

Fog in Finland

Alternative Party, an annual event held in **Helsinki**, is one of the most unique and interesting happenings in digital culture throughout Finland; a creative, fun, warm and welcoming atmosphere enjoying the possibilities of technology. A cornerstone for the mood of the event is a dim hall where the audience is surrounded by monitors and screens overflowing with light, soft-spoken people and electronic music.

The main attractions this year are the Belgian industrial-music pioneer **Front 242** and digital rights activist **Brad Templeton**, chairman of the **Electronic Frontier Foundation**. An important part of the party are the demoscene-competitions which show off the technical and artistic abilities of the authors; for example the world's first **FogScreen**-demo competition, in the spirit of Victorianism an invention competition and a Steampunk Costume contest. <http://www.altparty.org/competitions>

This year's theme, "steampunk", combines 19th century Victorian steam engines with state-of-the-art technology. In the spirit of the dawn of the modern world - the industrial revolution of the 19th century - a part of the event are the exhibitions of technology and art. There will be 1980's computer exhibition (Commodore 64, Amiga, Unix and other classics), electrofuturism, new-media art, a moon-base in a motor lorry by Finnish indie-cinematographers, workshops and seminars. The organizers emphasize that the computer expo is not just a "museum", the audience gets to use the machines.

Following the misty theme of steampunk, Alternative Party organizes a competition exploiting the possibilities of a **FogScreen**. FogScreen is a relatively new acquaintance even to digi-field enthusiasts: it's a large screen based on a wall of mist which you can walk through. The FogScreen has received a good reception for example in the fashion world, but only a few people have been able to see their own productions on the FogScreen. Alternative Party 2008 offers this possibility.

There will be two screens installed at the event: one at the main stage and the other at the entrance. The "FogScreen Interactive Demo Competition" gives us a chance to see the first demos you can walk through. A long time Alternative Party active, artist **Pilvari Pirtola** describes his expectations: "The FogScreen-democompo offers maybe the most interesting technical platform of the party. I also believe that some of the best entries in the compos will be seen on the FogScreen."

The organizers of the competition both from Alternative Party and from FogScreen are awaiting the FogScreen-works with interest. "The creation of FogScreen has been fixed with a vision where you can control this immaterial screen by touching 'air'", says **Mika Koivula**, CEO of FogScreen Ltd. "The idea is old and there is a technical implementation of it. What we're looking for are concepts where this idea appears at it's best. We believe that the Alternative Party participants are technically and graphically gifted visionaries, for whom this kind of a vision is an inspiring possibility to create something really astonishing." The winner is determined in the demoscene tradition of audience votes.

Alternativity

The special character of Alternative Party is partly built upon it's **demoscene**-background. The character of this Baltic digital festival can be exposed by examining the backgrounds of computer hobbyists. Demoscene can be characterized as a hobby and a group of people, with roots in the hacker culture of the 1980's where young, skilled programmers cracked the copy-protections of games and traded these games. As a display of skill and status, they started to program more and more elaborate realtime multimedia presentations, which were shown as the game was loading. Later on, programming these presentations, which now were known as "demos", became the main goal of

these groups and were produced as individual works. Creating demos requires great technical and artistic creativity, where the goal is to produce a gorgeous piece of work surpassing the technical limits of the platform computer. This is also a reason why competent demo-artists are a wanted work-force in the IT-business. Demos have been made on a plethora of platforms, from home computers to mobile phones, pocket calculators and so forth.

The roots of Alternative Party reach back a bit over ten years into a situation where most demo-events started to focus on a platform of PC and Windows, leaving other platforms out of the competitions. The first Alternative Party was organized in 1998 with the idea of offering competitions for users of alternative platforms. The inspiration and originality stemming from this background is still a supporting force today, as Alternative Party celebrates its ten year journey. A creative Alt-spirit and a more evolved know-how – and let's not forget attitude – are uniting once again at the event.

Everyone interested in digital culture are welcome to join us and enjoy the bubbling cross-art ambiance of the festival. The event is open round the clock from Friday to Sunday on the 24th through 26th of October. During the day kids under 12-year olds get a free entry with an adult, a possibility to explore the world of computers from their parents' youth. In the evenings and nights the event stirs up to a merry all-night-long festival with focus on music, demo-competitions and socializing.

Alternative Party 2008
"Punish Your Machine."
24-26 October 2008
Merikaapelihalli, Kaapelitehdas,
Helsinki, Finland.
www.altparty.org