Interviews

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Cover: Cubes, 2009, by Laura Thompson, Gary Kupczak, & Jason Geistweidt.
Left: Top Right Clockwise: Braid by Jonathan Blow, Untitled by Janell Baxter.
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What made you decide to transfer to Columbia’s IAM department?
Following a disappointing year at the University of Illinois and after a few months of “soul searching,” I looked at my life situation and asked a simple question: What was it that I truly love to do and would continue wanting to do for the rest of my life and how could I begin to prepare myself to attain a quality position in that field? I excelled in and enjoyed math and science, problem solving and video games so my quest was to find a college program that would combine these disciplines into one great experience. I actually heard about Columbia College Chicago’s Game Development program during a discussion with a family friend and after quite a bit of research, I decided the IAM department at Columbia offers one of, if not the best-accredited game design programs in the country. Columbia immediately became the place I saw myself being the next academic year. After taking a tour and seeing the great facility and facilties the IAM department had to offer, there was no question I was going to attend the perfect school for me.

What is your concentration and why did you choose it?
Following my strengths, the concentration I chose from the IAM department was Video Game Programming, and I could not be happier with my decision. Columbia’s game programming concentration not only focuses on aspects of computer science and theory, but also provides an additional art-focused viewpoint to the curriculum. As a programmer in today’s video game industry, it is not only important to understand the underlying code and structure of what you are working on, but also to understand how it fits as a small piece of a huge canvas of art. Columbia’s core IAM classes put me into that mindset in the first week of school, and I cannot begin to express how that has helped me already. Currently, I work as an intern for a start-up game development company, MetaMoorePhosis Games in the Chicago Merchandise Mart. The lessons of interactivity and narrative that Professor Hicks provide in his Game Culture course have been of great benefit in the tools and algorithms I engineer every day. Overall, my career aspirations are to continue what I am doing right now—engineering enjoyable and thought provoking games with a great development team at my side. Regardless of whether I stay where I am now or find myself somewhere else after I graduate, I just want to make sure I enjoy what I do.

Academically, what was the most challenging aspect of your first year at Columbia and how did you overcome it?
The most academically challenging aspect of my first year would have to have been my first steps as a programmer. Professor Bill Gershwan, a genius in all things computer science, challenged our class and tied us to a very high level of expectations for a group of students who had never programmed before. Feeling myself starting to slip behind a bit near the beginning of the year, I took advantage of my teacher’s generous time and met with him regularly. I continued this pattern in my other classes. By taking advantage of the immense knowledge and support the IAM faculty has to offer, by working with them outside of class, I was able to push myself to new levels I never would have imagined to achieve so early in my academic career.

What have been the highlights of your experience so far and what are you looking forward to this year?
The main highlights of this year were the connections I’ve made with my peers and faculty at Columbia outside the classroom. I received the offer to have an internship at MetaMoorePhosis through my Introduction to Programming Professor Bill Gershwan, networked with my Object Oriented Programming professor at Columbia’s monthly Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) chapter meetups, worked with my peers on various side projects and participated in the IAM department’s video game podcast, CriticalHit! One particularly challenging experience this past year was learning to accept that I was not only a programmer but also an artist. I had a very hard time grasping that my video game and media theory classes would be beneficial to my knowledge base as a programmer—someone I envisioned only deals with numbers and logic. But I soon discovered that art and technology make a perfect fit. In my Media Theory & Design class, Professor Nicholas O’Brien demonstrated that all the great developers and creators of interactive media projects had to look at the bigger picture and how their art affected those around them as well as how their art affected other art.

What advice would you give to a freshman or transfer student as they begin their year? 
The main advice I would give to a new student at Columbia is to network. Introduce yourself to every new person you see when you are in the department. Stop by the lab and open studio and chat about your favorite game or why you think Pokemon was the coolest video game franchise ever created. Ask questions of your fellow classmates when you don’t understand something, as you can’t learn everything on your own! Work with your classmates or professors on extracurricular projects, as you won’t learn everything you need to know from the classroom. Our industry is always growing and the scope of available knowledge is so vast that there is always something to learn or do! Most of all, enjoy what you’re doing and learning. And heed this advice: If you think a particular class you need to take doesn’t apply to what you care about, think again. Some of the things I learned during my first year at Columbia I thought would be truly useless, are subjects that come up every day at my job. Those around me without that prior knowledge are at an obvious disadvantage an employer can easily see. Like I said early on, it’s a great thing that I am in the IAM department.

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When I first came to Columbia, I majored in American Sign Language Interpretation. I loved learning the language, but interpreting wasn’t what I thought it would be. Two years later, I wanted to switch majors, but I wasn’t sure what to. While talking to my dad about it, he asked, “What class in High School were you so bored in because you were always done before everyone else?” Web Design, of course! I don’t know why I didn’t see it coming. I’ve wanted to be an artist since I was little and since my father is a software engineer, I grew up around computers. Sounded like a perfect fit to me.

The thing I love about web design is it is a place where I can combine many of my hobbies: photography, drawing, painting and sound. And while that’s all well and good, lately, I’ve been focusing more on interactive art. Thanks to Jason Geistweidt and Gary Kupczak, I had the opportunity to work on a wonderful project: Cubes 2009. This project taught me so much: how to solder; how to build circuit boards and how to creatively engineer something on the fly. It was also an exercise in the type of interactive media I want to create. The one reason I wanted to be an artist was so that my art could engage and inspire people the way art inspired me. My goal in my art is to have at least one person ask me, “How does that work?” And an installation like the Cubes does just that.

Cubes 2009 was the perfect starting block to my future endeavors in the IAM’s new BFA program, to which I was just accepted. I plan to keep working in the vein of interactivity, working to cultivate my own style and ideas. And there are more collaborations on the horizon, both with Jason and Gary, and with other students as well.

Not a day goes by that I regret my choice to switch into the IAM department. As much as I loved my two years in the ASL department, I really found a home in IAM. I met people who were not only of like mind, but people who inspired me to do more than I had ever known I wanted to do.
For the past year, up until recently, I had the wonderful opportunity to intern downtown at Slack Barshinger, a business-to-business advertising agency. I was brought on as a Web developer in the Digital Strategy team. This was my first time ever working in the advertising industry and I had no idea what to expect.

My initial responsibilities included simple HTML websites and search engine optimization, in particular link building. If you have never done link building be warned that it can be an extremely monotonous task, however on the bright side you get to meander through interesting blogs and learn a lot of information on the subject you are optimizing for a particular site.

As the weeks went by, my superiors recognized that I was very proactive in teaching myself new techniques that would help me complete a project more efficiently. So one day they decided to give me the new task of learning how to implement and style a content management system called DotNetNuke. I gathered the necessary resources and spent the time to learn the framework. Within about two weeks I was the resident expert on this cms. My first project was to create a repository for the company Web site.

With each project I completed, I gained priceless knowledge about the advertising world. The most valuable lesson that I learned is that you can never say “No.” There is always a solution for everything. You just have to be willing to find it. In the rare occasion that you have to use that two-letter word, it must always be accompanied by an alternative solution. Clients always want the best and they always believe they are right, so taking a diplomatic approach when addressing issues they have with your solutions will result in a more positive working experience with the client.

Another valuable lesson that I learned is that you must always be willing to take on new tasks even though you may not know how to do them. My boss, on many occasions, would approach me and ask me if I would be willing to take on a specific task. He understood my capabilities and that the task he was asking me to complete was slightly outside my knowledge base and skill set. However, he knew that I was capable of quickly learning new technologies. I soon found out later that this particular skill to learn new things quickly made me stand out as an employee and was considered my greatest strength.

As I became more comfortable in my work environment, I was given more and more responsibility up until the point to where I was considered lead developer. I was soon providing the company with new skills in Flash and ActionScript 3.0 that allowed them to present new and innovative solutions to clients.

Looking back on my experience at Slack Barshinger, I now realize how much Columbia prepared me for the work world. Out of all my classes I felt that Team was the most beneficial. It helped me to understand the concept of processes and how to plan a project from start to finish. Team also introduced the concept of working for a client and how to properly manage time.

My internship was an invaluable experience. I learned the pros and cons of the advertising industry as well as how to handle a client with difficult demands. In addition, I learned how to work as part of a team and how to facilitate good communication between all members. Communication is the number one reason why projects fall apart or don’t go as planned.

"Communication is the number one reason why projects fall apart or don’t go as planned.”
Tell me a little bit about yourself.

My name is Danny Lee and I am a designer at Razorfish. I graduated from Columbia in May, 2007. Ever since I was a kid and signed on to America Online for the first time via a 14k modem, I knew I wanted to do something with the Internet. Little did I know, I would end up doing digital work for a living.

I started at Purdue University studying computer science but that was short-lived as I hated it with a passion. However, because of good friends and the guidance of a wonderful professor, I realized I was pretty good at designing. So, I decided to finish my studies at an art school. The decision to attend Columbia College was one of the best decisions of my life—I was hired the same day I graduated!

How did Columbia help prepare you for your career?

As I said earlier, attending Columbia was the best decision I made regarding my career. I was not restricted like I was at Purdue and the faculty and staff at Columbia actually gave a crap about their students.

At Columbia, I was able to customize my degree with things I wanted to do. Back then, it was called the Digital Media Technology program and the name actually caught my attention. Niki Nolin, my counselor, was always there to guide me and make sure I was doing stuff I was passionate about. She helped me take the courses that would get me to where I wanted to go. These courses were also crucial because they opened doors to things that would have taken me much longer to figure out by myself. I remember Mirella Shannon’s C++ class and I still thank her to this day for teaching us object oriented programming the way she did—very patiently! I learned so much in one semester that I wanted to learn more. This was also important because I was able to ground my self once I knew I could learn something really challenging. And because the digital industry is constantly evolving, you need that self-confidence to pick things up quickly and go. Such experiences with the staff at Columbia assured me that I would be ready to go out and work. However, that said, once I found the direction I needed, I worked very hard.

What do you do for work and how did you get there?

As a designer at Razorfish, I find myself wearing multiple hats on a day-to-day basis. One day I’m designing comps for a new project campaign and on another day, I’m programming Flash work for something that is about to launch. I work a lot with Photoshop and Illustrator but the tool I work most often with is Flash. I had to learn Flash very quickly when I was in school. I guess you have to learn a lot of programs very quickly in school but it was easy because I was so fascinated by all the things I could do with Flash.

But, I yearned for more and began experimenting with, ironically, code and design. I just kept digging deeper and tried to learn from as many sources as I could tap. In the end, I learned not just the software, but also how to absorb information in a way that would work in my own mind. As I did the programming stuff, I would just look at a lot of inspiring pieces of work and try to see where the artist or designer was coming from. The best part about all of this learning was I just did it because it was fun. Corniché, huh? (I just made that up—cor’my + cloth = corniché).

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What are your plans for the future?

My plans for the future are not entirely known right now but in any case, I plan on growing.

Can you offer any advice for current or prospective students?

You may have to make some adjustments to find the trajectory you want to follow, but once you find that path, stay on it and go forward. There will be times you will get lost but keep your eye on the big picture and you will find your path again. That’s all there is to it. The fun will come.

My best advice is to learn everything you can! Don’t be afraid to try out new things—software programs, classes and making art. Be open-minded and, most importantly, be passionate about what you want to do! And, work your a** off.

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ALUMNI PROFILE

Danny Lee

Interactive Designer at Manifest Digital / Class of 2007
dyleeo.com/lite

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Janell Baxter is an artist, educator, and interactive developer. She began creating interactive art (in both traditional and digital mediums) in 1993 and has been focusing on emergent and adaptive solutions for the past number years. She is currently working on a series of small sculptures and paintings that required someone to touch or interact with them. These were all digital, thought it took me a few more years to generate my artwork with programming even though I had been programming since I was in grade school (an awesome uncle gave me a TRS-80 when I was in fifth grade). It seems obvious now, but the internal paradigm shift to combine programming and art wasn’t immediately apparent to me.

Was there a light bulb moment: a specific piece or event that triggered the change?

I was part of a group show where one of my pieces was just printed code—and it made perfect sense. The theme had to do with the idea of “godness” and it was a hard concept for me to work with because my artwork had been autobiographical and in my mind not related at all to what I thought “godness” meant (newage, natural, etc). At the same time, I didn’t want to make something that made light of the topic. This was a struggle, I often have irony in my work and was conscious of how easy it could be to make something that didn’t really fit into the kind of work that I had been doing. It was important to me that each piece I showed somehow connected to a larger thread.

In this case I decided to make an application that created artwork. That, in a sense, I would take on the role of “godness” in that I was creating something that in turn could then itself create. And for that, I needed to combine programming and art. It was scary—it seemed like a risk for me to do it, but now it seems so natural.

A lot of your recent work—Yen and entInt—searches for meaning in chaos, and the pieces are left to fend for themselves. How do you feel about your process of creation, and then releasing that creation onto itself? Those two series sometimes give me the feeling that I am collaborating with myself, or with a shadow of myself. It’s really interesting to me and I keep trying to find ways to evolve them. The current entInt, for example, is an application that requests images from people about a topic that it is working on. It evaluates the images sent and how well it feels the images fit into its theme, how fast the person responds and some other criteria influence the way application regards the person as a collaborator.

For this kind of piece the actual process—the journey—is more interesting to me than the final output (or destination). The artifacts these applications create are appealing and I appreciate them, but the real fascination for me is the process these applications go through in order to create their “works.”

How do you feel about the fact that most institutions aren’t ready to consider interactive art to be “Art” with a capital A? Have you encountered this obstacle in your own work? I think that is a big issue with a lot of artists who work with digital media. There are many things to consider—for example, how current media can degrade or no longer be compatible with future systems. A painting can hang on the wall for hundreds of years, but work created on a jazz drive could be lost if you hadn’t migrated it to a newer medium when jazz drive usage started to dwindle. Digital media is also very easy to copy so the value in having a “one-of-a-kind” painting is hard to replicate with newer media. I do think interactive art should be valued—programming can be an art form in and of itself.
Ambivalent Interplay
by Heejoo Kim
Adjunct Faculty

Introduction
Synesthetic experimentation by artists is arguable. Many different types of art works are based on deliberate confluences or interrelations of sensory fusion and not on involuntary senses of cross-wired association. Therefore, most artistic approaches with hybrid sensory fusion are not inside of the domain of biological synesthetic research. On the other side, in contrast, some researchers assert that synesthesia is social, cultural, but not a biological phenomenon: It is cultivated and formed by trained exercises. As a matter of fact, we recognize the ‘synesthetic experience of being’ in all forms of art throughout the history—in poetry, painting, sculpture, music and noticeably new media art, such as: interactive cinema/installations, artificial reality, net art, wearable art, telematic game art, game art and even mobile art. The emerging conjunction between new technology and new media art links intimately to the way humans appreciate and understand the ecology of art. If we need to mark the distinction between old and new media, inevitably, the leading distinction is interactivity. Nevertheless, the issue of “Interactivity” is controversial. How about the reciprocal influences between a painting and a viewer? Even though any traditional form of art stimulates only one or two sensory organs, it is an unavoidable consequence that viewers respond to the pieces of old forms of art in different ways. Then, what is the core perception of art media these days? What redeﬁnes the deﬁnition of interactivity in new media art history?

Although discussing how traditional and emerging art media have inherent connections in the way of interaction with viewers, we all cannot deny the radical differentiation between passively watching and dynamically participating. New technologies reconstitute media and psychological inﬂuences the senses. If the traditional painters, filmmakers, or performance artists present the circumstance for speculation, the contemporary media artists transform the viewer to participant, and invite more senses to engage their works. Furthermore, more than ever before, many different types of recent method art media evokes and coalesces sensations that are normally obtained in which one type of stimulation evokes another sensation. *Synesthesia means a condition in which one type of stimulation evokes another sensation. In this book, we deﬁne the term, ‘synesthesia’, has been displayed since about a century ago, and ‘synesthetic approaches’ is an intriguing, but may also contribute to present artistic phenomenon is not only historically complex research of art creativity. Nevertheless, the prevalent sensory organ for a noticeable embodied experience through senses and communicating. There are investigating the interrelations of the synesthetic approaches arts. The function of synesthesia evolves considerably in the new situation with new technological tools, such as, electronics, sensors, computers, and internet spaces.

Recent developments in hypermedia, multimedia and virtual reality has challenged the traditional perspective of human computer interaction. This brought us many other possibilities of our various perceptions. There are differences between ‘sensation’ and ‘perception’. Sensation is what stimulates our sensory organs, perception is what is experienced mainly as consequences. Synesthesia is the sensation that normal transmits one perception actually produces another perception or more, so that the sensation stimulates other multiple sensory systems. Synesthetic media has been already appearing in various forms. This phenomenon alters how sensations are perceived. For example, recent information technology conveys rich experiences that were previously not available to most other people. The purpose of new technology is to broaden our realm of sensation to feel reality more fully. This is a crucial point in the stage of developmental technology and its impact on our culture. In the psychological approaches, understanding new media art corresponds to analyzing synesthesia experiences in human interaction. In terms of creativity, speciﬁcally, hybrid, cross wired sensory experience stimulates aspects of the human sub-consciousness. In the emerging media arts, synesthetic interactions are increasing and becoming something to be inspired by. Based on new empowered technology and highly developed research, this interplay will become more sophisticated, intricate, and immersive. Ambivalent senses will be obtained as well.

Conclusion
Through our senses, we feel, see, smell, and hear our surroundings. Since we always use our senses, we hardly pay attention to them. However, each of these senses is irreplaceable and valuable. What we perceive through the nervous system deﬁnes our experiences. As a speciﬁc sense of interaction in an integrated perception, sensory fusion is an essential human ability. The term, ‘synesthesia’, has been displayed since about a century ago. Nowadays, this is quite common in aesthetics, although there are some controversial issues that remain in between neurological science and art boundaries. In order to comprehend the aesthetic of art, we need to understand the human sensory mechanism. Synesthesia is a critical characteristic of new media art. New media art contains a synesthetic complex, particularly in interactive art forms. The level of interplay between views and arts has been developed by the emergence of multi sensory functions. Synesthetic interplay often occurs with trained artistic individuals. It is quite an important feature in art theory and mono sensory arts. The function of synesthesia evolves considerably in the new situation with new technological tools, such as, electronics, sensors, computers, and internet spaces.

Synesthetic art, a sensation that normally transmits one perception in a single sensory channel, evokes another sensation. In which one type of stimulation evokes another sensation. *Synesthesia means a condition in which one type of stimulation evokes another sensation. References
Gno, Oliver (2000), MUSICA HUMORAE. Cambridge: The MIT Press
Maurer, Lex (2001), The Language of New Media. Cambridge: The MIT Press
*Synesthesia evokes another condition in which one type of stimulation evokes another sensation. Abstract
The human vision, the most ubiquitous receptor of the human senses, has been in the prevailing sensory organ for a noticeable manifestation of visual arts. Nevertheless, in the face of new technology art, the embodied experience through senses dismantled and amalgamated in hybrid aspects. Explicitly, new media artists perceive that interactive technology is evolving rapidly in such a short period of time. Rather than engaging in technology more interactively, however, they seem they are scrutinizing the subsequent progression of interactive art. Artistic experiments have predominantly been transferred through the human sensorium in interrelated approaches: touch, sight, smell and socializing their qualities in their interactive conversations in between works and viewers. There are investigating perceptual and emotional mechanisms of involuntary synesthetic experiences. This artistic phenomenon is not only historically intriguing, but may also contribute to present synesthesia research. The functions and interrelations of the synesthetic approaches in new media arts and neurological researches are discussed separately.
By Terence Hannum
Internship and External Relations
Coordinator & Adjunct Faculty

Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago
May 1st – September 13th 2009

Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson

Many of Eliasson’s works are staged forgeries of natural phenomena and manipulations of perception. It is this manipulation that seems to concern him the most. The show is initiated by “Your Eye Activity Field,” a work comprised of 300 paintings flanking the entrance atrium walls of the museum. The work emphasizes the 300 nanometers of the visible spectrum available to the human eye, with each long and narrow canvas, flush to the next, painted in a single hue. This massive minimal piece frames the entire exhibition like a more grandiose Ellsworth Kelly but also a referent to the limited scope from which we visually perceive.

To the right, one enters “Room for One Color” (1997), a corridor where the entire field of visible light has been reduced to a field of primrose by a set of monochromatic lights. The Ratman of paintings surrounding the room and the sudden immersion in the artificial vacuum of this piece requires the eyes to adjust and to keep a steady head. Already, one becomes aware of the senses attempting to shift to this other place.

It should come as no surprise that Eliasson contributed a project to Daniel Birnbaum’s book “The Hospitality of Presence” (1998), and is based primarily on the work by phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and his concept of “otherness.” Eliasson’s work engages the phenomenological approach entirely, breaking down experiences and distilling perception to allow the viewer a more potent and focused reflection of the world. Perhaps more telling is Eliasson’s involvement with this early concept of “otherness” in phenomenology, and that this concept seeks to unite the subject with the world at hand, including other individuals. Husserl insists that we treat others as equal subjects with their own level of perception, not as mere objects in the world but as subjects like ourselves within the same world. This lays the conceptual foundation for interactivity, as well as the philosophical groundwork for interactivity, as well as the philosophical groundwork for phenomenology and presented them to us in a simple and matter-of-fact manner. Heidegger, another phenomenologist, refers to the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander in a lecture titled “Anaximander’s Saying” supporting the legend that this saying by Anaximander is the oldest saying in Western thought: "Where things have their origin, there also their destruction happens, According to necessity, For they give to each other justice and recompense For their injustice In conformity with the ordinance of Time."

Eliasson’s work is staged to reenact this early concept of “otherness” in phenomenology, and that this concept seeks to unite the subject with the world at hand, including other individuals. Husserl insists that we treat others as equal subjects with their own level of perception, not as mere objects in the world but as subjects like ourselves within the same world. This lays the conceptual foundation for interactivity, as well as the philosophical groundwork for phenomenology and presented them to us in a simple and matter-of-fact manner.

Anaximander, known for this cryptic utterance is also later attributed the first principle of air, as part of Aristotle’s system of physics. Air is an immense and endless void, one in which Heidegger would certainly find a similarity to the existential situation. Air is a primal substance in which individuals, events and things fade-in, interact and disappear again. Adjacent to “360° room for all colours,” is the most brilliant and stunning work of the exhibit. It is here where Eliasson has perhaps best absorbed the theories of phenomenology and presented them to us in a simple and matter-of-fact way with his piece “Beauty” (1999). Even before entering, a familiar smell is registered in the air and the skin seems to anticipate a pleasant surprise. “Beauty” uses a dark enclous of a room, covered entirely in black waterproof foam, a Fresnel lamp, a hose, a pump and some tubing to generate an ethereal experience. Eliasson fixes the beam of the Fresnel through a fine cascade of mist generating an indoor rainbow as participants pass their hands through the delicate rays of water and light. The spectrum returns, but in this instance alters the entire environment of the museum, saturating the space, giving it an almost holy glow in all its admittance of theatrical construction. “Beauty” allows the audience interaction and generates awe and the immediate realization of the humble materials. Honest, revealing and epiphanic, this is a place where one could take their time.

Right, clockwise:
1. 360° Room for All Colours, 2002. Installation view at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on the occasion of Take your time: photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA.
2. Moss Wall, 1994. Installation view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. In “Moss Wall” (1994), an entire side of a room is thickly coated from floor to ceiling with living and dying reindeer moss. It is a simple action here, generating a knobby and lavish surface from afar by using a native lichen of Iceland. Yet, whether the visual element entices or repulses you—appearing at first like a plush carpet one might like to touch and roll around on, but revealing upon closer inspection that it is in fact decaying organisms—it is the fragrance, the essence, that keeps one pacing and lingering in front of it.

3. 360° Room for All Colours, 2002. Installation view at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art on the occasion of Take your time: photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA.


All work © 2009 Olafur Eliasson.

In conformity with the ordinance of Time.
Reviewed by Emily Kuehn
Adjunct Faculty

Sidequest: Text Adventure by The Guardians of Tradition
2009
gott.wordpress.com

Inspired by the earliest text adventure games like William Crowther’s Adventure, Sidequest is Loaded with classic computing references. Prepare yourself for a cyberpsychedelic crawl through treacherous terrain ranging from the Mammoth Cave system to the farthest reaches of the ARPANET network and right into the center of Hollow Earth.

The Intruder by Natalie Bookchin
1999
bookchin.net/intruder/

An earlier work from the maker of Metapet, Natalie Bookchin’s The Intruder combines Jorge Luis Borges’s short story The Intruder with ten mini-games inspired by arcade classics. The game is focused on advancing the disruptive narrative of brothers who fall in love with the same prostitute.

SOD by Jodi
1999
sod.jodi.org

Iconic net collective Jodi’s initial foray into the world of art games SOD is a modification of the 1992 game Wolfenstein 3D. It falls somewhere between minimalism and an architectural AutoCAD-like drawing. Combined with a similarly esoteric interface, the result is an elegant (and virtually unplayable) deconstruction of Wolfenstein’s representational realism.
Garnering an impressive amount of acclaim upon release, this self-financed title by renowned game designer Jonathan Blow fascinates on many levels. It features highly innovative gameplay, expertly designed puzzles and lush graphics by artist David Hellman. Meanwhile, the backstory behind how this game was created serves as an instructive lesson and inspiration for indie game developers of all levels.

At first blush Braid seems very similar to a host of side-scrolling platform games—a lineage tracing back to the original Super Mario Brothers. Controlling the main character Tim, you run back and forth, jump up onto different platforms and stomp on enemies to defeat them. On this level the game is already well designed and showcases polished gameplay. The controls are responsive and the jumping movements feel as agile as the best of the genre. Very quickly, however, you discover that Braid features a powerful time-rewarding ability. That is, by holding down a button you are able to rewind everything that’s happened. Death becomes irrelevant as you can rewind from every missed jump.

This time shifting mechanic forms the core of many of Braid’s innovative puzzles and has been compared to Prince of Persia: Sands of Time. However, that comparison really doesn’t do justice to the importance of time rewinding in Braid. Whereas Prince of Persia merely used time rewinding as a way of sparing the player some tedium in an otherwise straightforward run-and-jump game, Braid employs this device in deft and constantly surprising ways, gradually introducing new twists on the time rewinding gameplay with each successive section of the game. Plenty of puzzles involve moving forward and then rewinding in strategic ways. In fact, without giving away too much about the game’s ending, the time rewinding mechanic becomes an integral part of one of the most surprising and delightful game endings in memory.

Every bit as impressive as the well-crafted gameplay is the delightful graphical look of the game. Blow decided to hire Hellman, the artist behind the popular web comic, A Lesson is Learned but the Damage is Irreversible, to imbue the game with a unique and captivating aesthetic. The graphics have a painterly look unusual to video games. Meanwhile, many subtle touches help bring the game to life. For example, the background images shift into the distance when you rewind. That’s a subtle visual effect to be sure, but one that has a great impact in making your rewind ability feel magical.

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Programming Interactivity: A Designer's Guide to Processing, Arduino, and openFrameworks
by Joshua Noble

Reviewed by Janell Baxter

This text is a must read for interactive artists, and is an excellent introduction to creating physical interaction systems. It covers three popular and free tools: Processing, Arduino, and openFrameworks, and explains how to design hardware and programming without assuming any previous knowledge on the part of the reader—even those who have never programmed before will find the basics of programming addressed in the second chapter. Although the text is broad and covers the basics of the tools and interaction concepts, once readers grasp the foundational knowledge, they should be able to complete more advanced projects.

Physical computing examples in the second part of the text walk the reader through building relatively simple interactive components. The text then moves on to some more slightly advanced topics such as a Piezo sensor to detect touch and a PIR Motion Sensor to detect motion. The author provides a lot of support with comprehensive descriptions, code and schematics so that even those who have never worked with electronics before should be able to build interactive components after working through the chapters. The third part of the book covers 3D, visual detection (such as gestures and faces), GPS data and other advanced concepts.

Fashioning Technology: A DIY Intro to Smart Crafting
by Syuzi Pakhchyan

Reviewed by Janell Baxter

This text (like Programming Interactivity) also shows how to build simple circuits, work with LEDs and build things with Piezo sensors. However this book does not cover programming, and instead explains how to use cool materials like polymorph plastic, shape memory alloy (muscle wire), solar cells, thermo-chronic inks and electroluminescent ink/Film/Wire. These two books are excellent companions for those wanting to explore wearable electronics and “smart” accessories.

The tutorial based approach makes this book an easy read; step by step instructions and lots of pictures make it simple to understand the concepts. There are also some informative chapters on fundamental skills such as “The Art of Soldering” which shows images of correct and incorrect joints and provides helpful tips on how to choose a good soldering iron, and how to maintain your equipment. The helpful guides throughout such as “Your Toolbox” that lists all the equipment you should have (multimeter, wire strippers, etc.), and the visual indexes like the “Components Index” that have pictures of items (capacitors, fixed-value resistors, etc.) are excellent for those new to electronics.

If you are interested in learning more about interactive physical computing, sign up for the IAM course “Computer Controlled Installation Environments” (36-3630). Students in the IAM department may also be granted access to the Fabrication Laboratory (Fab Lab) which has much of the fundamental equipment needed for building projects outlined in these texts. For more information about how to get access to the Fab Lab, contact Jeff Meyers, IAM Operations Manager.

Mobile Nation
Reviewed by Mindy Faber

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In contrast to imperative programming languages such as C# or Java, where the data is invisible, Pd is a data flow language, with the implicit path of a data stream represented by patch cords interconnecting externals and abstractions. As Puckette explains, “Among the design principles of Pd is that patches should be printable, in the sense that the appearance of a patch should fully determine its functionality.” What you see is what you get. Thus, Pure Data provides a visual representation of processes that are typically kept well under the hood.

If you are unacquainted to working with digital signal processing, your first forays into Pd might be a bit daunting. First of all, you will have to build everything. For example, to construct a sampler you must 1) substantiate an array, 2) load the array, 3) read the array, and 4) route that data to a digital-to-audio converter. In addition, you may wish to adjust the playback rates to vary pitch, build envelopes to shape your sound, or connect to your MIDI interface along the way. It sounds like a lot of work and, yes, it is.

Prepare yourself: Pd has a steep learning curve. But, if all you wanted to do was playback a sample, well, there are already a dozen specialized programs to do so. Where Pure Data shines is in its ability to quickly prototype cross-modal interactions from a variety of inputs. Pd is for those who wish to explore, those who wish to innovate, to improvise and those that do not mind mucking about in a morass of ones and zeros. So, what is possible? Well, anything that you can imagine. Let us beef up our prior example to demonstrate what Pure Data could do.

We will modify our sampler to access Twitter and find the 25 most popular topics every 30 minutes (an easy html scrouge) and then cross-reference those keywords to find the descriptions of sound samples at a database such as freesound.org. As these download off the network into our arrays, we perform a search on Flickr of similar keywords and, utilizing the Graphical Environment for Multimedia (GEM) library, create an undulating composite of relevant photos which are projected into the space along with an algorithmic performance of our sampler. With a little idea, and a great deal more trial and error, we have lent Twitter a bit more tangibility. What does Twitter sound like, what does it look like? Pd can make the connections and provide an answer.

Whether bringing together sounds and images, combining narratives with gameplay, or meeting across continents in virtual worlds, making connections is at the heart of the interactive arts and media. Tools such as Pure Data, along with many others such as Processing, Second Life, Torque—and even the C-family of languages—are how we establish the link. As you move through your brief tenure with us here at Columbia, do make the effort to explore these connections. To do so, may I suggest the following action items? First, learn a programming language and use it, which is quite different from learning how to use a program. Second, make things: games, podcasts, programs, prints, installations, videos, etc. Your post-Columbia experience will be guided by what you have done here, rather than the fact that you were just simply here. And third, take creative risks. I will conclude with a quote from John Cage: “We’re breaking all of the rules, even our own rules. And how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for X quantities.”

Let $X = X$, good luck. 

For More Information
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Beautiful in its abstract and archaic view of a computerized world, "Tron" is an amazing film that still resonates today. Way back in 1982, computers were not commonplace as they are now. Very few could even imagine what went on inside those electrical impulses or behind those ones and zeroes. So, it was a truly wonderful experience when "Tron" breathed life and imagination into technology, giving a face to that which lacked one.

The plot is a basic good vs. evil story with a technological bent. Kevin Flynn, played by Jeff Bridges ("Iron Man," "The Big Lebowski"), is a video game programmer with a chip on his shoulder. He created several extremely popular games for the ENCOM Corporation, but never got any credit for his accomplishments. An executive named Ed Dillinger stole the game ideas and then fired Flynn. Dillinger also created the Master Control Program (MCP), a megalomaniacal computer program that rules ENCOM’s mainframe. Over time, the MCP has become sentient, and routinely hacks into other computer networks—kidnapping programs and assimilating them into the computer world. Heady stuff for 1982.

Flynn wakes up inside the computerized world. The MCP sentences Flynn to die by forcing him to play as a character in video games—ironically, the very games that Flynn programmed. The hero soon meets the titular character, Tron (also portrayed by Boxleitner), and the two set forth to take down the MCP.

Though interesting and straightforward, the story takes a back seat to the visuals. "Tron" utilized the most cutting-edge computer animation techniques available when it was produced in 1981, and combined that with backlit animation and live action. These three very different techniques seamlessly blend into a vision of a surreal, electronic world. Geometric shapes and gridded, CAD-like surfaces make up the haunting digital landscapes. No textures here—just solid-colored polygons in a vast, endless world.

The interior settings in the world of "Tron" are just as stunning as the exteriors. Etched lines glow vividly in primary hues. It is like a cross between a circuit board and a nighttime street scene in "Blade Runner."

Then consider the Light Cycles—perhaps the most popular scene in "Tron": Brightly colored and blazing fast, the Light Cycles make perfect 90-degree turns and trail a solid wall of color behind them. Only in a movie—or in a video game—could something this cool ever happen.

The film also anthropomorphized computer programs, giving a touch of humanity and personality to those anonymous little lines of code that toil away. Like humans who believe in and worship a higher power, programs in turn swear allegiance to the "Users"—those who create and use the programs. All programs take pride and enjoy what they do. Just ask the helpful actuaries program named Ram, who like Flynn is forced to battle for his life as a video game character. Speaking of which, all programs fear death, or "derezzing" as it is known in the "Tron"-verse.

"Tron" is fantastic because it came out at a time when computers were still a big unknown. Other than computer scientists, who really knew what AI or a GUI was? Back then, not many. Even though we know much more about that today, "Tron" is still awesome for the way it creatively visualizes computer technology. And while the tech has improved exponentially since, few films have eclipsed "Tron" for its vision of the digital world.
Fall 2009 Schedule

September 10th – October 15th

**Feed: The 2nd Annual Alumni Exhibition**

The second annual Alumni exhibition, featuring recent and past graduates from the Interactive Arts and Media department.

October 29th – November 30th

**Eschatology/Apocalypse**

Part of the Critical Encounters 2009-2010 theme “Fact & Faith,” Eschatology/APOCALYPSE will be an exhibition dealing with the issues of technology and the end of time. Often depicted in video games, science fiction, and popular culture, the fantasy of the end of the world arises either as a direct cause of technology, aided by technology or uses advances to depict these prophecies to us on a more direct level.

December 3rd

**Martin Meinerz: Independent Study in Sonic Arts**

Junior Marty Meinerz presents works created during his independent study in sonic arts in the department of Interactive Arts and Media, Columbia College Chicago. The event will include original works diffused over a multi-speaker array with commentary by the artist. All are welcome to come and enjoy an evening of scaled listening.

December 10th – January 7th

**Analect: IAM Practicum Course Exhibition**

IAM Practicum integrates the diverse technical, theoretical and aesthetic knowledge that seniors have accumulated. In Analect Seniors enrolled in this capstone course will each exhibit work they are preparing for Manifest 2010 and completed interactive art projects.
Leading the workflow at the Citizen Service Centers. The Totem Design Consultative Designers for the City of Copenhagen in optimizing have a great understanding of trends and new technology that is done by applying unconventional aspects to a subject. They solve challenges in untraditional ways making a virtue of working conceptually. Their company has an amazing ability to Totem Collective create industrial design, graphic design and digital environments, often created with a variety of collaborators, Levin applies creative twists to digital technologies that highlight our relationship with machines, make visible community TV stations and at new media conferences globally.

Jonathan McIntosh November 19 nebelouspixs.com

Jonathan McIntosh is a video remix artist, a photographer, curator and media activist. He also worked on numerous media and social justice related projects in the United States and around the world. Currently he is a co-founder of the Political Remix Video and a member of the Open Video Alliance. McIntosh’s digital video work focuses on transforming fragments of corporate mass media by remixing it to tell alternative political, social and cultural narratives. A self-described pop culture hacker, his remixes have appeared in film festivals, on corporate mass media by remixing it to tell alternative political, social and cultural narratives. A self-described pop culture hacker, his remixes have appeared in film festivals, on community TV stations and at new media conferences globally.

*All Lectures are in at 6 pm 916 S. Wabash Ave. Room 150 (Unless Otherwise Noted) Lectures are free and open to the public

**Golan Levin September 17 flong.com siskelfilmmcenter.org

Lecture co-sponsored with the Department of Film, Video and New Media at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Lecture will take place at the Gene Siskel Film Center 164 N. State Street

Golan Levin develops artifacts and events which explore the evolution of reactive 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 language of interactivity, and of nonverbal communications protocols in cybernetic systems. Through performances, digital artifacts, and virtual environments, often created with a variety of collaborators, Levin applies creative twists to digital technologies that highlight our relationship with machines, make visible community TV stations and at new media conferences globally.

**David Hellman October 22 davidhellman.net braidedgame.com

David Hellman is an artist living in San Francisco. From 2004-2006 he worked on a dreamlike web comic called A Lesson Is Learned But The Damage Is Irreversible. Since then, he has been doing the graphics for an upcoming Xbox game called Braid. Braid is a video game about solving puzzles in imaginative worlds. It is playful and philosophical. Its designer, Jonathan Blow, hired David Hellman to create the graphics for his functional but visually spare rough draft. Happily for Hellman, Jonathan asked him to bring his own sensibility and artistic guidance to the project. Braid is available on Xbox 360 and Windows PC.

Class visit: Friday, October 23

**Totem Collective October 15 totemcollective.com

With the Department of Exhibition and Performance Spaces TotemCollective create industrial design, graphic design and conceptual design. Their company has an amazing ability to solve challenges in untraditional ways making a virtue of working with different points of views in their work. If it is needed this is done by applying unconventional aspects to a subject. They have a great understanding of trends and new technology that is reflected in their work. TotemCollective have been working as consultative designers for the City of Copenhagen in optimizing the workforce at the Citizen Service Centers. The Totem Design System was centered on dialogues with the employees and the citizens. Through observations, workshops and interviews we adjusted the workspace and created a new flow in the interior.

Workshop: Wednesday, October 14

**Project Horseshoe November 05-08, 2009 Canyon of the Eagles, TX projecthorseshoe.com

Project Horseshoe is a thirteenth-style conference addressing the industry-wide challenges of modern game design.

**Southwest Gaming Expo November 20-22, 2009 Dallas, TX swge.com

SWGE is a place for gamers and industry insiders to come together and discover the latest trends and explore the culture that revolves around gaming. Whatever type of games you play, there’s something for every gamer at SWGE.

**ESDC March 1-3, 2010 San Mateo, CA go-esdc.com

ESDC—the Enterprise Software Development Conference—is for IT professionals who design, code, build, deploy and manage software for their business. These would include software project managers, architects, programmers and others involved in the enterprise software development lifecycle.

**Game Developers Conference® March 9-13, 2010 San Francisco, CA gdconf.com

The Game Developers Conference® returns to San Francisco with five days of industry-leading talks addressing the most current game development methods, trends, technologies and issues facing our community. GDC week’s expanded summit lineup will offer a deep-seated exploration of emerging trends in the game industry.

**South by Southwest Interactive March 12-16, 2010 Austin, Texas sxsw.com/interactive/

The SXSW Interactive Festival features five days of exciting panel content and amazing speakers. Attracting digital creatives as well as visionary technology entrepreneurs, the event celebrates the best minds and the brightest personalities of emerging technology. Whether you are a hard-core geek, a dedicated content creator, a new media entrepreneur, or just someone who likes being around an extremely creative community, SXSW Interactive is for you!

**PAX East March 26-28, 2010 Boston paxsite.com/paxeast

PAX is a three-day game festival for tabletop, videogame, and PC gamers. PAX East will bring the largest gaming festival in the U.S. to the east coast.

**Claiming Creativity: Art Education in Cultural Transition April 21-24, 2010 Columbia College Chicago, IL claimingcreativity.com

Creativity and the Economy; Art, Science, and Technology; Art and the Environment; Creativity and Research; Art, Culture, and Social Change.


The World Wide Web Conference is a yearly international conference on the topic of the future direction of the World Wide Web and will focus on “openness” in web technologies, standards and practices, and will showcase the best of the region’s technology and culture.

**New Media Consortium Conference June 9-12, 2010 Anaheim, CA nmc.org/2010/summer-conference

The 2010 NMC Summer Conference will be held in Anaheim, California and is hosted by the University of Southern California. Since its founding in 1993, the NMC’s mission has been to explore and promote innovative applications of technology to teaching, learning, and creative expression. Our history parallels the emergence of multimedia, the Internet, the World Wide Web, online video, Web 2.0, and how we are poised at the frontier of the 3D web.
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