

NYU

IN NYC

PHOTO © DANIEL SHIFFMAN



interactive media

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 mirrors and 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

AT 120 FEET LONG AND 11 FEET HIGH, THE IAC'S VIDEO WALL IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST IN THE WORLD.

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 (*Flowerworks*) 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." ■

Predicting the Unthinkable

CATASTROPHE SIMULATION OFFERS NEW YORKERS A "PLAN C"

by Ted Boscia

Just as those 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 simulations, 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

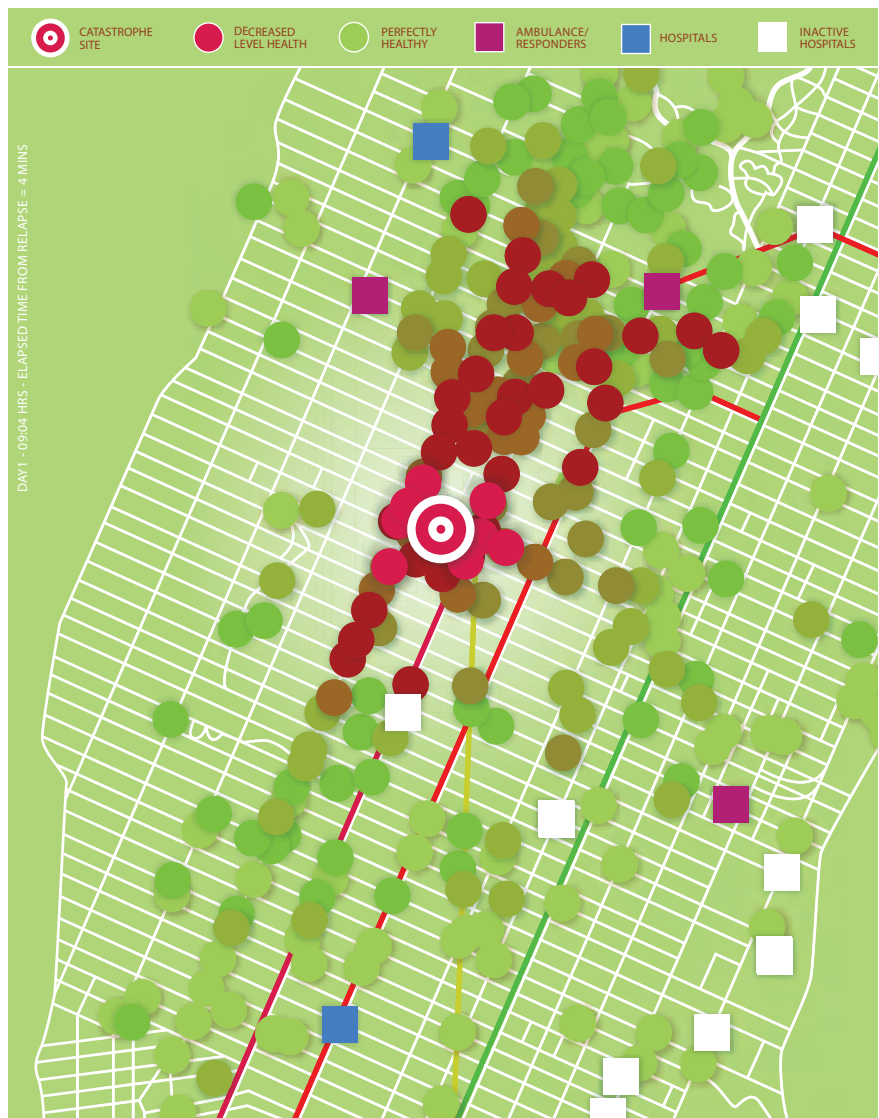
science, law, and other areas—studied the outcomes of domestic and international catastrophes, such as Hurricane Katrina and the December 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka and Thailand. They found that people instinctively reach out to loved ones in a crisis, sometimes at their own risk, which means evacuees can take far longer to leave if they must collect family members scattered across a city or region. This knowledge, along with focus group data from first-responders, helped shape the 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 "all 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-

break of food poisoning that spread to 8,000 people in Brazil in 1998 and plans to review the literature on responses to last spring's typhoon in Myanmar and earthquake in China as it relates to the next effort of modeling coastal flooding in New York. The team is currently able to simulate a disaster on the scale of 300,000 casualties (defined as anyone affected physically or psychologically by a calamity) and intends to increase this to one million, while adapting the software for other regions. Goldfrank, who chairs the emergency-medicine department in the School of Medicine, says: "We can take all the diverse characteristics of a city like New York and make order out of them." ■



THIS 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.

ENNYC

the insider

BEST OF NEW YORK

NYU FACULTY AND STAFF
OFFER UP THEIR FAVORITES

by Renée Alfuso / CAS '06

PDT

DUMBO

TABLA

WHETHER IT'S UNLOCKING A SECRET NIGHTSPOT OR INDULGING IN A SPA GETAWAY, THERE'S SOMETHING FUN FOR EVERYONE THIS FALL.

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, discovered such a watering hole and, even though it's called Please Don't Tell, or **PDT**, it's just too good to keep to himself. Tucked inside the East Village frankfurter joint Crif Dogs is an unassuming telephone booth, but dial the right number and—*viola!*—the back wall opens into a modern-day speakeasy. “Suddenly you're right in this really nice, low-lit bar,” Cano says. PDT rewards those who find it with an array of inventive drinks, such as the Hemingway Daiquiri, a white rum, citrus juice, and maraschino liqueur concoction,

and the absinthe-based Corpse Reviver No. 2, which landed on *New York* magazine's 2008 list of best cocktails. For the hungry, PDT offers waffle fries and hot dogs smothered with bacon, jalapeños, and other decadent toppings, passed from next door through a hole in the wall. “It's a fun concept—being able to eat your drunk food before you're drunk,” Cano says.

113 ST. MARKS PLACE, 212-614-0386

SAY CHEESE, NEW YORK

Capturing the perfect shot of New York can be tricky. “If you're in Manhattan, oftentimes you don't see enough to get it,” says Mark Jenkinson, associate teacher in the photography and imaging department at the Tisch School of the Arts. “If you go to New Jersey, it *feels* like you're in

Jersey and New York is just in the background.” After 30 years as a professional photographer, he returns to one location time and again—the **DUMBO** section of Brooklyn. DUMBO, which stands for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass, provides spectacular views of Manhattan, as well as a classic New York icon. “The Brooklyn Bridge arches over in this perfect way and, if you're shooting at night, it's got lights,” Jenkinson says, which brightens the whole upper frame. And with its many restaurants, bars, and galleries, the neighborhood isn't just for the pros, but anyone with a camera. Jenkinson recommends getting there by walking across the bridge or by taking a New York Water Taxi to the Fulton Ferry Landing just west of DUMBO to snap shots along the way.

NEW YORK WATER TAXI, 212-742-1969; WWW.NYWATERTAXI.COM/FULTON

THE PERFECT PAMPERING

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, accentuated with bamboo and black stones, the spa exudes Eastern tranquility. LaMorte is partial to its facials and massages, but Silk offers everything 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



SILK DAY SPA

PHOTOS FROM LEFT: © NOAH KALINA, TOP; MARK JENKINSON, BOTTOM; BILL BETTENCOURT, SILK DAY SPA

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.”

47 WEST 13TH STREET, 212-255-6457; WWW.SILKDAYSPA.COM

DOUBLE THE DHAL

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 at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, Ray says what he misses most are the more subtle flavors from home. “At most Indian restaurants here, the food reeks of spices,” he explains. “That’s the nature of commodified cooking. People expect that aggressive

spice, and they’ll be disappointed otherwise.” Still, Café Spice has become a habit, he confesses, because of its delicious dhal and inexpensive prices. The bistro’s proximity to campus, on University Place, makes it the perfect spot to grade papers over a lunch of lamb thali with curry and rice. For a special treat, however, Ray opts for **TABLA**. There he can choose from two different dining experiences: The balcony level offers upscale American cuisine infused with Indian spices and flavors, while the downstairs Bread 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.”

11 MADISON AVENUE, 212-889-0667; WWW.TABLANY.COM

education

MAKING THE GRADE

by Ted Boscia

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE EVERY REASON TO FAIL: LANGUAGE BARRIERS, THE STRESS

of assimilation, and a lack of family resources, to name a few. In many cases, however, they are beating the odds and outperforming native-born peers in the classroom, according to a study by two professors in the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.

Using data on more than 60,000 high-schoolers provided by the city’s Department of Education, researchers discovered that immigrants surpass U.S.-born students in math scores on Regents exams, graduate on time at a higher rate, and are more likely to take the SAT, a sign that they are college bound. Titled “Do Immigrants Differ from Migrants?,” the working paper by Amy Ellen Schwartz and Leanna Stiefel complements their earlier research, which showed a similar “nativity gap” among NYC students in elementary and middle schools. Performance disparities even hold up in both studies when controlling for race, income, and language facility. “The bottom line is that immigrants are doing better at all levels of school regardless of when they enter the system,” says Schwartz, director of the Institute for Education and Social Policy, a partnership between the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, and Wagner.

After their initial surprise, Schwartz and Stiefel, the institute’s associate director, developed a few ideas about why nonnative students were excelling, including selective migra-

tion. They also surmise that poor, undereducated immigrants often do not enroll upon entering the United States, sparing the school system of those most likely to fail. Similarly, those immigrants who do attend American schools are more motivated to succeed.

The findings from both studies challenge assumptions that foreign-born students overburden the U.S. public-education system. Schwartz and Stiefel believe that their research could upend this misconception, which is often tinged by anti-immigrant sentiment. “Who you go to school with matters, and immigrants are good peers in our classrooms,” Schwartz says. “They’re not the drain on our schools that some people think.” ■



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