NYU

MEGA PIXELS

A NEW SPACE FOR EXTREME PROJECTIONS

by Suzanne Krause / GSAS ’08

Travelers along the West Side Highway might notice IAC’s Chelsea headquarters because of Frank Gehry’s striking architectural handiwork—an angular glass igloo amongst the block’s utilitarian garages. But the 16 students in Daniel Shiffman’s Big Screens class are drawn to the smooth white wall in the lobby, on which passersby can see Kool-Aid colors pulsating to music. The 120-foot-long, 11-foot-tall video wall is one of the world’s largest high-resolution video walls, driven by a hidden network of 42 servers, 21 projectors. Shiffman charges his students in the Interactive Telecommunications Program at the Tisch School of the Arts to create displays for the multimillion-dollar video wall, which are then exhibited on-site for several minutes apiece at the end of each semester. Using screen-based algorithms that can be linked to weather satellites, ambient noise, or physical movement, students have generated works, such as a flower that grows to a drum beat (Flowersworth) and a cell-phone-linked interactive game of shooting colored hearts (Let It Snow). The sheer scale of the medium, the unique aspect ratio, and the real-time programming would have been a near-impossible challenge 10 years ago, Shiffman says. But with Big Screens now in its second semester, he adds, “We’re pushing the limits even further.”

Emergency response

Predicting the Unthinkable

CATASTROPHE SIMULATION OFFERS NEW YORKERS A “PLAN C”

by Ted Boscia

Just as safety booklets in airplane seat pockets depict passengers placidly slipping on oxygen masks as the plane loses pressure, emergency plans often operate as if people will evacuate from a terrorist attack or natural disaster in an orderly, single-file line. NYU researchers have now advanced emergency preparedness beyond such assumptions with a new digital model that simulates minute by minute how a crisis might unfold. Called PLAN C, or Planning with Large Agent-Networks Against Catastrophes, the software relies on hundreds of algorithms to calculate response and recovery efforts during a disaster and is the first to allow public-safety officials to test-drive their response ahead of a crisis. “We want to consider the worst case, because that’s what you’ll probably see,” says Ian Portelli, project manager for NYU’s Center for Catastrophe Preparedness and Response. “In many other situations, people don’t have children, they walk straight, there are no wheelchairs, everyone speaks English. That’s not real life.”

To better understand how civilians behave in emergencies, the PLAN C team—a multidisciplinary group with funding from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that draws on faculty from medicine, psychology, social science, public health, computer science, law, and other areas—studied the outcomes of domestic and international catastrophes, such as Hurricane Katrina and the December 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka and Thailand. They found that people instinctively reach out to loved ones in a crisis, sometimes at their own risk, which means evacuees can take far longer to leave if they must collectively move to safety. PLAN C algorithms.

It’s hard to predict human behavior,” Portelli admits. “We know how many minutes we’ll have to get you to a hospital to save you. But how will you behave in a vulnerable situation when your child is at school and your wife is across town?”

Along with social dynamics, PLAN C weighs what principal investigator Lewis Goldfrank calls “the ingredients of a community”—hundreds of variables such as city infrastructure and resources, commuting patterns, and community beliefs. One hypothetical supposes a sarin gas attack on Manhattan’s transportation hubs, including the Port Authority Bus Terminal and Grand Central Terminal. In this case, the PLAN C software displays a Geographic Information System map of the city overlaid with color-coded circles representing hospitals, subway stations, and other landmarks. It shows the real-time crosscurrent of victims fleeing and rescuers approaching the scene, which can help planners determine the optimal locations for staging areas and expose gaps in preparedness. The team also replicated an out-of-town evacuation of residents fleeing a hypothetical sarin nerve gas disaster, mapped by a center for catastrophe preparedness team, offers planners a visual sense of emergency response over a five-minute period.

The HYPOTHETICAL SARIN NERVE GAS DISASTER, HAPPPENED AT A CENTER FOR CATASTROPHIC PREPAREDNESS TEAM, OFFERS PLANNERS A VISUAL SENSE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE OVER A FIVE-MINUTE PERIOD.
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Along with social dynamics, PLAN C weighs what principal investigator Lewis Goldfrank calls “the ingredients of a community”—hundreds of variables such as city infrastructure and resources, commuting patterns, and community beliefs. One hypothetical supposes a sarin gas attack on Manhattan’s transportation hubs, including the Port Authority Bus Terminal and Grand Central Terminal. In this case, the PLAN C software displays a Geographic Information System map of the city overlaid with color-coded circles representing hospitals, subway stations, and other landmarks. It shows the real-time crosscurrent of victims fleeing and rescuers approaching the scene, which can help planners determine the optimal locations for staging areas and expose gaps in preparedness.

The team also replicated an out-of-town exercise involving the hypothetical sarin nerve gas disaster, mapped by a Center for Catastrophe Preparedness team, offers planners a visual sense of emergency response on a four-minute period.

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THE HYPOTHETICAL SARIN NERVE GAS DISASTER, MAPPED BY A CENTER FOR CATASTROPHE PREPAREDNESS TEAM, OFFERS PLANNERS A VISUAL SENSE OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE ON A FOUR-MINUTE PERIOD.
THE SECRET’S OUT

The Prohibition era may be over, but those who know where to look can still party like it’s 1929. Trevor Cano, an administrative aide for university development and alumni relations, says Mark Jenkinson, associate professor of nutrition and food studies, has the insider knowledge. “The neighborhood isn’t just for tourists anymore,” Cano says. “When Krishnendu Ray immigrated to New York, he was plagued by such nostalgia for Indian home cooking that he switched his studies from political science to food. Now an assistant professor of nutrition and food studies, Ray says what he misses most are the traditional ingredients and spices, and they’ll be disappointed otherwise.” Still, Café Spice has become a habit, he confers, because of its delicious dhal and inexpensive prices. The bistro’s proximity to campus, on University Place, makes at the perfect spot to grade papers over a lunch of lamb shawarma and curry roti. For a special treat, however, Ray opts for TABLA. There he can choose from two different dining experiences. “The balcony level offers upscale Indian cuisine infused with Indian spices and flavors, while the downstairs Bistro Bar serves home-style fare.” Ray especially likes the creative twists on some of his favorite dishes, such as the Italian-inspired rosemary naan and the fish steamed in banana leaves. “They play with the traditional ingredients and spices so that it’s stylized,” he says, “but it works.”

THE PERFECT PANAMPERING

After raising more than $3 billion for the Campaign for NYU, a girl could use a break. So when Debra A. LaMorte, senior vice president for development and alumni relations, finds time to relax, she heads to SILK DAY SPA off Fifth Avenue. “It’s a real oasis,” she says. “It’s so serene, it feels like you were swept into another world.” With deep red and golden tones, accented with bamboo and black stones, the spa exudes Eastern tranquility. LaMorte is partial to its facial and massages, but Silk offers every- thing from quick fixes, such as the New York Minute Peel—a half-hour facial for those on-the-go—to more extravagant specials, such as the Urban Vacation, which combines a body scrub, hot stone massage, and papaya mango wrap. But whatever the treatment, LaMorte says she’s always welcomed by clean conditions and impeccable service—a refreshing change from other spas that can be crowded, noisy, or too pushy with their products. “You never feel as though you’re on any kind of mass production line,” she says. “It’s a very individual place.”

DOUBLE THE DHAL

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11 MADISON AVENUE, 212-899-0667; WWW.TABLANY.COM
WHETHER IT’S UNLOCKING A SECRET NIGHTSPOT OR INDULGING IN JUST TOO GOOD TO KEEP TO HIMSELF.

19 29 . Trevor Cano, an administrative aide for university development and alumni relations, discovered such a watering hole—tucked inside the East Village unassuming telephone booth, and, even though it’s called Please Don’t Tell, or PDT, rewards those who find it.