

SKINS: VIRTUAL MODDING AS SELF-DETERMINATION

BETH A. DILLON – *SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY*
PORTLAND, OREGON
503 876.8358
BDILLON@SFU.CA

JASON LEWIS – *CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY*
MONTREAL, QUEBEC
JASON.LEWIS@CONCORDIA.CA
514 848.2424 x4813

How can we as indigenous people participate in determining the future of interactive media? Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC), based out of Concordia University, is a network of academics, artists, and technologists whose goal is to define and share conceptual and practical tools that will allow us to create new, Aboriginally-determined territories within the web pages, online games, and virtual environments that we call cyberspace. In regards to this effort, AbTeC is implementing the Skins project.

Skins is a virtual environment development workshop that addresses the unique worldview of Native youth. Taught by game industry professionals, 3D animators, programmers, artists, and storytellers, Skins guides Native youth in how to create their own virtual environments. The workshop covers traditional storytelling as well as game and virtual environment production, including: art direction, 3D modeling and animation, sound, and programming. A unique and important aspect of this workshop is the inclusion of elders and contemporary Native artists who lend their considerable expertise as consultants in forms including traditional storytelling, comic books, and film. As such, they will help ensure the authenticity of cultural elements and language, and provide moral support to the young producers.

This paper shares the in-progress work from the Skins prototype that began September 2008 with Mohawk youth at the Kahnawake Survival School and in doing so identifies methods by which Aboriginal people can use new media technologies to compliment our cultures.