

# Trigger



Jody Zellen



**Pace Digital Gallery**

Inaugurated in the Spring 2003, Pace Digital Gallery is an initiative of Pace's Center for Advanced Media. The gallery is a collaboration between the School of Computer Science and Information Systems and the Fine Arts Department.

**Mission**

The goal of Pace University's Digital Gallery is to foster the creation and understanding of digital art. It furthers Pace University's commitment to education excellence, diversity and civic involvement by exhibiting the work of Pace faculty and students, and regularly presenting curated programs featuring leading digital artists. It sponsors lectures and symposia on digital art, an artist-in-residence program, and supports publication of materials for documentation and promotion.

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Jody Zellen  
Pace Digital Gallery  
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Pace University

163 William St. New York NY 10038

[www.pace.edu/digitalgallery](http://www.pace.edu/digitalgallery)



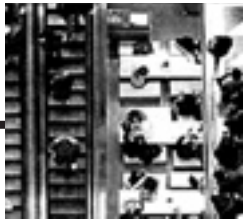
## Saccadic Streets: Jody Zellen's urban exploration.

The urban prospect can be defined as a shining city on a hill or a dark alley. It can be full of vibrancy and spirit, or sullen and deadened. Either way, it is about movement. Just as a river has its natural flow, and digs deep into the terrain, the people wear on a city and redefine it over time. Jody Zellen has explored the human ebb and flow of city life for several years in a series of web works and in more encompassing installations. Her best-known web piece is Ghost City ([www.ghostcity.com](http://www.ghostcity.com)) dating from 1997, which continues to evolve. Its evolution is not unlike that of a city itself, retaining old parts, perhaps renovating some locations and building new elaborate structures. One over-arching theme that runs through Ghost City is anonymity. The inhabitants are caught up in collective processes; they are more subject to these processes than active agents in their own course of affairs. The structures within this city are as much word forms as architectural elements. The city is one of constructive poetry that morphs itself based on mouse clicks and temporal changes. Zellen takes this theme further in [visualchaos.org](http://visualchaos.org) where the entire screen becomes a pallet for moving windows filled with changing content. This, and other works present a saccadic experience where content on the periphery of our vision can suddenly take center stage within the confines of the computer screen. Perhaps the clearest statement to date regarding the power of anonymity is a net art piece from 2002, 'Crowds and Power' found within the Ghost City site.



In some ways Zellen anticipated the recent fad of “flash mobs” – seemingly spontaneous gatherings where people are called to a particular location in a city via email, IM, or other mobile electronic messaging systems. This netart piece employs visual associations to strong effect. It makes great leaps connecting the individual houses in suburban tracks to massing of people in apartment buildings but also suggesting the power and potential of the massing of people. While Lenin or Hitler conjured up throngs, which were put to dastardly ends, the crowd in this work is described as not centrally controlled but a natural ebb and flow, more tidal than political. Zellen brings curiosity and ambivalence rather than pedagogical comment to such human processes.

Technological tools mediate our experience with the world. The telegraph first allowed people to send missives quickly from point to point. This compression of time and space was reserved for only the most important forms of communications – and at a significant cost. In contrast, the cell phone now allows people to stay in communication as they proceed across town, or through multiple time zones. The imperative tone of the telegraph gave way long ago to the casual communication that has reached its current zenith in the cell phone. Zellen’s web site [Disembodiedvoices.com](http://Disembodiedvoices.com) explores those private conversations that spill over to the public sphere. Cell phones allow people to trespass into public space with private information; the invasion of the private into the public has tended to extend the living room into the street. But there is also an element of surveillance to Disembodied Voices in contrast to Ghost City. As we pan over photographs of individuals in crowds we seem to eavesdrop on one-side. There is a sense of omniscience as we mouse over hot spots and target individuals within this chattering cellular world.



Installation works have afforded Zellen the prospect to create pieces scaled for city life. Gallery projects dating from the mid 1990s have often explored the urban zeitgeist within a constructivist aesthetic. This new project, 'Trigger' at Pace University, brings together the flow of netart works within a public space rather than a conventional gallery. Its six projections create continuously changing tableaux within which visitors proceed. The projections vary from horizontal to vertical pans of urban spaces, some historical, others more fanciful. Zellen exploits the palette of documentary photography -- black and white -- to create a sense of gritty veracity. She gives these images new life by animating them and adding color fields as new interpretive layers over the traditional monochrome image. The installation is in a transitional space, a stairwell, where students and visitors walk energetically to the next class or office. People twist and turn as they ascend and descend, encountering new image experiences along the way. The process of navigating in real space, rather than within the space of a computer screen, also adds a playful element. The visitors become performance artists or dancers unintentionally interacting within this encompassing artwork. The outside world is further transformed by large-scale transparencies covering the windows. Instead of ecclesiastical imagery, these "stained glass windows" represent the iconography of the city. There is an interesting contrast between the backlit transparencies in their quiescent color and the projections mimicking rapid eye movement with frenetic velocity. The pacing of motion within the space, ambient sound and continuously changing projections become an exploration in visual anthropology -- a form of "Kinesics in Context" to use the title of an important text in that field. In the work Jody Zellen has been able to incorporate the spirit of transient experience exemplified by the web into a human space which will force visitors to pause and reflect before returning to their immediate mission. Perhaps during that pause they will give some thought to the larger question about where we are all heading as mediating experiences begin to dominate daily life.

Edward W. Earle

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# Jody Zellen



Jody Zellen is an artist living in Los Angeles, California who works in many media simultaneously making photographs, installations, net art, public art, as well as artists' books that explore the subject of the urban environment. She employs media-generated representations of contemporary and historic cities as raw material for aesthetic and social investigations. Solo exhibitions include Laguna Art Museum (2004-05); Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects (2002); Deep River, Los Angeles (2001). Her net art projects have shown world wide since 1997 in festivals and exhibitions such as Arte Nuevo Interactive, Mexico, ACCEA International media festival, Armenia, Prog:me, Rio de Janeiro (2005); File, Brazil, Festival du Nouveau Cinema, Montreal, Siggraph, Los Angeles, 404 International Festival of Electronic Art, Argentina, Cosign, Croatia (2004); New Forms Festival, Vancouver, Recontres Internationales, Berlin (2003); Whitney Museum Artport (2002); XXV Bienal de Sao Paulo (2002); Art Future 2000, Taiwan; Net\_Condition, ZKM (1999); Film + Arch.3, Graz (1997). Her website Ghost City ([www.ghostcity.com](http://www.ghostcity.com)) begun in 1997 is an ever changing meditation on the urban environment. A complete bio and other projects can be accessed at her website - [jodyzellen.com](http://jodyzellen.com).

**'Trigger' was produced in residence at Pace Digital Gallery in 2005, with the collaboration of members of The Center for Advanced Media at Pace University in New York City.**



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