

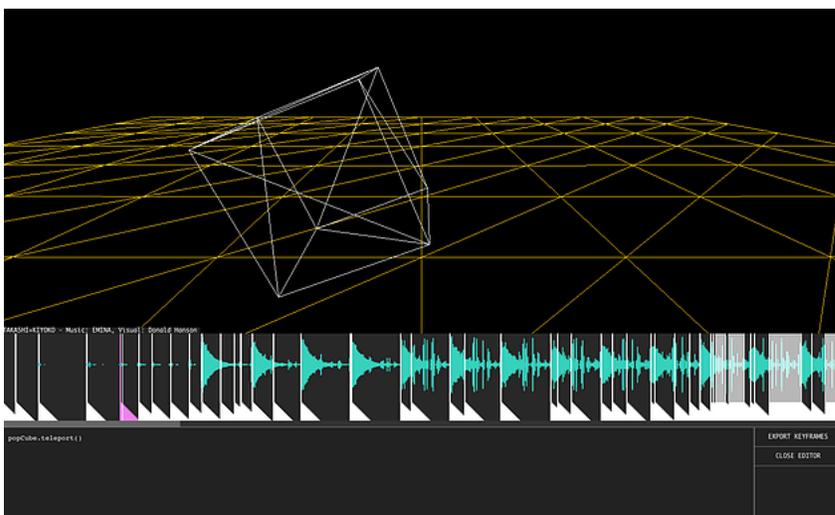


Interacting with Code: Donald Hanson

October 2, 2018 | Rose Lou

Born in Walnut Grove, CA on a pear farm(!), new media artist/VJ Donald Hanson turned to circuit bending at an early age to escape from the boredom of his youth. Through the restructuring of electronic instruments such as synths and Cassio keyboards, Hanson became interested in the creation of music (Hanson's favorite IDM artist is apparently Aphex Twin). A quick learner with a highly creative mind, Hanson soon realized that he was able to gain faster movement and more results with programmatic visuals.

Later on life as he was finishing college, Hanson developed *gifSlap*, a VJ performance software that allows for the usage of GIFs. After touring around in Europe, sharing his desktop-ready software with eager listeners at such venues as the Maze Club in Berlin, Germany and Texture (part of the Test Card event) in Manchester, England, Hanson returned to the Bay Area to focus on a series of smaller projects.



codeKeyframes. Image courtesy of the artist.

Currently, Hanson is developing a timeline editor tool for creative coders called *codeKeyframes*. This is an open source browser-based tool allowing for artists and creative coders alike to enter in their own JavaScript functions and key frames. The idea here is to create an

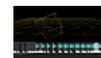
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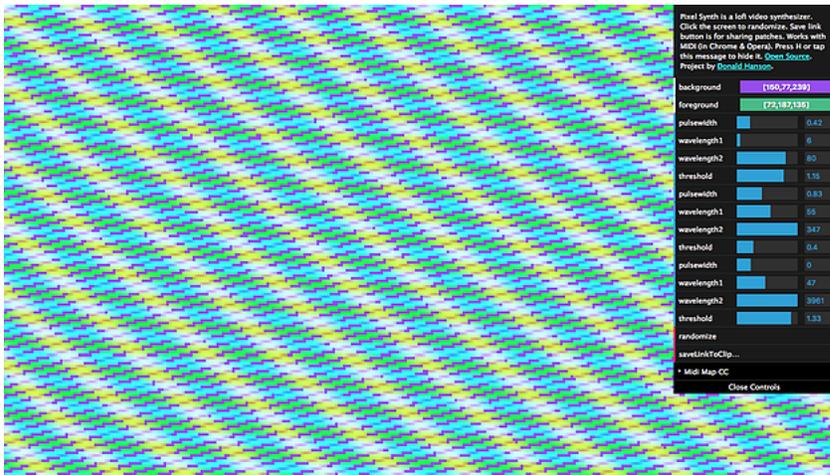
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interactive music video in the browsers for live renders and interactions with the visitor.

Hanson is also the Co-Founder and Director of Technology for the interactive music label [Grid AV](#). This netlabel emerged almost nine years ago as a result of Hanson's frustrations with the traditional format of music production, asking "what is a label going to be?" With Grid AV, Hanson was able to produce a new format of forward thinking practices that encourages collaborations, contributions, and music-related productions.

Collaborations are a central theme within Hanson's practice. In collaboration with [Delta Ark](#), they created a flash-mob style series of spontaneous street projections. Supported by Oakland-based art space [B4bel4b](#) they are referred to as Interventions/Interfaces Group. In addition to this, B4bel4b has also recently started a monthly Visualist Meetup, bringing together local makers to share ideas, techniques and approaches. The next (and second) meeting is scheduled for October 10th.

Another video-related work produced earlier this year is [Pixel Synth](#).



Pixel Synth, image courtesy of the artist.

Pixel Synth is another open source piece that allows for the user to experiment with the same functions an analog video synthesizer offers for free in the web browser. If you have a MIDI, this works with that too, and that's really cool. The user has control over different foreground and background colors, wavelength and threshold parameters. Or they can simply hit the randomize button for endless, mesmerizing ocular entertainment. What's even more is that if a particular combination stands out amongst the different possibilities, the site visitor can select the "saveLinktoClip..." option at the bottom of the control panel and share a copy with friends. Gotta love open source tools.

Following *Pixel Synth*, Hanson joined a team of four others in the creation of a piece called *ShyBot*, which has been featured at [The Lab](#) and [Codame Art + Tech Festival](#) under the alias Norma Jeane (a widely recognized alias of an artist, or group of artist, that wishes to remain anonymous). *ShyBot* is an autonomous robot composed primarily of wheels, solar panels, camera, a GPS chip, motion sensors and a motor designed to run away from people.



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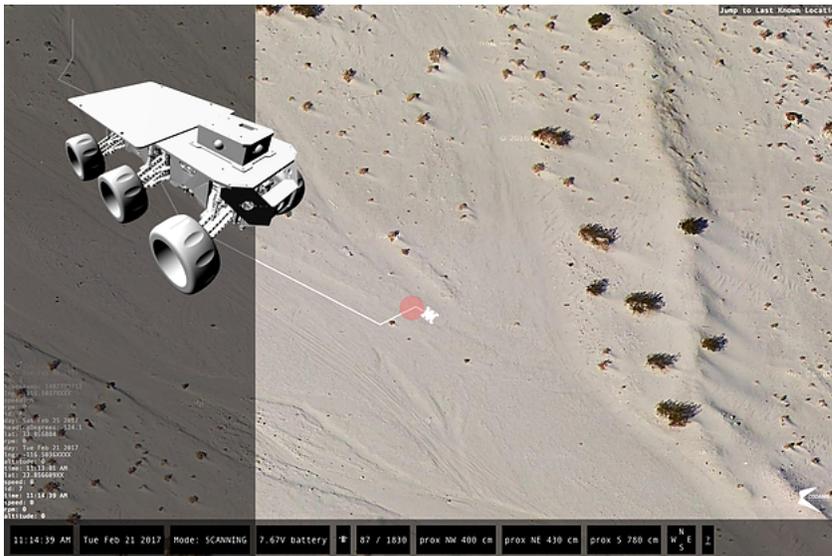
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ShyBot tracking website. Image courtesy of the artist.

With *ShyBot*, Hanson's role was to build a website that could keep track of the fearful robot's GPS tracking system. Shortly after being released into the California desert, *ShyBot* was lost, too successful at its primary purpose. Although found months later, let's consider the effect of a robot designed to avoid all humans. Hanson's work evokes a playful, often humorous approach. Why is it so funny that this robot was so shy that it got lost in the desert? Because it is all too relatable. And here is where the genius behind Hanson's works resides - it brings attention to how people relate to one another, and how accessible a work can (or can't) be.

Hanson's most inaccessible piece is a project called *The Permanent Redirect*. In this net art piece, while many users got caught up and focused on reaching that final site, the real art is actually the experience of being repeatedly redirected. The more people clicking on the link, the further away the final site moved. On this, Hanson commented, "with digital arts and *The Permanent Redirect* project, I was really thinking about artificial scarcity. Digital files can be infinitely reproduced which is an issue... Reproduction of work devalues it. Why should it cost money if it doesn't cost any money to reproduce? The digital should have scarcity. Scarcity should have value, even if it's artificial scarcity."

301 Permanent Redirect

This art has moved to a new URL. The art is now available at:

permanent-redirect.xyz/pages/1515208561

This redirect was created at January 5, 2018, 7:16 pm

50202

2

Screenshot of *Permanent Redirect*

This piece is not about what is on that final page, it is more about experiencing that struggle, how one reacts to an inconvenient obstacle, about finding humor along the way. It also calls into question the accessibility of art. The more popular the site became, the more elusive

the art became. The more desired a thing is, the less available it becomes.

The menial payoff at the end of all that work of clicking through hundreds of links, the viewer having been redirect through a maze of randomized links evoked a wide range of responses. Some laughed, some scoffed, some (hilariously) bitter. "I just let it play out," said Hanson. The idea here is that there is a humorous element at struggling and failing. On the first day *Permanent Redirect* was released, there were so many visitors that the site broke, crashing under the high volume of requests. Some got caught in redirect loops, others became competitive, as if it was a race and there was a grand reward at the end. There was not.

Hanson has created several visually captivating, open sources tools (a favorite is the *More Plants* browser extension), projects and music. To see more work from this multi-talented human, please be sure to check out his website at: <https://donaldhanson.net/>

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