

Pace Digital Gallery

# David Crawford: Retrospective

Presented by Pace Digital Gallery and Turbulence.org

Opening reception and remarks by Helen Thorington, Tuesday September 21, 6 - 8pm

Show runs Sept 21st to Oct 22nd, 2010



*image: Stop Motion Studies - Tokyo (2003)*



Pace Digital Gallery

# David Crawford: Retrospective

exhibition curated by Jo-Anne Green, Helen  
Thorington, Jillian McDonald, and Francis  
T. Marchese

presented by Pace Digital Gallery and Turbulence.org  
at Pace University in New York  
[www.pace.edu/digitalgallery](http://www.pace.edu/digitalgallery)  
[www.turbulence.org](http://www.turbulence.org)



Age 30: 2000 – Mid

EMPLOYER:	Zentropy Partners
GIRLFRIEND:	None
HOMETOWN:	New York, New York
SCHOOL:	None
(STEP)FATHER:	None

*images this page (L - R): Light of Speed (1999); Substitute (2000)  
images next 4 pages: Stop Motion Studies - Tokyo (2003)*



# David Crawford: Retrospective

*"How can we really live if there is no more here and everything is now? How can we survive the instantaneous telescoping of reality that has become ubiquitous, breaking up into two orders of time, each as real as the other: that of presence here and now, and that of telepresence at a distance, beyond the horizon of tangible appearances?" – Paul Virilio*

In his sadly abbreviated adult life, David Crawford grappled with this question. It was as much a question about the changing nature of reality and the problems of representation brought about by the acceleration of telecommunications technologies, as it was a question about the compression of time and space introduced by the invention of the Internet, and the rapid spread of its use enabled by the World Wide Web.

**David Crawford** (1970-2009) was a filmmaker whose early Internet/Net Art experiments reflect both contemporary themes (identity, privacy, and distance) and contemporary technologies (browsers, hyperlinks, email, storage, bandwidth, and computer processing power). Crawford circumvented early technological limitations by: (1) animating text rather than images, as in *Digi-Clinic*, 1996; (2) animating gifs, and animating ASCII images by using the <blink> tag and the "scrollMe()" browser function, in *Charming One Bedroom*, 1997; (3) creating simple Flash motion graphics in *Experimental Files*, 1998 and *Here and Now*, 1999; (4) developing the "algorithmic montage," which allowed him to pre-load a series of low resolution images and create

randomly generated sequences for a unique cinematic effect in *Stop Motion Studies*, 2002-2004; and (5) creating an "animated Cubism" by playing multiple videos layered within a single browser window, in *These People from Elsewhere*, 2007. In fact, Crawford's entire oeuvre provides a glimpse into his investigation of the space between still and moving images.

```

-----+-----
      /^^[
    /|^+---+  #
(  +- |____|  -----<>-
                        ==  --'
      ~|____|_
  
```

Helicopter, *Charming One Bedroom* - Life During Wartime  
[www.turbulence.org/studios/crawford/charm/life\\_during\\_wartime.html](http://www.turbulence.org/studios/crawford/charm/life_during_wartime.html)



Over the course of his short but important career, Crawford was an astute practitioner who was attracted to the “public space” of the Internet and ambivalent about exhibiting Net Art in physical space – he referred to the former as “media space” and the latter as “museum space.” He discusses this at length in his PhD dissertation, *Art and the Real-time Archive: Relocation, Remix, Response*. His creative practice concluded with a type of offline or “relocated” Internet Art that was configured variously as a video installation in *These People from Elsewhere*, 2007, and a print book in *38 Messages from Space*, 2007. He wrote:

*“What is being considered is not so much the re-location of net art as its location. In other words, its being spatially situated someplace. In Castells’ terms, this would be the distinction between the space of flows and the space of places. If the former is where net art was previously unlocated, the latter is where it has relocated.”*

Crawford’s work was deeply influenced by twentieth century theorists, especially Walter Benjamin, Jean Baudrillard, and Paul Virilio – who is directly referenced in *Charming One Bedroom: Ode to Virilio*. Both Benjamin’s and Virilio’s ideas about space and time are reflected in his artwork titles *Here and Now* and *Light of Speed*. *Light of Speed* “can generally be thought of as an epistemology in which electromagnetic radiation (light) is overtaken by rate of movement (speed) as the dominant metaphor in models of interpretation.” (Virilio) “Virilio suggested that we ought to chuck out “the geometric perspective of the Italian Renaissance and replace it with an electronic perspective: that of real-time emission and instantaneous reception of audio-video signals ... (T)he play of light in space yields to the play of speed in time as the arbiter of semblance.” (Crawford) Like Virilio, Crawford was disturbed by both the spatial and temporal displacement created by interactive computer screens. *Here and Now* situates the isolated Internet user in a distant war room from which commands for bombs to be dropped on innocent civilians are issued, and where they drop without emotional consequences.

***Light of Speed*** (1999) brings Crawford’s four earliest net art works together

***Digi-Clinic*** (1996) was influenced by artist Jenny Holzer’s language-based LED signs, which are often displayed in public space. *Digi-Clinic* exploits the two-way communication technology of the Internet by issuing a “call” and soliciting a “response”. The homepage loads a Java applet with three lines of text: (1) “I think I might hurt myself...” (2) “or someone else.” (3) “What should I do?” Beneath them is a request for “Your Suggestions” which links to his email address; and to the right, a dropdown menu that loads previous viewers’ suggestions, including their names and countries of origin. The piece was created in 1996, when most users would have been viewing it at the slow speed of dial-up modems; today, it is almost impossible to read the text as it speeds across the screen. *Digi-Clinic* comments on the nature of Internet “relationships” characterized by anonymity, ambiguous identity, and the sometimes frivolous/thoughtless reactions people display when they cannot be held accountable.

***Charming One Bedroom: Ode to Virilio*** (1997) provides clues to the author’s identity but when users are given the opportunity to learn more about him/her, they are confronted with the Google search results for “Who am I?” Crawford was prescient in observing, early on, what Anne Helmond came to write in 2009: “The advent of the search engine has had a major impact on both the construction and the presentation of the online identity.”

***The Experimental Files*** (1998) was Crawford’s first Flash piece. It has a low-bandwidth motion graphic aesthetic that emphasizes real-time and the technologies of war and genetic modification. A digital clock starts running the moment one loads the page. It keeps track of how long the user “watches.” There is also a red light “on” with the word “live” next to it, which suggests that users are viewing these motion graphics through a video camera’s viewfinder, and that they are in fact recording them themselves, in real-time. Speed, distance, and science have gone awry.

***Here and Now*** (1999) (commissioned by Turbulence.org and funded by the National Endowment for the Arts): “Communication is no longer dictated by traditional paradigms of leaving and arriving in space, but rather by the speed of information exchanged in real time. This trend is altering what it





each installment. The average “movie clip” contains 5 frames. The individual frames are not necessarily contiguous: in considering which stills to keep, he made his selections on the basis of both how they would stand alone and the overall effect of the resulting montage. Thus, Crawford sought to capitalize on the absence of frames. The remaining frames are stochastically re-animated by means of a short script; the animation may play forever without ever repeating itself.

```
x = random(y)+1;  
photo.gotoAndStop(x);  
gotoAndPlay(random(10)+55);
```

The result of nonlinearity, repetition, and randomness is that the arrested gestures of his subjects are amplified, or “data rich”.

Crawford studied the chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey and Eadweard Muybridge. His approach to filmmaking was influenced by André Bazin, especially in his use of the single frame and the long shot, in which, Crawford wrote, “ones eye is free to roam over a number of characters and is thus subject to the responsibility of exercising free will.” David was also moved to create this international character study by Walker Evans’ 1930s study of the New York City subway’s subterranean inhabitants, published as *Many Are Called* in 1966. Finally, Crawford’s SMS pays homage to Godfrey Reggio’s film *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) in which time is carried from form to content via stop motion sequences. Interestingly, it was Philip Glass’ score for the film – which Crawford described as “algorithmic in spirit” – that propelled him to experiment in “repetition with slight changes over time.” In all, he sought to reveal the unseen and create a space for reflection through algorithmic montage.

**Stop Motion Studies 13** (2004) In this remix of footage originally shot for previous installments in London, Paris, Boston, New York, and Tokyo, each installment’s modular structure provides a library of building blocks edited

into a linear animation approximately 7 minutes long. The speed of the transitions is based on network connection speed.

***These People from Elsewhere*** (2007) is a computer-based video installation that was conceived and designed to be instantiated both on- and off-line. According to Crawford, it is a type of “animated cubism whereby shards of photographic imagery depicting clouds are interlaced such that successive moments in time are simultaneously juxtaposed.” The piece is based on The Wilbert Smith Archives compiled by Grant Cameron on a CD-ROM. Smith claimed that he had received mental messages from space people, and he convinced the Canadian government to create the UFO research group, “Project Magnet.” Crawford wrote of this artwork:

*“As a video installation, the fracturing of frames that occurs makes direct reference to the windowed environments of the Web. As net art, the absence of interactivity shifts the positioning of the work towards the medium of video art. Thus, the work as a thing, a noun, or video installation/net art can be seen as an example of relocated net art. Along the same lines, the work as an action, a verb, or an experience can be seen as relocating net art. Just as we are increasingly both here and elsewhere when sitting in meetings and checking text messages, re- or bi-locating net art is neither fully on- nor offline.”*

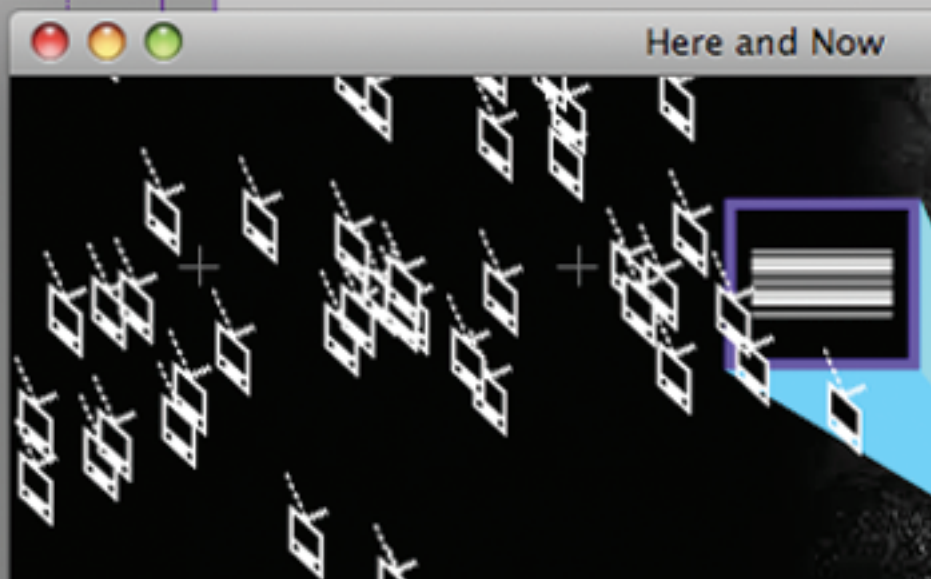
Note: Crawford created several remixes of his own work and he created two remixes of The Wilbert Smith Archives; he also referred to his extensive use of quotations in his writing as “remix.” In homage to David, this statement remixes his work too.

*\*The curators are grateful to David’s family, especially Bev, Matt, and Nancy, for their support of this retrospective exhibition.*

# HERE : AND : NOW

00:42:26

image: *Here and Now*  
(1999)



**David Crawford** (1970-2009) studied film, video, and new media at the Massachusetts College of Art and completed a BFA in 1997. He received several Turbulence.org Commissions, including *Here and Now* (1998), *National Velvet* (2000), and *Stop Motion Studies - Tokyo* (2003). In 2000, his *Light of Speed* project was a finalist for the SFMOMA Webby Prize for Excellence in Online Art. In 2003, Crawford's *Stop Motion Studies* project received an Artport Gate Page Commission from the Whitney Museum of American Art, an Award of Distinction in the Net Vision category at the Prix Ars Electronica, and became part of the public collection of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (*SMS - Series 6*). In 2004, he received an MSc from Chalmers University of Technology and taught at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Crawford received his PhD in 2009 from the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts at Göteborg University in Sweden. His artwork has been featured by the Guardian and Leonardo. His writing has been published by Princeton Architectural Press and SpringerWienNewYork.

To view more of David's work and read his writings, please visit [www.turbulence.org/studios/crawford/](http://www.turbulence.org/studios/crawford/)

Pace Digital Gallery  
Pace University  
163 William Street (between Fulton and Anne Streets)  
New York, NY 10038  
212.346.1814  
[www.pace.edu/digitalgallery](http://www.pace.edu/digitalgallery)  
hours: tues - fri; noon to 5pm

**accessible by subway**  
**A/C to Broadway / Nassau**  
**2/3 to Fulton Street**  
**4/5/6 to Fulton Street**  
**N/R to City Hall**  
**J/M/Z to Fulton Street**

**\*map available on our website**

The goal of **Pace's Digital Gallery** is to foster the creation and understanding of digital art for the benefit of Pace University, the surrounding community, and the general public. It furthers Pace University's commitment to educational excellence, diversity, and civic involvement by exhibiting the work of Pace faculty and students, and regularly exhibiting curated work of leading digital artists. It sponsors lectures and symposia on digital art and publication of materials for its documentation and promotion.

*The Pace Digital Gallery gratefully acknowledges the financial support of Pace University's President, Stephen J. Friedman and Constance A. Knapp, Interim Dean, Seidenberg School.*

**Turbulence** is a project of New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc. Now celebrating 14 years, Turbulence has commissioned over 180 works and exhibited and promoted artists' work through its Artists Studios, Guest Curator, and Spotlight sections. As networking technologies have developed wireless capabilities and become mobile, Turbulence has remained at the forefront of the field by commissioning, exhibiting, and archiving the new hybrid networked art forms that have emerged.

image: *Dance to the Radio* (2002)

Pace Digital Gallery



**turbulence**  
COMMISSIONING AND SUPPORTING  
NET ART FOR 14 YEARS: 1996-2010