POETICS OF THE ALGORITHM
POÉTIQUES DE L’ALGORITHME
NARRATIVE, THE DIGITAL, AND UNIDENTIFIED MEDIA
OBJETS MÉDIATIQUES « NON-IDENTIFIÉS »

AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE BY THE ACME COMICS RESEARCH GROUP
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La narration vidéoludique : de la notion de « récit » 
à celle d’« univers fictionnel »

Cette communication vient synthétiser l’ouvrage Narration et jeu vidéo. Pour une exploration des univers fictionnels, lui-même dédié à l’étude des différentes modalités via lesquelles le médium vidéoludique peut représenter une histoire. En se basant sur l’analyse de deux oppositions épistémologiques qui ont agité le champ des sciences du jeu au début des années 2000 (celle entre ludologues et narratologues, d’une part, et celle entre game studies et play studies, d’autre part), ce travail défend l’idée que les outils narratologiques traditionnels ne sont pas aptes à rendre compte de la narrativité du jeu vidéo sous tous ses aspects, car celle-ci ne se limite pas à un récit strictement linéaire et unidimensionnel : les informations narratives peuvent être portées par des éléments proprement ludiques (les décors, l’interface, le gameplay...), qui, en outre, peuvent être actualisés de différentes manières par les joueurs. Fonder l’analyse narratologique du jeu vidéo sur la notion de récit semble dès lors réducteur puisque celle-ci ne permet pas de décrire la narrativité latente propre au médium ni l’influence qu’exerce le joueur sur son activation. En réponse à ces problèmes théoriques, cette étude propose donc de substituer au concept de récit celui, plus opératoire, d’univers fictionnel.
Julien Baudry (Université Bordeaux-Montaigne)

Les paradoxes de l’innovation esthétique
dans la création numérique en bande dessinée

"Les paradoxes de l’innovation esthétique” présente une analyse plus esthétique qui tente de comprendre un paradoxe central dans l’histoire de la bande dessinée numérique : la création numérique de bande dessinée n’est pas forcément synonyme d’innovation esthétique mais se traduit au contraire par une permanence de formes traditionnelles. Où prend place l’innovation dans le contexte numérique ?
Digital Oulipo: Programming Potential Literature

The work of the Oulipo (l'Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, loosely translated as Workshop of Potential Literature) lends itself particularly well to digital studies, which was quickly recognized by the members of the group themselves. For the Oulipo, whose goal is to avoid chance in its literary production, computer science seems to offer the perfect solution: on a computer — a naturally deterministic machine — true chance is simply impossible. In order to simulate chance on a computer, you need a program. Especially for the first generation of Oulipians who were writing programmatic texts, algorithms meant to produce their potential literature (Raymond Queneau's Cent mille milliards de poèmes, for instance, which is a literal machine that produces $10^{10}$ sonnets using 10 base poems; or Jean Lescure’s S+7 method, which creates a new text from an original by substituting every noun with the seventh one following it in a dictionary of the author’s choice), the intervention of computers should have resolved this central problem of chance.

To explore this fertile ground, the early Oulipians carried out their own digital experiments on some of the first computers, creating some of the first electronic literature — a programmed version of Queneau’s Cent mille milliards de poèmes, poetry composed with the syntactic structure of Rimbaud’s Dormeur du val but with the vocabulary of Baudelaire, and finally Paul Braffort and Jacques Roubaud founded the ALAMO (Atelier de Littérature Assistée par la Mathématique et les Ordinateurs; Workshop of Literature Assisted by Mathematics and Computers) in 1981. In 2004, the Oulipo released a CD-ROM, published by Gallimard, entitled Machines à écrire (ed. Antoine Denize). These first attempts were educational, even if the Oulipo has done surprisingly little with computer science since.

I am currently finishing one of the inaugural projects of Princeton University’s new Center for Digital Humanities. This project, which I designed and carried out myself with the help of the center’s staff, had at its goal to create digital annexes to accompany my doctoral dissertation that serve as an interactive component to my analysis. What I hope to prove through my dissertation is that the mathematical methods of the Oulipo create a sort of mathematical thought in their readers. Therefore, the reader of my dissertation will benefit from these annexes, which will allow him or her to experiment with these texts and reflect on the mathematics that govern them. The chapter division of my dissertation is made in terms of mathematical disciplines, and I therefore deal separately with texts that are inspired by set theory, algebra, combinatorics, algorithms, and geometry.

At this conference, I propose to speak in depth about my project: first, I will give an historical survey of the Oulipo and their proto-digital humanities experiments; then, I will talk about my own experiences as a coder-researcher, what learning Python has brought to my project, and how this developed a new type of critical reflection. Establishing these annexes forces me to learn to code, a type of work that does not only produce digital texts, but also helps me to reflect on the notion of chance in a more nuanced way. Finally, coding has allowed me to better understand the Oulipian mentality concerning this sort of digital experimentation.
Magali Boudissa (Université Paris 8)

**De l’album à l’écran : enjeux narratifs et esthétiques de la bande dessinée numérique**

Si le champ de la bande dessinée numérique est hétérogène et inclut des œuvres qui vont des BD papiers numérisées aux BD multimédia et interactives, elles ont cependant toutes un point commun : leur « matière » numérique codée et leur affichage dans l’espace d’un écran.

Or l’écran n’est pas une surface comme les autres, sa nature profondément différente du papier met en mouvement tout élément qui s’affiche à sa surface. Les vignettes surgissent ainsi de la profondeur de l’écran au détour d’un clic ; le système du récit se temporalise, il devient potentiel et activable par le lecteur-interacteur.

Dès lors, les possibilités narratives et esthétiques de la bande dessinée se transforment dans cet espace infini et malléable, dont la temporalité « latente » offre une existence intermittente aux vignettes et renouvelle les articulations possibles entre ces dernières.
Victor Cayres, Lynn Alves, Cristhiane Ribeiro (State University of Bahia)

A game narrative development framework based on dramaturgical analysis tools

Seminal works on narrative studies in digital media, like Computer as Theatre (Laurel, 1993) and Hamlet on the holodeck (Murray, 2003), have already identified the relationships between digital games and drama. However, the drama theories, especially those coming from the theoretical framework of the Performing Arts, are still underutilized in game development. This work articulates both the research conducted in the Research Center Comunidades Virtuais of Bahia’s State University and the game development company Sinergia Games. This paper presents a game narrative strategy of creation, which’s based on dramaturgical analysis tools. This work is characterized as an active research because it produced direct interferences within creative processes. The main reference for this research is the book Reading Theatre by the French professor Anne Ubersfeld (2005) whose approach is guided by greimasian structural semantics. Therefore, it proposes: 1) using Greimas actantial model, taking into account Ubersfeld’s (2005) dramaturgical approach and Murray’s (2003) properties of computers as a narrative medium to structure the dramatic action – it makes possible to choose consciously the protagonist’s goal, to create the forces to equilibrate the game conflict and to identify earlier the ideological meanings; 2) building characters and understanding them as semiotic ensemble (Ubersfeld, 2005) and so, defining consciously their structures and meanings; 3) establishing the game level design, taking into account the idea of In Game Locus based on Ubersfeld’s (2005) Theatrical Locus, that is a limited and codified locus for mimeses and actions; Herein, it is developed a qualitative discussion about the application of a game development framework based on Ubersfeld’s theatrical semiotics onto two concrete projects: the game Cosmopolitan Egito developed by Sinergia Games and the Gamebook Guardiões da Floresta developed by the Research Centre Comunidades Virtuais. This discussion is cross-checked with quantitative surveys to users. As a result, it is verified the applicability of dramaturgical analysis tools to structure creative process and documentation in digital games development. Such a procedure has turned out the integration between the narrative and both the gameplay and the development team’s scripts to be more conscious, although it is not possible (nor even desirable) for players to control the production of meanings.

References:


Olivier Crépin (Université Paris 8)

*Walking Dead*: de l’adaptation à la transmédialité, transformations du rythme du récit et implications

Crée en 2003 par le scénariste Robert Kirkman et le dessinateur Tony Moore\(^1\), la série de bandes dessinées *Walking Dead* parut aux États-Unis aux éditions Images Comics dans une relative confidentialité. Cependant, son succès grandissant s’accompagne, en 2010, d’une adaptation en série télévisée, puis de la mise en place rapide d’une narration véritablement transmédia. Cette dernière établira définitivement la série comme succès populaire. C’est cette transformation du récit de bande dessinée en récit transmédia que je me propose d’aborder dans la présente communication.

Dans un premier temps, je me propose d’analyser spécifiquement la bande dessinée *Walking Dead*. Je m’intéresserai notamment à son statut ambigu, entre comics et roman graphique, et à l’implication de l’usage de ces deux termes concernant cette bande dessinée. Leur usage et leur portée comportant des différences notables, selon qu’il s’agisse de sa classification en librairie, ou de légitimer l’adaptation de ce récit en série télévisée. L’analyse se poursuivra sur les spécificités rhymiques et graphiques de *Walking Dead*. Ce sera l’occasion d’interroger le lien que l’œuvre entretient avec une sélection de bandes dessinées qui l’ont précédée, notamment *Watchmen* d’Alan Moore et Dave Gibbons, *Dark Knight* de Franck Miller, ou encore les récits publiés par Image Comics dans les années 90, que Kirkman cite volontiers comme influence.

La précédente analyse se trouvera ensuite doublée de celle des transformations de *Walking Dead* lors de l’adaptation puis du passage au récit transmédia. En effet, rapidement, le récit de la série télévisée se transforme et l’adaptation s’émancipe de la bande dessinée, tout en continuant à entretenir avec cette dernière un système de « forage et de circulation » pour reprendre la terminologie de Jenkins\(^2\). Le récit *Walking Dead* se trouve par ailleurs progressivement augmenté de jeux vidéos, webisodes, romans et d’une seconde série télévisée qui seront autant d’extensions de l’univers initial.

Je conclurai par une rapide analyse visuelle et rhymique des scènes d’ouvertures des différents médias impliqués. Il s’agira de comprendre les modifications de l’écriture scénaristique, pour permettre la circulation du lecteur entre les différentes œuvres autant qu’une lecture indépendante de chacun des récits. Ce qui permettra de questionner également l’un des aspects vertueux de la transmédialité : la conception du récit comme objet autonome, n’ayant plus besoin de se limiter aux contraintes du support. J’interrogerai ainsi également les liens que la notion de récit transmédia entretient avec les ambitions portées par les premiers usages de l’appellation *roman graphique*.

\(^1\) Le dessinateur Charlie Adlard se joindra à la série en 2005 et remplacera Tony Moore, dès le chapitre 7

\(^2\) *La culture de la convergence, des médias au transmédia*, Henry Jenkins, Armand Colin 2014 pour l’édition française
Jean-Bertrand Cheymol (CMI – Université Paris 3)

**La vitesse dans 3° de Marc-Antoine Mathieu**

L’objectif de cette communication est de montrer comment le récit numérique 3° met en question le mythe de l’immédiateté de la diffusion de l’information et propose une réflexion sur la vitesse (de la communication, de la lecture, entre autre).

En effet, intituler ainsi la bande dessinée numérique donne l’impression que les images peuvent condenser l’histoire en 3 secondes, en un récit accéléré, et que l’information peut être effectivement transmise à la vitesse limite de la lumière, en une prouesse technologique et picturale. L’immédiateté constitue un paradigme pour les techniques numériques et les pratiques sociales contemporaines\(^3\), voire un mythe, qui imprègne 3°. Le pouvoir de révélation traditionnellement associé à la lumière (renforcé par le caractère symbolique des surfaces de réflexion du rayon lumineux, comme le rétroviseur, les lunettes, etc., la symbolique de la percée grâce à un zoom interrompu\(^4\)), s’associe à la rapidité extrême de sa propagation et à la fascination procurée par un effacement des distances.

Mais 3° pointe aussi la contradiction suivante : la vitesse est à la fois ce qui crée le lien signifiant – ou l’intelligence – entre des éléments et un obstacle à la compréhension de celui-ci. En effet, le récit pose la question de la possibilité de le comprendre. Car saisir le parcours à vitesse maximale d’un photon au sein de la scène, même au ralenti, est difficile en l’absence de narration, l’instance énonciative se trouvant masquée. D’ailleurs ce parcours est erratique, passe par des détours improbables, jusqu’à un avion qui évolue dans l’atmosphère terrestre. L’œil sur lequel s’ouvre la bande dessinée, devenu pure surface de réflexion du rayon lumineux, appartient à un personnage dépassé par la surprise d’une scène qu’il ne comprend pas. La prise en charge des événements, la gestion de leur apparition et de leur diffusion instantanées, posent problème.

Le dispositif numérique met ainsi en demeure le lecteur de choisir une vitesse de défilement des images pour trouver sa propre vitesse de saisie et d’acceptation du récit et de modifier ce choix régulièrement, car l’uniformité d’une vitesse qui va apparaître tantôt comme trop lente ou trop rapide ne permet pas la compréhension. Instrument de maîtrise sur l’histoire, le curseur de commande du dispositif souligne la place du récepteur, être vivant qui anime sa lecture d’un rythme lui aussi vivant, fait de reculs et d’avancées.

Nous souhaitons articuler études des procédés et réflexion sur la vitesse dans 3° en faisant notamment appel à la pensée de Gilles Deleuze et à sa conception de la vitesse et de l’image plutôt qu’aux théories narratives où la vitesse du récit est rapportée à l’histoire.

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Pour une esthétique du GIF : à propos de Zac’s Haunted House et Zac’s Control Panel de Dennis Cooper

GIF Novel, HTML book, livre numérique... on ne se saisit pas facilement d’un qualificatif pour déterminer ce à quoi on a affaire devant Zac’s Haunted House et Zac’s Control Panel de Dennis Cooper. L’auteur est avant tout reconnu pour son activité en tant qu’écrit, ce qui laisse parfois oublier son engagement dans le domaine des images en mouvement, en tant que réalisateur. Un peu rapidement, on serait tenté d’avancer que les propositions mises à l’examen relèvent des arts cinématiques. Tout autrement, on peut affirmer que ce sont des œuvres singulières en ce qu’elles sont les paradigmes de l’expérimentation d’un langage, qui consiste à faire œuvre à partir du Graphics Interchange Format (GIF). Le GIF animé, ces quelques secondes réalisées par le tout venant, produites aujourd’hui de manière surabondante et exposées ostentatoirement dans chaque coin d’Internet, c’est le matériau dont s’empare Dennis Cooper. Il puise dans le vivier des GIF, il ne les élabore pas lui-même, puis effectue un geste d’assemblage de ces boucles infernales. Ainsi, ce que Zac’s Haunted House et Zac’s Control Panel proposent, c’est d’envisager un programme codé dans le cadre d’autres instructions, et en l’occurrence, en injectant des instructions sensibles à ces instructions mathématiques. De la sorte, ces deux œuvres (dé)hiérarchisent à nouveau compte les fragments disséminés aux quatre coins des écrans d’ordinateur, pour leur faire exécrer leur violence, la vacuité d’un monde en boucle et endophone.
Sylvie Fabre (Université d’Artois)

**Du lecteur à l’utilisateur : l’expérience de la lecture sur écran, entre raison graphique et raison numérique**

Cette communication souhaite explorer le nouveau rapport au sens qu’instaure le support numérique (ordinateur ou tablette), que ce soit au plan de la production (écriture) mais aussi au plan de la lecture, qui est de plus en plus appréhendée sous l’angle de l’expérience utilisateur, l’interactivité suscitée par la machine ayant tendance à faire du lecteur une sorte de co-éditeur du texte. Les objets numériques se révèlent parties prenantes de la construction du sens du texte, car ce dernier est indissociable de son support. Le document écrit a en effet comme spécificité de ne faire qu’un avec son mode d’existence matériel : sans support, l’écrit n’existe pas. Le médium est donc la condition *sine qua non* à la production, au transport, au stockage et à la pérennisation du texte, dont il contribue aussi à définir le genre (Dominique Maingueneau). Loin d’abolir toute forme de matérialité, le processus de dématérialisation lié à l’apparition des outils numériques entraîne paradoxalement un processus de re-matérialisation, qui s’avère sous-tendu par une logique de programmation, car écrire avec un ordinateur revient à écrire avec une machine à calculer (Stéphane Crozat). La matérialité du texte se voit reconfigurée selon une perspective de plus en plus dynamique, interactive (pour ne pas dire spectaculaire), qui délivre, certes, le texte de son statut d’objet sacré, achevé et statique, mais qui le condamne aussi, en vertu des lois computationnelles, à un mode d’existence voué à l’invisibilité et au secret. Pour la première fois de son histoire l’homme n’a plus accès à la mémoire de son écriture autrement que par des dispositifs techniques (Emmanuel Souchier). Trace et support de l’écrit ne vieillissent plus ensemble, une même machine pouvant lire une multitude de fichiers et un même document pouvant s’afficher sur une pluralité d’écrans. Seul subsiste et perdure l’algorithme, trace électronique que l’œil humain ne peut percevoir. Cette rupture sémiotique entre le contenu (le texte) et l’expression (le support) pose la question de la conservation, de la circulation et de la transmission des écrits car, comme le disait Jean-Paul Sartre dans *Les Mots*, c’est d’abord avec des objets que l’on rencontre la lecture. Ainsi, comment concevoir le livre et d’activité de lecture quand le texte n’existe plus en tant qu’objet mais en tant que fichier confidentiel, relégué dans le secret d’une boîte noire et accessible à partir d’un support universel et désormais sacralisé, dont le maniement exige à lui seul des compétences particulières ? Ce sont toutes ces questions que la présente contribution souhaite aborder de manière succincte, afin de faire le point sur les transformations sémiotiques et cognitives qu’impliquent nos nouvelles manières de lire et d’écrire, et qui oscillent encore – et probablement pour longtemps – entre raison graphique et raison numérique.
Lorraine Furter (Hybrid Publishing Group)

Hidden Histories, Public Libraries

The project Hidden Histories, Public Libraries is a collaborative and ongoing project addressing digital and multimedia reading experiences in public spaces. Using accessible DIY tools and open source languages — Raspberry Pi, HTML, CSS, JavaScript — Hidden Histories explores the potentials of urban screens and, more recently, local Wi-Fi networks to publish documents in “situated” locations, accessible through personal portable devices such as tablets, smartphones and computers. The project has built new open source software, on top of a rich ecology of existing software, for multimedia publishing. The software has been used in a rapid prototyping context to create a series of experimental publications.

Accessing contents in a specific place allows for new ways of reading both the environment and the content itself, mutually enriching each other. It also gives an opportunity to play with their narratives and imagine new ones. How can digital applications generate new urban imaginaries? How to enable hidden histories to re-emerge? The project also raises the question of collective reading in the public space. In the streets, can connected mobile devices extend the tradition of collective reading experiences?

Hidden Histories, Public Libraries first started during a workshop at MediaLab Prado in Madrid in June 2015, in collaboration with #bookcamping an online community library, in which collective reading experiments where imagined for urban screens, en la plaza pública. A “shared” space was imagined through visual storytelling, inspired by comics structures and infinite zooming processes.

A second workshop at iMal in October 2015 developed another thread: a local Raspberry Pi Wi-Fi router diffusing a website leading the passerby from images to texts and videos linked to the location, accessible through portable devices.

In both of these workshops a key question has been how to make visible the knowledge production taking place by the cultural organisations communities of practice. In this context what is important for the project are the research methods of Digital Humanities and Design Research practice. What we are currently exploring are the methods of rapid prototyping to examine knowledge disseminations questions, how to understand a communities knowledge issue and provide practical workflows. A goal of refining such design methods are the benefits greater efficacy to these cultural communities of DIY publishing workflows that are practical and accessible, in terms of skills, costs and conceptual frameworks that can be adopted by cultural practitioners in general.

Hidden Histories, Public Libraries continues a further experimental publishing rapid prototyping round in April 2016 with workshops for curatorial students at Southern Methodist University in Dallas to publish from art history collections.

Links:
Hidden Histories Software – [https://github.com/consortium/hybrid_player_audio](https://github.com/consortium/hybrid_player_audio)
Medium, knowledge, structure: capacities for choice and the contradiction of medium-specificity in games and comics

In reviews of Chris Ware’s Building Stories, critics regularly draw attention to the board-game like design of the comic’s box and elements of the text within. Yet while many have noted the similarities between Building Stories and the visual/physical design of board games such as Monopoly, and Ware himself has cited “French “Jeux Reunis” game sets from the late 19th and the early 20th century’ as one of the inspirations for the work’s design concept, few go as far as to suggest that Building Stories actually is a game.

In this paper, [we] will consider the ways in which Building Stories’ narrative structure parallels those conventionally found in games. Drawing upon works published by Bethesda Softworks, such as Fallout 3, Fallout: New Vegas and the Elder Scrolls series, as well as comics including Jason Shiga’s Meanwhile and Actus Tragicus’ Actus Box: 5 Graphic Novellas, and literary works such as Marc Saporta’s Composition No.1 and B.S. Johnson’s The Unfortunates, [we] will interrogate some of the formal and discursive relationships that open possibilities for revised interpretations of the differences between play and narrative, such as the productive structuring of choice, sources of narrative voice, the presence of untold plots, the impact of types of accumulated and excluded actions upon plot, and the narratological implications of subverting the social habits by which games, comics and literature are defined.

Making use of Chatman’s now canonical 1978 theorisation of narrative as a ‘double time’ structure, being the time of the plot plus the time of the text, [we] will suggest that both games and comics promote specific discourse activities over others as conditions of comprehension, whilst sharing formal structures that are utilised in each register to underwrite the distinctions between them. Hence, it is as possible to choose to read the cells of comic in any order as it is to choose one course of actions over another in a game. [we] will analyse the degrees of similarity and difference between these options in their particular contexts, relative to an experience of a plot, in order to problematise the relationship between discourse and plot at the heart of Chatman’s theory.


Vendela Grundell (Stockholm University)

Poetics: Glitch Art Transforming Spectatorship

Today’s network society is characterized by its flow of data. This flow and its underlying protocols are trivial and abstract: two kinds of invisibility that becomes more important to make visible as the flow becomes more pervasive. Art that is made, shared and viewed through a digital interface is embedded in that flow, it depends on it and feeds it. This paper is about how art makes that flow visible through a material and phenomenological friction. By exemplifying a moment when code – and the interfacing experience of code – is disrupted, I aim to test how digital flow is revealed and resisted through art. I home in on that disruptive moment as it happens in glitch photography. This practice is concerned with technical disruption: cracks that redefine and challenge the medium in which they occur. These cracks can be used to break the flow – to cause what I call a systemic friction. When they do so, their disruption takes on transformative qualities. My question here is thus how glitching underlines and undermines photography as a multi-modal yet specific medium. Whereas material aspects of glitches have been addressed since the digital turn of the 1990s, my interest lies in how their material transformation affects the phenomenology of interfacing. While generating, harnessing and aesthetically articulating glitches, the technical disruption spreads from the configuration of the computer to the perception of the viewer. Interfacing thus becomes a key site to understand the relationship between system and individual. In light of its dynamic between impact and response – and of what is clearly an aspect in need of further research – my paper takes the perspective of the individual to clarify that interfacing is an everyday activity that includes experiencing forms of art that indeed contest interfacing. The question posed above regarding medium is thus intertwined with a question regarding the individual interfacing with that medium: How does glitch art transform spectatorship? Online environments offer a situation that brings together a pervasive structural architecture with an intimate viewing experience. Online, individual and system are brought together by an interface conditioned by protocol. Exploiting contingency in mediation, to glitch is to question how both photography and interfacing is habitually engaged as materials, concepts and practices. In such a minimal yet strikingly sensorial circumstance – where the viewer is alone in an aesthetic encounter while simultaneously connected to an ungraspable network – experience becomes a key to this productive disruption. I am focusing on how this situation comes about and how it impacts both image and viewer, through the work of artists Evan Meaney, Phillip Stearns, and Rosa Menkman. Through their combinations of glitches, photobased mediation and interface display, this paper shows how viewers – me, you – are implicated in a spectatorship that is shaped as much by friction as much as it is by flow.

Evan Meaney: evanmeaney.com
Phillip Stearns: yearoftheglitch.tumblr.com/
Rosa Menkman: rosa-menkman.blogspot.se
Building with the unnamable: code, music and operational discourse

This paper explores reciprocities between the design and critical analysis processes of code and music, the activity of a research group at Orpheus Institute investigating Composition as Critical Technical Practice. It understands the 'aesthetic' to be a property of expanding consciousness or transforming perception, and suggests that critical practices in coding and composition might usefully inform each other in their goal of producing aesthetic technical objects.

Code is often considered in terms of natural language, an inevitable result of the face it conventionally presents. Cox has shown the limits of this analogy when subject to critical analysis. Musical semiotics arrived at an analogous impasse: aesthetic function cannot be understood without reference to the act of making. Berardi is right to emphasize the power of code, wrong to suggest that only in the sphere of language can we interact with the reality of Being.

Rather than the limits of language we explore a common repertory of abstract operations – an informal discourse – both prior to and beyond linguistic reasoning. This repertory of imaginable operations is acquired and shared through technological experience, unconstrained by the physical world yet shaped by embodied knowledge. The terms of any given moment are conditioned by its technological context (Ersperer), but – pace Hayles technogenesis – we think beyond media. Such a repertoire underlies both coding and music, irrespective of the particular technical instantiations or the type of data or material. We look to Stengers’ work with contemporary concepts in science as a model.

In music as with coding, an image of a fully notated, narrative, sequential design process is misleading. At play is the manipulation of operations always at a level of abstraction greater than their technical units. Coding and music are both nonlinear forms of inscription operating across multiple timeframes. Iteration, input, energy and context are vital to their realization. We consider Gjardigen’s analysis of the efficiency of C18th composers and Owens’ research into the notational and memory systems of mediaeval composition. Despite obsessions with text, the physical-spatial properties of the piano most inform C19th composition. The laptop is the conceptual space of contemporary musicians – a prosthesis the technological affordances of which feedback into mental models.

What is the nature of the artefact being created? Herbert Simon described the interface as the quintessential contemporary artefact. Coding and composition both produce technical objects best understood as interfaces – between designer and user/listener, virtual and physical worlds, and between what was conceived as technically possible and the potential that is now revealed. Both code and music produce ‘complexity-reducing interfaces’ (Berardi) to complex worlds. Talking of simulation science and the poem respectively, Delanda and Agamben refer to ‘spaces of potential’.

How might such an approach inform the design process? We develop Agre’s notion of critical technical practice. Code and music are domains in which we can use technical means to escape language games, or rather the constrained linguistic- economic framework in which the inhuman and illogical has been constructed as ‘reasonable’. The aesthetic power of both code and music lies in charting conceptual spaces that language and society might then populate. It lies not in the technical, the theoretical or the problem solving, but in the situated, distributed, technologically conditioned human process. Code and music share the property of being both the domains most open to commodification and those most able to resist it.
Towards Participatory Game Design

Seeking to explore questions raised in the call for papers vis-à-vis the changing notion of author in collaborative production and the roles of glitches, hacks, etc in contemporary interactive media, this paper examines the growth of "participatory game design" in recent years. This is understood as a game design process where the onus lies not solely upon the “official” game developers of a particular work, but in part also upon the players.

The paper will explore two examples which are indicative of what we term “active participatory design” and “counteractive participatory design”. Active participatory design denotes cases where game designers deliberately seek to include the community in the ongoing design of their game. The case study explored here is the open-source “roguelike” game “Dungeon Crawl: Stone Soup” (“DCSS”). DCSS has a wide-reaching philosophy of including user creations, suggestions, and additions, and blurring the boundary between users and players. It is developed by a large community of individuals who are actively encouraged to submit their own fully-coded additions to the game for consideration, to create “branches” or “forks” of the game where the game’s code is altered to reflect a style of gameplay that particular individual would prefer, and to submit what are known as “vaults”, which are handmade segments of gameplay designed by fans that number in the thousands. This philosophy of iterative design and player contributions is even reflected in the enumeration of DCSS releases - all are written as “0.x” where x increases by one with each version, rather than shifting to the more traditional “1.x” for a “finished” version. This case study shows the potential for a highly successful game (close to a million downloads) to be developed by a massively extended “team”, and the paper explores the participatory methods of DCSS, the success of this system, and the potential for its expansion into other games.

The latter, counteractive participatory design, denotes cases where game designers did not intend for players to have any part in the design process, but players have somehow seized developmental agency and modified the game against the will of the game’s original developers. This form of participatory design is best illustrated via a number of smaller case studies instead of only a single larger study: the paper will therefore explore a range of cases where glitches have been accepted into player-created rulesets that alter a game’s “design” to be inclusive of these unanticipated moments of gameplay (e.g. in “speedrunning” practice); cases where exploits (unintended situations that r within the game’s rules) have been discovered and have been accepted as valid forms of gameplay by a player community; and cases of the creation of “mods” (“modifications”) that seriously alter the game’s intended forms of play, and are most often created by reverse-engineering the game’s code to an extent that the developers never intended. We conclude by arguing that participatory game design of both sorts creates “player-designers”, but that the two different models result in different outcomes, tensions, and potential for future participatory engagements.
Nicolas Labarre (Université Bordeaux-Montaigne)

**The Users of Comics as Scholarship**

Presenting examples of comics as scholarship to various types of audience generates extremely diverse reactions, ranging from curiosity to enthusiasm, to an expressions of dissatisfaction with the aesthetics of the pages. In other words, these texts are framed by different horizons of expectations, which result in various uses and appropriations.

This presentation will seek to define the perimeter of comics as scholarship: what are the claims made by its proponents? what subjects does it encompass? To what extent can the form avoid being primarily about itself? How do the readership for comics and for scholarly text sintersect? My initial hypothesis is that the “comics as scholarship” label and specifically the affiliation with comics are both efficient ways to generate an interest in the form and a serious limit to its expansion; I intend to put this hypothesis to the test.

The presentation will rely on data from the journals which publish such scholarship, on a survey of the reception of these texts, and on discussions with the users of such texts are (authors, producers, critics, etc.). Theoretically, it will be underpinned by genre theory, as conceptualized by Rick Altman.
Catherine Lenoble & An Mertens (Algotit)

Exercices de style with algorithms

#Digital avant-gardes

Algotit is a project of Constant vzw, an artist-run organisation for art and media in Brussels. Algotit is a workgroup around i-litterature, F/LOSS code and digital text practises. The group was initiated in 2012 and meets regularly following the principles of the Oulipo-meetings: they share work and thoughts and create together, with or without the company of an invitee.

The members of Algotit share a common interest in the potential of using the Internet as a material to create literary works. Furthermore, they consider the release of the code under a F/LOSS licence as yet another possible reading of the work. Indeed, Constant vzw created this experimental reflection space out of the curiosity to look at code and literary creation as two sides of the same coin. This generates questions about methodologies, tools and design for reading, as well as, on the status of hybrid books, liquid publishing and algorithmic writing.

If the ‘author’ is a concept that gives ‘authority’ to a printed text, how do we call the ‘authors’ of the Internet – which is composed of text only⁷ – and all the software involved. Code is text and literary text can be coded. Algotit is a group of around ten people, coming from very different backgrounds, amongst them fiction authors, visual artists, designers, a philosopher and a law researcher. All of them experiment, in one way or another, with the combination of different kinds of writing, including code.

On the table of Algotit meet-ups, one usually finds the following ingredients: humans and machines, books and other editorial printed objects, a collection of digital files and (offline) networks. The group works on a list of thematic activities (so far ranging from natural language processing to learning & performing algorithms, from creating & parading with bots to programming with Python for literary uses). They collectively pick up some challenging ones and make these their yearly agenda.

During this lecture, we would like to present our latest discussions around automatic writing and reading machines. This comes with an overview of interesting ‘algoliterary’ works and questions of authorship, reading, writing and publishing.

Additional information

In Liège, « Exercices de style with Algorithms » will be introduced/ performed by Algotit members Catherine Lenoble and An Mertens.

Mainly focused on practise and research, Algotit work is occasionally presented in different artistic contexts at the intersection of literature, media art & digital humanities: [Lire+Écrire]numérique (Nantes, 2015), Désert Numérique (Saint-Nazaire- le-Désert, 2014), Transmediale (Berlin, 2015).

Read more on the Algotit wiki (under construction): http://algolit.constantvzw.org/

Côme Martin (Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV)

Contre ou au-delà de l'imprimé ?

La bande dessinée numérique à la recherche d’un statut spécifique

Qu’est-ce qu’une bande dessinée numérique ? Cette question à elle seule peut résumer le statut problématique de la forme bande dessinée hors de l’imprimé, tant elle appelle des réponses diverses et parfois contradictoires. Depuis la mise à disposition des technologies permettant de dématérialiser les cases et leur contenu, les œuvres sur écran (tactile ou non) se distribuent entre adaptation, transposition ou création, sans qu’il soit toujours possible de les rassembler sous un dénominateur commun autre que celui qui délimite déjà (avec difficulté) la bande dessinée imprimée.

Un grand nombre de bandes dessinées numériques s’illustre en outre par son recours fréquent, voire constant, au skeuomorphisme, c’est-à-dire qu’elles reproduisent numériquement les caractéristiques saillantes de la bande dessinée imprimée : distribution en cases, elles-mêmes présentées sur des planches de format rectangulaire vertical, alors même que les écrans sur lesquels elles sont présentées sont de format rectangulaire horizontal. Ce détail illustre bien la défaillance de la bande dessinée numérique envers le média dont elle découle et peine encore à se distinguer, à tel point que certains chercheurs n’y voient pas tant un média spécifique qu’une déclinaison technologique de moyens de diffusion préexistants.

La bande dessinée numérique doit-elle nécessairement se détacher de l’imprimé, aussi bien dans sa forme que dans son propos, pour mériter d’être désignée comme telle ? Est-elle en manque d’une « grande œuvre » qui ferait figure de classique et viendrait asseoir sa légitimité ? Doit-elle obligatoirement mettre à profit les potentialités du numérique et proposer interactivité, image en mouvement, formats inédits, pour obtenir son indépendance médiatique ? En posant ces questions (parmi d’autres), il s’agit de chercher à réconcilier les disparités de la bande dessinée numérique et de voir comment chercheurs, auteurs et éditeurs cherchent de concert à lui attribuer un statut spécifique, pour des raisons différentes mais menant cependant à une évolution commune du média.
Gert Meesters (Université de Lille)

Bob and Bobette and Digital Enthusiasm: How a Big Comics Publisher in Flanders Put a Lot of Effort into Discrediting His Own Books

In this paper, I will analyse how the biggest comics publisher in the Dutch speaking area, Standaard Uitgeverij (cf. De Vries 2012) has dealt with the possibilities that new technologies offer to experiment with narrativity. I will especially concentrate on the iOS app Suske en Wiske — De stuivende stad [The Rushing City], launched in 2010, after the eponymous paper album of the most popular comics series in the Dutch speaking part of the world (cf. Lefèvre 2003). It can be described as an enhanced edition of the album that offers two ways of experiencing the story: either one reads the story by swiping, or one sees an 'enhanced' version that differs from the paper version in several ways. First, the drawings are slightly animated. Second, the transition from one drawing to the next is not controlled by the user, but the rhythm of narrative progress is instead imposed by the app. Last but not least, all the text, visible in the artwork as the drawings are mostly unchanged, is read aloud by professional actors like in a radio play, each actor taking the text of one character. The soundtrack is furthermore filled with music and sound effects.

This app is intriguing for several reasons. First, in previous attempts at cross-medial use of its comics characters, Standaard Uitgeverij mostly aimed at following an existing tradition, be it with platform games, animated tv series, musical adaptations or live action and animated movies (Meesters 2007). In this particular case, Standaard entered a playing field that was/is still very much in development. Second, the choices they made in adapting the album betray much of their attitude towards the comics they continue to publish. Only extras of movies and radio play were added, erasing comics fortes like (double) page composition and written narrator text in the process. No attention seems to have been paid to interactivity, arguably the most differentiating narrative possibility in digital media. Nevertheless, an analysis of the reception of this one time app shows that users judge this new comics-based form favourably because of the addition of sound and movement that are absent from traditional paper comics, thereby discrediting the narrative efficiency of the latter and displaying the same uncritical technological optimism about the former as the publisher.


Dinu Gabriel Munteanu (Nottingham Trent University)

Indeterminate Media and the Poetics of Loss:
Architecture, Colour and Mood on Tumblr Microblogs

Hosting over a quarter of a billion websites, Tumblr is one of the most popular, innovative and flexible microblogging platforms currently in existence. Launched in 2007 and already surpassing Facebook in terms of popularity amongst teenagers, the service provides an idiosyncratic synesthetic space wherein countless visual, audio and stylistic gestures are expressed daily. This incessant flux of images, videos, quotes and animations, the absence of any subordinating vertical structures (there exists no ‘mainstream’ vs. ‘underground’ dynamic here), the possibility of interpreting the blogs both as micro- and niche youth media (Thornton, 1995, pp. 137-151), alongside the socially interactive element of these fundamentally democratic exchanges, all reflect a parallel world rich in psycho-social connotations that are still left largely unchartered by media analysts.

Focusing on a loosely-woven community of ‘nostalgic’ users, this paper will examine the ways through which these young bloggers use architectural photography, colour, luminance disturbance and other imaginative triggers to engage in various ‘nostalgic’ explorations the semiotics of which escape any singular explanation. Far from being victims of an extraneous, ‘simulational’ nostalgic malaise (Baudrillard, 1989; Jameson, 1991), I argue that these young individuals relate rather to the Romantic acculturation of nostalgia from psychiatry into the modern vernacular imagination. In this process, they take advantage of Tumblr’s own ability to create spatial collages replete with cinematic, visual and musical cues.

Of particular interest here will be the analysis of the ambiguous affective aesthetics thus created. I explore, in this sense, a number of essential nostalgia characteristics, including ideas of ambiguity, mystery, solitude and loss, mainly exemplified through architectural Tumblr photography. I argue that the complex transition from art and visual culture into an indeterminate space of residual online moods transforms these artefacts into strange hypermediated processes that, although instantly perceivable, are yet to be fully understood.
Possible Worlds, Literal Games

This essay is a description and critique of what I will label the Possible Worlds Scenario (PWS), a set of assumptions now shared to explain and understand the relationship between games and stories. I offer several reasons, based on the ludic and recursive experience of gameplay, why the PWS seems incapable of adding much, if anything, to our understanding of the relationship between games and stories.

- Storyworlds do not generate stories; rather, stories generate storyworlds. This implies that games cannot generate storyworlds without games being stories. And this begs the question for which the PWS is assumed an answer: Are games and stories aesthetically compatible?

- Within all (game-generated) possible worlds, storyworlds are rare. This implies that any mechanism reliably generating storyworlds must be narrowly (and purposefully) dedicated to this end: i.e., games must be story generation machines. This again presupposes (rather than constructs) a solution to the problematic relationship between games and stories.

- Storyworlds cannot co-exist. All possible storyworlds are counterfactual to a single storyworld generated by a single story. This implies that multiple story "chronotopes" within a storyworld can only be identified retroactively and non-contingently -- not as a set of contingent (or "possible") relationships.

- Possible storyworlds are not literal storyworlds. The contraindication of a possible world is not an impossible world; this contraindication is more properly a literal world. This implies that possible storyworlds can only be associated with equally "possible" -- i.e., ludic and non-literal -- stories: stories that are played with, rather than stories that are played.
From Music Videos to Music Algorithms.
The Convergence of Software Houses and Record Labels in Chrome Experiments and YouTube 360° Interactive Music Videos

2011 saw the appearance on the web of the so-called interactive music videos, hybrid audio-visual forms that, from the point of view of media sociology, entail, at a methodological level, several challenges. If semiotic studies have often handled interactivity in media evolution, if we want to analyse this topic in a social semiotic perspective we are forced to face a complex and multi-layered institutional framework. In these products, indeed, software houses’ interests are intertwined with those of record labels, which at their turn have to coordinate a three-poles communication (video makers, musicians, audience). On one hand, we have Oculos, a technology developed by Facebook with the main objective to occupy the field of interactive videos (allowed by web’s technologic evolution and users’ improved knowledge of the device); on the other hand, Google and its subsidiary YouTube have launched their own technologies, which until now consist only Chrome Experiments and YouTube 360° Videos (or spherical videos, later introduced by Facebook, too).

Software houses’ entrance in music videos’ promotional strategies can be seen (that’s what I will try to demonstrate) as an occurrence of a global process of media softwarization, stimulated by the logics of participative web (the gamification and customization of digital experience). If even Lev Manovich himself, the author of «The languages of New Media», have recently expressed the need to abandon the word media, parcelling it out in the complementary concepts of software and content, it is mandatory to rethink the role of software in contemporary media ecology. In other words: if we conceive gamification as a remediation of game-design elements and principles in non-game contexts, can we conceive softwarization, as well, as a remediation of software-design elements and principles (namely, input-output interfaces) in non-software contexts?

In my presentation, I will propose a functional scheme of analysis for interactive music videos, based on the four different requests which are actually shaping them (software houses, record labels, video makers and audience). I will focus, especially, on Chrome Experiments and YouTube 360° music videos, for, in these products, software house’s interests are explicit and quite stable. Analysing music video mutations in its shift to interactivity, underlining the elements of continuity and rupture, highlighting the critical aspects and the potentialities which are inherent to these new audio-visual forms, I will try to understand if it’s allowed to start to conceive them as software in spite of media. After that, I will experiment a measuring system in order to screen the real approval of those experiments by the four agents of the scheme proposed, to see if this process of softwarization correspond to a real social demand or not. Finally, I will try to weaken the notion of music video, a cultural phenomenon which, in its convergence (both technological and economical) with software, is now losing its own distinctive features; that’s a statement which, if confirmed, which can be extended to digital media in their entirety, and imply the need of a new software-based aesthetic model.
The Question Concerning Comics as Technology: Gestell and Grid

Addressing the effects of different technologies of reading comics (print, digital, etc) requires addressing the technology of comics themselves: what is it about the way comics are put together that allows them to be read both on a printed page and a computer or tablet screen and have the difference between them be considered meaningful in a way that is different from the linear tracking of typography?

This paper argues that an application of the terminology from Martin Heidegger's essay “The Question Concerning Technology” to comics can clarify this question, if not answer it. We propose that the key term of Heidegger's essay, “Gestell,” which can be translated into English as something like "skeleton" or "bookcase", is a fruitful analogue to the comics grid. Gestell is part structure and part network and for Heidegger is essential in distinguishing a technology from a tool. Thierry Groenstein's The System of Comics, with its title and key concepts like “arthurlogy” and “braiding,” reinforces this analogy: comics are distinguishable by the machinery that encases them, holds them, and presents them. The grid does all this and more: it generates content even though it appears to be a static structure. This apparent paradox is precisely what Heidegger meant by Gestell.

Heidegger's use of the Aristotelian term “technê” accounts for this generative quality in the grid. Technê relates to physis, natural, biological genesis as from a seed and poiēsis, a blossoming forth. But technê refers to mechanical arts produced out of necessity rather than imaginative freedom. As Heidegger sees it, technê becomes technology when it becomes a system that determines human action, when human beings live inside it as tools themselves acting in the service of the system. The comics grid is such a determinative, generative system.

The grid not only determines how comics are produced, but how they are consumed. We will present several instances of this dual function in our presentation in the context of screen reading and page reading. Our major questions will be: What happens to the grid when we read with "panel view" or "guided view"? When is the technology of reading or looking at odds with or complementary to the technology of the comics grid? If, as Heidegger asserts, technology is about revealing, what are the different revelatory possibilities of the modes of reading or looking?

Our paper will discuss pages from the following texts:

- Jason, Hey, Wait!
- Allen Haverholm, When the Last Story is Told
- Simon Grennan, Dispossession: A Novel of Few Words
- Richard McGuire, Here
- Chris Ware, Building Stories
Anthony Rageul (Université Rennes 2)

**De la jubilation de concevoir des « récits-interfaces »**

A l’heure où j’écris ce descriptif, je « code » pour un nouveau projet de bande dessinée numérique. Et cette activité produit en moi une certaine jubilation. Peut-être est-ce lié au plaisir de parvenir à résoudre des problèmes dans un domaine où je ne suis qu’un ignorant bricoleur, de la même manière qu’on trouve satisfaction à réparer soi-même une fuite d’eau sans faire appel au plombier ?

Pour moi, le codage fait pleinement partie de la création d’une bande dessinée numérique – point de vue très loin d’être partagé dans ce milieu. Pourtant, le codage est le seul moyen de contourner les interface « prêtes à l’emploi », celles imposées par tels logiciels ou plateformes, dédiées ou non à la création de récit numérique, ou encore par les *habitus* et les usages. En somme, seul le codage permet de réaliser des « interfaces artistiques » au sens donné par Annick Bureaud.

Car écrire un récit numérique – mais on pourrait l’étendre à toute forme d’objet numérique – c’est avant tout écrire une interface. L’interface opère en effet la synthèse de l’ensemble du dispositif de l’œuvre numérique (Jean-Paul Fourmentraux) et est donc la forme même que prend l’œuvre et sous laquelle elle se présente au spectateur. La bande dessinée numérique n’y échappe pas : elle est elle-même, comme je l’ai qualifiée dans ma thèse, un « récit-interface ».

Et écrire une interface, c’est *in fine* délimiter les espaces de liberté offert au spectateur, prévoir et conditionner ses comportements, c’est en faire un matériau du récit : autre aspect non moins jubilatoire de cette pratique...
Robert Rapoport (Leuphana University)

The Poetics of the AI Video Edit: Projection, Synch, Phase

AI is beginning interpret and edit video in both surveillance and commercial realms. What strategies are there to being such modes of post-production into the frame of production? In such cases an awareness of metadata’s use in postproduction increasingly projects itself forward in time. In this paper I comment on how this projection of metadata influences the division of labour in film production. There is, I argue, metaphorical significance in the changing understanding of terms like ‘continuity’ and ‘sync’ on set. This paper will contextualize these shifts by looking at previous changes in the relationship between production and post-production in the 1960’s.

Using my recent piece Phase Repair (2015) as a case study, I look at how new AI-inflected editing grammars might influence an actor’s understanding of the metadata their performance produces. What strategies are available these actors whose gestures are bound for interpretation by AI? The feedback loop with video- analytics requires a heightened awareness the connection between language and gesture, as understood by machine vision. Phase Repair explores the idea of an actor attempting to ‘narrate’ black boxed code.8

Editing done by AI will change moving image grammars and by extension the language of those who enter into dialogue with them. I contextualize these shifts with previous debates in ethnographic filmmaking about the matching of film and ritual. In this set of literatures there is a focus on how participant observation can be formalized in film.9 Triangulating between event, participant observer and edit grammar in ethnographic filmmaking provides a useful analogy in understanding how AI as film editor might function in relation to contemporary production. Traditionally understood, ritual tends to occur in a frame that is contingent on a spatially/temporally separate observer.10 This dynamic would seem to also inform the framing of film sets bound for post-production involving AI. How does the logic of this mode of post-production inflect production itself? The proliferation of automatic video editing apps invites us to think in visual terms about what Galloway has called the “black-boxing of the self”.11

Please see. www.phaserepair.net

10 Bell, Catherine M. 2009, Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, New York: Oxford University Press:“A ritualized space plays off a shared belief in some intelligence outside the embodied present”: 51.
Philipp Sack (Braunschweig University of Art)

Commodity and thought forms. On „Poetry for Robots“

In early 2015, Arizona State University together with Neologic and Webvisions launched a research project on the processing, and eventually, the production, of metaphoric metadata by algorithms. Initiated with the seemingly simple goal to optimize search queries in image databases, allowing for content to be retrieved not only by the literal, but also by the metaphorical meanings ascribed to an image (and again, eventually to take metaphor into account for automated image tagging), the project has to address and understand a fundamental mechanism of how living organisms make sense of the world. This is the universalist aspiration the project’s title seems to express: fostering the creation of “Poetry for Robots” (henceforth P4R).

Poetry, in the case of P4R, is not a metaphor—the research team claims that it is specifically in poetry that metaphoricity as a principle is put into practice. In order to assess metaphor by algorithms, they set up a website exhibiting some hundred photographs, and invite visitors to their site to select one of the images and write a poem inspired by it, i.e., to create metaphorical metadata. These poetic contributions are then to be algorithmically analyzed so as to identify patterns of metaphoricity, which in turn would be serving as the foundation of machine recognition and production of metaphors.

However, the project has a blind spot concerning the imagery that P4R seeks to build machine processing of metaphors on. Neither their particular aesthetic nor the particular conditions of image production and circulation that bring about their specific look are being addressed by the project. In fact, all the images used to stimulate the creation of metaphorical metadata are stock photographs. This, I would like to argue, causes the research design of P4R to be somewhat biased: whereas it centers on metaphor, its only outcome will be allegory.

Stock photography presents the image in its pure commodity form: produced with no prior assignment, images are here conceived of as visual content to be offered to an anonymous market, their specific meaning adaptable to whatever need for illustration they might cater. They need to be semantically discharged in order to fit into any semantic context. This discharging however does not cause these photographs to be neutral, and thus particularly open to metaphorical descriptions, as the P4R research statement suggests. Rather, I claim that these photographs do already convey a very specific meaning, one that derives from their status as commodities. What P4R seems to bracket out is that the epistemological model its puts forward as universal is determined by a specific historical configuration (post-industrial capitalism, that is) that gravitates around the commodity—causing, in the words of Alfred Sohn-Rethel, thought form to acquire commodity form. Drawing on Benjamin’s writings on Baudelaire and the analyses of capitalist temporalities by Kojin Karatani and Slavoj Žižek, I am going to demonstrate how the notion of allegory can help us understand the implications of the commodity soliloquy that is made operational by P4R.
Dane Watkins (Falmouth University)

Smudging the Interface: How Can the Aesthetics of Comics Enhance the Usability of User Interfaces?

Interfaces bridge the abstract world of symbolic logic with the material world of humans. Usability, how effectively a user can bridge those worlds, has come to dominate interface design and alongside User Centred Design changed the emphasis in media from sender (author) to receiver (audience). Where comics are self conscious, their material representation as important as the ideas they signify, interfaces should be invisible (Norman, 2013), nothing in themselves but a reference to other things (Tufte, 1983). The interface frames the content, it counts and compares the data. Its importance is in its usability.

Nielsen defines 5 key components of usability (Nielsen, 2012)

1. Learnability
2. Efficiency
3. Memorability
4. Errors
5. Satisfaction

The contemporary interface, for instance Google material design, Microsoft Modern UI and iOS have removed idiosyncrasies (eg. skeumorphism) and become flattened by minimalist design driven by the need for speed (efficiency) and a desire for universal appeal (satisfaction).

How can efficiency and satisfaction be evaluated? A 2012 study (Chiang, Natarajan and Walker) examined the impact of three different systems for energy interfaces. The study presented participants with a numerical, analogue and ambient design ("emotional cartoon faces"). The majority of participants understood the information more quickly through numerical design which lead to the conclusion that numerical interfaces were more effective. The trouble with the conclusion is that the cartoons were poorly designed smiley faces, how would the results have differed if Robert Crumb had drawn the interface? What would happen to the quality of comics if they were evaluated on how quickly they were read or by universal appeal? The desire to appeal to many as users as possible requires a simplification that eliminates diversity and difficulty. Preview audiences in the film industry have neutralised movies, The Little Shop of Horrors (1986) was remade with a happy ending after preview audiences gave poor reviews of the original conclusion (Ew.com, 2015). Creating content around the needs of a mass audience emphasises neutrality and avoids difficulty. Unlike interfaces, comics have embraced difficult subjects, cancer (Brabner, Pekar and Stack, 1994), the holocaust (Spiegelman, 1986) Kafka (Mairowitz, Crumb and Appignanesi, 2007) and explained complex ideas such as financial derivatives (Maassen, Matts and Geary, 2013). Can comics ease users through complex workflows? In an attempt to experiment with the interface Andy Smith and myself developed "Clock On" an attendance system for the Games Academy at Falmouth University. To monitor attendance "Clock On" had to keep accurate records but there was scope for playing with students’ interactions. The interface was developed with pen and ink animation more commonly associated with comics. The presentation concludes with an evaluation of "Clock On", a visually challenging interface tested in the Games Academy an environment receptive to experimentation and risk. Rather than creating flat interfaces that must appeal to everyone this research explores how interface design can maintain its usability but broaden its visual vocabulary. As comics have developed a rich ecosystem of styles and content could interface design more authentically reflect the diversity of human culture?
References


Martin Zeilinger (Anglia Ruskin University)

Machine-Readable Beckett: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Reading and Performing Quad as Algorithmic Theatre

This presentation documents a research-creation project that operates at the intersections of critical code studies, performance studies, literary scholarship, and game studies to reimagine Samuel Beckett’s late play Quad (1981) as an algorithmic expression. Quad, a roughly 20-minute choreography for four silent actors, has been called a ballet and a geometric mime. However, it could also be described as a functional algorithm, an iterative exploration of a geometrical figure, traced by a set of characters whose behaviour changes when their movements coincide. In its combined minimalism and high degree of difficulty, I understand Quad to push the boundaries of theatre-production and the conventions of playwriting, to explore narrative structure as geometrical graph, and to test the limits of performers’ agency vis-à-vis the codified instructions of a play. In collaboration with a professor of British drama, a theatre director, a videogame designer, and a stage lighting designer, the aim of my project is to produce a series of experimental algorithmic renderings of Quad. These are envisioned to include a translation of the play into a piece of software that can be ‘performed’ by a computer, a playable, experimental video game version (to be performed by four ‘players’), as well as parallel virtual and real-world performances of the original play. In combination, these renderings help us explore what Quad can contribute to the ongoing theorisation of code-based creative expression. What becomes possible when we read Beckett’s play as an algorithm, i.e., as a set of machine-readable instructions that can be interpreted by a combination of computer and human agents? Following through with this approach both in theory and in practice leads to an exploration of the algorithmic expressions’ relation to text- and performance-based creative practice. Is theatre by definition an ‘algorithmic’ art form? Are Beckett’s notoriously difficult plays algorithms that can crash the theatrical system? What are the ontological, formal, and practical connections between poetic speech, stage directions, and computer-readable code? What conventions do play-writing and code-based expression share, and what are the poetics, politics, and formal characteristics of these shared conventions? (Incidentally, many of these concerns strongly coincide with Beckett’s own critical interest in the nature of theatre.) In addressing these critical questions, I will demo my code-translation of Quad as a functional Java-based program that approximates the functionality of the play and also present the works-in-progress relating to our re-designing of Quad as a playable multi-player video game performance.