METROPOLIS

A LOOK INSIDE

FRANK GEHRY'S
First New York Building

**DREAMING IN CODE**
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*by*
**Andrew Blum**

# Dreaming in Code

Jonathan Harris distills the Web's infinite avalanche of thoughts, facts, and feelings into exquisitely framed portraits of humanity.

**One late-winter morning** Jonathan Harris sat in front of a MacBook in his Brooklyn apartment and opened the Web site We Feel Fine. Candy-colored digital balls and dots bounced around a black background. He clicked on one, and it shattered into a spinning sentence of text that flew to the top of the screen: "I feel for you." Then he clicked on another, and another—all statements beginning with "I feel," harvested live from the Web's millions of blogs by this artwork he cocreated:

*I feel so lonely today.*

*I feel he is there watching over me and even more so when I am in the garden.*

*I feel like I'm in tenth grade all over again.*

*I feel your might; I only have relinquish'd one delight to live beneath your more habitual sway.*

That last one is from William Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality." Janiele, a 23-year-old in Radford, Virginia, posted it on her MySpace blog "twenty-one minutes ago."

Every hour 10×10 scans the RSS feeds of Reuters, the BBC, and the *New York Times* for top international news stories and performs a weighted linguistic analysis to determine the 100 most important words. Corresponding photos are arranged on a grid; clicking on a photo enlarges it and displays links to the relevant articles.

Unsurprised by the serendipitous beauty his Web site creates, Harris then clicked on "Montage," and a grid of colored squares dissolved one by one into thumbnail images, the visual confetti of the blogosphere: *American Idol* contestants, the Eiffel Tower, prom pictures, a puppy. Clicking on one created an elegant little explosion of more candy-colored dots, as the image—a corgi frolicking in the grass, suddenly worthy of Tibor Kalman—expanded to fill the whole window. Clicking again launched the page the dog came from, with an intimacy so sudden it felt like magic: "Bron's Blog: Knitting Without a Net."

Then the wizard pulled back the curtain. "We realized there was all this amazing humanity hiding on the Web, but most people considered it to be a cold, inhuman space," Harris explains, speaking for himself and his frequent collaborator, Sepandar Kamvar, whose day job is technical lead of personalization at Google. "So we asked, 'How can we systematically quantify feelings using the Web?'" In a process Kamvar describes as "not quite rocket science," they wrote a program that scrapes new blog posts, looking for the statement "I feel." With the duplicates thrown out, it yielded 20,000 "feelings" a day. Harris punched up the raw feed of XML code in a source file—in other words, plain text. "Just in this form we could tell it was amazing material," he says. "Which is when the next big layer comes in: how to visualize all this information."

tsunami

**HEADLINES:** (click to read articles)
1. Tsunami devastates Somali island
2. Tsunami Toll Soars at Thailand's Khao Lak Beach
3. Tsunami Followed by Another Kind of Flood: U.S. Citizens' Dollars
4. Peak Threat Still Ahead in Indonesia Tsunami Zone

1. aid
**2. tsunami**
3. disaster

Wednesday, Dec 29 2004, 11pm EST

PREVIOUS HOUR • NEXT HOUR • HISTORY

the of and to a in that it is was if or on you he be with as by at have are this not

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9  10  11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

CURRENT WORD

FIND WORD: [        ]    BY RANK: [        ]    REQUESTED WORD: **THE**

america ensure oil opportunity lines

INTERNET KILLED THE ALIEN STAR

NOVEMBER 18 2005

SAN DIEGO PANDA CUB GETS VERY CUTE NAME

SCIENCE    AGITATE    DISCOVER    CULTURE

BABY PLESIOSAUR BONES FOUND IN ANTARCTIC

An interactive presentation of the 86,800 most used English words, from *the* to *conquistador*, Word Count was designed and developed by Harris in conjunction with Fabrica in 2004. The size of a word corresponds to the frequency of its use, based on data from the British National Corpus.

Harris developed an interactive Web site for *Seed* magazine that explores the balance between science and culture. Small photos linked to online news stories float in the center of the screen. Users can adjust a slider to the right toward "culture," which causes the photos to careen wildly, or toward "science," which organizes them into neat columns.

A collaboration between Harris and Sepandar Kamvar, Love-lines scans thousands of blogs to find expressions of love, hate, and the feelings in between. Statements beginning with "I love," "I like," "I want," "I don't want," or "I hate" are accompanied by the age, gender, and geographical location of the author when available, resulting in a constantly updated database of human desire.

For 30 days last fall, Yahoo! collected words, pictures, videos, drawings, and sounds from more than 170,000 people around the world to create a digital time capsule, developed by Harris. The submissions were organized into ten themes, and could be searched and sorted by contributor demographics. Now closed, the capsule will reopen in March 2020.

We Feel Fine—together with the handful of Harris's other works—defines a profound new kind of information design: it whittles down the world's 70 million Web sites and blogs into a framed image of humanity. And it does it live, continuously, and autonomously. Architects and designers have experimented with computational design, letting a computer run through a spectrum of possibilities within a given set of parameters. But Harris's creations are different: rather than static buildings, magazine covers, or shopping bags, they are constantly changing artistic responses to a constantly changing world. By using the Web as both site and material, they offer a way of seeing rather than merely being a sight.

If you believe that the Internet is a cultural revolution on the level of modern capitalism, the nuclear age, or even the age of reason, then think of Harris as struggling to create its Impressionism, its Abstract Expressionism, or its neoclassicism—struggling, in other words, to develop a new artistic language for a new human condition. And undoubtedly for a new generation. At 27 Harris is different from those of us even just a few years older who made it through high school without e-mail, college without IMs, and at least a few years of our twenties without blogs. The material of experience has changed. The old rituals of memory—photographs, scrapbooks, diaries, letters—have moved onto the Web, opening them up for a new kind of analysis. "The goal for me is really to hold up a mirror to the world, and then open that mirror up to the largest number of people possible," he says.

i feel so alone and this is just another time when i want to go hide where no one will ever find me

7 hours ago / from someone in henderson north carolina united states

We Feel Fine uses the same data-collection engine as Love-lines (the sites were launched simultaneously in May 2006) to harvest human feelings from blogs around the world—but here the user can narrow statements by feeling, age, gender, location, and even weather conditions. Results are initially displayed as colored particles that ricochet around the screen, but they can be further organized in several ways, including "mobs" (a breakdown of feelings) and "mounds" (the most common feelings overall).
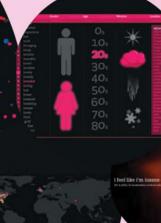
Madness
Murmurs
Montage
Mobs
Metrics
Mounds

L.A. Hosts Summit to Fight Gangs

Gaza Ceasefire

Flood Consumes

The interactive night sky of Universe, launched in March, is populated by a rotating galaxy of stars, each of which links to information from Daylife— a news story, for instance, or a quote or an image. Moving the cursor over the stars causes them to connect into constellations of related information, which can be isolated and explored.

Business  Arts  Sports  Science  Tech  Politics  More »          Search the world

IRAQ  PLACE

Overview  Stories  Photos  Quotes  Connections
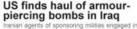
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BREAKING NEWS

Iran-EU nuclear talks to continue today
3 mins ago from The New York Times

Iran-EU nuclear talks to continue today, critics say
3 mins ago from The New York Times

Iran-EU nuclear talks to continue today, critics say
3 mins ago from The New York Times

BACKGROUND

The Republic of Iraq (conventional short form: Iraq) (Arabic: العراق translit: 'al-'Irāq, Kurdish: عێراق ), is a country in Southwest Asia encompassing most of Mesopotamia as well as the northwestern end of the Zagros mountain range and the eastern part of the Syrian Desert. It shares borders with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south, Jordan to the west, Syria to the northwest, Turkey to the north, and Iran to the east. It has a very narrow section of coastline at Umm Qasr on the Persian Gulf.

Read the full background at Wikipedia

THE PAST DAY   By Activity   By Date                    SEE ALL

US finds haul of armour-piercing bombs in Iraq
Iranian agents of sponsoring militias engaged in the country's bitter sectarian conflict. Earlier this month, Iran's role in Iraq came under the spotlight once more, when US commanders and a senior Iraqi officials claimed that radical Shi'ite cleric...
3 mins ago from The New York Times - 119 PERSPECTIVES

US seizure sparks Shiite anger
Mr Hakim met President George W Bush in the White House on December 4 at a time when the US leader was trying to encourage Iraqi parties to form a "moderate coalition". Members of the elder Hakim's party told AFP that Mr Ammar's convoy had been stopped...
3 mins ago from Voice of America - 313 PERSPECTIVES

Bomber kills Iraqi students
3 mins ago from The New York Times - 33 PERSPECTIVES

Britain Announces Troop Drawdown in Southern Iraq
3 mins ago from The New York Times - 33 PERSPECTIVES

Bush: Saddam Not Responsible For 9/11
3 mins ago from The New York Times - 33 PERSPECTIVES

Iran-EU nuclear talks to continue today
3 mins ago from The New York Times - 33 PERSPECTIVES

THE PAST WEEK   By Activity   By Date                    SEE ALL

White House warns against pullout
American public in escalating the war," said Jim Manley. ... people have demanded a change of course in Iraq and ... committed to holding President Bush accountable." As ... Democratic legislation says the...
York Times - 33 PERSPECTIVES

of Iraq Rape

CONNECTIONS                                              SEE ALL

GEORGE W. BUSH   ROBERT GATES   HARRY REID   COLIN POWE

SEE CONNECTION   SEE CONNECTION   SEE CONNECTION   SEE CONNE

PHOTOS

3 mins ago from Getty Images
Armed militants drive through Ramadi, Iraq, Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2006. Ramadi of Baghdad, is located in Anbar province, where many based. The showdowns in Anbar demonstrate how the

PLAY SLIDESH

TIMELINE

Dec 18 - 1,067 mentions

QUOTES   By Me

"One thought is that we should limit the mission to a support mission - in other words, an anti-terrorist mission to go after al-Qaida in Iraq, to support and train the Iraqi army, to protect our own diplomatic personnel and other personnel in Iraq..."
Charles Schumer said this in:
Iraq resolution dropped
1 week ago from Madison Courier

"an anti-terrorist mission to go after Al Qaeda in Iraq, to support and train the Iraqi army, to protect our own diplomatic personnel and other personnel in Iraq..."
Carl Levin said this in:
Democrats seek to narrow the Iraq mission
1 week ago from Los Angeles Times

"I think the president ... ould veto it and the ... te would be upheld. I ... nk the point that ... ator Biden [is] ... ing, however, is that ... public pressure..."
... said this in:
... authorization in
... be
Democrats seek to narrow the Iraq mission
1 week ago from The ...

"What this debate is about right now is a continuation and an escalation of American military involvement in Iraq, putting young men and women in the middle of a sectarian, an intra-sectarian civil war..."
Chuck Hagel said this in:
Democrats seek to narrow the Iraq mission
1 week ago from Los Angeles Times

"We will be looking at a modification of that authorization in order to limit the mission of American troops to a support mission instead that is very different from cutting of..."
Carl Levin ...
Democr...

In January, Harris launched Daylife, a news service that gathers and organizes information from around the Web with an emphasis on the connections among stories, organizations, and people. Topic pages like the one for Iraq [left] contain breaking stories as well as photos, quotes, a timeline of news coverage, and links to other relevant topics.

continued from page 144    As an undergraduate at Princeton, Harris was consumed by traditional visual arts. He painted oils and watercolors, and obsessively kept a sketchbook. But he found the physicality of the medium literally limiting—"limited to what my eyes could see, and limited to the people that I came in physical contact with," Harris explains. So he turned to computer science and began experimenting with its techniques to represent the world. "I wanted to get away from the heavy hand of the designer or painter projecting a single viewpoint, and move toward a model where I was basically creating the tools and platforms and systems that could be interpreted and used in many different ways, based on the viewer's inputs," he says. He aligned himself with the mantra of computer artist and composer Golan Levin: to design tools that are "instantly knowable but infinitely masterable"—like the pencil or the piano.

Harris first garnered international attention in 2004, with the Web site 10×10, which he created while a fellow at Fabrica, Benetton's technology-based art center housed in a Tadao Ando–designed villa near Venice. Every hour 10×10 scans the feeds of major news sources from around the world. Then, in what Harris describes as an "elaborate process of weighted linguistic analysis," it determines the hour's 100 most important words, matches each word to an image, and arrays the images in a ten-by-ten grid—all set cleanly against a white backdrop with a Helvetica title. Mousing over each image makes the word that prompted it fluidly expand along one edge—like a finely woven fishing net for the world's bad news: *kill, Afghan, Bush, raid, troops, suicide.*