

Games as Art or Artifact

Poetry as a game – An Analysis of Online New Poetry Games

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Online Interactive Poetry – Poetry as a game, an experiential gaming experience whereby the players explore the poetic environment towards the end goal of constructing their own meaning.

Summary

Games as Art or Artifact – Poetry as a game. The Internet contains many examples of interactive poetry or new poetry. That is poems that a player must interactively explore, most usually they are made in Flash but there exist other forms as well such as hypertext and video. These examples of new poetry games allow the player to explore a poem interactively as you would a game. The game play is experiential whereby the players explore the poetic environment towards the end goal of constructing their own meaning. Each poem allows the player freedom to explore the poetic environment to such an extent that the player will find their own way through the interactive poetic environment in a non-linear fashion. In this paper I will discuss and analyze some examples of these new poetry games and the resulting experience for the player.

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Games as Art or Artifact - Poetry as a Game

The potential for literary expression is ever defined by the historical/cultural context in which it occurs, which of course includes the technology available for achieving such expression. Who knows what form literary expression will eventually take in today's new entertainment technologies? Or who the new Shakespeare or Tolstoy or Eliot or Joyce will be? It's much too early for the implications of the new technologies and forms of entertainment to have permeated fully, or even much more than marginally, into the new literary practice.² On the other hand almost all successful stories from popular culture are now nearly always automatically produced as a game such as most recently for example *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* and *Spiderman* to name but a few.

The Internet contains many examples of interactive poetry or *new poetry*. That is poems that a player must interactively explore, most usually they are made in Flash but there exist other forms as well such as hypertext and video. Kluszczynski in his paper *Arts, Media, Cultures: Histories of Hybridisation* (2005) discusses Lev Manovich's concept of Net Art which he views as a main component of new media art, the digital and/or interactive art of communication. If we view poetry as art, then new poetry would fall into this realm of new art. Kluszczynski (2005, p126) cites Simon Biggs' idea of the potential of the Net leading us to an accelerated localization of creative activity in relation to socio-linguistic space. The new poetry examples, which we find on the Net, are an example of such creative activity; they allow the player to explore a poem interactively as you would a game. The game play is experiential with the goal for each player is to construct their own meaning through the game space. In this paper I will discuss and analyse some examples of these poetic games and the resulting experience for the player.

Jenny Weight's recent article 'I, Apparatus, You: A Technosocial Introduction to Creative Practice' (Convergence 2006, pp413-446) is particularly relevant here. In

² As Lister et al (2003, p28) put it, having combined, a la post-structural theory, author and text into the 'web of textuality': "It is clear that we are in the process of understanding, through theory and practice, the implications of hypertextual organisation for texts and readers. However it is equally clear that the principle of hypertextuality is key to understanding the new media" (2003, p30).

developing her own argument she integrates the thinking of many prominent new media theorists including for example Ball, Cayley, Flusser, Glazier, Hayles, Manovich, Rosenberg, Seaman, Wardrip-Fruin and more generally the competing arguments of the ludologists and the narratologists. As both a theorist and an active practitioner in the creation of new poetry (in her case generative poetry³), Weight addresses the question of the ‘technical and social’ restructuring that has taken place in the new media, and the implications of this for poetic practice, i.e. both the creation and the consumption of new poetry. In addition to Weight’s arguments we will consider other practitioners and theorists such as Bush, Kluszczynski, Landow, McLuhan, Montfort, Murray, Mirzoeff, Odin and Ryan whose work is central to the question of the creation of new poetry games.

What is important to note about Jenny Weight’s argument is that she believes that the texts in question “cannot be understood separately from the apparatus that displays and performs them” (Weight 2006, p413). This is similar to Manovich’s opinion that in “cultural communication, a code is rarely simply a neutral transport mechanism; usually it affects the messages transmitted with its help” (Manovich 2001, p64). Also similar to the ideas put forward by Marshall McLuhan in his 1962 paper *The Medium is the Message*, where he describes how “the electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has “no content”” (Wardrip-Fruin & Montfort 2003, p203). Weight (2006) outlines a technosocial argument that a trilogical relationship is formed when an apparatus mediates creative communication (Weight 2006, pp413 – 446). Weight uses Flusser’s (2000) term, apparatus, to mean any programmed or programmable machine, he defines apparatus as “a plaything or game that simulates thought [*trans.* An overarching term for a non-human agency, e.g. the camera, the computer and the ‘apparatus’ of the State or of the market]; organization or system that enables something to function” (Flusser 2000, p83) In his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* Flusser (2000, p21) uses the term with reference to photography in that

³ Jenny Weight’s online creative poetic work belongs to a sub-genre called *generative poetics*. This work is textual both with regards the programming and the surface display. Weight calls such texts ‘text-as-apparatus’ and outlines their ultimate purpose “is to promote environments in which interpretation happens”(Weight 2006, p416).

photographic apparatuses “are black boxes that simulate thinking in the sense of a combinatory games using number-like symbols”. He views the activity of taking photographs as a game in which the photographer is a player (Flusser 2000, p27). In this sense it is clear how this applies to computers, as many people interact with the computer as a plaything rather than simply a machine. The core of Weight’s technosocial argument is a trilogical relationship that consists of three partners, the human programmer or artist, the executing apparatus and the human interpreter (Weight 2006, p414). A technosocial undertaking of this kind is formed with similar partners with reference to the cases of poetic games that I refer to in this research. The poet or programmer (this could be one or two people), the apparatus, and the player. Weight describes the trilogical relationship as meaningful and rewarding for its human interpreters. “The creating technosocial subject collaborates with the apparatus to create new media or communication. The interpreting technosocial subject interprets media or communication performed and disseminated via (but not initiated by) the apparatus” (Weight 2006, p415). “The apparatus performs at the behest of one or other human party, but not necessarily in ways that the humans can predict” (Weight 2006, p415) though the apparatus is being directed by the human there is the possibility of the apparatus itself contributing unanticipated elements to the process this is why it is important to view it as much as a partner in the undertaking as the other partners. She explains that “networked apparatuses command access to a near infinite database of information and media objects, and programs can be written to manipulate that information in nontrivial ways...it is a performative device of unique capacity, sensitivity and complexity, which encourages a wide range of human creativity, interpretation and, indeed, collaboration” (Weight 2006, pp415-416).

Jenny Weight (2006, p431) outlines three commonly identified features of the text-as-apparatus. The first of these is the interface; this is the apparatus screen or computer monitor, which creates a visual environment. Odin (2007, Online) explains how in the print medium content is the same as the interface however the writer for the digital medium needs an interface to make the content accessible to the user. Just as the interface

in a web browser⁴ allows us to access a web page without which the majority of users would not be able to understand the content as otherwise they would be presented with a page of HTML⁵ code which to most people would be unintelligible. “The interface shapes how the computer user conceives of the computer itself” (Manovich 2001, pp65-66).

The next common feature of the text-as-apparatus is the database. Traditionally narrative is associated with books and films, however now with the new media a new category of narrative has come about, that is the database; “a collection of items that constitutes the content of the work and exists in binary code on the computer” (Odin 2007, Online). As Lev Manovich states “Numerical representation turns media into computer data, thus making it programmable. And this indeed radically changes the nature of media” (2001, p52).

The third feature is the algorithm, an algorithm is a series of instructions, in this case Weight describes algorithms as interactivity, in other words the algorithm dictates the extent to which the user is given freedom within the environment. Algorithms link the user to the database allowing them to form new relationships (Weight 2006, pp431-432). In much of the new poetry the scripting language of Adobe Flash, ActionScript, defines the extent of the interactivity, or relationships to the content, in new poetry.

Any trilogical relationship such as that between the apparatus, the programmer and the interpreter has an inherent conflict between two models of language, the programming language and natural language. Weight (2006, p419) defines programming as “a species of logical writing whose operational efficacy derives from the correspondence of surface display...with coded instruction, where correspondence is not equivalent to representation.” What is significant for any apparatus or executing code is that it can be executed without error. Code can only ever ‘signify’ one thing. It is not open to interpretation. The apparatus has no concept of multiplicity; there is no ‘beyond’ the data,

⁴ Such as Mozilla’s Firefox, Microsoft’s Internet Explorer or Safari to name but a few.

⁵ Hypertext Markup Language, the basic code used to build web pages.

when a computer encounters a 'bug' in the code, no dialogic negotiation takes place. The program – the performance– stops (Weight 2006, p420). With reference to this Cayley in his paper *The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text)* (2005, Online) uses the term *codework*. He describes this term as it applies to literature which “uses, addresses, and incorporates code as an underlying language-animating or language-generating programming”. He views this as a special type of language in itself, or as an intrinsic part of the new surface language or ‘interface text’ of writing in networked and programmable media. Manovich states that the “act of writing code itself is very important, regardless of what this code actually does at the end” (Chun & Keenan, 2006). In all cases, as Weight notes (2006, p419) it is the feature of logical correspondence independent of any representation which is the defining feature of programming language in the new media. Natural language by contrast is not a transparent bearer of meaning in the way that programming code absolutely must be. “Natural language works on principles of coherence, empathy and a level of syntactical forgiveness” (Weight 2006, p419). Natural language is always concerned with meaning, which is contextualized and nuanced. It emerges from the way specific individuals interpret the unity of the text into a multiplicity of elements, and then unify it again. When humans encounter an apparently nonsensical piece of text (i.e. a ‘bug’ to a programmed apparatus) they usually attempt to extrapolate some meaning through clues and cues (Weight 2006, p420). Unlike the apparatus, the human interpreter engages in a ‘back and forth’ between the unity of text and multiple factors in the world that might be brought to bear on interpretation, the interpreter cannot help reaching beyond the text, the apparatus has no capacity to do so. Not surprisingly such issues re the human quest for meaning are central to the discussion/analysis of language throughout all fields of social science and the humanities.

Though the apparatus is considered a partner in this undertaking and the texts cannot be understood separately from this apparatus, the interpretation only takes part on side of the human user. In short computers cannot read poetry only humans can. “The apparatus does not care that representations of linear connection are somewhat emblematic of the human condition, that meaning or significance is ever framed by a need to make narrative connections they simply determine what narrative connections will be possible (Weight

2006, p433). It is only the human element in this relationship that has a need to construct meaning, a need for meaning which remains at the heart of new poetry, just as it has forever been with traditional poetry. The question with new poetry – with the provision of poetic experiences generated by the trilogical relationships inherent within the new technologies – is how such meaning is created and what are its characteristics.

In relation to poetic expression in these games the conflict between the two forms of language involved in the creation of text-as-apparatus comes immediately to the fore, as Weight notes (2006, p433) “many early texts-as-apparatuses...explore the problematic of narrative and expanded affordance”. In this regard Ryan in *Beyond Myth and Metaphor – the case of Narrative in Digital Media* (2001, Online), argues that “...narrative coherence is impossible to maintain in a truly complex system of links” and in order to maintain narrative within new media texts we need “...simpler structures, structures with fewer branches and fewer decision points, so that every path can be individually designed by the author...otherwise, the system would lead to a combinatorial explosion-or fall back into randomness, the deathbed of narrative coherence” (Ryan 2001, Online). Grand Theft Auto (2008) is an example of the limit to which interactive linear narrative can be extended. In Timo Arnall’s words (Online), GRA is a “realistically modeled discrete game world in which linear narratives occur in any order, and in any place. It is a model of a truly interactive matrix where the player is free to move as she pleases... Aside from the controversy that it has generated over the unusual level of violence, it has always had an extraordinarily developed narrative structure... The game is set in a number of fictional cities – the player is encouraged to explore the gameworld as much as she pleases. Narratives and sub-narratives are discovered as the city is explored, leading to new explorations, money, notoriety, and ultimately new cities... This highly developed simulation of a real world, in which story elements are randomly distributed, is very compelling. As a player there is never the feeling of being trapped by a linear storyline, or by unnatural game constraints. The narrative elements are thus more credible and intense... When the gameworld presents itself as an open, explorable environment, free of constraints, it is possible to start feeling that the world is yours, instead of an authors” (Arnall, Online).

Interestingly this is exactly what is done in many examples of new poetry, i.e. when interactivity is included in the poetic game, the number of choice points is greatly reduced and the outcomes are scripted by the author.

Now I'll look at a range of examples in terms of the extent to which interactivity is used and in terms of effectiveness re their potential for creating a poetic experience for the player. And in the process I'll consider both traditional print poems, which are 'translated', and poems created entirely in new media.

Elevator – Handplant Studio and Heather Lee Schroeder

<http://www.bornmagazine.org/projects/praise/>

1.) First off, it is quite common for translations of traditional print poems into new media forms to simply use interactivity as a sort of page turning device. For example *In praise of an elevator* (Handplant Studio & Schroeder, Online) made with Adobe Flash, a Shockwave program, limited interactivity is provided. To proceed in the poem the user must click one of the elevator buttons. However only the next sequential button becomes active at any one time so despite the opportunity of interactivity the player is forced to proceed in a linear fashion.

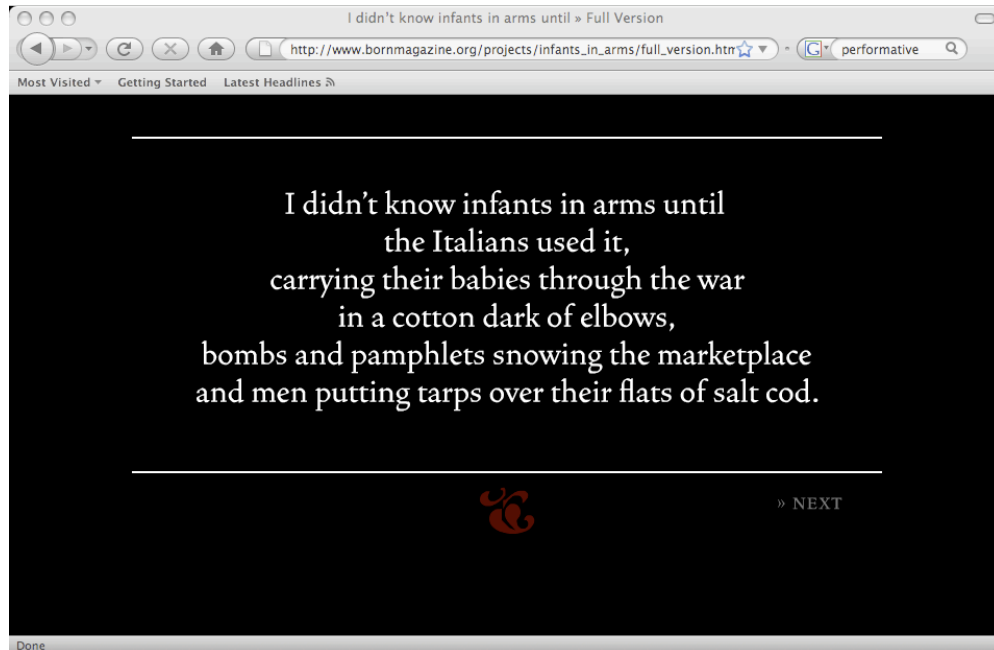


(Schroeder & Handplant Studio 2008, *In praise of an elevator*, Online)

I Didn't Know – Rob Weychert and Kiki Petrosino

http://www.bornmagazine.org/projects/infants_in_arms/full_version.html

I didn't know infants in arms until (Petrosino & Weychert 2006, Online) is a flash piece that requires you to click next to make the next line of the poem appear. Though in its original text form the poem is effective and powerful, the new poetry version is less so due to the necessity of the user having to click their mouse so frequently. The player is required to click not only after each verse but also after each line.



(Petrosino & Weychert, *I didn't know infants in arms until*, Online)

The incorporation of motion graphics/video and audio in online poetry games is often done through the use of Flash authoring software, in which continuity of visual or audio narrative is typically achieved by embedding such within the original Fla file. The same also applies with regards the use of interactivity in most online poetry games. It is not typically used for the purpose of creating poetic experiences, but simply as a way of regulating the flow of narrative (as in Schroeder's elevator buttons); or even to create

some potential for the reordering or sequencing of words or phrases and perhaps images by means of for example a simple drag and drop scripting in Flash.

It is clearly possible to create new poetry games which allow the player freedom to create their own poetic experience with interactivity within the existing source text.⁶ Curiously though the use of such interactivity is not at all common among existing new poetry games. More common is the use of interactivity simply to control the pace of presentation of the poem, as for example in *I didn't know infants in arms until*, a use of interactivity which inevitably breaks the rhythm of the poem. The rhythm is of course an integral component of any poem; so breaking that rhythm by pausing the piece until the user takes action, a disjointed poetic experience can be the result. The very act of distraction, inherent in the process of interaction via mouse or key, disrupts the rhythmic experience of the original. This is sadly common in many pieces of new poetry, an example of what Dorris (2006) in his paper *Creating Flash Poetry* terms “construction visible”, meaning that the presentation within new media requires attending to it in ways that pull the player out of the experience of the piece, literally distracting the player from the rhythmic experience inherent in the original poem.

The Last Day of Betty Nkomo – Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries

<http://www.poemsthatgo.com/gallery/winter2004/YHCHI/index.htm>

By way of contrast *The Last Day of Betty Nkomo* made by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries (Online) another online Flash piece though it may be considered poetically a weaker poem than *I didn't know infants in arms until* and uses very basic flash techniques, however the poetic experience is more effective as the rhythm of the piece is not broken by requiring the user to click a button or otherwise interact. The words instead appear onto the screen in time to music.

⁶ Dorris (2006) shows some ways of allowing the player to modify evocative effects such as sound volume or pan, movieclip properties such as color, size, location, rotation, alpha, etc. via interactivity while the Flash Swf movie is playing. He also suggests some scripting solutions to creating the sort of repetitive, re-iterated text effects used within generative poetry and provides the necessary ActionScripting to achieve such effects in Flash CS3pro, i.e. using AS3.0 scripting.

When looking at different online examples of new poetry games it becomes clear that those examples that are less effective in conveying the sense of a poem are those that require greater user interaction. The poetic experience is jarred by the necessity of the player removing themselves from the poem's illusion to move the mouse before re-immersing themselves in the piece. The player would be required to interact by, for example, clicking on the screen to proceed to the next portion of the poem. This has the effect of creating 'hypermediacy' (Bolter & Grusin 2000, pp272-273) which reminds the user of the medium and so shatters the illusion. 'Remediation', or "the representation of one medium in another...is a defining characteristic of the new digital media" (Bolter & Grusin 2000, p45) and the central underlying characteristic of visual representation in the new media which makes new poetry possible. This process attempts to either "make the medium disappear" (Bolter & Grusin 2000, p22) (Immediacy) or alternatively reminds the viewer of the medium and "emphasizes process or performance rather than the finished art object" (Bolter & Grusin 2000, p31) (Hypermediacy).

2) Secondly, there also exist examples that contain simple use of once off interactivity which triggers powerful new media poetic experiences.

Ambient Fish – Caroline Bergvall

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bergvall/amfish/amfish.html>

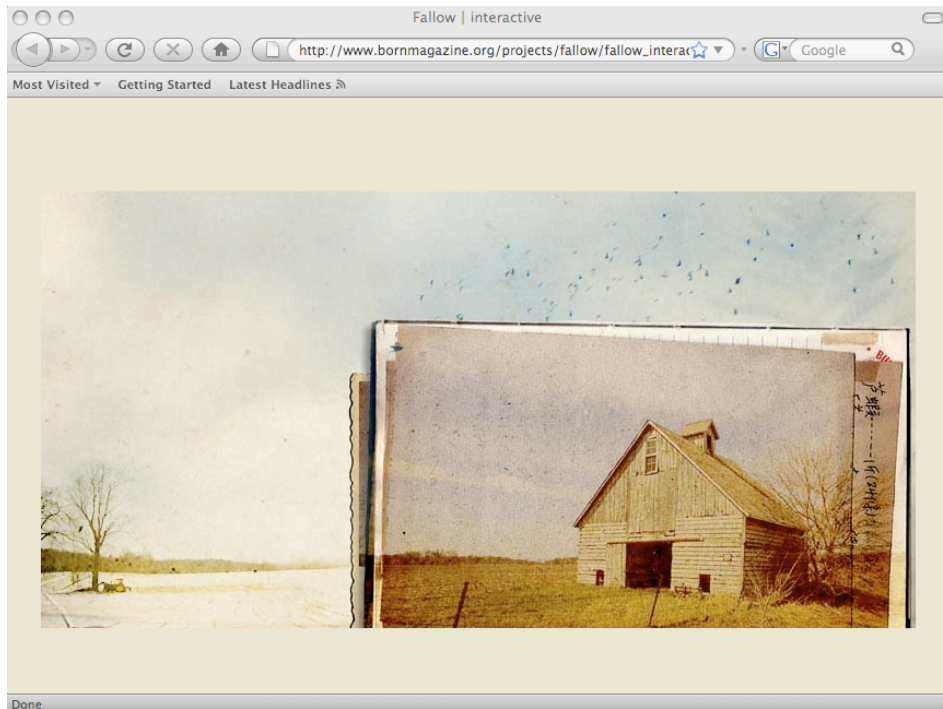
What's interesting to me re ambient fish by Caroline Bergvall (1999, Online) is that in its current form interactivity exists just to trigger what is already built into the poem not to play with a potential range of experiences and hence poetics through interaction. There is the potential in this case for the use of interactivity to be extended way beyond what currently exists and so drive the poetic experience however I will return to this point later.

3) Another type of online flash game that exists is one in which interactivity is used with an existing print poem translation in a way which enhances both the original poem and

allows for it to be re-nuanced over and over in diverse sequences and hence poetic experiences for the player.

Fallow – Monica Ong and Rebecca Givens

<http://www.bornmagazine.org/projects/fallow>



(Givens & Ong 2007, *Fallow*, Online)

Monica Ong's new poetry game of Rebecca Givens' *Fallow* (Givens & Ong 2007, Online) allows the user freedom to explore the poetic environment to such an extent that the player will find their own way through the poetic game in a non-linear fashion. For instance it is possible the player misses a part or even repeats the same part over and over. The player is presented with what is essentially an interface cleverly disguised as elements of the world created by the poem. The player can click on old photographs or birds in the sky to be brought to the next poetic piece.

In *Fallow* such repetition is in fact pivotal to the aesthetics of the poetic experience.

The likelihood that players experience chunks from the media database more than once can reinforce the poetic effect. Repetition is an effect of the iteration and re-iteration that is almost the defining feature of performance works from data based media. Iterative change in this context harmoniously co-exists with repetition, the impetus to always move forward with such texts is strong and such forward momentum suits the short and condensed rhetorics of poetry.

4) Sometimes there exist even more unpredictable and unexpected patterns of repetition in poems created entirely within the new media however they also in process sacrifice the narrative structures used in translations such as fallow.

Concatenation - Jenny Weight

http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/geniwate_generative_poetry/concatenation2.html

The experience of patterning, repetition here is similar to the experience in fallow although with a different motion graphic experience and much greater unpredictability.

Transience and repetition – patterning – seem to reinforce each other (Weight 2006, pp434-435). Such effects are of course not new to the poetics of data based media. They can be experienced in the repetition, especially when read aloud, of many traditional poems, for example Thomas Hardy’s “Timing Her”, or W.H. Auden’s “Night Train”. Here the cadence, intonation, and repetition of words, generate the same sense of powerful forward momentum as one might experience in generative new poetry games. In these however the control of the pacing and patterning of such repetition, not only of sound and word, but equally of the spatial and motion graphic patterning, can be given over to the player.

In geniwaites’s generative poetry for example, the player can actually experience these sort of poetic effects through interaction with the screen, and it is this potential for interactivity or, as Jenny Weight terms it, ‘freedom’ (2006, p432) that such effects are

achieved in new poetry. Jenny Weight describes her work *Concatenation* (geniwaite 2006, Online) an online generative poetry piece made with Director, as a text-as-apparatus which was necessarily created in and experienced via the computer (Weight 2006, p417). The player is allowed much more scope for interactivity clicking wherever and whenever they want creating a unique experience in each instance for each player. Weight describes text unfolding according to complex algorithmic rules in unrepeatably ways in this piece, as the program executes, the interpreter interprets and a poetic trilogy results in which programmer, apparatus and interpreter have distinct and equally important roles (2006, p422). The programming required for this compared to the previous examples created in Adobe Flash would be quite extensive. This is partly the reason why it was made using Director as this is a program that used to allow greater scope for dynamic user interaction through programming⁷ as opposed to Flash⁸. Now however this is no longer necessarily the case with the latest version of ActionScript, ActionScript 3.0 which is now an object-orientated language and this allows for greater control and dynamic interactivity.



(geniwaite 2003, *Concatenation*, Online)

⁷ The programming language of Macromedia Director is *Lingo*.

⁸ The programming language of Adobe Flash is *ActionScript*.

However trilogical ‘narratives’ have a different type of power than those of traditional novels or movies, they represent possibility rather than closure, the privilege of contingency over fate. Their patterning is different, because combinations of user behaviour and algorithm do not result in a standard narrative trajectory (Weight 2006, p433). So texts in text-as-apparatus may better be conceived as game environments rather than traditional, standard narratives. They may in fact better be conceived as environmental texts in which narrative or not becomes a choice that the player makes. Murray describes the digital medium is “as much a pattern of thinking and perceiving as it is a pattern of making things” (Wardrip-Fruin 2003, p11).

5) Now I will show you some other examples of creating and nuancing repetition via interactivity in new media poetics:

a) **Luz - Loss Pequeño Glazier**

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/e-poetry/luz/>

Here once the player clicks on word luz they get a short piece using different combinations of several words and short phrases. Hit back and click Luz again for a new mix of the same. Spacing also varies to create different experiences; this is an engaging yet simple interactive piece. And yet this has nothing of the engagement feeling of any powerful traditional print poem simply read aloud such as the Hardy and Auden poems I mentioned earlier. Luz reflects the early days of trying to think poetically when using the new media.

b) **When you reach Kyoto - geniwaite and Stefans**

http://machinepoetics.com/files/page_space/experiment/geniwaite-stefans/when_you_reach_kyoto/kyoto.html

For example in the piece *When you reach Kyoto* (geniwaite & Stefans 2006, Online) though initially confusing for the player, through repetitive use, meaning begins to be

formed in a manner outlined by Seaman. Each new context adds another layer of thought and experience to the accretive nature of meaning production – generating a hybrid of a hybrid” (Seaman 2005, p14).



(geniwaite & Stefans 2006, *When you reach Kyoto*, Online)

The generation of such *pattern flows* while using text is also, perhaps more importantly, generating forward momentum in the form of visual movement – in movement, change of pace, size, rotation, colouring, alpha, style etc. of the text and other visual patterns associated with it. These repetitions create multiple levels of impact via their visual, symbolic, and sometimes aural resonances with each other, and implicitly with whole worlds of meaning for players by virtue of their years of experience with the products of old media – film, video, radio, advertising, etc. In the process such new media productions rely on what has been termed ‘remediation’ to achieve their poetic effects.

In relation to “textual and written language”, Seaman for example in his paper *Pattern Flows: Hybrid Accretive Processes Informing Identity Construction* (2005) discusses how meaning arises from the experience of patterns. He notes that the “variety of

language use enables and is enabled through hybrid constructions. “In terms of outlining a new approach to linguistics, the computer functions as a pattern-producing semiotic machine...I call this more expansive take on linguistics *Pattern Flows*. This understanding of linguistics enfolds computer-based perturbations as well as other forms of environmental perturbations into an accretive participation in meaning production” (Seaman 2005, p15). In this light Seaman (2005, p16) proposes that computer-based environments can function as consensual domains, extending human agency through this potentially quixotic technological means.” It is not hard to imagine where this may take us in relation to new poetic experiences.

Ambient Fish – Caroline Bergvall

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bergvall/amfish/amfish.html>

Note here (while showing ambient fish again) how much more powerful the use of interactivity could be in new media poetry if instead of initial couple clicks of mouse triggering a predetermined – albeit powerful – poetic experience, the piece were scripted so that a much wider range of audio and textual assets could be brought into play thus Creating a more powerful individual experience. This poem could be programmed so it has repeated interactivity thus allowing the player to create a whole range of unanticipated, but poetic experiences, the poetics of it come from the unexpected mix of words with slight sound shifts in them but huge meaning or almost meanings in them and these are then augmented by both the text and the audio combinations. What exists now is albeit, a good once off new media poetic experience, but a rather weak and pointless form of interactivity. This could be made into a potentially powerful interactive poetic experience in which the payoff is only attainable via interactivity to build your own realms of poetic experience via learning which sequence of button push works for you and provides the most satisfactory poetic nuances in sound, rhyme, implicit meanings.

6) Finally I will show you two poetic games, which are illustrative of perhaps the defining characteristics of interactive poetry created solely in new media (or positioned within the new media is such a way that the traditional poetic experience derived from

reading or hearing poetry cannot be attained) as opposed to some of the traditional print poems translated into new media such as the examples we looked at earlier.

Arteroids (Morris 2006, p22) – Jim Andrews

<http://www.poemsthatgo.com/gallery/fall2003/arteroids/arteroids.htm>

This is basically a shoot 'em up game in its poetic form. Jim Andrews the creator states “Arteroids situates itself between entertainment and art”. In Arteroids the player uses the arrow keys to drive the red word around the screen and uses the ‘x’ key to shoot blue and green texts that attack you as you play. There is a game mode and a play mode with greater restrictions on the player in game mode and greater freedom to experiment and explore in play mode. As you go up in level in game play there is less chance for the player to actually read and experience the audio and text that appears. It certainly achieves the creation of a game experience but whether it achieves a poetic experience is questionable as after a while the player becomes mainly fixated on destruction not poetry. When writing about Arteroids Andrews explains “Writers realize, in their confrontation with the page and with language, that they need to understand their medium or it will have its way with them. When writers move to the Web and/or the Net (which includes email etc.), they often do not acknowledge that the change in media has consequences for their work, how it is distributed, read, contextualized, and understood” (Jim Andrews, *Arteroids, Poetry and the Flaw, poems that go*).

Vniverse (Morris 2006, p181) - Stephanie Strickland and Cynthia Lawson

<http://vniverse.com/>

This is an interesting project as the poetry not only exists online in this interactive format but also exists as a book by the poet Stephanie Strickland V: WaveSon.nets / Losing l'Una (Penguin, 2002). In their essay “Making the Vniverse” Strickland and Lawson state “Our most important goal in implementing the *Vniverse* was to give the reader ways to chart their own new courses. “ “Clicking a star on the constellation releases the text of a WaveSon.net. Each poem begins, not as it does in print, but rather with the star/triplet chosen by the reader, and assembles itself not sequentially, but in relation to that chosen

triplet, which displays in color while the other lines of the WaveSon.net display in white.” (<http://vniverse.com/> Online, accessed 14/05/09) The player can chart their course through the stars and WaveSon.nets by sweeping the cursor across the screen and tracing imagined constellations. Hovering your cursor over a star allows the player to see its constellation and number, then clicking on that star brings that constellation to the fore and allows you to explore it in greater detail. Double clicking on the star brings the related WaveSon.net to the screen. You may also interact by typing in a number in the circle at the top right hand corner of the screen and this will bring the related constellation and WaveSon.net to the fore. As in many new poetry examples this project, made in Director, was brought about through collaboration with a poet and a technologist. While vniverse certainly offers a creative and interesting form of interaction for the player, the poetic experience attained is questionable.

In all cases the poetic experiences though widely varied have totally left the realm of traditional poetic experience. There is no evocation of rhythm, rhyme, story or narrative structure, imagery or movement or metaphoric experiences such as one finds in the lyric of traditional poems. There is not even the emphasis on certain central features of traditional poetry such as the repetition we found in concatenations or the potential for such, along with all others aspects of traditional poetry which could be achieved in our example of rescripting ambient fish as suggested earlier.

What we find here are the essential characteristics of what might be termed the postmodern (to borrow from David Harvey (1990) and posthuman (to borrow from N. Katherine Hayles (1999)) condition.

The postmodern and post human condition- referring to the pervasive sense of fragmentation, loss of individuality, roots, connection (i.e. depth) characteristic of the postmodern world and the equally pervasive awareness that one’s own self identity intellectual, emotional, biological and of course interpersonal functioning is now ever bound up in a condition that Adalaide Morris (2006, p4) refers to as “cybernetic organisms joined in continuous feedback loops with media and information technologies..

that we are ever entwined in an all pervasive “synergy between human beings and intelligent machines”.

The development of interactive poetry or poems as games is of course in its infancy. At this point we’re still in the period, between as Adalaide Morris (2006, p1) puts it “the... two kinds of knowledge: what we know because it is what we see and do, and what we know because it is what we think”. We are in what N. Katherine Hayles (1999) terms the “post human” era as we are all increasingly continually connected and hence defined by digital influences both in media and elsewhere. A fact that most of us – especially those of us working and living in the world of digital creation – are particularly aware of. We have all inherited the thinking knowing from the analog generations and this is changing. Bill Maher on his show Real Time With Bill Maher on HBO on Friday June 12th announced with relish it was the first day on which analogue television signals were no longer being transmitted, so any one with an analogue T.V. watching his show was obviously hallucinating. Things have changed, our knowledge has changed but so too must our thinking.

In relation to this little e-spec of it in the creation of interactive poetry, or poetry as games, perhaps we can close just by noting.

We’re now in a world in which poetry and computing are merging or to use the common jargon, converging in which traditional poets – those with expertise in nuancing Jenny Weight’s ‘natural language’ find themselves having to let go of their original print creations and allow the influences of new media programming, software, and thinking to give new and alternative dimensions to their poetic visions. And likewise a world in which new media practitioners – those whose expertise is in primarily in the ‘programming language’ are in collaboration with traditional poets as for e.g. in Bornmagazine.org creations, are finding their own poetic voice to maximize the potential of their digital audio, imaging, and programming expertise. Art and technology no longer preclude the other.

In the examples we considered here it is clear that interactive poems like computer games succeed to the extent that they engage the player in the process of determining their own experience within the poetic game and the extent to which that the virtual world on offer for such creation is itself rich and varied in its game or poetic opportunities.

As far as new media poetry goes, interactivity in itself is nothing, in a weak poetic world it offers little; but in a strong one – rich and varied in its poetic potential – it can offer a whole new world of poetics...over and over again.

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