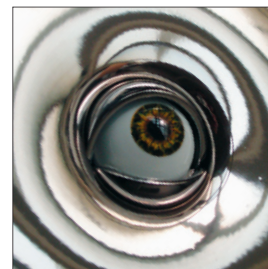# #5 digital|arti

GOLAN LEVIN
INTERACTIVE SOUNDS & GRAPHICS

NICOLAS CLAUSS THIERRY FOURNIER EMPAC
DIGITAL ART PRESERVATION ART & SCIENCE INTERNET OF THINGS
DATA CENTERS 01SJ BIENNIAL SRTP SFR PLAYER 2010

Opto-Isolator II
Revised version of the Opto-Isolator
by Golan Levin with Greg Baltus /
Standard Robot Inc.

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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 ⟩

ANNE-CÉCILE WORMS

GOLAN LEVIN
INTERACTIVE
SOUNDS
& GRAPHICS

Artist, teacher, engineer and composer, Golan Levin has been combining all of his skills to create interactive works. His creations involve the eye ("Double-Taker (snout), Opto-Isolator, Eyecode, Reface (portrait sequencer)"...), the gesture ("Interstitial Fragment Processor, Scrapple, The Manuel Input Workstation, Interactive Bar Tables"...), the voice and the ear ("Ursonography, Messa di Voce, Dialtones (a telesymphony)"...) or graphic software ("Self-adherence (for written images), Merce's Isosurface, Floccular Portraits"...). Often produced with collaborators, Golan Levin's projects, whether they are "software art" or audio-visual performance, are primarily surprising because of their playful characteristic. Further information follows.

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 ver-

bal, *Messa di Voce* is designed to provoke questions about the meaning and effects of speech sounds, speech acts, and the immersive environment of language.
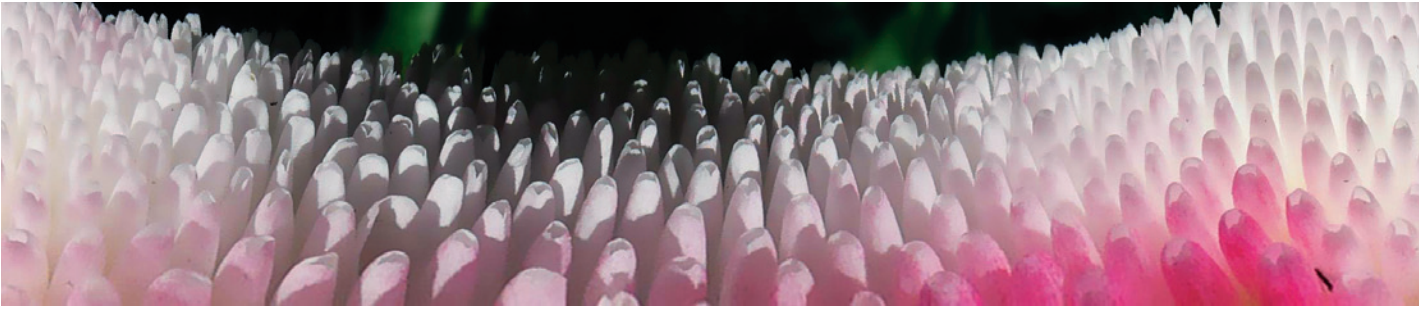
"Messa di Voce" was shown for the first time in 2003 at Ars Electronica festival. Is it still the same piece or has it been modified in any way?
The original version was a performance, specially tuned for the two vocalists, Jaap Blonk and Joan La Barbara. The version we showed in Paris is a special version 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
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Golan Levin
& Kyle McDonald,
*Rectified
Flowers.*

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".

››› **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 API's (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.

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.
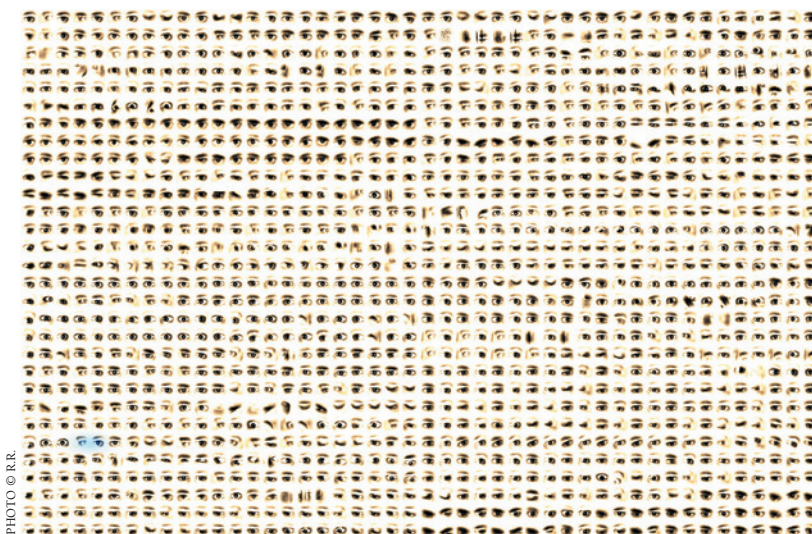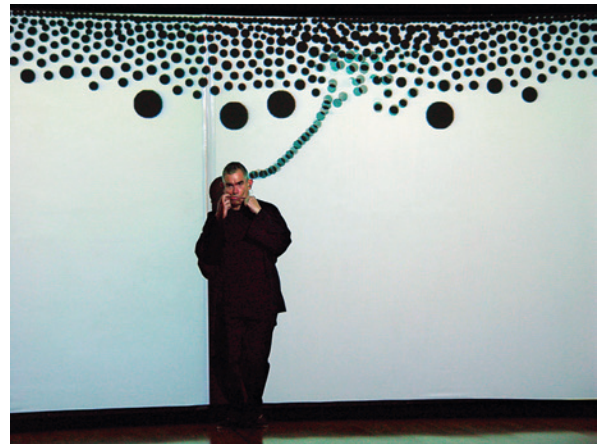
Golan Levin,
Eyecode.

PHOTOS © R.R.

Golan Levin
& Zachary Lieberman,
Messa di Voce
(a performance
for voice and
interactive media).

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 incited 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.

LAURENT DIOUF