FILMMAKER

20th
Anniversary
Year

funny girl

Noah Baumbach
and **Greta Gerwig**
team up for the
spirited New York
tale **FRANCES HA**

Joshua
Oppenheimer
**The Act
of Killing**

Richard
Linklater
**Before
Midnight**

Sarah Polley
Stories We Tell

Jem Cohen
Museum Hours

Olivier Assayas
**Something
in the Air**

Issa Rae
**The Misadventures
of Awkward
Black Girl**

Civilian Casualties

Heather Chaplin on **Unmanned.**

Unmanned

I've been reviewing the fourth installment of *Gears of War* recently, and it's gotten me thinking about military games. *Gears* takes place on a planet called Sera and you fight big locusts, so it's not exactly the U.S. Army, like, say, *Call of Duty*, but it's the same basic idea — lots of weapons, lots of choices of weapons and lots of killing.

Now, people are always talking about "violent video games" and the harm they do to young minds, and this drives me crazy for two reasons. The first is simple: video games aren't violent. They deal in representations of violence, and that may be something you have a problem with, but be clear: it's not actual violence. It might be a problem, but it's a different problem. Rugby — that's a violent game.
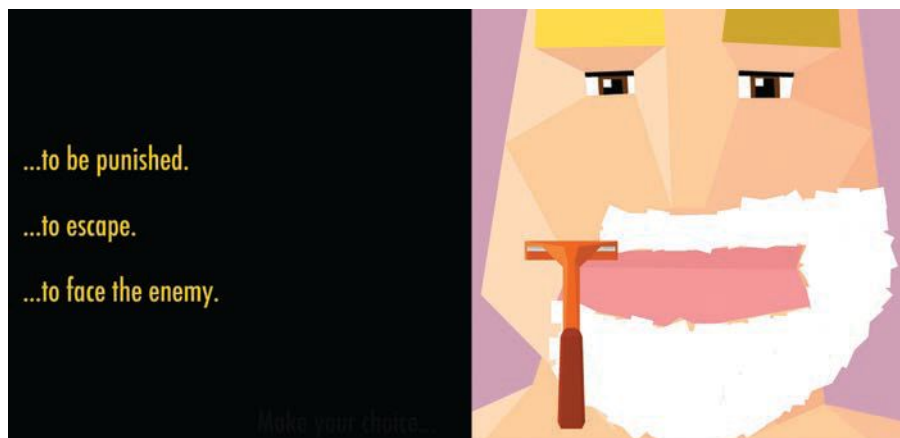
Second, as to whether playing games that traffic in violent representations makes you more violent, I'll say this — you're barking up the wrong tree.

The instinct is right. But the question is wrong. There is something to be concerned about when it comes to military-style shooter games and being bombarded with these hyper-violent images, but it's not what you think. It's not that these games turn innocent babes into violent maniacs. But they are teaching people how to be good soldiers. Play *Call of Duty*, or *Gears of War*, and you're learning skills such as how to flush out a building, how to set up a kill zone and how to work with a squad in a combat situation. I would say you're being desensitized to images of war violence, which would come in handy, if, say, you were a drone pilot.

All of which leads me to *Unmanned*.

Capturing a day in the life of a drone pilot, *Unmanned* is the latest creation from the brilliant Paolo Pedercini and his "radical videogaming project," Molleindustria.

I ran into Pedercini last month, and I told him I was glad someone like him was bringing a little anger to the indie gaming scene. Pedercini looked at me like I was stupid and said, "I live in a nice apartment in Pittsburgh with lots of midcentury furniture. I'm not sure how much I represent anger."

Okay, fair enough. Pedercini is now a visiting assistant professor of art at Carnegie Mellon, teaching media production and experimental game design, and presumably has health insurance and other indicators of an upper-middle-class life. But in an industry that remains adamantly apolitical, even on the edges, his work is a breath of fresh air. (Can fresh air be angry?)

Pedercini is from Milan by route of northern Italy. He first came to notice in the U.S. in 2006 with his *McDonald's Videogame*, a simulation that has players clearing rain forests, bribing officials and destroying villages. Since then, there's been *Faith Fight* ("religious hate has never been so much fun") and *Operation: Pedopriest* ("cover-up the sex scandals, restore the faith") — to name just a few.

Unmanned is a more thoughtful, more meditative piece of work, though it certainly carries Pedercini's signature stinging fury fleshed out as humor. It's an extremely slow game, full of strangely mundane tasks, such as shaving in the mirror, driving on a straight road and smoking a cigarette. Or take the dialog in the game. What happens in *Unmanned* is to a large extent determined by your choices of the dialogue options. But every time a line of dialog appears, several seconds pass before the flashing "click to continue" appears on the screen. At first you think something is wrong with the game, then you start to think that maybe something is wrong with you for chafing under a slower pace. The game is as much a commentary on video games themselves, and what we expect from them, as it is on American foreign policy.

Unmanned is a day-in-the-life story of a drone pilot done in stylized, blocky, lo-fi animation. We follow him for 24 hours as he has nightmares about being beaten by a member of the Taliban, drives to work, hits on his fellow drone pilot, talks with his wife, plays first-person shooter video games with his son and suffers from insomnia.

In other words, not much happens in *Unmanned*. You choose from dialogue options whether to be a more thoughtful husband and father or whether to be a total jerk. If you don't drive your car straight on the road, you get into an accident and miss out on one of the game's strangest moments, which is a karaoke section to Queen's "One Vision." ("One world / one nation / one true religion" and then "One man / one goal / one mission.") The song takes on a whole other meaning driving down a pixilated desert highway on your way to operate a drone strike.

Almost the entire game is done in split screens. In one case, the action on one half of the screen is shaving the drone pilot's big

the source of POD's most valuable growth. POD is currently in beta and needs the help of consumers to improve."

For now, BMC is hedging their bets on a collaboration with Hollywood, hoping that the cinematic experiences that audiences love will be the gateway BMC needs to convince consumers to become a host for POD. Only time will tell if users of device-based mobile applications will be ready to take the leap to become hosts for biotech solutions that live inside them. But one thing is for sure: Hollywood has a never-ending supply of stories, much of which is sitting around on shelves collecting dust.

To learn more about BMC and POD, *Filmmaker* recommends you visit the website, http://www.bodymindchange.ca. ∎

EXTRA CURRICULAR
tory of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina and his vast library. Gatten's films are about reading, writing, thinking and knowing, and they deal explicitly with the material of film — emulsion, light and dust, for example. In 2012, however, Gatten also made a three-hour digital work, *The Extravagant Shadows*, that invited the artist to explore a new form of writing and cinematic composition, as well as more extreme forms of duration.

"I don't think I could have made a three-hour movie without having done these courses," Gatten says. "Almost for the first time in my life, the way I've been thinking about structuring the classroom space into these four-hour blocks and the way I was thinking about structuring a long movie started to align. They started to feed each other."

Having viewed much of Gatten's body of work in Los Angeles last October as it traveled across the country as part of *Texts of Light: A Mid-Career Retrospective of Fourteen Films*, organized by Chris Stults of the Wexner Center for the Arts, and having had several conversations with him about films and filmmaking, I can't help but envy a group of undergrads in Durham, N.C.,right now. ∎

INDUSTRY BEAT
"Some countries are racist, I guess, but that's not a big factor compared to other issues," continues Mickie, who notes that a film like Clément Virgo's *Poor Boy's Game*, which stars Danny Glover, was not critically acclaimed, but sold well "because Glover is a 'name.'"

Visit Films' Ryan Kampe agrees. "I think there are people in the foreign community who are old school, like Italian or German or Russian buyers, in particular, who would say: Nope, can't buy it," says Kampe, who recently took on Sheldon Candis's *LUV*, which stars rapper Common, Dennis Haysbert and Danny Glover. "But more and more, I think it's film dependent."

Indeed, Adam Leon's Bronx-set low-budget *Gimme the Loot*, which stars two African-American unknowns, has sold to major distributors in France and the U.K. and smaller ones in Spain and Greece, according to Eric Schnedecker, head of sales and acquisitions at France-based sales company Urban Distribution International. He says the problem is less about race and more about "U.S. indies in general," which suffer as a result of "Hollywood hegemony abroad" and European subsidies that support their own domestic films.

But veteran international sales executive David Glasser, CEO of The Weinstein Company, which acquired worldwide rights to Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale* after its Sundance triumph, believes the "times are changing," he says. "We sold every territory on *Fruitvale*."

"Sure, we have obstacles to overcome," acknowledges Glasser. "But I think a good movie domestically is a good movie internationally."

But it helps if Forest Whitaker and an Oscar-winner such as Octavia Spencer are involved. ∎

GAME ENGINE
blocky face, while dialogue lines on the other half of the screen have you musing about the relationship between shaving and civilization. The split screens create a sense of disconnection — a reflection surely on the schizophrenic nature of being simultaneously an agent of violent death and a father/husband/ordinary guy who shaves in the morning.

Pederici's aim, he said, was to articulate the American paradox of being bombarded with militaristic entertainment, while studiously ignoring the realities of our wars.

For me, the most interesting part of the game is when you're playing first-person shooters with your son while discussing his ADHD, what kinds of weapons you have at work and who is worse: commies, Nazis or terrorists. Again, the screen is split — the action is you playing the first-person shooter, aiming for people's heads as blood splatters the screen — while the conversation takes place on the other side of the screen. It's funny. It's horrible. It's disorienting.

And yes, it's angry. Even if its maker lives in a nice apartment. ∎

FEST CIRCUIT
some very high temperature bacteria, but nothing that can build rockets ... I want to die on Mars — just not on impact."

Speakers such as Musk were undeniably fascinating at SXSW this year, even as shifts in the tech landscape meant that many of the conference's topics — life on Mars! — seemed a bit distant from the lives of early-career developers for whom consumer app development is this generation's version of starting a garage-rock band (or making an indie film). Indeed, with venture capital flowing to the less-sexy enterprise sector, and the next wave of transformative innovation (biotech and personalized medicine) a few years out, SXSW Interactive featured rock star speakers such as Pettis and Musk, as well as Al Gore — who described his sale of Current TV to Al Jazeera as "the most disruptive move on the chessboard" — and Megaupload Dark Lord Kim Dotcom. Alongside the usual seminars on coding and development, there seemed to be a higher number of somber panels examining digital lifestyles, such as "Is Social Media Making Us Sick?" I attended one such talk, "The New Serendipity?" based around one of SXSW's buzzwords this year. Panelists included John Perry Barlow (Electronic Frontier Foundation), Joichi Ito (MIT Media Lab) and Kevin Rose (Google Ventures), who all discussed how technology can enable the sort of unexpected encounters that can transform one's life. Their conversation essentially updated self-help homilies for the digital age. Said Barlow, "They used to say fortune prefers the prepared mind, now it's fortune prefers the networked mind." For Ito, keeping an open mind and surrounding yourself with interesting people was translated into, "To develop a weak tie network, move toward outliers and look for patterns."

As always, SXSW Interactive is hit-or-miss, depending on one's own schedule and the size of the crowds. I couldn't get into one hot seminar — Google's demonstration of Google Glass — although I did hear a lot about the company's unveiling of a talking shoe. But what about SXSW Film? Curation from the