

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Our Culture: Looking Forward With a Backflip

Adam Leipzig · Saturday, July 31st, 2010

As the [X-Games](#) wind down tomorrow – wind *up*, actually, probably flying across the half-pipe – they'll also close three events that describe our culture, how we consume it, and where it may be heading.

Southern California's cultural event triple-header started with Comic Con in San Diego two weeks ago. This year was [Comic Con](#)'s most corporately commercial yet. Every movie studio had a presence there, and most showed previews of tentpole films laden with super-heroes and massive visual effects. Some fans wondered if Comic Con had strayed from its roots as an outsiders' affair.

As the janitors were sweeping Comic Con marketing materials into dumpsters, [Siggraph](#) opened at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Siggraph is the trade association of graphic artists and interactive technologists who have created the software and artistry responsible for those grand visual effects. This year we saw advances in 3D technology and emerging prototypes of fully immersive experiences – tools that will allow you to touch, feel and smell experiences in virtual worlds.

Then the X-Games began, with competition arenas just a stone's throw from Siggraph. The X-Games boast plenty of technology, including a live 3D television broadcast replete with color commentators wearing those dopey looking 3D glasses, and plenty of corporate money, with sponsorship logos occupying every square inch of the competitors' form-fitting outfits. But the X-Games are not about technology; they're more thrilling than the most vibrant effects reel unspooled at Comic Con or designed by the best Siggraph artists. Because at the X-Games, they do it real. And that renders jaw-droppingly amazing Travis Pastrana's double back-flip executed while riding a motorcycle 75 feet in the air. Visual effects don't carry emotion or story in their bones, as a motocross athlete does.

From this series of events, we can identify the four corners that influence our culture today: media and money, entertainment and technology. That's what's Cultural Weekly is about. We're going to look at our culture – the movies, plays, books, blogs, television, games, music, performing and visual arts – the whole creative expression of America. And we're going to ask how creativity figures into all this, how artists respond to it, and, most importantly, how we can make our culture better.

Don't I think our culture is good? Sure, some of it is. But much of it is no more nourishing for our

spirits than a Happy Meal is for our bodies. Our culture surrounds us so much that we barely notice it, like the water surrounds fish in the sea. Meantime, we are immersed in it and breathe and speak our culture every day. In this blog, I'll discuss how we can become more aware of our culture, how we can find a vocabulary to describe it better, and how we can get more good work into the world with new business models, new technologies and new creative vision. Hope you'll join me and comment back. Because it would be nice to have as much fun as Travis Pastrana.

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