2011 • Press

Golan Levin

Select books, critical reviews, published interviews, and press clippings.

029 Fressola, Michael J. “Classic abstracts meets contempo-computer art in Helen & Golan Levin’s ambitious new ‘Gesture’" Staten Island Live, 10/2/2011.
035 de Lange, Catherine. “Exhibition makes you see sense about feelings”. Newsscientist.com, 6/30/2011.
052 Bozzi, Nicole. “Golan Levin’s Infoviz Graffiti, or Communicating Dissent In a Short Attention Span World”. Owni.eu, 6/23/2011.
EDITORIAL

A SOFTWARE CULTURE

The American artist Golan Levin is our first 2011 cover. He teaches and researches at the intersection of art, technology and cultural inquiry. According to him, quoting the media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, the choice artists face is to “program or be programmed.”

That was also the credo of the team of 01SJ, the North American Biennial at the nexus of art, technology, and digital culture: “Art can be more than merely aesthetically pleasing, but rather a tool with which to Build Your Own World.”

And we’ll definitely need more artists to create an alternative to the society of surveillance because “it is quite likely that sooner or later the majority of items connected to the Internet will not be humans, but things.” That is what Gerald Santucci, head of RFID unit at the European Commission, explains to us, looking through a “window to our future, the Internet of Things.” He says: “Object-to-object communications has been long predicted, but has always seemed to be perched safely on the horizon. Now it is rushing into the present.”

In this issue, you’ll discover features about art and science, real and virtual, preservation of digital art, and more. We’re also happy to introduce two French artists, Thierry Fournier and Nicolas Clauss, as well as reports on EMPAC in the state of New York, and festivals such as SRTP in Eindhoven, the 01 Biennial in San José, and the SFR Player event dedicated to innovation in Paris.

We hope you enjoy this 5th issue, now also available in French.

We look forward to your help and feedback in enhancing our upcoming magazines. Please send us your comments, questions and suggestions at: info@digitalarti.com or post them directly on the site at: www.digitalarti.com/blog/digitalarti_mag
First of all, could you tell us something about the installation “Messa di Voce” you did with Zachary Lieberman and which we (Digalarti) recently presented at SFR Player 2010 in Paris. This interactive piece seems to be influenced by John Maeda, could you tell us more? Maeda is personally influential for us, but he didn’t specifically inspire that project. I’m not sure why you assert that. Our interactive installation augments the speech, shouts and songs produced by a pair of vocalists with real-time interactive visualizations. The project touches on themes of abstract communication, synaesthetic relationships, cartoon language, and writing and scoring systems, within the context of a sophisticated, playful, and virtuosic audiovisual narrative. Custom software transforms every vocal nuance into correspondingly complex, subtly differentiated and highly expressive graphics. “Messa di Voce” lies at an intersection of human and technological performance extremes, melding the unpredictable spontaneity and extended vocal techniques of human improvisers with the latest in computer vision and speech analysis technologies. Utterly wordless, yet profoundly verbal, Messa di Voce is designed to provoke questions about the meaning and effects of speech sounds, speech acts, and the immersive environment of language.

“Messa di Voce” was shown for the first time in 2003 at Ars Electronica Festival. Is it still the same piece or has it been modified in any way? The original version was a performance, specially tuned for the two vocalists, Jaap Blonk and Joan La Barbara. The version we showed in Paris is a special version optimized for real-time interaction in an installation format.

In 2001 you created a “symphony for mobile phones” (“Dialtones”). Since the massive introduction of smartphones (e.g. iPhone) do you intend to create something similar? What would you like to do with these new objects? I am now creating iPhone software, such as my “Yellowtail” app, which can be found in the Apple App Store. Soon I will be creating other audiovisual apps as well. The mobile platform is very exciting; many new things are possible when a computer can move around in a city.
The project touches on themes of abstract communication, synaesthetic relationships, cartoon language, and writing and scoring systems, within the context of a sophisticated, playful, and virtuosic audiovisual narrative.
Also, after "The Secret Lives Of Numbers", how do you see future online developments of what we call "net-art" or "web art"?

The Secret Lives Of Numbers (2002) was an early example of an interactive data visualization using internet data. Today one can see hundreds of such projects on blogs like Infosthetics.com and VisualComplexity.com, and Visualizing.org -- it is a large movement. One important development has been the creation of APIs (application programmer’s interfaces), such as those released by Twitter, Flickr or the New York Times, which enable incredible access to data streams.

A sound and music environment is important in your creations. Could you explain why?

I like full-bandwidth experiences. I like to address my audience in a multisensory way.

Most of your works feature graphical interfaces proposing interactive visuals with the audience ("Reface, Eyecode, Motion Traces, Re:Mark", etc.). Could you explain your reasoning, in particular as regards this search for involvement as opposed to contemplation from the audience?

For me, the interactive aspect of my works is their true content. It is not how they look or sound, but how they respond, which is where I locate the concepts of my works.

Nonetheless, your "raw material" is the software. Could you explain this artistic "cyber practice"?

I teach and research at the intersection of art, technology and cultural inquiry. I locate my work at this intersection because I believe it provides a powerful means by which a humanist voice can help predict and productively shape the future. In a world in which culture is increasingly shaped by software, artists must have control over the technologies of cultural production in order to maintain a voice in the conversation. The choice artists face, to use the elegant words of Douglas Rushkoff, is to "program or be programmed".

Regarding some programs close to ‘motion capture’ which create visuals from movements you compare the result of this practice with abstract expressionism. Could you clarify your idea?

Gesture is the common root, here, of an aesthetic experience. The interactive modality allows me to shift the source of the gesture from the "Artist" (Abstract Expressionism) to the "Audience".

For you, is the use of programs and software comparable to an artistic "détournement"?

Wikipedia states that a détournement is a variation <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variation_on_a_theme> on a previous media work, in which the newly created one has a meaning that is antagonistic or antithetical to the original. I do not regard my work as antithetical to anything.
Some of your works feature a random and/or generative protocol. Sometimes, this principle gives rise to criticism from people unfamiliar with digital art and doubtful of the artistic value of these creations. What is your response to this criticism and how do you deal with it? They are welcome to their opinion. The conceptual foundation for such work has its origin in the generative practices of Sol Lewitt, and the aleatoric practices of John Cage, nearly 50 years ago, so presumably such critics doubt the value of that work as well. A condition of contemporary media is that it is unstable and variable, but if some people are nostalgic for fixed artifacts marked by the hands of geniuses, then fortunately there are still plenty of museums to oblige them.

You are both a teacher and an artist. As such are you inclined to adopt a pluridisciplinary attitude, more assertive and realistic than some visual artists who are into pure games or far-fetched theories? I have to cover a wide range of material with my students. Some of it is very technically grounded, and some is historical, conceptual, or critical. This is typical, I think, of practice in the media arts.

One final question: as for various approaches, trends, etc., do you feel a difference between the United States and Europe regarding digital art? Or is digital art and its many representations a global practice? It's a global practice with many facets. Europe typically invests more in arts and culture than the United States, and it shows.
Cover Story

Leading Cultural Investigation
RIT’s Caroline Werner Gannett Project and Carnegie Mellon’s Golan Levin

Demanding Standards
Bruno Chalifour and Howard Koft

Breaking Through
New York State Literary Center’s Dale Davis

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Unifying Dualities
Nathan and Susan Robfogel

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On the Cover

Floccular Portrait of Ben Fry, image by, and courtesy of, Golan Levin (www.flong.com). Levin has developed a model for “representing the underlying structure of ‘physical’ lines,” which has the effect of “simulating the tensile properties of thin physical filaments, such as hairs or twigs.” He has used this model to create a series of reactive drawing systems. According to Levin, “filaments drawn by the user are buffeted by forces derived from a hidden but underlying photograph. The results are wispy, organic and sometimes unsettling transformations: chiaroscuros in hair.” Levin is being brought to Rochester this March by RIT’s Caroline Werner Gannett Project, as part of its Visionaries in Motion speaker series. See story on page 14 and visit www.cwgp.org.

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Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester
(585) 473-4000, extension 205 • gombatto@artsrochester.org

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LEADING CULTURAL INVESTIGATION

RIT’s Caroline Werner Gannett Project and Carnegie Mellon’s Golan Levin

By Sarah E. Lentini

“Program or be programmed.”
Golan Levin talks with the rapid-fire speech and affect of a native New Yorker. The words—provocative and cautionary—are the title of Douglas Rushkoff’s new book, which Levin has been reading. We are discussing technology’s impact on culture—which he defines as “modes of human expression.”

Levin is being brought to Rochester in March by the Caroline Werner Gannett Project of the Rochester Institute of Technology, a sophisticated initiative that is part think tank, part speaker and discussion series, headed by Dr. Mary Lynn Broe, the Caroline Werner Gannett Professor of Humanities. Working with an impressive cross-disciplinary team of experts from both within and outside of the university, Dr. Broe regularly showcases a variety of individuals with groundbreaking ideas from across the world. In 2011, in addition to Golan Levin, she has lined up an eclectic group of speakers that includes composer David Lipatik, storyteller Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and popular science writer David Bainbridge.

A graduate of MIT’s renowned Media Laboratory, where he designed his own interdisciplinary degree program, Golan Levin now directs the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University, which “supports atypical, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research at the intersection of arts, sciences, technology and culture.” Levin’s lab provides residencies to support the work of “artist-engineer hybrids”—artists who create circuits and write computer code in order to create new forms of art.

Early on, Levin worked in Silicon Valley, at Interval Research Corporation, a company that brought together artists and scientists to develop many of the significant new technologies that have redefined our daily existence. “It was a very interesting place,” he tells me.

“What I think characterizes most of the best media laboratories is a recognition of the feedback loop that exists between culture and technology. New technology makes possible new forms of culture. Likewise, culture sets the agenda for the development of new technologies. One of the most profound ways that new culture is made today is through software.” I ask for some examples and he replies, “There are thousands of examples. It’s not just Facebook—it’s your toaster, your car. Wikipedia, a document authored by millions of people, is one thousand times bigger than the largest encyclopedia we had up until now, the Encyclopedia Brittanica. Artists must have a voice in defining how culture is shaped by software.”
Levin is a professor—an educator—who teaches artists how to write software and teaches computer scientists how to “get in touch with their own idiosyncratic ideas.” According to Levin, in the future, the arts will produce very different aesthetic expressions, constructed and experienced in ways that are entirely different, and distributed many places simultaneously.

He tells me that he is perhaps best known as a computer artist, a new media artist, although he is also a designer, a composer, a performer, a scientist, and an engineer. “Part of the problem is the words we use,” says Levin. “I’m not too interested in categories.”

I tell him that I have become increasingly interested in the power of language to shape thinking.

“I am an artist and a designer,” Levin continues. “There is no one word in English that encompasses the role. There is a German word, gestalter, which I like—I am someone who gives form to things.”

“There are disciplinary boundaries. The most interesting work is at the boundaries.”

Levin is such an unconventional thinker that it prompts me to ask what he was like as a child. “I can’t answer that,” he says. “I don’t have an adult perspective on myself as a child.” He pauses and then continues, “I made a lot of art.”

Levin attended Stuyvesant High School, a public math and science magnet school in New York City. Levin’s mother is an artist and an educator; his father is an engraver and a craftsman.

I ask him what conclusions he is drawing—on where we are going and what it means. “It’s hard to have that kind of perspective. We’re standing on constantly shifting ground. But we are without question in the middle of a profound cultural shift, as significant as the printing revolution in the sixteenth century.”

As I listen and repeat these words in my head, it occurs to me that we appear to be experiencing a “virtual” geological event. Perhaps, as with so many other human activities, we have moved into a new geological era, one that exists in the ether.

I picture tectonic plates—the earth—moving under us, as they have done so many times before, as they are always doing—imperceptibly moving and changing in ways that are at once small and large, leaving us different and the same.

For, the core idea of needing to shape the design of our world in order to have power and freedom and happiness is not a new one; it is, however, being expressed within a new context and in a new language.

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**Visionaries in Motion Speaker Series**

**CAROLINE WERNER GANNETT PROJECT/ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

- Golan Levin: *Interactive Art and Speculative Human-Computer Interaction*, March 8 at 8 PM—RIT, Webb Auditorium (Building 7A)
- For information, call (585) 475-7174 or visit www.cwgp.org
- All events are free and open to the public
Talk to Me

Design and the Communication between People and Objects

MoMA
Double-Taker (Snout). 2008

Windows PC running custom software, stereo-depth camera, 6-axis robot arm, and vinyl. 9 x 11 x 11 x 59 1/8" x 59 1/8" x 150 x 150 cm

With a body similar to a large worm or elephant trunk, Double-Taker (Snout) is surprisingly emotional for a creature made of a robotic arm and a single, giant googly eye. Snout was placed above the entrance to the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts in 2008, where it silently tracked the actions of museum visitors as they came in and out. A computer program used information from a stereo camera and vision algorithms to detect the visitors’ behavior and then directed these signals to influence the movements of the arm. The result was a mechanical cyclops that seemed bashful yet curious as it caught glimpses of passersby and followed them with its eye. By endowing the robotic creature with realistic observational behaviors, the designers achieved a suggestion of intelligent awareness.
This shift adds a fundamental difference on the possibilities of artworks with mobile technologies when compared to fixed telephones.

When cell phones arose, as in the early days of the telephone [Gitelman & Pingree 143], they were regarded as media to transmit messages, and generally only urgent messages. Even now, cell phones are still viewed in many parts of the world as mobile telephones, that is, a telephone that can be carried around, used mostly for voice conversations. However, the incorporation of new functions such as text messaging (SMS), multimedia messaging (MMS), and location-based services contribute to the creation of new meanings for the mobile interface. The cell phone’s potential for making new art is explicitly highlighted in cities with dense populations, because there is more potential for people to interact with each other. The emergence of nomadic technology devices allows whole cities to be used as a “responsive surface,” or as a game board. It is as though the urban space has become a map of itself, a place for interaction and long-distance contact, without the need for a restricted or fixed space.

The following works use cell phones as promoters of collective and social actions in public spaces. They envision the phone no longer as only a voice transmission device, but also as a musical instrument, a game controller, and location-aware device. 


In the Ars Electronica 2001 in Linz, Austria, Golan Levin and the Ars Electronica Festival used the audience’s cell phones to create a music concert at the Brucknerhaus Auditorium. Prior to the concert, members of the audience could register their cell phone numbers in kiosks, after which they would be assigned a seat in the auditorium and have a set of ringtones downloaded to their phones. Knowing each person’s position in the auditorium and their respective ringtones, the computer could call them individually and produce a musical symphony, which was eventually a product of collective authorship.

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4 Writing about the first days of the telephone in Lancaster, England, around 1910: “Telephone company advertising in the village weekly newspapers amplified these themes by emphasizing the value of the telephone in times of emergency: accidents, fires, illness, stolen horses, mad dogs, robbers, and threatening weather.”

Art by Telephone

This piece was innovative because it used cell phones as musical instruments. Although Dialtones is not a communication experience and it does not include voice, it can be regarded as a social and collective action happening in public space. The distance from the mobile phone as a two-way voice communication device becomes even stronger when cell phones' power is used to create collective games.

Figure 5: Dialtones in Austria 2001. The audience is able to see a mirror of itself on the ceiling, where the spotlights point to the actual ringing phones. The two projection screens placed on the side of the stage show the graphic interface used by the performers to trigger the audience's phones, constituted by the spotlights projected on the audience. © 2001 Golan Levin

3.2. Blinkenlights: the cell phone as a remote controller and game device

In 2001, the Chaos Computer Club transformed an eight-story building in Berlin's Alexanderplatz into the world's biggest interactive computer display. One hundred and forty-four lamps were arranged behind the building's front windows, which were

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6 A past work combining telephones and music was Telefonmusik, Vancouver IV (1983) in Heidi Grundman (ed.), Art Telecommunication, Vancouver, Canada: A Western Front Publication, pp. 112-125. (1984). However, whereas this project was mostly concerned with the idea of transmitting and receiving music over the telephone, Dialtones transformed the cell phone in the music instrument itself. In 1983, one of the major characteristics of the project was the limited frequency bands which the telephone could provide for music broadcast. In 2001, Midi (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) ringtones enables the creation of polyphonic musical compositions simulating an orchestra on the handset.
Art contemporain
nouveaux médias

Dominique Moulon

sentiers d’art

nouvelles éditions
Scala
C'est la popularité de tous les nombres entiers se situant entre zéro et un million que Golan Levin mesure sur Internet dès 1997. En ligne depuis 2002, *The Secret Lives of Numbers* nous révèle la vie cachée des nombres. Il est en effet des nombres qui, selon nos pratiques, cultures ou croyances, nous sont plus ou moins familiers. Et ce jusque dans les numéros de téléphone et autres codes postaux. Mais l'interface conçue par l'artiste anihile toutes les différences quant aux provenances pour ne préserver, en la quantifiant, que la fréquence des répétitions. C'est là que le nom d'un microprocesseur côtoie le numéro d'un formulaire ou une date historique. L'application permet de voyager dans ce monde de nombres où les vainqueurs sont au plus proche du zéro, quand les années de capture des données sont encore très présentes. *The Secret Lives of Numbers* nous dit tout simplement notre fascination pour

les nombres. L'on se souvient que les Jeux olympiques d'été, à Pékin, ont commencé à 8 heures, 8 minutes et 8 secondes (heure locale), le 8 août 2008.

Une base de données, tout comme une collection, se doit d'être la plus complète.

C'est ainsi qu'Antoine Schmitt, en 2009, s'est fixé pour objectif de concevoir celle qui contiendrait les prénoms et noms de tous les êtres humains. Elle est consultable en ligne sous la forme d'un générique. Prénoms et noms, lentement, défient de bas en haut. Mais ce *Grand Générique de*
A TOUCH OF CODE

INTERACTIVE INSTALLATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

gestalten
Flong
Tnema (Golan Levin and Zachary Lieberman)

REFACE (PORTRAIT SEQUENCER)

The installation, Reface (Portrait Sequencer), is a surreal video mish-mash that composes endless combinations of its viewers’ faces. Based on the macabre Victorian Exquisite Corpse parlor game, the Reface installation records and dynamically remixes brief video slices of its viewers’ mouth, eyes and eyebrows. Reface uses face-tracking technology to allow automatic alignment and segmentation of the faces of the participants. As a result, viewers are able to move around freely in front of the display without being concerned about aligning their faces for the system’s camera. The video clips recorded by the project are edited by the participants’ blinking eyes. Their blinking also triggers the display to advance to the next set of face combinations. Through interactions with an image entirely constructed from its own viewing history, Reface enables a new form of inventive play with one’s own appearance and identity. The resulting kinetic portraiture blends the personalities and genetic traits of its visitors, to create a generative group portrait of the people in the project’s locale.

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Cultura e nuovi media
Cinque interrogativi di
Lev Manovich

a cura di
Vito Campanelli
e Danilo Capasso

Prefazione di
Daniele Pittéri
L'affermazione che <<viviamo in una cultura del remix>>, anche se corretta, suggerisce implicitamente che ci siano culture che non sono culture del remix, o che il fenomeno del remix nella nostra cultura sia qualcosa di relativamente nuovo. Io credo invece che questa implicazione sia falsa, e che tutte le culture umane siano definite dalla loro abilità di assimilare nuove idee e adattarsi ad ambienti e meki in continuo cambiamento.

Mentre è certo che le tecnologie digitali come i network, gli ipermedia e il campionamento hanno notevolmente accelerato la velocità con cui i materiali culturali sono distribuiti e riproposti, l'abilità di generare ed incorporare nuove combinazioni di idee è necessaria anche alle culture tradizionali o conservatrici. Se i DJ e i VJ di oggi hanno fatto del remix di frammenti di musica e video, quasi una professione di fede, questa forma di remix non è affatto il loro dominio privilegiato; lo si può trovare infatti in egual misura nel cinema indiano, nella musica pop africana o, per fare un esempio estremo, nell'appropriate e riproposizione del viaggio aereo e della tecnologia di Internet da parte di Al-Qaeda.

Tutto può essere remixato con tutto, nel momento in cui se ne può trarre vantaggio o beneficio, sia esso estetico, funzionale, o politico. Non vedo nessuna forma intrinseca per cui non si possa improvvisare il remix di due parti di cultura qualsiasi.

La questione se la combinazione risultante abbia alcuna rilevanza o persistenza può essere affrontata meglio mediante la teoria di Richard Dawkins sui emi, teoria che considera il grado in cui un parte anche piccolissima di cultura (che sia un'idea, uno slogan, una melodia, un paradigma religioso ecc.) è in grado di propagarsi e

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1 Richard Dawkins è universalmente riconosciuto come uno tra i più importanti biologi della sua generazione. Insegna Zoologia all'Università di Oxford ed è autore, tra gli altri, di un libro nel quale affronta analiticamente la teoria della trasmissione culturale tra geni, per la quale Dawkins coniò i termini: meme e memetica.

perpetuarsi all’interno e attraverso la coscienza umana. Certo possiamo pensare a combinazioni fallite, o che almeno non sono riuscite a offrire strategie culturali produttive e significative. Negli anni Settanta, ad esempio, quando la musica disco emerse dalla cultura di strada di Detroit incarnando un nuovo formato musicale, Walter Murphy (2) ebbe l’idea di remixare la musica disco con della musica classica, e produsse un successo di breve vita: A Fifth of Beethoven. Anche se questo motivetto tenne le prime posizioni delle classifiche per molte settimane nel 1976, e quindi dimostrò che questi due generi possono essere remixati, non riuscì tuttavia a stimolare operazioni simili con altra musica classica. Certo, la novità è di per se stessa un valore. Possiamo certo aspettarci che «tutto venga remixato con tutto», almeno finché la curiosità e l’attrazione della novità restano forti motivazioni.

Oggi molti, come Lawrence Lessig e la RIAA (3), sono interessati all’etica del remix nel contesto di battaglie legali intorno al copyright e al diritto di riproduzione. Avidi dirigenti dell’industria discografica sostengono la posizione che un brano campionato in un nuovo brano rappresenta una perdita di introiti assimilabile al furto materiale.

La risposta logica a questo atteggiamento all’antica è l’album di John Oswald Plexure, che comprende più di 30.000 campionamenti di un secondo presi da un ampio ventaglio di musica pop: se Oswald avesse dovuto pagare i diritti per ogni campionamento, questi sarebbero ammontati a varie migliaia di dollari. È chiaro che le leggi devono cambiare e che, davanti a nuove modalità di produzione come Creative Commons, saranno obbligate a farlo. Personalmente, sono stato sempre più interessato all’etica legata all’estetica del remix, piuttosto che alle sue implicazioni legali. Quando ero al college nei primi anni Novanta, ho passato un bel poco di tempo mettendo in sequenza e mixando campionamenti da vari tipi di musica. Mi ispiravo ai Public Enemy, alle collaborazioni Eno/Byrne, ai Negativland, e a John Oswald. Ovviamente, come molti altri, volevo anche creare un bel sound ed avere un bel ritmo. A quel tempo molti artisti campionavano James Brown, ricordo di aver pensato che, a parte il fatto che la musica di James Brown era troppo ovvia per questo tipo di operazione, in un certo senso non aveva il diritto di campionare la sua musica e che per “meritarmi” di campionare la sua musica, così incredibilmente apprezzata, avrei dovuto produrre qualcosa di altrettanto valido. I Public Enemy si erano guadagnati quel diritto, ma io no, e così scelsi di campionare esclusivamente la musica bianca dello stesso periodo.

Ricordo che presi un sacco di materiale da un certo album di Barbara Streisand della metà degli anni Settanta, uno dove la sua band bianca faceva di tutto per suonare alla “nera”.

Quella era davvero musica “usa e getta”. Sentivo che il mio imperativo morale era letteralmente di riciclare questa musica, musica assolutamente da dimenticare, in qualcosa di meglio. In breve, la mia etica del remix consisteva nel fatto che bisognava fare del mondo un posto migliore, migliorando (e non insultando) il materiale di cui si fa uso. Certo, in un’età relativista come la nostra, difficilmente si potrebbe autorizzare questa etica, o qualunque altra.

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3 RIAA sta per Recording Industry Association of America, si tratta dell’associazione che riunisce le case di produzione discografica americane.
Three Weimar Masters Flaunt “Decadence & Decay”

A Flashback to Camelot
an excerpt from HOODLUM HEART: a memoir
by Ed McCormack, pg. 10
Helen Levin and Golan Levin Close the Aesthetic Generation Gap at The Staten Island Museum

An intergenerational joint museum survey is a rare enough event; but rarer still is one in which the two artists represent such opposite poles of expression as do Helen Levin and her son Golan Levin in their two artist exhibition, “The Gesture in Paint and Software,” at the Staten Island Museum.

Helen Levin carries on the painterly tradition of the New York School in her large abstract acrylic paintings while Golan of musculature in these strokes that rarely makes itself felt in the paintings of other female New York School painters such as Joan Mitchell or Helen Frankenthaler — a vigor and a violence which belies the gender stereotyping that often made that school seem an exclusionary boy’s club. This painting in particular, with its energetic slashes of strident reds, greens, and blues, intersected by jaggedly architeconic black

Levin creates interactive software projects generated with digital “motion capture” techniques. Yet the purpose of the show, according to Helen Levin, is to unify a commonly perceived dichotomy that supposedly exists between older and newer media, and demonstrate “a synergy between the paintbrush and the computer.”

For her part, Helen Levin demonstrates that the power and the immediacy of the paintbrush remains undiminished since the heyday of the Abstract Expressionist movement, from the mid 1940s through the 1950s. Levin continues to keep the faith of pure, untrammeled gesture that characterized the first major homegrown American art movement in compositions such as “Jazz Fusion,” 2009, with its fiery red forms floating against a vibrant blue ground. Here, as in all of her best canvases lush, saturated color is combined with the vigorous calligraphic strokes that signify authentic “action painting.” Unlike those of abstract painters whose compositions appear derived from landscape, Levin’s canvases yield few overt references to nature. Rather, as the title “Jazz Fusion” suggests her gestures seem to spring from inner moods, impulses, and emotions. Color, too, seems nonreferential, employed for pure chromatic impact in an intuitive, spontaneous manner.

But above all is gesture that drives these paintings, as seen in the boldly slashing, overlapping, splintered strokes that animate the 2010 acrylic on canvas “Arch Hommage II.” There is a sense of Contemporary Art, and in museums in Taiwan, Germany, Japan, and elsewhere around the world, he creates virtual environments that engage the viewer as a participant, and sometimes collaborator, in the creative process. To be more specific, one could say he employs digital technology to put museum visitors through a kind of conceptual/perceptual mixmaster via his use of digital technology to explore issues of identity and interactivity.

One of his best known installations, for example is Re: Face an updated digital variation of “Exquisite Corpse,” the surrealist parlor (or café) game in which several artists seated at a table would pass around a folded piece of paper to which each would add the features of a face that would not be revealed in its entirety until the paper was unfolded. Levin’s version substitutes for the piece of paper a row of six large LCD screens on which brief video slices of different participants’ eyes, brows, and mouths are scrambled and recomposed in real time. Genders and races overlap and blend, giving each participant the experience of personally participating in one of those computerized composite pictures of hypothetical intermixed citizens of the future that we’ve all seen at one time or another.

Along with “Yellowtail” and “Meshy,” two pieces designed for touch screen technology that translate the users’ strokes into a variety of self-replicating abstract patterns, this show features “Ghost Pole Propagator,” an installation that harks back in time to some of the first images created by human kind to represent itself in the ancient petroglyphic stick figures carved and painted on stone surfaces and cave walls. Again in real time, visitors to the exhibition can see themselves transformed on a screen into archetypal stick figures that, remarkably, retain their own characteristic gait and individual gestures.

Among Golan Levin’s best known past performance projects was “Telesymphony, 2001,” a concert composed entirely of carefully choreographed dialing and ringing of the audience’s own mobile phones. Although his work is more in the tradition of John Cage, Yoko Ono, and other avant garde conceptualists, it shares a spontaneous spirit with the gestural abstraction of Helen Levin, and together mother and son make for a highly engaging family dialogue in this rare gem of a museum survey.

—— Ed McCormack

Helen Levin & Golan Levin, Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Place, Staten Island, NY July 7, 2011 - January 8, 2012

JUNE/JULY/AUGUST 2011
MUSEUM EXHIBITS/ART GALLERIES

STATEI N ISLAND


ART AT BAY 2, 10 Bay Street, 718-720-8489. Fri.-Sat. 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat. & Sun. noon-6 p.m. "Art by the Ferry-Mash-up: Remix of Artwork from 2011 Festival," through Aug. 31.

ART LAB GALLERY, Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden, 1000 Richmond Terrace, Livingston, 718-447-8667. Mon.-Thurs. 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Fri-Sun. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. "Process To Product," featuring works by Pat DeGraffenreid, Phyllis J. Feathersworth, Bill Murphy, Maria Ruggiero-Aklozes, through Aug. 20.

COURTESY OF THE STANEN ISLAND MUSEUM


CARASALI MUSICO MUSEUM, 420 Tompkins Avenue, Rosena, 718-442-1606. Wed. to Sat. 1-5 p.m., $3; free to under 18; free to under 2. Permanent exhibit includes more than 500 original musical instruments, and tours of the historic house. "From 1500 to the Present." "From the Colonial Period to the Present." "From the Colonial Period to the Present.", through July 30.


JIMMY MAX, 280 Watchogue Road, Westerleigh, 718-983-6713. No admission; daily from noon to 7 p.m. "Tibetan Thangkas: Ancient and Traditional Tibetan Art," through Sept. 9.


KATIE MATYAS tests out Golin Levin's "Ghost Pole Propagator," a piece of camera-based interactive software art now at the Staten Island Museum. See listing for exhibit details.

Curator Diane Matyas tests out Golin Levin's "Ghost Pole Propagator," a piece of camera-based interactive software art now at the Staten Island Museum. See listing for exhibit details.

KATIE MATYAS tests out Golin Levin's "Ghost Pole Propagator," a piece of camera-based interactive software art now at the Staten Island Museum. See listing for exhibit details.
Classic abstracts meets contempo computer art in Helen & Golan Levin's ambitious new 'Gesture'

You gotta have friends (to last when you're gone)

Online auction to benefit college fund for sons of late S.I. musician "Jimmy O'D"

By MICHAEL J. FRESSOLA

Celebrity friends of the late IT expert and Island rock-band veteran James J. O'Donnell — people like Rosanne Cash and Rosanne Barr, the Wu-Tang Clan, Joe Jackson and actor Carmine Giovinazzo — have donated memorabilia, CDs, books and collectibles in his memory.

The items will be sold in an ongoing online auction with proceeds directed into a college fund for O'Donnell's sons, Seamus and Aidan.
"Gesture In Paint & Software: An Intergenerational Exhibition" is up now at the Staten Island Museum in St. George. The multimedia exhibition captures the colorful improvisational paintings by abstract painter Helen Levin, and interactive art works by her son, Golan Levin, who is known internationally for his real-time computer applications and innovative collaborations. Visitors are invited to enjoy both the visual and the hands-on experiences of the "gesture" within ten large abstract paintings by Ms. Levin and through opportunities to compose their own creations using original, customized software by Mr. Levin on four iPads as well as a visual projection which allows the viewer to interact with their entire body. See venue listing for more information.
Classic abstracts meets contempo-computer art in Helen & Golan Levin's ambitious new 'Gesture'

By Michael J. Fresella | fresella@siadvance.com
on October 02, 2011 at 5:33 AM, updated October 02, 2011 at 2:19 PM

STATEN ISLAND, NY — Visitors won’t be dumbstruck by the family resemblance in “Gesture: In Paint and Software” at the Staten Island Museum this fall.

But it grows pretty emphatic.

“Gesture” is a mother-and-son smackdown. In one corner, you’ll find longtime Island painter Helen Levin. In the other, there’s her son, Golan, a post-millennial artist whose practice is digital.

Ms. Levin approaches a canvas as if the New York School — the abstract and expressive revolution led by Willem de Kooning in the 1940s and 50s — were still in session.

She’s been at it for 40-plus years now and her paintings are enriched by time and experience. They percolate with movement and rhythm, color and romance.

They’re ornery in places and gorgeous in others. For example, notice the dangerously brown and red action of “Zenscape II,” interacting with jarring white intrusions.

It’d be perfect in somebody’s apartment on “Mad Men,” except that the clarity of the color makes the composition look younger than the early Sixties.

Golan, a 39-year-old MIT graduate, has been part of the vanguard of artists who work in digital/cyber media.

He hadn’t even hit 30 when he began to attract international notice for projects that required new vocabularies and technology. In 2001, Golan led a team that produced a concert/online production extravaganza called “Dialtones: A Telesymphony.” The audience members’ cellphones, properly tuned and orchestrated, generated the performance (which was pretty amazing).

The following year, “Secret Lives of Numbers” plotted the “relative popularity” of every integer from one to 1,000,000. The project was commissioned by the formerly New Brighton-based New Radio and Performing Arts venue for its digital art website, Turbulence.org. The result got into the Whitney Museum Biennial in 2002.

SEDUCTIVE SOFTWARE

Golan’s six works in “Gesture” come from the late 1990s. Four of them are just “simple” (very relatively speaking) drawing programs available on iPads.

You touch them, gently, any way you like, and things happen. At the screen called “Floccus” (i.e. “hairball”) a fine, curling pencil-point line swirls around an imaginary drain. Nearby, “Meshy” generates ribbons of Escher-esque structure. Touch “Dendron” and the screen blooms with a dendritic effusion — something like chicory or ice crystals on a window pane.
The best of this quartet, “Yellowtail,” sets up a series of moving, flowing forms. As Golan explains it: “Yellowtail repeats a user’s strokes end-over-end, enabling simultaneous specification of a line’s shape and quality of movement. Each line repeats according to its own period, producing an ever-changing and responsive display of lively, worm-like textures.”

“Yellowtail” could be dangerously mesmerizing. It is the one you wish was available in the museum store.

In a similar vein, “Ghost Pole Propagator” (shown on a SONY flatscreen) records viewers as they move about the gallery and “applies” the pattern to luminous, stick-figure avatars that that dance across the screen. The gesture, a movement —launches the Propagator, much as it activates and determines the iPad patterns.

In all five instances, the results are intricate and seductive. “Yellowtail” is especially engaging since it systematically determines and reconfigures the output in a logical way that you will almost certainly try to figure out.

BRUSH! PAINT! ACTION!

The now-classic abstraction practiced by Ms. Levin is the kind that used to prompt dim remarks like: “Looks like my kid’s finger-paintings.”

She is showing 14 recent paintings that will remind everyone who sees them that rules and requirements govern this kind of painting, just like any other.

Ms. Levin and other abstract painters are hoping to produce a certain range of effects, an illusion of change occurring on the surface. In her energized canvases, she’d probably like viewers to think that disorder reigns, but it doesn’t.

Is anyone likely to imagine that the green/blue vs. orange/yellow counterpoint of “Jazz Train IV” was anything but a cool and collected decision?

On other canvases, there might well be elements that were inspirations of the moment — instinctual and spontaneous, but when you’ve been painting as long as Ms Levin, spontaneity probably doesn’t entail a lot of risk.

She favors clean opaque tones to muddy, misty shades. She’d rather paint a drama than an understatement, but some sections of some paintings speak softly.

So, it’s actually good to see a misstep here and there. The scribbly blue and white “Zenscape III” just looks frantic and underdressed. But it could be that it was her intention all along.

‘Gesture: In Paint and Software’

An intergenerational exhibition by Helen Levin and Golan Levin

Where

Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl., St. George.

When

Monday to Friday, noon-5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, noon-5 p.m.; through Jan. 8.

How much

Admission is $3 adults; $2 students and seniors.
In Your Computer

Or, how I learned to love the art that comes to you through your computer screen, and why you should learn to love it as well.
Generative Ars

This text was written in 2006 for the first edition of the festival C.STEM, a first (and, unfortunately, short-lived) attempt to create an event showcasing recent experiments with software and generative processes on Italian soil. Playing on the ambiguity of the label “Generative Art”, the text defines it as a technique (ars, not art), that attempts to bring international debate onto more solid ground.

Almost fifty years since the term first appeared, for the art audience Generative Art is still a mystery. Not that it is difficult to understand, the opposite is actually more the case. The real problem seems to be finding a place for it on the contemporary art scene. Artists like Casey Reas, Ben Fry, Joshua Davis, Yugo Nakamura, Marius Watz, John Maeda, Philip Galanter and Golan Levin, who move freely from art to pure programming to visual design and back, keep astonishing the public, and the fact that the term “Generative Art” is used also in relation to music, poetry, architecture and industrial design doesn’t help either.

I believe that the problem resides in the term, or, more precisely, in the way it is usually understood. The succession of art labels such as Pop Art, Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, Digital Art and so on, throughout the 20th century, make us think that Generative Art should be interpreted in the same way: as a style definition, a trend or an art movement. Yet, in order to understand Generative Art, you need to step back, to consider terms like “ars combinatoria” or, more in general, to consider the Latin meaning of the word “ars” rather than the present meaning of it. Like the Greek “technē”, the Latin word “ars” indicates a technique, a structured set of rules and acts that allow somebody to produce something. Generative Art is, in fact, a technique, a method, a practice, a way of proceeding. This element is present in all definitions of Generative Art, but it probably deserves to be highlighted. Take the seminal definition proposed by Philip Galanter in 2003, for instance:

«Generative art refers to any art practice where the artist uses a system, such as a set of natural language rules, a computer program, a machine, or other procedural invention, which is set into motion with some degree of autonomy, contributing to or resulting in a completed work of art.» [1]

This definition, which is appreciable under many aspects, still places too much emphasis on the term “art” to be considered really comprehensive, but is nevertheless a good start.

A technique, then: which can be variously used by artists, musicians, architects, scientists and designers. Sometimes, all these roles converge on the same person, but we must be careful: as Marius Watz says, «I work and think very differently when creating art and design» [2]. A technique which is based on the application of a system’s internal rules – as Galanter observes, ordered, unordered or complex – in order to produce something. A technique which pre-exists the computer era, but
As babies we couldn't help but revel in our sensory experiences. Jangling keys, the texture of sand and the taste of new foods intrigued us and captivated our attention. Whatever happened? As grown-ups we plough through the world like automatons barely noticing how hard our senses unremittingly work for us. If you've fallen out of touch with your senses, a quick visit to See Yourself Sensing: redefining human perception at the Work Gallery in London's King's Cross should remedy that.

The exhibition is inspired by a new book of the same name by architect and multimedia artist Madeline Schwartzman, and challenges conventional thinking about the way we perceive our own bodies and those of others. Art works play with the senses and tend to incorporate futuristic design concepts, often resulting in cyborg creations, utopian or dystopian predictions of the future, or strange experimental set-ups.

A number of the works are based on collaborations with scientists and these were often the most successful. Neck Clamp and Impactor by Sitrika Rakotoniaina and Andrew Friend is based on research from the University of Nottingham into shock-absorbent nanomaterials that
are being used to design body armour for the military. The duo turn this idea on its head, asking whether we might use this new technology for more playful purposes.

The device comes in two parts, one consisting of a neck brace with a shock-absorbent target, the other a giant mechanical contraption that looks like a kind of hybrid between a torpedo, a spider, and some bicycle spokes linked to a powerful motor. The idea is that one person wears the neck brace, while another fires the torpedo at the shock-absorbent pad on the brace. The concept exemplifies that developments in science mean we no longer need to rely on our natural instincts, yet struggle to overcome our primal impulses in order to trust new technologies.

Works like this feel fresh, using clever designs to challenge our acceptance of the latest technological developments, and speculate on original ways we might use them. Other works, though, feel outdated, possibly because this is an exhibition around a theme, not a new show, so many of the works are quite old. Some of these offer an interesting retrospective, others just feel stale. Reality is fast catching up with science fiction, and some of the projects seem to underestimate quite how far the technologies have come in bridging that gap.

Some much-needed energy is injected into the exhibition by the only interactive exhibit, *Eyecode* by Gavin Levin (see top image). The concept of this interactive display, through which you see yourself seeing, fits snugly within the exhibition's remit. Put simply, it's a computer screen which takes pictures of your eyes when you look at it. As you approach, the screen is covered with a grid of eyes of the people just gone but as you try and work out what the screen means, you'll feel a glimmer of recognition when some of the eyes become highlighted in a subtle blue hue. They are your own. It's mesmerizing, and the more you look, the more of the eyes on the screen become your own. The result is a screen covered with fleeting fragments of your own eye movements from different angles, and snapshots of your mouth - it seemed as if little pieces of my face were in conversation with each other. It's a unique way to look at yourself, and cleverly taps into our propensity to eye up the human body.

Other works are conceptually and visually fascinating, such as Susana Soares's *Pathogen Hunter*, yet lack enough information for visitors to really understand what science they are based on and what kind of questions they raise. That's a shame when Schwartzman's book is filled with thought-provoking and relevant explanations of the artworks and how they relate to scientific developments.

The contrast between tantalising or terrifying glimpses into our possible future selves and other works that are playful and fun cannot fail to get your mind whirring. But then again, that's just my perception - you might see it completely differently.
Language Mutations: Cuneiform to QR

BY JASON HUFF

Language is a staple of art criticism, art history, and art making. In its frequent use as the architecture of communication, language mutates to survive and fit the needs of the culture that creates and maintains it. Continuing the lineage of glyph generation F.A.T Labs have created new QR_STENCILER and subsequently QR_HOBO_CODES which are QR translations of Hobo glyphs with additions made to help tech-savvy urbanites.
images via F.A.T Labs
So many puns just itching to get typed with this one... Graph/Graffiti, etc... Anyhow, unmistakable is the rise (or near overwhelming amount?) of infovisualizations and infographics the last few years... So the real question is, why haven't we seen more of this infiltrating the street art scene?

When I popped by the Studio for Creative Inquiry at CMU last weekend, I got a sneak peek at Golan Levin playing with this latest project ~ a DIY stencil for making Info-graph-iti (details up at F.A.T.: Free Art & Technology)! Using the stencil, you can use the pointer (adjustable using the tension bolt/wing-nut) and assortment of letters (attached easily with tape) to create a pie chart just about anywhere. There's even a tiny arrow to show which section of the chart is described by your text, as well as 100 tick marks to make percentage accuracy easy.

While I love the concept ~ there's one thing I'd love to add ~ I like my pie charts multi-colored, or at least multi-textured. Perhaps the addition of a fan or perforated stretchy material between the moving arm and the fixed divider would allow for some more playful spray painting. (Also make it look less clock-like!) Fan it out to keep one section blank for a more pac-man like look? Or use that, then invert it, to spray paint the significant wedge a crazy neon pink to really make it pop? You can even download the files and details. Now if only I could get my hands on laser cutter to try it out... See more pics on the next page!
WOMEN EARN 77% PER DOLLAR OF MEN.

USA CONSUMES 25% OF WORLD'S ENERGY
Infographiti: Golan Levin Brings Data Viz To The Street

An ingenious template for tagging infographics on the fly.

Infographics already gets tons of play on the web. But geek superstar Golan Levin wants to spread them even further. So he developed an adjustable stencil that lets you spray paint pie-chart data visualizations of your own making on walls, highway underpasses, the house of your
high school math teacher — wherever! As someone noted perfectly on Twitter, it’s “Bansky meets Tufte.”

And anyone can use it. The design, which Levin whipped up for the techie art collective Free Art and Technology Lab (F.A.T.), is available gratis online. It comes with a set of re-arrangeable letters and a flexible piechart pointer so you can switch up your message to your heart’s content. (One downside: You’ll need a laser cutter — which is pricey and kinda’ limits who can make this thing.)

Levin thinks infographiti (see what we did there?) is a potent political tool. Which makes sense when you think about it: Street art provokes by being everywhere it shouldn’t be. Data viz provokes because it makes actual points. Combine the two, and you’ve got something pretty damned powerful on your hands. Not that we’re advocating that you go out and deface public property; we’re law-abiding citizens, officer! But hey, if you want to stencil horrifying global warming stats on the side of BP’s headquarters, that’s your business.
For lots more on the project, check out this blog post, in which Levin responds to questions that Co.Design and another news outlet sent him via email.

To download a printable stencil pattern, click here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Suzanne LaBarre is the editor of Co.Design. Previously, she was the online content director of Popular Science and has written for the New York Times, the New York Observer, Newsday, I.D. More
New QR Codes Emulate ‘Hobo Symbols’ Of The Past

July 21, 2011 3:42 PM  By Alex Silverman

Filed Under: Alex Silverman, Carnegie Mellon University, Golan Levin, QR Code, Smartphone, Technology, Wi-Fi

NEW YORK (WCBS 880) – Technology is bringing a new life to a tradition that is over 100-years-old.

WCBS 880’s Alex Silverman Connects To The Story

Hobos were migrant workers who were all over the United States hopping train rides looking for work and shelter.

“In order to deal with the troubles and tribulations of nomadic life, they would leave these chalk marks on places, saying like ‘The owner of this place has a gun’ or ‘This place has a dangerous dog.’ ‘If you go here, you can work for food.’ [It was a] sort of secret visual language that they would use to communicate with each other,” says professor Golan Levin of Carnegie Mellon University.

These symbols were left all over cities including New York.

Now, Levin has made a piece of software, which he has released free to the public and combines the concept of those symbols with the now somewhat common QR code.
“[It] allows you specifically to make it into a stencil and this means that now QR codes could be, oh, I don't know, spray painted on to buildings, for example, or chalked on buildings more easily,” says Levin.

He has already has come up with 100 different QR codes with messages you might need to go about modern life. Instructions and examples are located on his website (contains some adult language).

They include symbols for free Wi-Fi or a place that has a nice bathroom.

Others are speed trap, unexpectedly good coffee, and vegans beware.

People have wondered how a homeless person would utilize this technology.

“If you're homeless, you probably do have a mobile phone because how else is anyone going to find you? It may be the only piece of technology you have and it's kind of a critical lifeline,” Levin tells WCBS 880’s Alex Silverman. “In developing nations, where they’ve leapfrogged the whole copper infrastructure, wireless is taking off completely in Africa because you don’t have to lay cable anywhere.”

Of course, QR codes have thus far been mostly used for commerce – to try and sell a product or service.

“The idea that people can take this back for their own purposes, create urban messages that are not necessarily commercial advertising, I think that's important,” says Levin.

To actually read a QR code, you can download any number of free apps for your smartphone.
Experimentalist Engineer Golan Levin is Next Subject of ‘Visionaries in Motion’
Pioneer in new modes of human-machine interactive expression speaks at RIT March 8

Feb. 23, 2011
by William Dube
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Golan Levin, artist, performer, composer and engineer, is a leader in the use of human-computer interaction to infuse art and design with new forms of reactive expression. Levin will highlight humans’ creative relationship with machines, using work from his online, installation and performance media, during a presentation March 8 at Rochester Institute of Technology. It is part of the Caroline Werner Gannett Project’s “Visionaries in Motion IV” speaker series.

The free, public event, “Interactive Art and Speculative Human-Computer Interaction,” will be held at 8 p.m. in Webb Auditorium in Booth Hall. It will be preceded by a musical performance by Men Behaving Badly beginning at 7:15 p.m.

In conjunction with the talk, Levin will host two workshops focused on art and performance on March 9. An introductory session will be held at 10 a.m., and an advanced critique at 2 p.m. in Liberal Arts Hall, room 3244. Both require preregistration and interested individuals can call 585-475-2057 for more information.

Levin currently serves as associate professor of time-based art and director of the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University. He has earned international acclaim for his use of computer technology, digital imaging and cybernetic systems to create elaborate, interactive art and performance projects that explore humans’ relationship to technology.

His performance pieces include Dumpster, commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art and The Tate Modern, and Scribble, which received an award of distinction at the International Competition for Cyber Arts in 2000. Levin’s work has also been featured in the Whitney Biennial, at the Neuberger Museum and is in the collections of a host of institutions in Europe, Asian and America, including Austria’s Ars Electronica Center, the NTT InterCommunication Center in Tokyo and The Taiwan Museum of Contemporary Art.

The Gannett Project’s Visionaries in Motion series explores new connections across technologies, social sciences and humanities, increasing opportunities for interdisciplinary understanding and collaboration both on campus and in the Greater Rochester community. In 2009, the series was selected as City newspaper’s Critics’ Pick for “Best Lecture Series in Rochester.” All Gannett events are free and open to the public.
When you think of hacking, school assignments probably aren’t the first thing that come to mind. But then again, you’re probably not in Golan Levin’s *Interactive Art & Computational Design* (http://golancourses.net/2011spring/) course at Carnegie Mellon University.

Earlier in the week, we covered (http://www.pcworld.com/article/221250/kinect_hack_class_project_makes_you_see_ghosts.html) a couple projects (http://www.pcworld.com/article/221231/comic_kinect_turns_human_interaction_into_a_comic_book_fight_scene.html) from the class involving hacking Microsoft’s Kinect controller for Xbox 360. While Kinect hacking has been a popular topic in hacking and DIY circles (and here at GeekTech), it isn’t something one normally thinks of as a topic of study, but Professor Levin worked the Kinect into his curriculum as a way for students to get creative--and to learn something in the process.

### The Assignment

In late January, Levin assigned his students to (http://golancourses.net/2011spring/projects/project-3-statement/) "[create] a system that responds to signals or information interactively, in real-time." That is, the students were to write a program that could analyze the content of a video feed, and insert interactive elements depending on the video’s content.

[Further reading: The best surge protectors for your expensive electronics](http://www.techhive.com/article/3138905/sensors/best-water-leak-detectors-for-smart-homes.html)

This is basically the concept behind [augmented reality](http://www.pcworld.com/article/170943/the_future_is_now_augmented_reality_comes_to_the_iphone.html) (AR), but not all AR software goes quite this far (many AR smartphone apps, for example, just overlay location information over video captured by the phone’s camera): Levin’s students would have to write programs that could recognize human forms or objects, in addition to simply overlaying items over video.
Students Nisha Kurani and John Horstman designed a hack that would make the "Boo" ghost from Super Mario Bros. follow you.

Levin had his class break up into groups, and he had a dozen Kinects for his students to use. The students then had roughly two and a half weeks to complete their projects.

And the results are impressive (http://golancourses.net/2011spring/projects/project-3-interaction/).

**Why the Kinect**

Levin cites Kinect hacks--many of which we’ve covered in this very blog (http://geektech.pcworld.com/)--as the inspiration for this assignment.

"The Kinect sensor is an ideal teaching tool. It makes altogether new forms of interactions possible, it is inexpensive and it is readily available," Levin told me in an e-mail. "I was inspired by all of the numerous artistic projects and research investigations produced by individual hackers and coders all over the world--projects which, in my opinion, are more interesting than any of the commercially available software ‘intended’ for the Kinect."

His students used various open-source programming toolkits to complete their projects, including the Processing programming language (http://www.processing.org/) (which has been used to program various other Kinect hacks), as well as OpenFrameworks (http://www.openframeworks.cc/) and Cinder (http://libcinder.org/). In the case of the project we showed you yesterday (http://www.pcworld.com/article/221250/kinect_hack_class_project_makes_you_see_ghosts.html), some students also used other related tools, such as the ofxKinect add-on for OpenFrameworks (https://github.com/ofTheo/ofxKinect).
Golan Levin is an artist, composer, performer and engineer interested in developing artifacts which explore the new modes of machine expression. His work focuses on the design of systems for the creation, manipulation and performance of simultaneous image and sound, as part of a more general inquiry into the formal languages and interactive and networked communication protocols in cybernetic systems. Through performances, digital artifacts, and virtual environments Levin applies creative tools to digital technologies that highlight our relationship with machines and make visible our ways of interacting with each other.

Levin’s work combines equal measures of the whimsical, the provocateur, and the sublime in a variety of online, installation and performance media. He is known for the conception and creation of Dactronics: A Telephony 2001, a concert whose sounds are wholly performed through the carefully choreographed dialing and ringing of the audience's own mobile phones, and for interactive information visualizations like The Secret Lives of Numbers and The Dumpster, which offer novel perspectives on millions of online communications.

Reframe (Oral Sequences) [2001 with Zachary Lieberman] is aural and video mash-up that composes endless admixtures of the personalities and genetic traits of its victims. The installation records and dynamically remixes brief video slices of its viewer's moods, eyes and breeze. The resulting kinetic portrait maintains a sense of humor and narrative invention while creating a "generic group portrait" of the people in the project's locales.

Levin's work has been exhibited among many other venues, at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York), the 2004 Whitney Biennial (New York), Art Electronica (Linz), ICA (London), ZKM (Karalsruhe).

Golan Levin a un artiste, compositeur, performer et ingénieur intéressé au développement d'objets qui explorent de nouveaux modèles d'expression machine. Son œuvre se concentre sur le développement de systèmes de création, de manipulation et de production simultanée d'image et de son. Elle s'inscrit dans une recherche plus générale sur le langage formel des interprétations et des protocoles de communication non verbale dans les systèmes cybernétiques.

Par le développement de performances, objets numériques et d'environnements virtuels, Levin développe les technologies digitales de manière créative pour mettre en lumière notre relation avec les machines et révéler nos interactions sociales.

Les œuvres de Levin indiquent à la fois le fantastique, le provoquant et le sublime dans une série d'installations et de performances en ligne. Il est connu pour la conception et la création de Dactronics: A Telephony (2001), un concert dont les sons sont entièrement provoqués par les appels et sons envoyés simultanément d'ordinateurs et de mobiles par le public ainsi que pour ses visualisations d'information interactives comme The Secret Lives of Numbers et The Dumpster, qui présentent des perspectives nouvelles sur les interactions de communications en ligne.

Reframe (Oral Sequences) [2001 avec Zachary Lieberman] est une mix-up vidéo aural qui compose en un mélange infini les personnalités et les traits génétiques de ses visiteurs. L'institution enregistre et responsable de manière dynamique de brèves séquences vidéo des bouches, yeux et sourires des spectateurs. Le portrait cinématique ainsi créé comporte, non sans humour et invention narrative, un "portrait de groupe génétiquement" des visiteurs du lieu d'installation.


Reframe (Oral Sequences)
2001. Golan Levin with Zachary Lieberman. LCD screen, custom software, computer. 44 x 44 x 8 cm

Crosby Street gallery, New York.
Art

Golan Levin’s Infviz Graffiti, or Communicating Dissent in a Short-Attention-Span World

Infviz graffiti is a provocative exhortation to get the substance of immediate information and infuse it with the boldness of political rage, hopefully defacing public properties and informing people at once.

Tags

graffiti, infographics, information, pie charts, visualizations

by Nicola Bozzi On June 23, 2011

20 Reactions

Sometimes you come across a project that, in its simplicity, manages to hit not one, but several important knots in the contemporary cultural landscape. It doesn’t necessarily need to be a game-changer, but it definitely makes a statement through its self-evident utility. When I came across Golan Levin’s Infviz Graffiti Pie-Chart kit, I immediately thought it was the case.

Levin is a new media artist, a teacher, and also a member of F.A.T., an artist collective whose extended name is Free Art and Technology Lab. You might know him for his piece Dialtones: A Telesymphony (2001) – in which he managed to perform a concert through synchronized calls and ringtones on the audience’s phones – or for his many other exhibitions in prestigious events like the Whitney Biennial and Ars Electronica.
What struck me about the kit was its extreme rawness and lo-tech approach, contrary to Levin's usually far more sophisticated inventions, but also its timely and to-the-point realization.

These days it's hard to surf any website without bumping into at times confusing infographics, often beautiful but unreadable, and pictures of arguably political street art are just as common. What links the two is the eagerness of both infoviz designers and street artists to get a message out there, to take advantage of an easily accessible medium in order to channel certain ideas.

In times of political tension (and we know these are), before being typed by hordes of Twitter-using revolution sympathizers, the most pressing social demands still appear on walls. Or, in case the tweets come first, it is not until somebody gets them on the walls that the authorities start to get worried. I am aware that infographics and social media are not the same thing, but the latter are indeed a big tool for diffusing the former, and both – at least in my opinion – are part of the same short-attention-span world.

Infoviz graffiti is thus a provocative exhortation to get the substance of immediate information and infuse it with the boldness of political rage, hopefully defacing public properties and informing people at once. There is definitely some paradoxical irony in that, but I found the pie-chart format – possibly the simplest and most old
school type of infographic around – just perfect for the task. It basically says: do it yourself, keep it simple, and get it out there.

To make it sure I got the point right and in order to put it into context, I decided to contact Levin himself and ask him a few questions about what stands behind his project:

Is the political and emancipatory potential of information and communication today, in the age of the Internet and so-called Twitter revolutions, really bigger than the past, or is it all still about taking the streets?

Our information-environment interpenetrates the fabric of urban space. (Kevin Slavin has even convincingly argued that urban space now conforms itself to the needs of information flows.) But this relationship is not owed to some new feature of augmented-reality iPhone apps. It has always been this way; before the Internet, we had the agora, the pashkevi, the broadside. Information and urban space have always been coextensive, and impinge on each other; this is why e.g. the locus of the “Twitter revolution”, if there really is such a thing, is the Arab public square and not the PC in the family office. My stencil project simply corrects a technological bias in the ways we typically receive and consume visual displays of this information: a correction to the overprivileging of the digital screen and printed paper as the expected vehicles of information transmission and exchange. The pie-chart stencil addresses a paucity of tools for the high-speed reproduction of infographic messages in and around urban surfaces.

What can graffiti and infoviz learn from each other and how can they improve each other as media?

Earlier this week, someone generously tweeted that my project was “Banksy meets Tufte”. Although that’s high praise – both of these men are personal heroes – this remark definitely delineates the territory I’m seeking to explore. Certainly, it’s clear that Banksy and Tufte both share an aesthetic of graphic efficiency and a faith in the communicative power of simple messages. And of course, both street art and infographics depend on extreme visual economy to communicate effectively and memorably: graffiti must be quick to execute, charts must be easy to read. The key, I believe, is that both must also provoke. What makes my project significant, I hope, is that it reminds people that even a simple pie-chart can be used to communicate information that matters. It prompts us to question what information is worth visualizing, and why. Furthermore, by situating quantitative visual information in urban space, this project also compels us to commit to a confrontation with a specific audience in a specific locale.

It seems clear that the field of information visualization possesses tools and media which, suitably adapted, can bring new communicative capacities to street art. If street art has lessons for infographics, on the other hand, it is to remind us of the pressing need to explain the egregious problems of the world today, to the widest possible audience, and to prompt tactical thinking about how (and where) this be done most effectively. What data is essential to communicate to others? Can the insertion of that data, semi-permanently, into urban space, change people’s behavior? When is it worth risking arrest to ‘publish’ that information? These are the questions I hope my stencil project raises.

As a media artist, what do you feel your personal duty is while intervening on the public imagination?

As an artist, I try to leave the world a more interesting place. I’m also an educator, so I care that people learn something new, and become empowered in some way.

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Many thanks to Golan Levin for his participation! If you want to read this interview, enriched with replies to some other complementary questions from FastCompany.com’s Suzanne LaBarre, you can also go check out this post here.
Pittsburgh Center for the Arts mounts a collection of solo exhibits

KURT SHAW  |  Sunday, March 13, 2011

If you want to take the pulse of regional art making, there's no better place than at Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, where eight solo exhibits fill the place.

The exhibits -- chosen from an annual call for solo/collaborative artists -- offer everything from full-scale, room-size installations you can walk into to hi-tech works that you can play with, and might even play with you.

Some, like Anna E. Mikolay's "The Space Between," can be quite contemplative. Basically, a room filed with bright red canvases punctuated with white rectangles in various progressive groupings, the installation explores what happens to the mind during the time it takes a human being to glance at a given space or object.

Each painting represents a slice of "data," Mikolay says, with many slices of data needed to "make a thought become part of our consciousness." But all thoughts aside, this group of paintings, so strategically hung in progression in a sterile white room, is very fun to look at.

Simplifying data is also the theme of Heidi Bender's "Motherlands," in which maps on the walls, and those she has cut up and arranged on a table, represent people and personal interactions the artist has had with them. For Bender, each map represents a different day in her life, and are given successive titles -- "V 9865," "V 9871" and "V9882," for example. As the maps amass, the new versions are pinned over the old, creating a layered, visual history of the artist's social interactions and experience.

Experience is the focus of Henry J. Simonds' "Rodin." That is, specifically, Simonds' experience of walking in and around the Rodin Museum in Paris. Here, the artist has arranged a series of 10 solarized photographs he took of not only some of the bronze and marble sculptures on display in the museum, but of the trees and walkways around the museum. Together, they make a memorable impression that speaks of the experience visiting museums have on us.

Experience, too, is perhaps the perfect word to sum up several of the other solo shows on display. For example, Seth Clark's sophisticated collages of imagined row houses and giant factories in his exhibit, "Ruination," call to mind the kind of abandoned and otherwise dilapidating structures he found when moving to Pittsburgh from Massachusetts two years ago. Using bits and pieces collected throughout his daily life, Clark has amassed a group of believable images that are much more than the sum of their parts.

Experiencing amusement parks is the theme of two video works on display -- "Gravitron" and "Feuerball" -- by Aaron Henderson in his exhibit, "Midway." Both were filmed at state and county fairs in Indiana and South Carolina. One, "Feuerball" is a four-channel video of folks clamped into a
gravity defying ride that captures a range of emotions from the obvious -- fear -- to the less so -- boredom. The latter is expressed most humorously in a vignette in which one of the four passengers shown is texting while on the ride.

Questioning what we experience is the notion behind Gerald Van Scyoc's works in "Rare is the New Medium." The exhibit features half a dozen large-scale paintings that are each a composite of digital imagery the artist has combined in a computer, then painted on canvas. Some blur into abstraction, but others are much more direct to jarring effect, such as "Jupiter, 1776" in which a marching band is depicted passing a burning house.

Finally, Carnegie Mellon University professor Golan Levin shows a variety of interactive multimedia works that are just plain fun to play with.

Levin's work ranges from simple interactive works to more complex responsive projections, each of which operates initially on the level of a mirror effect, enticing the viewer into a deeper engagement.

For example, "Eyecode" (2007) is an interactive installation that displays a wholly constructed history from its own history of being viewed. In other words, in it you see hundreds of sets of eyes that have viewed the work before you, and by the time you've looked at it, your eyes are recorded and displayed among the mix.

Then there is "Messa di Voce" (2003), a video installation run by custom software that transforms every vocal nuance you make into a microphone into correspondingly complex, subtly differentiated and highly expressive graphics.

Undoubtedly the most engaging piece in the exhibit, "Messa di Voce" lies at an intersection of human and technological performance extremes, melding the unpredictable spontaneity and extended vocal techniques of human improvisers with the latest in computer vision and speech analysis technologies.

Utterly wordless, yet profoundly verbal, it is designed, Levin says, to provoke questions about the meaning and effects of speech sounds, speech acts and the immersive environment of language.

The 10 remaining works by Levin on display are engaging in their own way, making for the most interactive of all eight of the exhibits and most likely the one visitors will find themselves spending the most time with.

Additional Information:

**Solo exhibits**

- **Heidi Bender:** 'Motherlands'
- **Seth Clark:** 'Ruination'
- **Aaron Henderson:** 'Midway'
- **Anna E. Mikolay:** 'The Space Between'
- **Ian Page:** 'Pleasant Momentum'
- **Henry J. Simonds:** 'Rodin'
- **Gerald Van Scyoc:** 'Rare is the New Medium'
- **Golan Levin:** 'Looking at Looking at Looking'

**When:** Through March 20. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, noon-5 p.m. Sundays

**Admission:** $5 suggested donation

**Where:** Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, 6300 Fifth Ave., Shadyside

**Details:** 412-361-0873 or [www.pittsburgharts.org](http://www.pittsburgharts.org)
Distributed Collectives may be an exhibition best enjoyed from the comfort of your home computer because you don't necessarily need to visit the gallery in order to enjoy the work. Curated by Little Berlin member Kelani Nichole, the exhibition spotlights three new media art collectives who practice in a range of media from basic computer drawing to cutting-edge technology used to spawn avatars, orchards and sculptures visible only to the virtually enhanced eye.

While there's a motherlode of hardware in the gallery (16 computers, two projectors, a formidable switch and a heap of Internet boosters), it all serves as a base to support the real artwork that exists in the disembodied space of the Internet. This approach works well when the viewer is asked to interact with the artwork, but falls flat in the case of quieter pieces with less arresting content.

Computers Club, a drawing club for the technologically inclined, uses the web as medium to draft two-dimensional artworks shared via their blog which is where they stand up best. Standard in size and often created using Computers Clubs browser-based drawing tool, the compositions run together like drafts in a drawing exercise. Reliant on technology whose complexity is hidden from the casual observer, these drawings are an insider affair, best enjoyed when you're part of the team. Their jerky, incremental graphics, smooth planes of airbrushed color and pixilated lines flicker on gallery monitors like vintage screensavers; they count time but never truly make a mark.

Works by the collective F.A.T. (Free Art and Technology Lab) can likewise be explored online, either in the gallery via browsing stations, or at any home computer. However, their presence in the gallery is anchored by the realization of some complex projects, making F.A.T.'s work as engaging in the gallery as it is in the online version of the exhibition. Much of the work is browser-based with a boisterous sense of humor. Greg Leuchs Shaved Bieber browser extension censors any mention or image of Justin Bieber's ubiquitous face; Tobias Leingrubers Pirates of the Amazon, replaces Amazon's buy now button with download for free, routing visitors to a free version of the book hosted on a rogue server. Inspired by a similar vision for open access, Golan Levins QR_Hobo_Codes offers instructions for creating QR code stencils that can stand in for a hobos signature chalk scratches. Cut into sleek, silicon slices, Golans stencils are used to spray paint secret messages for any wayfarer bearing a smart phone. Like much of F.A.T.'s work, the project is canny, cheeky and political with a touch of cyber romance. In a digital world, where everyone roams from site to site, Golan lets us know where we can score a bowl of hot soup.

More radically site-specific than even a QR hobo marker, the collective Manifest.AR contributes the most exhilarating work in the show by deploying augmented reality (AR) technology to explore a new kind of space. Founded in 2011, the collective creates geo-specific art installations, backed by a stridently hopeful manifesto announcing that in AR, The Safety Glass of the Display is shattered and the Physical and Virtual are united in a new In-Between Space. Dislocating the viewer from our so-called Physical Real, this in-between space hurtles toward us when we stumble upon the colossal, hidden sculptures in ScreensavAR by Sander Veenhof. Visible only through a smart phone using the filter function in an app called Laylar, Veenhofs work forces the viewer to physically scan the gallery in order to discover the delicately helixed sculptures that float above our heads. Like peering through a magic spyglass into another dimension, Veenhofs work plunges us into a spatially dissonant reality. Suddenly impossibly we physically exist in the same space as a virtual phenomenon.

6-10pm. Through Aug. 29. Little Berlin, 2430 Coral St. littleberlin.org