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Pac-Manhattan

By Abul Taher, Metro Last updated at 00:00am on 12.05.04

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It was the original cyberspace game of the 1980s that took youngsters off the sports field and into the computer room.

Kickarounds on the streets, skateboarding contests and BMX-racing were consigned to the history books as youths turned into solitary creatures who craved the virtual world rather than the real one.

For many, Pacman is a reminder of a misspent youth. For others, it was the forerunner of much better things to come.

But now the legendary computer game that kicked off a multi-billion-pound industry seems to have gone full circle.

Instead of playing on a machine, gamers are acting it out on the streets of New York. Dressed as Pacman and four ghosts - Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde - they race through

the Manhattan streets taking their orders from controllers on mobile phones.

The controllers use a map of the city to tell the players where to go, turning New York's urban grid into a real-life game board. Frank Lantz, who developed the game with students at New York University, said: 'What this game does is make the players physical and social - qualities that you don't really find in computer games. We are invading a public space and transforming it into a game space.'

The creators of Pac-Manhattan studied the work of British creative artists Blast Theory, whose games Can You See Me Now? and Uncle Roy All Around You allowed online players to communicate with runners racing through cities in search of clues.

Major companies have already approached Prof Lantz, who believes Pac-Manhattan is the next step in the evolution of computer games.

But he is aware that using real cities as game boards may have legal stumbling blocks.

'Playing Pac-Manhattan is like skateboarding - benevolent usage of public space,' he said. For more details see www.pacmanhattan.com



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