

**THE BLOG**

Snapshots from the Coolness Conference

By Marty Kaplan

02/03/2006 10:23 am ET | Updated May 25, 2011

I've been attending eg2006, a gathering about information and entertainment at the Skirball Center up in the Sepulveda Pass above Los Angeles. The event's impresario is Richard Saul Wurman, who for years ran something called the TED conferences (for Technology, Entertainment, Design). I'm there to promote an urban design project I've been working on. At the Thursday night Yahoo!-sponsored buffet dinner, I ran into conference latecomer Arianna. She was popping cherry tomatoes as if they had no carbs in them at all, and when I gave her a fill on what'd happened at the conference so far, she thought it'd be worth a post. So here are a few Kodachromes (yeah, Kodak — or is it Kodak! ? — is a sponsor, too) from the more than 50 presentations.

Scariest: James M. Phillips, the chairman of a company called Luminetx, demo'd a device that enables a health professional to point a camera lens at your arm and instantly see your veins. The good news: it enables a flawless injection (instead of turning you into a pincushion). The scary news: turns out that your veins are like your fingerprint. Big Brother doesn't have to implant unique bar codes in us; we already possess them, all over our body, and all it takes is pointing a lens at us to reveal them.

Most inspiring: Nicholas Negroponte, who founded MIT's Media Lab, explained the economics and showed a prototype of the \$100 crank-powered laptop he aims to get to every child in the world. In many places on the planet, when kids bring that laptop home at night, its screen will be the only light in their electricity-less homes.

Most infuriating: Wall Street Journal computer/tech columnist Walt Mossberg said that soon, legally, content providers like TV networks will be able to reach into your TiVo and determine how long your recordings will last and how many times you're able to view them.

Funniest: Peter Hirshberg of Technorati gave a hilarious account of the blogosphere (have you seen Jesus the Musical?) and the suicidal ways that the MSM is reacting to the competition (have you followed the Du Bist Deutschland flame war?).

Coollest: Sims creator Will Wright demo'd his new game, Spore, which mobilizes users' creativity (and the power of computing-on-the-fly) to design and give life to creatures over a span of billions of light-years of evolution. Everyone instantly wanted to play it; one audience member said, "Now I know what I'll be doing when I retire."

Most moving: Yo-Yo Ma playing his cello, a Stradivarius, and then telling us it once belonged to the late Jacqueline Du Pre, whose recordings playing it once inspired young Yo-Yo.

Gutsiest: Naomi Judd and Dwight Yoakum ripped the country music industry, as well as the Sago mine owners, a new one. (She also showed a creepy, riveting movie of snake handlers in West Virginia. Later, Discovery Channel's Jeff Corwin, who brought a 20-foot anaconda onstage, was asked about that. "Yes, he said, they really do handle rattlesnakes. They also get bit, and die.")

Most sobering: Online music metrics honcho Eric Garland, of Big Champagne, contrasted the humongous amount of unpaid traffic in P2P music downloads with the minuscule sales at iTunes. In that context, looks like the attempt to compensate artists for online content are basically nowhere.

Best teaser: David Rockwell showed a short clip illustrating the idea of Spectacle, a book he's been working on. It's about non-mediated in-the-moment bigger-than-life community-generating events, from Burning Man to the hadj, that still, despite all the high tech and omnipresent media, have enormous power to move and transform us.

Best crack: TV writer/producer Tom Fontana, who's got a new series about to debut on the almost-extinct WB: "I've had shows canceled on me before. This is the first time I've had a network canceled on me."

There's been lots more... but I gotta go back now to find out what the genome folks and the JibJab guys have cooking.

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Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director