



Paul Zelevansky

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FIG. 3 Jonathan Harris and Terry Bolam, from *Emotional Virgins: From Jon to Jonathan and Back Again: A Series of Prints*, 1996. Courtesy the artists.

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from his childhood, and the second, Super-8 film transferred to video. The former consists of twelve large photographs of himself with his wife and children on a holiday in Kos in 1994 (*fig. 3*). These were family snapshots blown up to a large scale accompanied by the text of a letter his therapist had advised him to write to his dead parents about his feelings for them. This was both graphically and semantically “enlarged,” made clearer, and the images and text were exhibited in tandem. In the second work, the Super-8 video was manipulated digitally to focus on the “family-package” form of holiday travel he experienced as a child in a working-class British home. Recognizing the “microcultural imperialism” of such packaged vacations, and his own journey as a male child who traveled around the world in the 1960s and 1970s, Harris comments on the commodification of experience through the inherently class-based patterns of consumption. Taking advantage of the potential of software manipulations, he focuses and comments on features in the snapshots or original footage to create a critical emphasis. The poor quality of the original archival items sampled thus becomes part of the historical and cultural context of which it speaks, while the flexibility of the electronic environment permits the shaping of a critical dialogue between the visual and material characteristics of these texts.

As one of the faculty helping to organize a new program at Keele University in Britain that combines history, theory, and art practice (founded with fellow art historian and critic Francis Frascina), Harris has been concerned with the ways new technologies can promote a rethinking of the concept of the ideological mythology of artist and artwork. The degree at Keele is offered at the undergraduate level as an honors program in the visual arts in combination with an academic department, and at the graduate level as a master’s in visual arts in contemporary culture; it can be pursued either as a theory-only course or as a combination of theory and studio practice.

Paul Zelevansky

Paul Zelevansky’s creative engagement with electronic media crosses disciplinary lines between artistic practice and pedagogic concerns. While designing several interactive educational media presentations for museums, Zelevansky became keenly aware of the problems of how interface design relates to content structure and, by extension, the larger questions concerning audience. He realized that his assumptions about a viewer’s reception of a work—especially of an electronic piece—affect the entire structure of its form and narrative, and he began to focus on the ways in which viewers might grasp the designer’s graphic and thematic intentions in their own experience of the work. In the course of various on-site user evaluations, the discrepancy between the designer’s idea of what an “ideal” viewer would get from the experience and the actuality of a real encounter became apparent, and this caused him to reflect on the “performative” dimension of graphic design as communication. His commitment to a dialogic structure has emerged from this realization. He tries to anticipate a series of exchanges and responses to his work and incorporate these into the basic structure of an exhibit like *The Human Immune System* (1991; *fig. 4a, b*), an early interactive computer installation. This project, developed for the New York Hall of Science, utilized various animations and simulations to introduce the viewer/participant to the biological processes underlying the immune system and the conditions of health and disease. Beyond engaging viewers with the individual graphic screens and thematic content, the challenge was to orient them to the overall structure and sequence of possibilities within the piece as a whole through various intuitive and already familiar logics.

Zelevansky’s earlier work was in artist’s books, where he explored the ways language systems, iconographic elements, and schematic narratives could produce a network of meaning outside conventional story structures. His concerns with fundamental issues of human communication and meaning were evident in such projects as *Shadow Architecture at the Crossroads* (Zartscorp, 1988) and *The Book of Takes* (Zartscorp, 1976), in which biblical and mythological frames of reference underpin a contemporary archive that functions as much as a sign system as it does as a classical narrative.

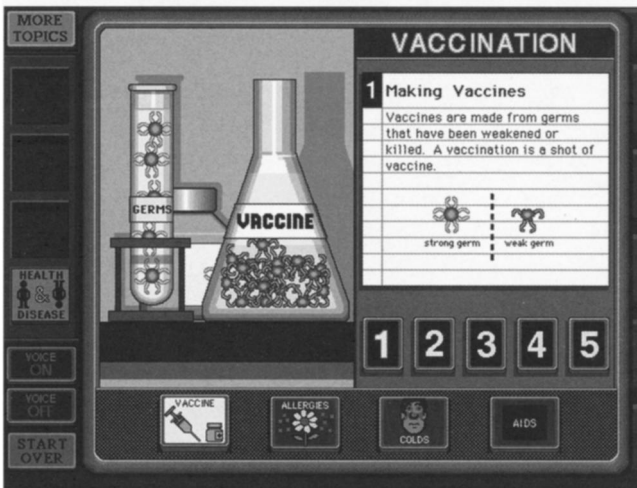
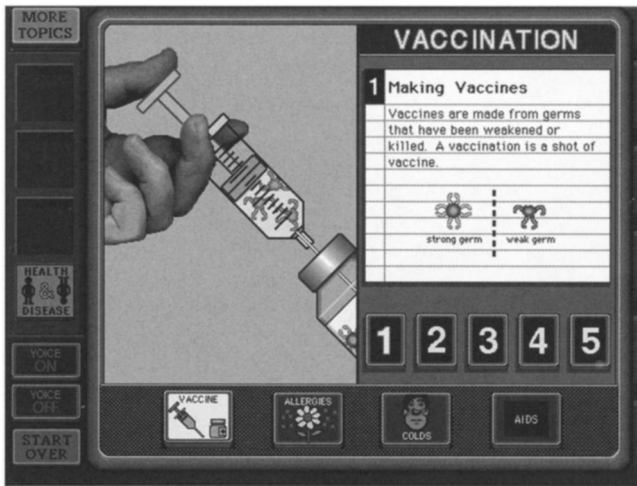


FIG. 4a, b Paul Zelevansky, screens from *The Human Immune System*, 1991, interactive educational computer installation.

Zelevansky has extended his investigations of issues of cognition, perception, and the symbolic features of communication to the video medium as well. In a 1994 installation at the Sculpture Center in New York, he created a four-part work titled *In the Dark*. Consisting of four scenes, each installed for one week in succession, the work was meant to evoke sensory, psychological, cultural, theological, and mythological associations. The concept of darkness has links to the cave, the womb, spaces of terror, loss, blindness, and the idea of the void—though Zelevansky suggested that it might serve as a metaphor for the blank space of the page and the computer screen as well, both sites of potential and creative origin. Video, with its own electronic specificity as a means of producing an ongoing, temporally self-renewing trace—the endlessly redrawn message of the signal transmission—served as the means through which the four successive themes of orientation, security, night, and light were explored through images that were both banal and symbolically charged. Thus, the mythic dimensions of human experience were made manifest in the profoundly familiar domain of daily life.

Dew Harrison

Dew Harrison has been using digital media in her teaching and art practice since the mid-1980s, when she was struck by the fact that personal computers had found ready acceptance in applications to classroom work in the sciences and languages. She became interested in the potential of these desktop tools as they could be used in artistic explorations. Though trained in the use of traditional drawing media—and paints applied to a two-dimensional surface—she has been particularly drawn to the electronic environment because of its capacity to support concept-based work, which combines a heavy textual component with elements from other media. Her interest in hypertext has therefore led to her working with hypermedia defined quite broadly—what she describes as “the linkage of multimedia items through structures of association.” The unique capacity of hypermedia to cross-reference multimedia files of sound, image, animation, and text so that they function as integral parts of a single work or document has exceeded the integrative capabilities of any other art form. In effect, she does not conceive of these pieces as unique artworks in the conventional sense, but as multimedia systems through which the viewer chooses a route. The viewer/participant’s encounter with such a work of art is as a series of choices, each unfolding according to the individual’s disposition with regard to time, sequencing, and duration of the experience. Like other artists working in this domain, she is most comfortable locating her pieces within the Internet environment, where it exists simultaneously as an independent site and as a point at the intersection of various “doorways” connecting it to the rhizomatic matrix of the Net. The definition of the “piece” in this context occurs at several levels: within the design of the site, its immediate connections to other sites, and as a function of the ongoing transformation of the work through the contributions of other artists or participants who help shape the site over time (fig. 5). Excited by the idea of collaborative work unconstrained by limitations of geographic location or temporal synchrony, Harrison has also produced open-ended hypermedia systems to promote contributions by a wide range of participants. “Work,” “piece,” and “site” are being continually transformed in definition, conception, and practice by this activity, which takes as a