tend to be idealistic about it. Whether this is true or not, there is nonetheless the sense that new ground is being broken, and this imbues everything with a certain energy.

One likely path is that netart takes the same path as performance art: it will be assimilated into existing institutions. But like performance art, the issue of selling the work will be a touchy subject. Perhaps video and other sort of documentation of the work will be sold, but I don't know.



Jon Rafman, SLEEPING SHEPHERD BOY, 2009.

[website](#)



I also have the sense that a lot of the serious artists that are using the internet are very reluctant to call themselves "netartists," and I understand why. The label carries baggage with it. There is a triviality that often is associated with the word "netart," a certain feeling that netart is somehow reducible to either retro animated gifs or a certain kind of ironic kitschy humor or in-jokes that employ a mix of pop-cultural and obscure internet references.

**LH:** Does the internet subvert the idea of a 'master narrative'?

**JR:** No, I think the master narrative was subverted way before the internet became popular. I think it had more to do with the failure of major ideologies.

But I also think that we live in one world and we are not so different from one another, and that a universal discourse exists. If I experience fragmentation due to being overwhelmed with data, it may well represent contemporary reality and consciousness. Perhaps our subjectivity changes over time, but it is ultimately part of our shared human history. We are narrative creatures. No matter what, we will create stories that have patterns and arcs and consist of a series of events that can be recounted.

**Jon Rafman will be showing original work in a one-night-only group exhibition, titled Area/Zone, at Bruce High Quality Foundation University this Friday, July 9th at 7pm. On Saturday July 10th at 10pm, Rafman is performing Kool-Aid Man in Second Life at the Brick Theater in Williamsburg as part of the Game Play Festival. To schedule a guided tour of Second Life contact: [koolaidmaninsecondlife \[at\] gmail \[dot\] com](mailto:koolaidmaninsecondlife@gmail.com).**

## Share Bomb



*Lindsay Howard has performed in galleries, theaters and warehouses from Chelsea to Philadelphia to the Time Based Arts Festival in Portland. She curates video/net art shows in Brooklyn, NY and blogs at [www.look-im-lucid.tumblr.com](http://www.look-im-lucid.tumblr.com). She is on Facebook.*

This entry was posted on July 8, 2010 at 4:33 pm, filed under [Art](#) and tagged [interview](#), [Jon Rafman](#), [Lindsay Howard](#), [Netart](#), [SecondLife](#), [Video](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#). Follow any comments here with the [RSS feed for this post](#). [Post a comment](#) or leave a [trackback](#): [Trackback URL](#).

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## ONE TRACKBACK

1. By [Tweets that mention Revealing Jon Rafman – BOMBLOG – Topsy.com](#) on July 9, 2010 at 2:09 am

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by BOMB Magazine, Matei Sâmișălan. Matei Sâmișălan said: [from seecoy] Revealing Jon Rafman – BOMBLOG: <http://bit.ly/cK0QVk> [...]

## POST A COMMENT



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## JON RAFMAN TALKS TO DEAN KISSICK

Montreal resident Jon Rafman is at the forefront of a new wave of internet artists and filmmakers from around the world. He's best known for his tumblr blog *The Nine Eyes of Google Street View* – a collection of found photographs – and for his narrative films made in *Second Life*, and he has just finished a new film about professional video gamers. Rafman spoke to Dean Kissick via Skype about finding Shangri-La in a run-down Chinatown arcade, and finding '20s Parisian café culture on the internet.

**DEAN KISSICK:** Why did you decide to make a piece about an arcade?

**JON RAFMAN:** It started about four years ago. I was hanging out at this arcade in Chicago, where I was going to college at the time, and I met this gamer who had reached a certain pinnacle in his short career that was so high – you're at your best when you're still in your teens, because your hand-eye co-ordination is at its peak – and from that moment on he lived in the past. I liked the idea of this character who was reminiscing about his glory days at the joystick, and I had always wanted to tell the story of the end of an era. So the film would be an elegy to the arcade era, and also to a person living in an age where everything is so accelerated that you can be outmoded when you're still in your 20s.

Then I moved to New York and I discovered this arcade in Chinatown: just this little smelly hole in the wall, packed with teenagers, reeking with sweat and bad Chinese food, and all the machines were dilapidated. But at the back there were four new machines playing *Street Fighter 4*, with massive amounts of kids crowded around the machines, betting money and competing against each other. And it turns out it was considered the last great arcade on the east coast, and it's where all the greatest east coast players emerged. I already wanted to tell the story and I had started playing around with it, and shooting stuff with actors, but when I found this place it was like, everything's so much more real – my fantasy of this world didn't even come close to the richness of the reality of it. Every day I'd go there and hang out at the arcade.

**DK:** So what happened?

**JR:** I learnt about one guy who was considered the first east coast champion: his name was Eddie Lee and he pioneered the New York style of gameplay, "turtle style", an extremely defensive form of fighting where you just constantly run away. Anyway, he disappeared after a while, and everyone had different stories, but apparently he was picked up by these Wall Street types who thought that pro video gamers would make amazing day traders, because it requires the same skills: fast-paced decision-making

and whether anyone will actually remember him. Ultimately, gamers are not playing for money, so a huge part of it is playing for respect and having their legacy live on.

**DK:** Did you have any filmic influences?

**JR:** Structurally I'm most influenced by Chris Marker, who uses montage and found footage to weave together narratives.

**DK:** I've heard that he uses *Second Life* himself, that he's constructed his own virtual archipelago and museum.

pessimism. His magnum opus, *Sans Soleil*, is all about in Japan in the '80s, which was the most technologically and economically advanced culture of the time, so he's definitely interested in the future as well as the past.

**DK:** Are you nostalgic for the past?

**JR:** Every generation migrates to a new centre, and I think the internet is the equivalent of Paris in the '20s – with all the great expatriate writers from Ernest Hemingway to James Joyce to Gertrude Stein – or postwar New York. I can't visit my friend's studio, or meet in a café, but I can communicate through Skype, like with you right now. The "net art" community that I found online is who I'm in dialogue with, and they're basically providing the inspiration and audience that is helping forge this new vernacular that is very much tied to the internet. You don't have that tangible touch and physicality of hanging out in New York in the '50s or Paris in the '20s, but at the same time it's way more international, and I'm able to reach way more people – it's reflecting the modern experience, which is extremely tied down to the computer.

**DK:** On that note, can you explain the process of exploring the world through Google Street View?

**JR:** I'll usually go to places that I really want to go in real life, or places that the Google cars are exploring at the moment, because often if there's something crazy in these photographs it won't have been caught or deleted yet. On the Street View website it tells you where the cars are at the moment – so right now, Romania

and Brazil – and it's great because they're progressively moving towards the less developed countries, and those are often more exotic and less documented. For instance, I now have a far better understanding of the geography of a Brazilian favela than I ever did before. And when I first started, I would go on these marathon Street View runs where I would almost enter a trancelike state of just clicking and gathering and not stopping until I found an incredible image.

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and just going with your intuition; understanding these limited rules and working within them, and working fast. So he became a day trader and made millions of dollars, and he hasn't returned to the game. And everyone wants him to return, but he's moved on. He was an inspiration for my film, which uses the interviews that I've shot at the arcade and "machinima" – basically, using video games to make movies – shot in *Second Life*. The whole movie takes place in *Second Life*, and the story's told in a nostalgic voiceover from a character who was once a great video-game player, but is now thinking about his past,

**JR:** I have a feeling he got help building that world, and he's in his 80s now so I wonder whether he actually hangs out in *Second Life*. But he was one of the pioneers of interactive models of art back in the '90s, and he very much embraces new technologies. I think he's a modernist in a postmodern world, which is kind of how I feel. There's this fragmentation that's occurred, and it's taken to new levels with the increasing amounts of information that we're constantly processing every day, and as artists we need to confront that. There's a sense of loss in Marker's films, but it's never nostalgic to the point of pure