



LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

**VOL 18 NO 3** VOLUME EDITORS LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES,

IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU / EDITORS JONATHAN MUNRO AND ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

*Touch and Go* is published in collaboration with Watermans and Goldsmiths College in occasion of the Watermans' International Festival of Digital Art, 2012, which coincides with the Olympics and Paralympics in London. The issue explores the impact of technology in art as well as the meaning, possibilities and issues around human interaction and engagement. *Touch and Go* investigates interactivity and participation, as well as light art and new media approaches to the public space as tools that foster engagement and shared forms of participation.



# TOUCH AND GO

Copyright 2012 ISAST

Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Volume 18 Issue 3

August 2012

ISSN 1071-4391

ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

The ISBN is provided by Goldsmiths, University of London.

#### LEA PUBLISHING & SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

##### Editor in Chief

Lanfranco Aceti lanfranco.aceti@leoalmanac.org

##### Co-Editor

Özden Şahin ozden.sahin@leoalmanac.org

##### Managing Editor

John Francescutti john.francescutti@leoalmanac.org

##### Art Director

Deniz Cem Öndüğü deniz.onduygu@leoalmanac.org

##### Editorial Board

Peter J. Bentley, Ezequiel Di Paolo, Ernest Edmonds, Felice Frankel, Gabriella Giannachi, Gary Hall, Craig Harris, Sibel Irzik, Marina Jirotko, Beau Lotto, Roger Malina, Terrence Masson, Jon McCormack, Mark Nash, Sally Jane Norman, Christiane Paul, Simon Penny, Jane Prophet, Jeffrey Shaw, William Uricchio

##### Contributing Editors

Nina Czegledy, Susan Collins, Leonardo Da Vinci, Anna Dumitriu, Vince Dziekan, Darko Fritz, Marco Gillies, Davin Heckman, Saoirse Higgins, Jeremy Hight, Denisa Kera, Frieder Nake, Vinoba Vinayagamoorthy

##### Cover Image

Scenocosme

##### Editorial Address

Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Sabancı University, Orhanlı – Tuzla, 34956

Istanbul, Turkey

##### Email

info@leoalmanac.org

##### Web

- » [www.leoalmanac.org](http://www.leoalmanac.org)
- » [www.twitter.com/LEA\\_twitts](https://www.twitter.com/LEA_twitts)
- » [www.flickr.com/photos/lea\\_gallery](https://www.flickr.com/photos/lea_gallery)
- » [www.facebook.com/pages/Leonardo-Electronic-Almanac/209156896252](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Leonardo-Electronic-Almanac/209156896252)

Copyright © 2012

Leonardo, the International Society for the Arts,  
Sciences and Technology

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is published by:

Leonardo/ISAST

211 Sutter Street, suite 501

San Francisco, CA 94108

USA

Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA) is a project of Leonardo/ The International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology. For more information about Leonardo/ISAST's publications and programs, see <http://www.leonardo.info> or contact [isast@leonardo.info](mailto:isast@leonardo.info).

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is produced by

Passero Productions.

Posting of this journal is prohibited without permission of Leonardo/ISAST, except for the posting of news and events listings which have been independently received.

The individual articles included in the issue are © 2012 ISAST.

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 18 ISSUE 3

# Touch and Go

VOLUME EDITORS

**LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES, IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU**

EDITORS

**JONATHAN MUNRO, ÖZDEN ŞAHİN**

# Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012

**Touch and Go is a title that I chose together with Irini Papadimitriou for this LEA special issue.** On my part with this title I wanted to stress several aspects that characterize that branch of contemporary art in love with interaction, be it delivered by allowing the audience to touch the art object or by becoming part of a complex electronic sensory experience in which the artwork may somehow respond and touch back in return.

With the above statement, I wanted to deliberately avoid the terminology 'interactive art' in order to not fall in the trap of characterizing art that has an element of interaction as principally defined by the word interactive; as if this were the only way to describe contemporary art that elicits interactions and responses between the artist, the audience and the art objects.

I remember when I was at Central Saint Martins writing a paper on the sub-distinctions within contemporary media arts and tracing the debates that distinguished between electronic art, robotic art, new media art, digital art, computer art, computer based art, internet art, web art... At some point of that analysis and argument I realized that the common thread that characterized all of these sub-genres of aesthetic representations was the word art and it did not matter (at least not that much in my opinion) if the manifestation was material or immaterial, conceptual or physical, electronic or painterly, analogue or digital.

I increasingly felt that this rejection of the technical component would be necessary in order for the electronic-robotic-new-media-digital-computer-based-internet art object to re-gain entry within the field of fine art. Mine was a reaction to an hyper-fragmented

and indeed extensive and in-depth taxonomy that seemed to have as its main effect that of pushing these experimental and innovative art forms – through the emphasis of their technological characterization – away from the fine arts and into a ghetto of isolation and self-reference. Steve Dietz's question – *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?*<sup>1</sup> – remains unanswered, but I believe that there are changes that are happening – albeit slowly – that will see the sensorial and technical elements become important parts of the aesthetic aspects of the art object as much as the brush technique of Vincent Willem van Gogh or the sculptural fluidity of Henry Moore.

Hence the substitution in the title of this special issue of the word interactivity with the word touch, with the desire of looking at the artwork as something that can be touched in material and immaterial ways, interfered with, interacted with and 'touched and reprocessed' with the help of media tools but that can also 'touch' us back in return, both individually and collectively. I also wanted to stress the fast interrelation between the art object and the consumer in a commodified relationship that is based on immediate engagement and fast disengagement, touch and go. But a fast food approach is perhaps incorrect if we consider as part of the interactivity equation the viewers' mediated processes of consumption and memorization of both the image and the public experience.

Nevertheless, the problems and issues that interactivity and its multiple definitions and interpretations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century raise cannot be overlooked, as much as cannot be dismissed the complex set of emotive and digital interactions that can be set in motion by artworks that reach and engage large groups of people within the public space. These interactions

generate public shows in which the space of the city becomes the background to an experiential event that is characterized by impermanence and memorization. It is a process in which thousands of people engage, capture data, memorize and at times memorialize the event and re-process, mash-up, re-disseminate and re-contextualize the images within multiple media contexts.

The possibility of capturing, viewing and understanding the entire mass of data produced by these aesthetic sensory experiences becomes an impossible task due to easy access to an unprecedented amount of media and an unprecedented multiplication of data, as Lev Manovich argues.<sup>2</sup>

In *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* Timothy Murray writes that "the retrospective nature of repetition and digital coding—how initial images, forms, and narratives are refigured through their contemplative re-citation and re-presentation—consistently inscribes the new media in the memory and memorization of its antecedents, cinema and video."<sup>3</sup>

The difference between memorization and memorialization may be one of the further aspects in which the interaction evolves – beyond the artwork but still linked to it. The memory of the event with its happening and performative elements, its traces and records both official and unofficial, the re-processing and mash-ups; all of these elements become part of and contribute to a collective narrative and pattern of engagement and interaction.

These are issues and problems that the artists and writers of this LEA special issue have analyzed from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, offering to the reader the opportunity of a glimpse into the complexity of today's art interactions within the contemporary social and cultural media landscapes.

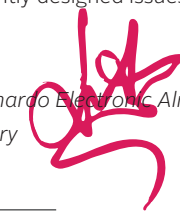
*Touch and Go* is one of those issues that are truly born from a collaborative effort and in which all editors have contributed and worked hard in order to

deliver a documentation of contemporary art research, thought and aesthetic able to stand on the international scene.

For this reason I wish to thank Prof. Janis Jefferies and Irini Papadimitriou together with Jonathan Munro and Özden Şahin for their efforts. The design is by Deniz Cem Önduygu who as LEA's Art Director continues to deliver brilliantly designed issues.

**Lanfranco Aceti**

Editor in Chief, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*  
Director, Kasa Gallery



1. "Nevertheless, there is this constant apparently inherent need to try and categorize and classify. In *Beyond Interface*, an exhibition I organized in 1998, I 'datamined' ten categories: net.art, storytelling, socio-cultural, biographical, tools, performance, analog-hybrid, interactive art, interfacers + artificers. David Ross, in his lecture here at the CAD-RE Laboratory for New Media, suggested 21 characteristics of net art. Stephen Wilson, a pioneering practitioner, has a virtual – albeit well-ordered – jungle of categories. Rhizome has developed a list of dozens of keyword categories for its ArtBase. Lev Manovich, in his *Computing Culture: Defining New Media Genres* symposium focused on the categories of database, interface, spatialization, and navigation. To my mind, there is no question that such categorization is useful, especially in a distributed system like the Internet. But, in truth, to paraphrase Barnett Newman, "ornithology is for the birds what categorization is for the artist." Perhaps especially at a time of rapid change and explosive growth of the underlying infrastructure and toolsets, it is critical that description follow practice and not vice versa." Steve Dietz, *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists? Web Walker Daily* 28, April 4, 2000, <http://bit.ly/QJEWIY> (accessed July 1, 2012).
2. This link to a Google+ conversation is an example of this argument on massive data and multiple media engagements across diverse platforms: <http://bit.ly/pGgDsS> (accessed July 1, 2012).
3. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 138.

# Touch and Go: The Magic Touch Of Contemporary Art

It is with some excitement that I write this preface to Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012. It has been a monumental achievement by the curator Irini Papadimitriou to pull together 6 groundbreaking installations exploring interactivity, viewer participation, collaboration and the use or importance of new and emerging technologies in Media and Digital Art.

From an initial call in December 2010 over 500 submissions arrived in our inboxes in March 2011. It was rather an overwhelming and daunting task to review, look and encounter a diverse range of submissions that were additionally asked to reflect on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Submissions came from all over the world, from Africa and Korea, Austria and Australia, China and the UK, Latvia and Canada and ranged from the spectacularly complicated to the imaginatively humorous. Of course each selector, me, onedotzero, London's leading digital media innovation organization, the curatorial team at Athens Video Art Festival and Irini herself, had particular favorites and attachments but the final grouping I believe does reflect a sense of the challenges and opportunities that such an open competition offers. It is though a significant move on behalf of the curator that each work is given the Watermans space for 6 weeks which enables people to take part in the cultural activities surrounding each installation, fulfilling, promoting and incorporating the Cultural Olympiad themes and values 'inspiration, participation and creativity.'

Some, like Gail Pearce's *Going with the Flow* was made because rowing at the 2012 Olympics will be held near Egham and it was an opportunity to respond and create an installation offering the public a more interactive way of rowing, while remaining on dry land, not only watching but also participating and having an effect on the images by their actions. On the other hand, Michele Barker and Anna Munster's collaborative *Hocus Pocus* will be a 3-screen interactive artwork that uses illusionistic and performative aspects of magical tricks to explore human perception, senses and movement. As they have suggested, "Magic – like interactivity – relies on shifting the perceptual relations between vision and movement, focusing and diverting attention at key moments. Participants will become aware of this relation as their perception catches up with the audiovisual illusion(s)" (artists statement, February 2011). Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi and Emeka Ogboh are artists who also work collaboratively and working under name of One-Room Shack. *UNITY* is built like a navigable labyrinth to reflect the idea of unity in diversity that the Games signify. In an increasingly globalized world they are interested in the ways in which the discourse of globalization opens up and closes off discursive space whereas Suguru Goto is a musician who creates real spaces that are both metaphysical and spiritual. *Cymatics* is a kinetic sculpture and sound installation. Wave patterns are created on liquid as a result of sound vibrations generated by visitors. Another sound work is Phoebe Hui's *Granular Graph*, a sound instrument about musical gesture and its notation.


Audiences are invited to become a living pendulum. The apparatus itself can create geometric images to represent harmonies and intervals in musical scales. Finally, Joseph Farbrook's *Strata-caster* explores the topography of power, prestige, and position through an art installation, which exists in the virtual world of Second Life, a place populated by over 50,000 people at any given moment.

Goldsmiths, as the leading academic partner, has been working closely with Watermans in developing a series of seminars and events to coincide with the 2012 Festival. I am the artistic director of Goldsmiths Digital Studios (GDS), which is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research and practice across arts, technologies and cultural studies. GDS engages in a number of research projects and provides its own postgraduate teaching through the PhD in Arts and Computational Technology, the MFA in Computational Studio Arts and the MA in Computational Art. Irini is also an alumni of the MFA in *Curating* (Goldsmiths, University of London) and it has been an exceptional pleasure working with her generating ideas and platforms that can form an artistic legacy long after the Games and the Festival have ended. The catalogue and detailed blogging/documentation and social networking will be one of our responsibilities but another of mine is to ensure that the next generation of practitioners test the conventions of the white cube gallery, reconsider and reevaluate artistic productions, their information structure and significance; engage in the museum sector whilst at the same time challenging the spaces for the reception of 'public' art. In addition those who wish to increase an audience's interaction and enjoyment of their work have a firm grounding in artistic practice and computing skills.

Consequently, I am particularly excited that the 2012 Festival Watermans will introduce a mentoring scheme for students interested in participatory interactive digital / new media work. The mentoring scheme involves video interviews with the 6 selected artists and their work, briefly introduced earlier in this preface, and discussions initiated by the student. As so often debated in our seminars at Goldsmiths and

elsewhere, what are the expectations of the audience, the viewer, the spectator, and the engager? How do exhibitions and festival celebrations revisit the traditional roles of performer/artist and audiences? Can they facilitate collaborative approaches to creativity? How do sound works get curated in exhibitions that include interactive objects, physical performances and screens? What are the issues around technical support? How are the ways of working online and off, including collaboration and social networking, affecting physical forms of display and publishing?

As I write this in Wollongong during the wettest New South Wales summer for 50 years, I want to end with a quote used by the Australia, Sydney based conjurers Michele Barker and Anna Munster

*Illusions occur when the physical reality does not match the perception.* 

The world is upside down in so many alarming ways but perhaps 2012 at Watermans will offer some momentary ideas of unity in diversity that the Games signify and *UNITY* proposes. Such anticipation and such promise!

**Janis Jefferies**

*Professor of Visual Arts  
Goldsmiths  
University of London, UK*

23<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2011, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

- 
1. Stephen L. Malnik and Susana Martinez-Conde, *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about our Everyday Deceptions* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 8.



## Leonardo Electronic Almanac

### Volume 18 Issue 3

**4** **EDITORIAL** Lanfranco Aceti

**6** **INTRODUCTION** Janis Jefferies

**10** **SUGURU GOTO, CYMATICS, 2011 - AN ACTION SHARING**

**PRODUCTION** Simona Lodi & Luca Barbeni

+ **SUGURU GOTO** in conversation with Paul Squires

**30** **INTERACTIVITY, PLAY AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT** Tine Bech

**44** **UNITY: IN PURSUIT OF THE HUMANISTIC SPIRIT** One-Room Shack

Collective

+ **ONE-ROOM SHACK COLLECTIVE** in conversation with Evelyn Owen

**52** **HOKUSPOKUS** Michele Barker & Anna Munster

**58** **AS IF BY MAGIC** Anna Gibbs

**60** **BLACK BOXES AND GOD-TRICKS: AN ACCOUNT OF USING MEDICAL IMAGING SYSTEMS TO PHOTOGRAPH CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF A DIGITAL ARTS PRACTICE** Eleanor Dare

**72** **CO-AUTHORED NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE: AFFECTIVE, EMBODIED INTERACTION THROUGH COMBINING THE DIACHRONIC WITH THE SYNCHRONISTIC** Carol MacGillivray & Bruno Mathez

**84** **UNTITLED** Phoebe Hui  
+ **PHOEBE HUI** in conversation with Jonathan Munro

**98** **GOING WITH THE FLOW**  
**GAIL PEARCE** in conversation with Jonathan Munro

**102** **THE SWEET SPOT** Graeme Crowley in collaboration with The Mustard and Blood Orchestra

**108** **STRATA-CASTER: AN EXPLORATION INTO THE TOPOGRAPHY OF POWER, PRESTIGE, AND POSITION** Joseph Farbrook  
+ **JOSEPH FARBROOK** in conversation with Emilie Giles

**114** **WHERE IS LOURENÇO MARQUES?: A MOSAIC OF VOICES IN A 3D VIRTUAL WORLD** Rui Filipe Antunes

**122** **GEOMETRY**

**FÉLICIE D'ESTIENNE D'ORVES** in conversation with Claire Le Gouellec

**130** **THE EMPOWERING POTENTIAL OF RE-STAGING** Birgitta Cappelen & Anders-Petter Andersson

**140** **SCENOCOSME: BODY AND CLOUDS**

Grégory Lasserre & Anaïs met den Ancxt

**154** **LIGHT, DATA, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Dave Colangelo & Patricio Davila

**164** **INCARNATED SOUND IN MUSIC FOR FLESH II: DEFINING GESTURE IN BIOLOGICALLY INFORMED MUSICAL PERFORMANCE**

Marco Donnarumma

**176** **THE STORY OF PARCIVAL: DESIGNING INTERACTION FOR AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DANCE PERFORMANCE**

Gesa Friederichs-Büttner & Benjamin Walther-Franks

**190** **INTERACTION'S ROLE AS CATALYST OF SYNTHESIZED INTELLIGENCE IN ART** Judson Wright

**200** **IN SEARCH OF A DIGITAL MASTERPIECE (OR TWO): STANZA**

Maria Chatzichristodoulou [aka Maria X]

**212** **TELEMATIC TOUCH AND GO**

Ellen Pearlman, Newman Lau & Kenny Lozowski

**224** **HAPTIC UNCONSCIOUS: A PREHISTORY OF AFFECTIVITY IN MOHOLY-NAGY'S PEDAGOGY AT THE NEW BAUHAUS**

Charissa N. Terranova

**236** **THE GESTALT OF STREET TEAM: GUERRILLA TACTICS, GIFS, AND THE MUSEUM** Charissa N. Terranova

**240** **BIOGRAPHIES**

**250** **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**



*Timescapes* Madrid, 1997–2005, Stanza, photograph software output, 200 cm by 180 cm, © Stanza.

# In Search of a Digital Masterpiece (or Two): Stanza

by

Maria Chatzichristodoulou  
[aka Maria X]

University of Hull

## THE PROBLEM OF THE DIGITAL MASTERPIECE

On Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2011 Christiane Paul, Adjunct Curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art, an influential and prolific writer and speaker on matters of digital/ media art, was discussing contemporary digital identities at a Thursday Club event – one of a regular series of public talks organized by Goldsmiths Digital Studios, University of London. In this discussion Paul asked: “are there any digital artworks that can be said to merit the title of a masterpiece?” and suggested that there are no works within this area of practice that could be described as ‘masterpieces.’

The term is certainly loaded, wrapped within visions of romance, grandeur and genius that raise expectations to almost a mythical level. In that sense, nothing contemporary can possibly merit the title of a ‘masterpiece,’ as only time can tell whether a piece of art can sustain its relevance, status and appeal, and whether it is forward looking enough to move generations beyond its own. But what does the term ‘masterpiece’ actually mean? Etymologically, it refers not to the work of a master, but to the work of an apprentice aspiring to become a master in the old European guild system: it is derived from the Dutch term “meesterstuk,” or the “work by which a craftsman attains the rank of master.”<sup>1</sup> Other dictionary definitions refer to “a work of art [...] which is made with great skill,”<sup>2</sup> or “an extremely good example of something.”<sup>3</sup> Does Paul’s statement therefore suggest that there are no digital artworks made with great skill? No digital artworks that are extremely good examples of this specific area of practice?

## ENTER STANZA

On my way out of the Thursday Club event I encountered digital artist Stanza; an artist whose practice I have been enticed to follow since the late 1990s, when he contributed generative artworks of the *Amorphoscapes* series and the net art piece *The Central City* to the Medi@terra art and technology festival I was co-directing at the time (Athens, Greece). Stanza is an internationally recognized, award winning digital artist, pioneer in his use of technology in the arts, who boasts a vast and diverse body of work that spans a range of practices, techniques and media: from prints, video and net art works, to interactive installations, responsive environments, generative art and complex digital ecosystems. He started creating and presenting work in the mid-1980s with pieces such as *Artitextures*, a multi-monitor video art installation (originally made as video wallpaper) presented at the V2\_ Institute in Den Bosch, Holland (1986); and the *Conundrum* video, shot in the grey cemented mazes of South London and heavily aestheticized in post-production (1987). Both works use city images and sounds to reflect upon fractured urbanity, communicating a sense of cultural discontinuity and emotional isolation within a post-industrial urban landscape.

Though the thematic strands, aesthetics, and affective impact of Stanza’s work have remained remarkably consistent over the years, dealing with issues such as urbanism, solitude and surveillance culture, his practice has undergone significant shifts: he has moved from creating linear, object-based works such as prints and videos, to (often grand-scale) compositions of (a)live, open-ended, permeable, and unpredictable systems characterized by a state of flux.

## SITUATIONIST CITIES

The Situationist International (or SI) movement (formed 1957), “a revolutionary alliance of European avant-garde artists”<sup>4</sup> ideologically rooted in Marxism and Surrealism, advocated the construction of ‘situations’ as a means of fulfilling human desires suppressed by capitalist consumerism. Through their two main fields of experimental study, Unitary Urbanism (UU) and psychogeography, SI were concerned with a critique of urbanism and a re-envisaging of ways to structure and relate to this geographical, architectural and social space. Unitary Urbanism, a “synthesis of art and technology,”<sup>5</sup> envisaged “a terrain of experience for the *social* space of the cities of the future.”<sup>6</sup> According to the Situationists, UU was a move past functionalism in an attempt to reach beyond the immediately useful to ‘the scenery of daydreams’: “In light of the fact that today cities themselves are presented as lamentable spectacles, a supplement to the museums for tourists driven around in glass-in buses, UU envisages the urban environment as the terrain of participatory games.”<sup>7</sup>

Stanza also deals with cities: urban landscapes and soundscapes, along with their complex social functions and dynamic networks of interconnections, have been central to his artistic practice. Influenced by the Situationist International since the early stages of his



career, Stanza undertakes a critique of contemporary urbanism that is not defined primarily by restrictive architectures but by surveillance networks and connective data flows. Stanza's cybercities<sup>8</sup> and data cities<sup>9</sup> might not directly constitute a terrain of participatory games, but they are playful 'dérives'<sup>10</sup> to fragments of urbanism that gesture beyond the functional and into 'daydreams' – or urban nightmares.

The net art piece *The Central City* (1997–2001), which won an accolade of awards (VIDA 6.0 2004, Videobrasil 2001, among others) and was exhibited internationally in practically every venue/festival that presents net art, is an interactive audiovisual work made for the internet, which offers 30 different versions of urban experience. Stanza's intention in this work is to explore the notion of an 'organic identity' of the city and highlight the tensions that compose this: the natural versus the man-made; the attempts at organization and control versus the uncontrollable and unexpected movements of the crowd; the organic versus the superimposed; structure versus chaos; one versus many; collectivity versus individualism; networks of information technology versus networks of organisms and urban sites; urban and virtual communities. Net art works like *Central City* and its 'sister project' *Inner City* (2002) visualize the city as an "organic network of grids and diagrams"<sup>11</sup> that is both alive in its own 'organicity' and emotionally detached from human ardour. Stanza's cities are their own organisms, but they are not there (not visibly, at least) to be inhabited by the organisms of other – human, animal or cyborg – beings. Those are urban experiences of seductive data flows, aesthetically pleasing but emotionally detached, beautiful but bloodless.

The Situationist movement criticized the use of technology "to further multiply the pseudo-games of passivity and social disintegration (television)," while pointing out that "new forms of playful participation

that are made possible by this same technology are regulated and policed."<sup>12</sup> Stanza is also questioning the way technology is used to log and control peoples' movements. Through *Inner City* he warns against the ubiquity of technology within modern cities. He highlights the precariousness of contemporary urbanism as our own cities are turning into menacing totalitarian superstructures: "Data mining will be part of the fabric of the landscape. Everything is or will be tracked. [...] The patterns we make, the forces we weave, are all being networked into retrievable data structures."<sup>13</sup>

As Stanza delves deeper into creating abstracted audiovisual experiences of urbanism, his works, like physical cities, become interactive. The earlier 'city' pieces are self-generative artworks, which respond to the user's move of the mouse-grid structures. As Michael Gibbs observes: "What both worlds [...] have



*The Central City*, 1997–2005, Stanza, installation, © Stanza.

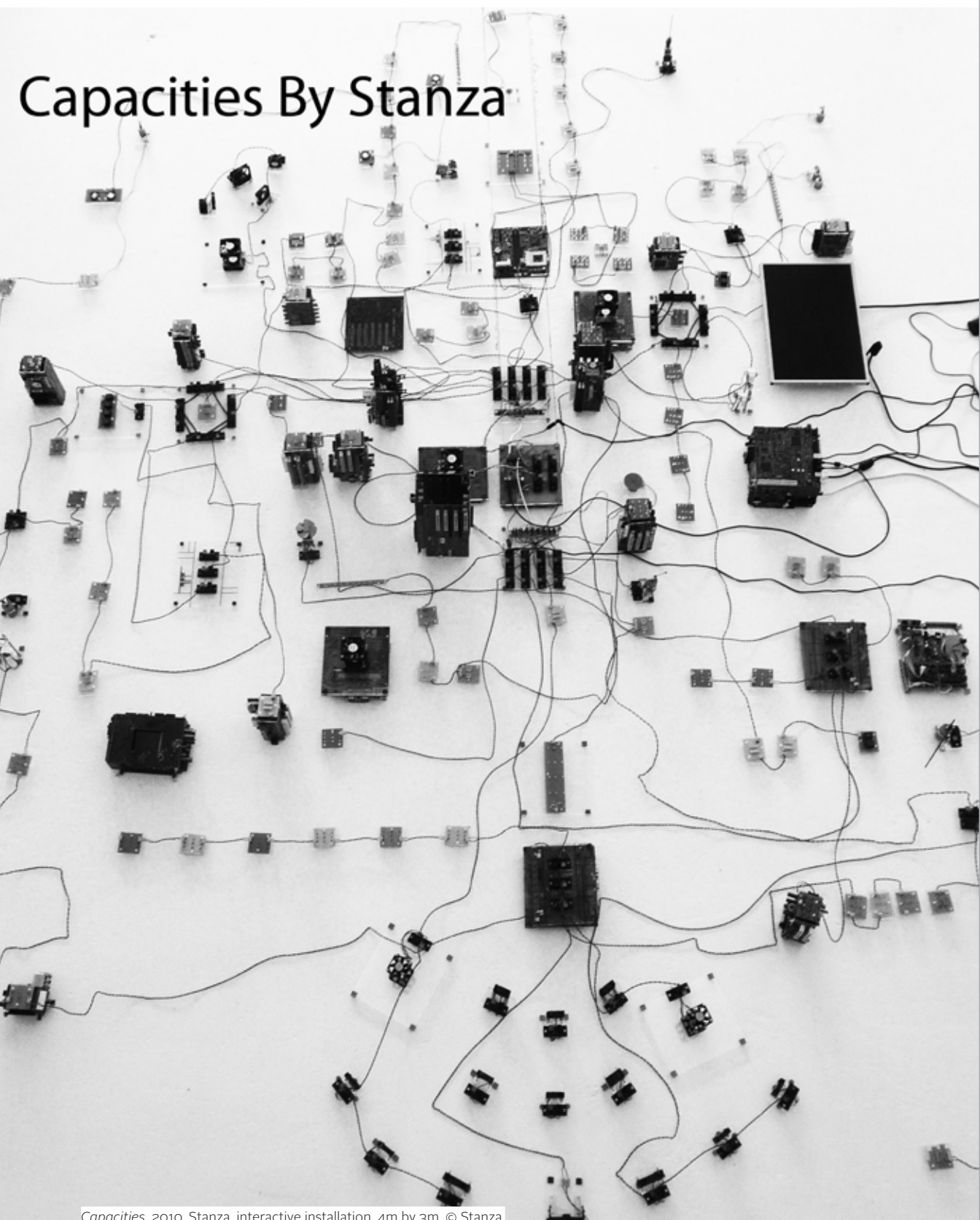
in common is the grid, a cellular structure that inevitably proliferates through arterial streets and cables into urban sprawl or information overload."<sup>14</sup> His more recent works though, such as *Sensity* (2004–2010), *Capacities* (2008–2010), and *Sonicity* (2008–2010), respond not to a single user and his/her mouse moves, but to the whole complex ecosystem that surrounds them. Since 2004 Stanza embeds technology into the urban environment to monitor its 'pulse.' *Sensity*, *Capacities*, and *Sonicity* monitor their environment through wireless sensors, collect real time data by recording every change that occurs around them (the sensors measure specific aspects of the environment such as temperature and humidity), and respond to those changes by visualizing them within the gallery space. Stanza's "open social sculptures"<sup>15</sup> are not only useful (i.e. informative, meaningful) but also beautiful, poetic, "the scenery of daydreams."<sup>16</sup> Those

works are subtly – rather than polemically – critical of urbanism, and of the way digital technology is employed for the surveillance of our every move.

### THE ART OF LOGICAL SYSTEMS

Since 1995 Stanza has been creating generative artworks. Matt Pearson describes generative art as "the discipline of taking strict, cold, logical processes and subverting them into creating illogical, unpredictable, and expressive results. [...] [It] is about creating the organic using the mechanical."<sup>17</sup> Stanza's large body of generative works succeeds in spawning organic, messy aliveness out of coded structures. Works such as *Biocities* (2003) (exhibited at the Venice Biennale, 2007) and *Nanocities* (2006), both part of the *Amorphoscapes* series, are "paintings actioned by the interpretation of code"<sup>18</sup> that approach the city itself as code: Processes of city-formation, design, building and mapping; interconnected webs of activities; behaviors of public interaction – all essentials of urbanity conceptualized, translated and visualized as abstracted, generative images and sounds. These interactive audiovisual 'paintings' "map out emergent city spaces"<sup>19</sup> by performing themselves – their aliveness – differently. Each work demonstrates its own distinct set of behaviors that impact upon its visual and aural manifestation – that is, upon its nature, its character, its very existence. Small changes might entail big differences. In essence, Stanza's generative works subtly unearth and gradually (even seductively) bring to the fore the fact that, within the complex interconnected urban networks and multi-layered city flows we – I, you – are "both integral and irrelevant, as the movement occurs both because, but also in spite of your presence."<sup>20</sup> Those works, says Stanza, "all disclose new ways of seeing the world."<sup>21</sup> I would add: ways of seeing the world as a beautiful logical system.

# Capacities By Stanza



*Capacities*, 2010, Stanza, interactive installation, 4m by 3m, © Stanza.

In 1968 art historian Jack Burnham introduced the notion of systems aesthetics for what he termed 'unobjects' (any artwork that cannot be classified as an object in a way a painting or a sculpture can, such as environments, kinetic art, public art, happenings and so on). Burnham explained that a systems viewpoint "is focused on the [...] relationships between organic and nonorganic systems," and suggested that a 'systems aesthetic will become the dominant approach to a maze of socio-technical conditions rooted only in the present.'<sup>22</sup> The historical interest in systems aesthetics in the 1960s and 1970s was directly related to technological innovations of the times as well as the study of cybernetics (itself closely related to systems theory). Thus systems aesthetics stems from a post-industrial condition of technological being (or a *destining* of technological being as Heidegger would put it). Since media art practice inevitably deals with technology as its medium (and often message), it is inevitable that such practices are often characterized by a systems aesthetic. Stanza's work has a clear interest in systems. This becomes manifest not only in the works' aesthetics, but also in their structure, content and 'dramaturgy' (in terms of the development of live, dramatic interaction between users and works).

In a self-conducted interview in relation to his project *Soundtoys* (1998–2012)<sup>23</sup> Stanza explains that his aim is "to develop analogies for the organic identity of the city as an urban community and make links with electronic networks,"<sup>24</sup> attempting to draw parallels and connections between organic and nonorganic systems. The city thus becomes, says Stanza, "a visual labyrinth, a maze of circumstance."<sup>25</sup> It is interesting that Stanza, like Burnham, uses the term 'maze' to describe the circumstance that gives context to his work. Indeed his works are often maze-like, and the experience of navigating oneself through those digital urbanities can be complex, fragmented and confusing: one thing leads to another in maze-like structures and

patterns. The repetitive aesthetics make it impossible for the user to be able to account for a beginning or an end in the experience – indeed, one doesn't even know whether linear notions of beginnings and endings do apply. The *Central City* invites the user to navigate him/herself within the experience of a man-made, coded urban maze that grows, shifts and changes in his/her presence – like a 'real' city does. *Urban Generation* (2002–5) collects live CCTV feeds from various cities around the world in real time, and reworks them into multi-layered, abstract patterns and textures – surveillance becomes aestheticized, and exposed.

Stanza's current works go further towards inviting the city and the people that inhabit it to populate and become the artwork. From generative and interactive art such as the *Central City*, Stanza has moved to open systems that collect and re-appropriate real-time data to create multifaceted "urban tapestries,"<sup>26</sup> such as the *Urban Generation*. The even more recent installation *Capacities* consists of two elements: a physical installation within the gallery space made from hundreds of electronic components such as fans, leads and motors, which resembles a miniature electronic city; and a tailor-made network of wireless sensors that is embedded within the gallery space and the urban landscape that surrounds it, and which collects data from its environment. The data collected "include GPS positions, humidity, noise, temperature, and light."<sup>27</sup> The data and their interactions – that is, the events occurring in the environment that surrounds and envelops the installation – are then translated into the force that brings the electronic city to life by causing movement and change – that is, new events and actions – to occur. In this way the city performs itself in real time through its physical avatar or electronic double: the city performs itself through an-other city. Cause and effect become apparent in a discreet, intuitive manner, when certain events that occur in the real



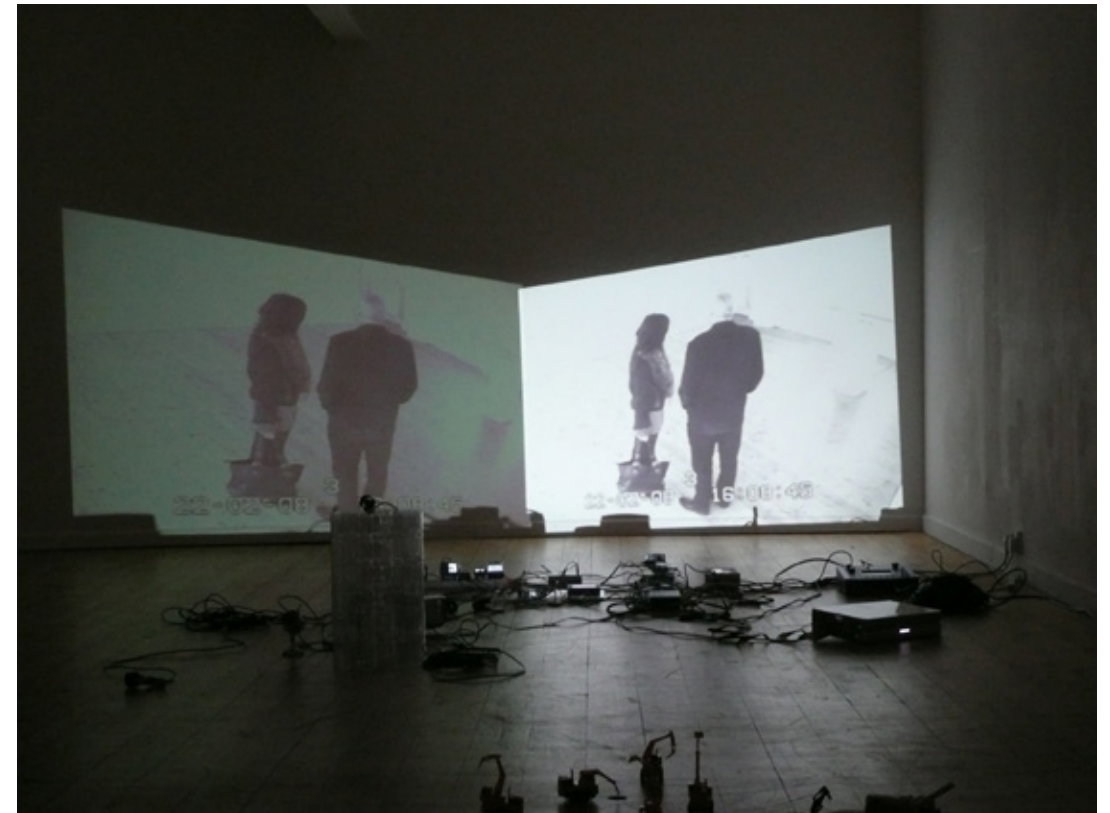
city cause certain other events to occur in its completely different, but seamlessly incorporated, double. The avatar city is not only controlled by the real city in terms of its function and operation, but also utterly dependent upon it for its existence. The co-dependent system of *Capacities* poses questions around issues of interaction, dependence and control within the hyper-mediatized, surveyed, urban environments that envelop the biological, co-dependent systems that human bodies also are.

#### PERFORMATIVITY

*Sonicity*, an installation developed the same time as *Capacities*, is also utterly dependent upon the environment that surrounds it. *Sonicity*, like *Capacities*, operates on the basis of wireless sensors that collect real-time data from the surrounding urban space. In this case the environmental changes of noise, light, temperature and so on are turned into sound through an installation that consists of 170 speakers. This is yet another live performance of the urban environment, manifested as a responsive sound installation. The numerous speakers, distributed on the gallery floor, create a physical maze of cables and sound sources that the user has to negotiate within the space. Again, the artistic outcome of Stanza's work is an 'unobject' that becomes manifest as a complex system, interconnected to and dependent upon other complex systems, both organic (human bodies, nature) and inorganic (man-made structures). What is important here, and in the development of Stanza's practice from works like *The Central City* to the more recent *Capacities* and *Sonicity*, is the turn towards the performative due to the liveness of the installations, which all depend on 'real' (i.e. collected from the environment rather than randomly generated) and real-time data. Though the works had always been focused on the user experience rather than simulations of the urban environ-

ment, earlier works such as *The Central City* were nonetheless attempts to simulate the experience of navigating oneself within a city, through interactive digital representations of urbanism. Stanza's current practice does not simulate the city, nor does it represent the city: it *is* the city. Even more poignantly, it is the city not as it has been, but as it is right *now*.

Chris Salter, in his book *Entangled*, claims that "performance as practice, method and worldview is becoming one of the major paradigms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>28</sup> He points at a shift in the zeitgeist that occurred at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when the euphoria of the virtual (that to some extent characterizes Stanza's early works, as well as several of the media art works of the 1980s and 1990s) was replaced by a reconsideration and re-foregrounding of the physical body<sup>29</sup> and, with it, "embodiment, situatedness, presence, and materiality."<sup>30</sup> This shift in culture that Salter points at, and which one can follow through discourses that re-foreground embodiment and materiality – from Katherine Hayles's influential book *How we Became Posthuman*<sup>31</sup> to Mark Hansen's *New Philosophy for New Media*<sup>32</sup> – is also evident in Stanza's artistic practice, which has shifted from abstract generative representations of cybercities to physical installations situated within a specific habitat and directly dependent upon it for their own being. Rather than simulating or representing a closed structure (object or closed system) those works accurately perform their social milieu as a constantly changing, alive, complex and dynamic open system. Salter explains that, what performance suggests as a worldview is that 'reality' is not pre-given (and thus cannot be represented).<sup>33</sup> What in the past would be a representation of the world around us (that is fixed in time) is replaced by an enactment of the world in the here and now: "the world is actively performed anew."<sup>34</sup> And that is exactly what Stanza achieves with his current practice: to perform the world anew; to approach the world as a reality that "emerges over time" and is "continually transformed through our history of interactions with it."<sup>35</sup>



Visitors To A Gallery, 2008, Stanza, installation, © Stanza.

#### 'AFTER PRIVACY'<sup>36</sup>

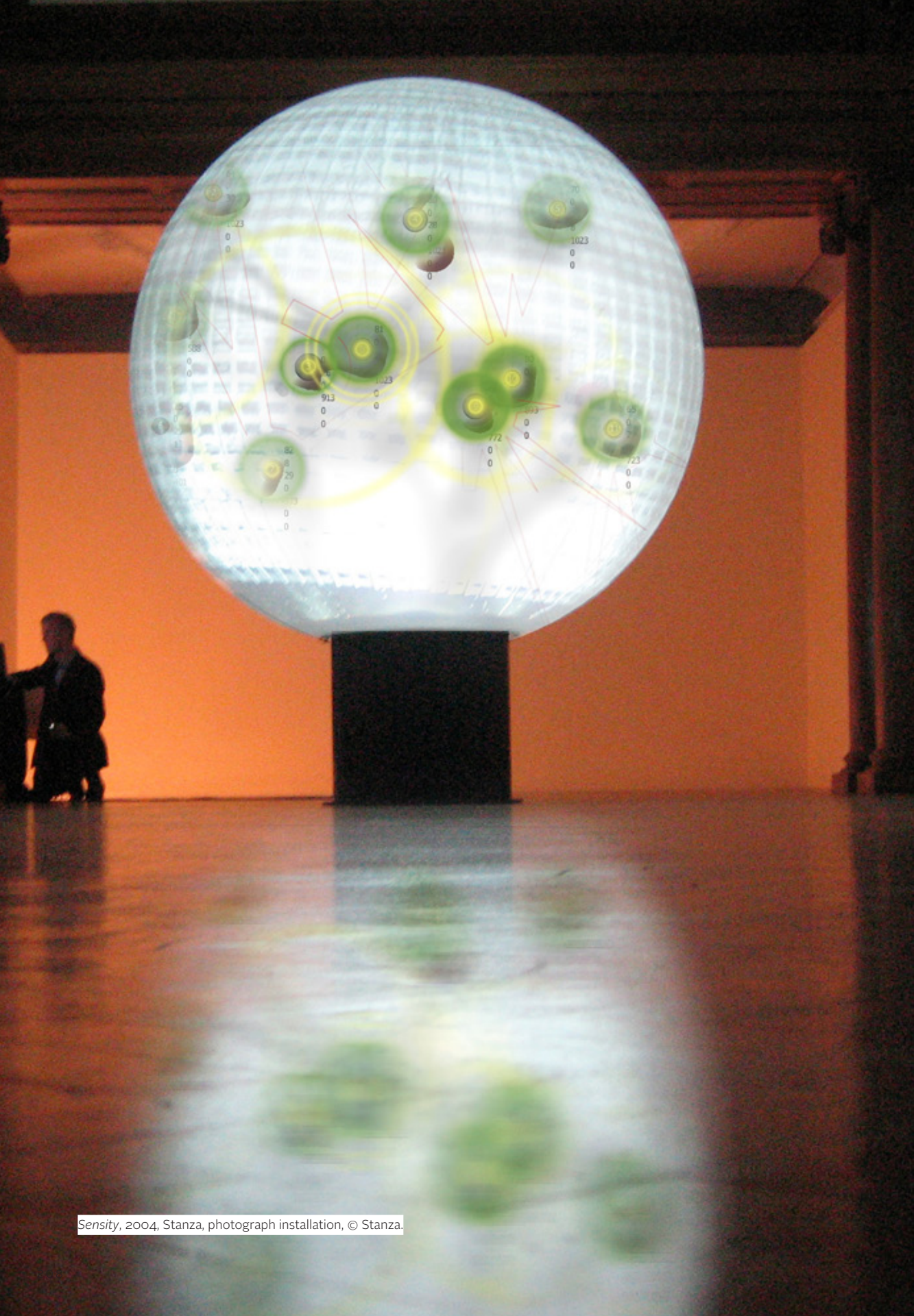
The exhibition *Visitors to a Gallery – referential self, embedded* (2008) uses the live CCTV system inside the gallery space to create an artwork where the protagonists are the visitors to the gallery. Visitors to the Plymouth Arts Centre in February 2008 were controlling the CCTV feeds through their own movements in space. Here, the gallery (and the artwork) becomes transparent, as they are turned inside out. What is normally hidden (the CCTV cameras, the CCTV footage) becomes exhibited. What is normally exhibited (the artwork), is an 'unobject': the act of unleashing control (over the gallery visitors) through making the mechanism of control transparent and visible to all. Once the visitors take control over the system that has been put in place to control them they become the artwork and, to some extent, the artist. The – crucial, urgent, even burning – question posed here, and in several of Stanza's works, is the matter of access to data (especially surveillance data): Who owns your image? If we accept that surveillance systems (public, private, as well as private ones that allow public access

such as Google Earth) are here to stay, then Stanza asks: "will these systems be open or closed?"<sup>37</sup> Who will have access to the data those systems collect and often store? Who will profit from them? Stanza's work encourages us to reflect upon the urgent questions of surveillance and data ownership – our own data, the traces that we unwittingly (and often unknowingly) leak on a daily basis as we go about our everyday lives – through the act of laying out in public, "layering, and re-layering multiple instances of our daily realities, the documentation of segments of space and time, fragmentation and recomposition, bits and bites, moments [...]."<sup>38</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Closing this essay on Stanza's complex and intricate artistic practice, I would like to propose a brief 'détournement' to Paul's discussion of the 'digital masterpiece.' My personal frustration with the use of this term led me to the Virtual Collection of Masterpieces, of project of the Asia Europe Museum Network, and





Sensity, 2004, Stanza, photograph installation, © Stanza.

a series of mini interviews with Asian and European students and cultural professionals who are asked to define this contested concept. According to those international emergent and established experts a masterpiece is:

- » 'Original'
- » 'Inspiring'
- » 'Moving'
- » 'Recognizable'
- » 'Memorable'
- » 'Monumental'
- » 'Historically significant'
- » 'The pinnacle of an artist's production'
- » 'The idea of a genius'
- » 'An ultimate favorite'
- » 'The most vivid expression of one's personal experience'
- » 'A work that expands the definition of what art is'
- » 'An idea that influences future ideas'
- » 'An artwork that demonstrates balance between technique and content'
- » 'A work that can change one's life'
- » 'A work that reminds one of the importance of being alive'

Also:

- » 'Context'
- » 'The communication of an idea'
- » 'A piece that starts a discussion'
- » 'A work that communicates with a large number of people'
- » 'A piece that seeks answers to relevant questions'
- » 'A work that is most representative of an artist'

And:

- » 'The wrong concept [in terms of approaching a work of art]'
- » 'A term surrounded by romance and hype'
- » 'A self-referential concept that exists within the framework of art history'
- » 'A very expensive piece of art'
- » 'My work when finished (I am an artist)' <sup>39</sup>

I enjoy the diversity of responses to this question as it acutely demonstrates the considerable distancing of the meaning of the term 'masterpiece' from its original etymological (and social) context as well as the tremendous complexity this carries within a current art historical framework. The responses range from zealous protectionism of the weight the term should carry (the idea of a genius), to romantic existentialism (work that can change one's life), pragmatic understanding of an art world defined by global markets (a very expensive piece of art), critical questioning (context, self-referential concept) and, finally, the rejection of the term (a term surrounded by hype, the wrong concept). My favorite response though is the following: "A masterpiece is a masterpiece because someone said so, and this person was a master at some point." <sup>40</sup> Indeed, masterpieces, both contemporary and historical ones, have been commissioned, acquired and preserved by wealthy patrons of the arts, either private or, more recently, public (through museums, foundations, and public art collections). Some expert or master, at some point, pronounced the works to be masterpieces for them to exist today and be historically perceived as such.

Christiane Paul has been one of the most knowledgeable and insightful spokespersons for the field of digital/media art practice within the last decade. It seems though that her statement regarding a perceived lack of digital masterpieces is a proposition consistent with a lengthy and persistent institutional turn against – or just past – digital /media art practices (and practitioners), that has more to do with a consensual numbness when confronted with a new, and radically different in some ways, type of artistic practice, than with the aesthetic and conceptual value of those works. If "a masterpiece is a masterpiece because someone said so," someone must also dare make this claim within the field of digital and media art practice. And contested though the term might be, I will have to take up



the gauntlet and argue that some of Stanza's works indeed merit to be called 'digital masterpieces.'

Artworks such as the long acclaimed *Central City* and the more recent *Sonicity* and *Capacities* are skillful, technically flawless, aesthetically pleasing, conceptually complex, and politically urgent. Those works are not only extremely good examples of the potency, efficacy and cultural currency of certain instances of digital art practice, but also characteristic of their times in an exemplary manner – as many masterpieces are. *Central City*, *Sonicity* and *Capacities* are the artistic expression of the city itself: they are the digital or technologized Other of contemporary urban mazes sprawling uncontrollable around the globe, seductive and threatening, sensual and treacherous. Beatriz Jaguaribe argues that in a world of "globalized branding and intense cultural hybridity" it is the cities that continue to provide what Baudelaire termed "the commotion of the modern" through the "tumultuous rush of the urban maze."<sup>41</sup> Stanza's works are the complex, often confusing (because uncharted or unmapped) and hyper-stimulating representations of this 'rush of urban maze'; they are urban fantasies, sensual urban experiments. Those are works that live *within* the 'flesh' of the city; they document it, measure it, map it, represent it, imagine it, drift through it, perform it, and become it. Stanza is an inspired 'poet' of the post-modern, technologized, globalized and frenzied cities we inhabit; and of our own lives in them. He is not a landscape painter, and his works are not classical masterpieces – those are the masterpieces of today, of the contemporary digital age. (Though the term does remain contested). ■

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. D. Harper *Online Etymology Dictionary* official Web Site, 2001–2012, <http://www.etymonline.com/> (accessed January 10, 2011).
2. *Cambridge Dictionaries Online* official Web Site, 2011, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/> (accessed August 8, 2011).
3. *Macmillan Dictionary* official Web Site, 2009–12, <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/> (accessed August 8, 2011).
4. Tate Glossary Online, "Situationist International," *Tate*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=277> (accessed May 1, 2012).
5. Gil J. Wolman, "Address by the Lettrist International Delegate to the Alba Conference of September 1956," trans. R. Keehan (address, Alba Conference, Piedmont, Italy, September 1956).
6. Internationale Situationniste, "Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s," *Internationale Situationniste* 3 (1959), <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/unitary.html> (accessed September 27, 2011).
7. *Ibid.*
8. A 'cybercity' is defined by Boyer as an 'unwieldy mixture of urban dystopia and cyberspace.' M. Christine Boyer, *CyberCities: Visual Perception in the Age of Electronic Communication* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Princeton Architectural Press: 1997), 14.
9. A piece of the same title by Stanza (2003–4) collects 'assets' from the city in real time (e.g. CCTV images) and displays them in the gallery space.
10. A 'dérive' is a 'drift' in the practice of psychogeography. See: Guy-Ernest Debord, "Theory of the Dérive," trans. Ken Knabb *Les Lèvres Nues* 9 (1956), <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/314> (accessed May 1, 2012).
11. Stanza's official Web Site, "The Inner City," 2002, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
12. Internationale Situationniste, *ibid.*
13. Stanza's official Web Site, "Microcity Databalls," 2004, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
14. Michael Gibbs, "The Central City by Stanza," *Art Monthly Online* (March 2002), <http://www.stanza.co.uk/emergentcity/?p=480> (accessed September 27, 2011).
15. Stanza's official Web Site, "Sensity," 2004–10, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
16. Internationale Situationniste, *ibid.*
17. Matt Pearson, *Generative Art: A Practical Guide Using Processing* (New York, Manning: 2011), xviii.
18. Stanza's official Web Site, "Beautiful Maps," 2005, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
19. Stanza and Rob van Kranenburg, "Stanza: Can we use new technologies to imagine a world where we are liberated and empowered..." May, 2012, <http://www.stanza.co.uk/emergentcity/> (accessed May 14, 2012).
20. Charlotte Frost, "Coded Behaviour," in *Artsway Catalogue* (Venice Biennale 2007), Venice, 2007, <http://www.amorphoscapes.com/> (accessed August 20, 2011).
21. Stanza's official Web Site, "CCITYV," 2003, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
22. Jack Burnham [1968], "Systems Esthetics," in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art C. 1970*, ed. D. Salvo, 166–9 (London: Tate, 2005).
23. *Soundtoys* is an online platform for audiovisual artists, where they can meet and exhibit new work. See: <http://www.soundtoys.net/> (accessed August 30, 2011).
24. Stanza's official Web Site, "Continuing the Search for the 'Soul of the City,'" 2005, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
25. Stanza's official Web Site, *ibid.*
26. Stanza, interview with author, June 10, 2011.
27. Stanza's official Web Site, "Capacities: Life in the Emergent City," 2010, <http://www.stanza.co.uk> (accessed August 30, 2011).
28. Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press: 2010), xxi.
29. Maria Chatzichristodoulou, "Performance, All Over the Map: On Chris Salter's *Entangled*," *Rhizome Blog Online*, August, 2010, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2010/aug/4/performance-all-over-the-map-on-chris-salters-enta/> (accessed September 26, 2011).
30. Chris Salter, *ibid.*
31. See: N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press: 1999).
32. See: Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 2004).
33. Maria Chatzichristodoulou, *ibid.*
34. Chris Salter, *ibid.*, xxvi.
35. Chris Salter, *ibid.*, xxvii.
36. This subheading is a reference to Sean Cubitt's chapter 'After Privacy: the Politics of Intimacy' in his book *Digital Aesthetics* (London and New York: Sage, 1998).
37. Stanza, interview with author, June 10, 2011.
38. Stanza, *ibid.*
39. Virtual Collection of Masterpieces (VCM) "What is a Masterpiece" (video), *YouTube*, September, 2007, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMjghfDWcvk&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMjghfDWcvk&feature=player_embedded) (accessed January 10, 2012).
40. Virtual Collection of Masterpieces (VCM), *ibid.*
41. Beatriz Jaguaribe, "Cities Without Maps: Favelas and the Aesthetics of Realism," in *Urban Imaginaries: Locating the Modern City*, eds. Alev Çinar and Thomas Bender, 100–120 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

