![ARTFCITY]

Jeremy Bailey demonstrates "Big Penis Mode" at Seven on Seven 2013. Photo by Jesse Untracht-Oakner. (Image courtesy of Rhizome.org)

Rhizome's Seven on Seven is, by definition, a crap shoot. The conference runs with the basic premise that by pairing seven technologists with seven artists and sticking them in a room together for 24 hours, a few creative sparks might fly. The following day, Rhizome hosts a six hour long conference in which the pairs are given 30 minutes each to present their collaborative work. The results are predictably mixed. Some projects fail, many have potential, but almost none amount to anything at all. Acknowledging this, Seven on Seven Moderator John Michael Boling quickly conceded during his opening remarks that "the main deliverable here is conversation."

As with previous years, that much was immediately evident. Listening to the pairs of participants who got along sometimes felt a little witnessing new love—you're invited to hang out, but your role is to dutifully listen while they talk about how much they have in common. Even those who didn't seem to get along still talked about how great meeting was, though it was sometimes unclear whether they enjoyed it.

One of two GIFs used as wallpaper in Paul Pfeiffer and Alex Chung's
Giphnosis (2013)

Early video loop artist Paul Pfeiffer and Giphy founder Alex Chung fell into the "lover" category, producing a talk dedicated to relaying all the topics they'd discussed. By the time they got around to introducing their project, GIFNOSIS.com, we were 25 minutes into a 30 minute presentation. The final five minutes was dedicated to discussing their website and downloadable screensavers, which basically allow one to "reprogram your subconscious with GIFs," by looping a horror gif with a kitten gif. The project seemed particularly informed by the Boston Marathon bomber manhunt, that occurred during the making of the work.

Artist Jill Magid and Foursquare founder Dennis Crowley similarly spent their presentation talking about their discussions, but unlike Pfeiffer and Chung, they were not a match made in heaven. Thanks to Crowley's bout with a cold, the two produced no project. Their presentation, which, like Pfeiffer and Chung's, was just summary of thoughts discussed, suggesting they might never have completed an idea; it took an enormous amount of time just to determine that the two shared "the city" as a medium. Not even conversation was likely to come of this collaboration.

By contrast, artist Matthew Ritchie and turntable.com founder Billy Chasen undoubtedly provided the most fodder for post-conference debate with Dabit.org. The charitable website divides the donations collected at the end of each day in two, giving half to a donor, chosen at random, and the other half to three non-profits.

"I don't understand how this isn't a totally morally corrupt project," a friend told me hotly, arguing that the site markets gambling as charity. "It's badge of honor for an essentially selfish act!" he

Johnson, Paddy. "Rhizome's Seven on Seven: Cards on the Table." Art Fag City N.P. 26 April 2013. Web. 30 April 2013. (english)
http://www.artfagcity.com/2013/04/26/rhizomes-seven-on-seven-cards-on-the-table/

continued. In addition to the possibility of winning loot, a real time visualization that has colors explode with larger size donations, provides visual gratification for those who opt to donate.

The concept may be crass, but Chasen spun it well. "There are plenty of people in this room who really need the money," he told us. "We can be charitable to each other." Those words didn't sell me, but I felt a lot better once I realized that the project wouldn't wholly appeal to the gambling impulse. Unlike many forms of betting, the payoff doesn't increase the more money one puts into the pot (though the game does become more appealing the more people donate, since that makes the betting pool gets larger.) In any event, Dabit's already been turned off until the two can get the organization charity status, so the discussion about this project may ultimately prove short-lived.

Screen shot of Friendfracker, by Harper Reed and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

The strongest project of the event may actually hinder conversation. Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Obama for America CTO Harper Reed created Friendfracker, an app that randomly deletes 1-10 Facebook friends. As someone who suffered from the effects of Facebook's race to 1 billion users—two years ago the site reactivated inactive accounts tipping me well over the 5,000 friend limit—the project holds some appeal. Finally a way to remove a few friends, guilt free! Well, almost. Friendfracker fucks with its users, in that it doesn't tell them which friends have been deleted. Even those of us who have plenty of inactive accounts to spare may not want to take the risk of deleting a good friend and failing to notice.

That danger is the appeal of the project, which is hilariously reinforced by their web graphic of a dude getting zapped. It may also ensure it's never used.

Within the context of Seven on Seven, that's not necessarily a failure. A lot of the work is meant to last about as long as the conference, and the more successful projects didn't try to do too much more than that. A good example of that came from artist Jeremy Bailey and gaming console CEO Julie Uhrman, whose presentation doubled as a performance that parodied Uhrman's own Powerpoint presentations. Jane McGonigal's famous TED talk on how gaming can save the world, seemed an

obvious touchstone for these collaborators, as their zeal and concepts seemed just as absurd.

"We wanted to reinvent the presentation so that you get feedback to how you're doing halfway through" Uhrman told the audience, after explaining that the pair's idea came from their shared interest in winning. Soon, an augmented reality point-counter measuring our performance ran on a projection in the background. Who knows what it was counting.

By the time Bailey took the stage, the joke had been set up. "The future of presentations is measuring their success in real time." He began, before introducing the group's signature Powerpoint feature; Big Dick Mode. This particular add on seemed to exist for the sole purpose of attaching itself to Seven on Seven's Moderator John Michael Boling, and tracking his movements around the stage! Boling ended up hiding behind a podium, bemoaning his google results, as a dick attached itself to his side!

While this presentation got points for entertainment, far fewer points can be given to [Cameron Martin](#) and [Tara Tiger Brown](#). This pair decided their audience was passive—a point at least one tweeter took issue with—and took it upon themselves to "transform" the audience. They did this by telling tweeters to use the hashtag #3Dhelper. This way, we could crowdsource 3D rendering software instructions for a kid they pulled from the audience, who said he didn't know how to use the program. He was given ten minutes to print his initials. Predictably, the audience found it easier to shout instructions than to tweet them.

While Martin and Tiger Brown demonstrated more by error than by trial—imposing technology to demonstrate known characteristics of crowds isn't the road to new ideas— the most effective call to action removed the specificity of the "call" altogether. Composer [Fatima Al Qadiri](#) and App.net Founder [Dalton Caldwell](#) produced a score and video composed of text message and computer update bleeps. Entirely imageless, the video fades words like "constant", "firm", and "steadfast" in and out to the relaxing sounds of waterdrops and glass tinking. Yet, these sounds, known mostly for their role as computer alerts soon became nerve wracking. After a while, any repeating computer sound begs to be turned off.