

Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres

International conference at the Cultural Studies Research Center “Media Upheavals”

University of Siegen, Germany, November 20-21, 2008

Organized by Professor Dr. Peter Gendolla and Dr. Jürgen Schäfer

Using electronic and networked media has resulted in such serious changes in the relationship between “author,” “work,” and “reader” that it seems necessary to make revisions in the traditional models analyzing literary communication. The Siegen conference on *The Aesthetics of Net Literature: Writing, Reading and Playing in Programmable Media* (Nov 25-27, 2004)¹ had already made clear that this triad has to be extended into the technical aspects of media: Literary processes emerge from techno-social networks, i.e. they materialize in the interplay between human and electronic “actants.”

If in the past discussions centered mostly on those projects that were perceived by looking at the computer screen or that were controlled via keyboard and mouse, now man-machine interactions are organized by considerably more complex interfaces. The specific attention of this follow-up conference therefore will be focusing on the *aesthetic* processes of AI-controlled *environments* that occur in the physical realm between the interfaces of technical sensors or effectors and the human body. Electronic media take “body language” to a new level as well since more and more the whole body is involved in the media activity. Increasingly complex sensors (integrated into vehicles, clothes and environments) “realize”—hear, see, feel, in other words: measure—the movements of the body, its mimics and gestures. This “multimodal” body itself then also exchanges information with the “products” of this kind of technology. Such medial couplings and framings enable the co-operation of non-symbolic activities, symbolic language activities and algorithmic processes of computer systems.

If it is true that semantics is always the result of intermedial transcriptions between media then this development affects all human behavior concerning linguistic signs and therefore also the *aesthetic* processes of perception and self-perception. In this context the contributions to this conference will refer to *literary* communication and strategies thereby interrogating how literary structures, interfaces and genres change regarding:

- *Locative Narratives*, i.e. environmental, neighborhood and city projects with GPS-based media following literary patterns (e.g. travel- and adventure-narratives or detective stories like J.-P. Balpe’s *Fictions d’Issy*; S. Schemat’s *Augmented Reality Fictions*; *Inter Urban* by 34 North 118 West or S. Berkenheger/G. Müller’s *Worldwatchers*).
- *Immersive Environments* (Cave or interactive camera-projection systems) in which reception does not only take place through the eyes alone but rather in which the whole body is “reading” and thereby recomposing already saved meanings or those that still have to be

¹ The proceedings were published under the title *The Aesthetics of Net Literature: Writing, Reading and Playing in Programmable Media* by Transcript Publishers (Bielefeld, 2007, 384 pp.). Distributed in the U.S. by Transaction Publishers, Edison, NJ.

constructed (e.g. N. Wardrip-Fruin's *Screen*; J. Cayley's *Lens*; C. Utterback's *Text Rain* or D.Small/T. White's *Stream of Consciousness*).

- *Stagings* of inner realms and environments in which real characters (from simple users to trained actors) and artificial ones (from avatars, software agents etc. to complex AI-programs) following quite classical dramatic patterns of activity are involved in dialogues (e.g. M. Mateas/A. Stern et.al.: *AR Façade*).

Regarding the aesthetics of net literature therefore the question has to be asked whether we can continue talking of a specific migration of traditional literary forms into computer-based and networked media. Can we continue analyzing such examples as "literature"? In what way can the semantics of literary terminology, concepts and systems be retained or does it have to be revised? Can we still correlate the examples mentioned above with the three traditional genres?

Apart from this the performative projects mentioned above intensify the already difficult problem of the documentation/archiving of as well as the access to processes of electronic literature. Lastly, the conference also will address the problem of archiving and editing the rather transitory electronic literature, thereby attempting to advance the cooperation of current and planned databases, archives and editions.

Schedule

Thursday, Nov 20, 2008, 9.30-12.50

9.30-10.00: *Welcoming Address* by Ralf Schnell, President of the University of Siegen:
Introduction by Peter Gendolla & Jörgen Schäfer (Siegen)

Panel I: Performance and the Emergence of Meaning (*Moderator: Peter Gendolla*)

10.00-10.50: Roberto Simanowski (Providence, USA): *Event and Meaning: Reading Interactive Installations in the Light of Art History*

Abstract: As has been stated, AI-controlled environments take the “body language” to a new level by controlling and reacting to its movement, mimics and gestures. Theoreticians of interactive art have conceptualized “behaviourist” or “relational” art as a shift from content to event (Roy Ascott), from “*private* symbolic space” to the “realm of human interactions” (Nicolas Bourriaud). It is important, however, not to ignore the content of the event and the symbolic of the interactions. My presentation explores the meaning of two interactive installations, which require very difficult bodily actions. While *Still Standing* by Bruno Nadeau and Jason Lewis requires the participant’s body to be immobilized as a condition for the reading and contemplation of its linguistic content, *Mondrian* by Zachary Booth Simpson and his collaborators allows the audience to generate Mondrian-like images by drawing lines on a screen with one’s hand and coloring sections with one’s finger. These pieces do not only offer two different concepts of the interactors’ action and hence body experience but also engage in a very difficult way with the issues of inter- and transmediality as well as avant-garde. While *Still Standing* uses new technology in order to enhance the cultural practice of reading endangered since the arrival of electronic and digital media, *Mondrian* promotes craftsmanship and parodies the aesthetics Mondrian represents. Both interactive installations, I will argue, do not simply create „a period of time to be lived through” (Bourriaud) but have to be understood in the context of art history and as a specific contribution to it.

10.50-11.10: Coffee break

11.10-12.00: N. Katherine Hayles (Los Angeles, USA): *Behind the Screen: Implications of Database Construction*

Abstract: While “Beyond the Screen” evokes a post-GUI environment in which mobile devices, mixed reality environments and pervasive computing escape from the desktop to run in the wild, the databases that store, execute, and transmit information will remain as crucial as ever. This talk will explore the implications of structured environments such as relational databases versus unstructured data searched through such engines as the Google algorithms. The emphasis will be both on artistic uses of database structures and on the political, social, and artistic problematics of unstructured data.

12.00-12.50: Ludwig Jäger (Aachen, Germany): *Epistemology of Disruptions: Thoughts on Some Principles of Cultural Semantics*

Abstract: In cultural studies and their diverse disciplines it is a familiar phenomenon that media refer to each other and that they intramedially allude to themselves in recursive loops. Cultural semantics are generated, conserved, disrupted and modified in a field in which communication unfolds as a symbolic game of interacting and interwoven media, as an assembly of different methods of “cultural reconceptualization” (Lev Manovich). Behind these diversities of communicative processes in oral, written, and visual media—no matter how varied they are regarding their medial and aesthetic aspects—we can identify a fundamental approach of cultural semantics that we can describe as logic of *transcriptive reference*. My lecture, going beyond the idea that transcription is a fundamental procedure of cultural semantics, will

reveal some of the principles that underlie the practices of cultural reconceptualizations attempting to show that and how they are characterized by an epistemology of disruptions.

13.00: Lunch

Thursday, Nov 20, 2008, 14.30-18.10

Panel II: Literature between Virtual, Physical and Symbolic Space

Moderator: Jörgen Schäfer

14.30-15.20: John Cayley (Providence, USA): *Surface Text: Text as Surface in Immersive 3D Environments*

Abstract: When we address ourselves to digitally mediated writings practices, it is clear that the properties and methods of the surface of inscription are at issue. The inscriptional surfaces of digital media are complex, even when manifest as a relatively passive ‘screens’ that emulate paper-like media. At the very least, these surfaces bear properties that reinforce the necessity for ‘media-specific analyses,’ as Katherine Hayles puts it. Related and corresponding complexities are demonstrable in what we may describe as the ‘atoms’ of inscriptional practice in digital media, the programmable difference-engines that leave their traces on just such complex surfaces. These features are, literally, ‘spectacularly’ in evidence when applied to writing for 3D immersive environments such as the three-wall Cave at Brown University, where new engagements with writing have been practiced experimentally and pedagogically since 2002. This presentation will report on recent writing and literary art practice in Brown’s Cave with some reference to the critical and theoretical context that the author has been seeking to provide for this variety of writing digital media. In particular, I will attempt to address the use of text-as-surface in 3D space -- text as, itself, a potential surface of inscription; text as a space for writing; and text as a prime delineator, a generative engine of ‘virtual’ (artificial, culturally-structured) space.

15.20-16.10: Noah Wardrip-Fruin (Santa Cruz, USA): *What is Behind the Complex Surface?*

Abstract: Works with complex surfaces (to use John Cayley’s phrase) can have very different means of driving their behavior. Locative media works such as Teri Rueb’s *Itinerant* and ARGs such as *The Beast* both use the larger physical world as part of the surface of the work. But the behavior of one operates autonomously based on GPS-driven triggers, while the other requires the live creativity of human “puppet masters.” Many literary works for the Cave and other VR environments depend primarily on operational logics of navigation and collision detection, simple behaviors both conceptually and computationally. But other authors, from Brenda Laurel to the creators of *AR Façade*, have proposed and employed much more complex models. We have often thought about such differences in terms of Chris Crawford’s “process intensity” - but the world of complex surfaces (from the “data” of the everyday world to the “crunch” of VR display) requires a rethinking of the concept. This paper provides that, as well as an evaluation of how well my recently-developed “three effects” of relation between audience experience and underlying process apply to works with complex surfaces.

16.10-16.30: Coffee break

16.30-17.20: Rita Raley (Los Angeles, USA): *Locative Narrative: Figuring Urban Space in the Network Society*

Abstract: Locative media has brought about a convergence between the widespread use of functional location data (GPS, GIS) and site-specific, conceptual, and land art practices. So, too, the Situationists—particularly their theorizing of psychogeography and the *dérive*—have informed contemporary art practices that employ handheld, location-aware devices interfacing with the geospatial web. It follows, then, that a predominant trend within locative media is the production of alternative and collaborative maps, those that emphasize sociality, community, and the user, those that offer

bottom-up rather than top-down imaginaries of urban space. In projects such as *PDPal* (2002-04) and *[murmur]* (2003-), users identify, annotate, and spatially tag particular locales, emphasizing in the process individual user experience on the one hand (“your city”) and communal record on the other. Such cartographic projects, whether they are positioned as exercises in psychogeography or cognitive mapping, endeavor to produce a database of histories rather than History, both recovering and archiving the micro-narratives of the everyday. My paper addresses two locative works that similarly invest in the collection of spatialized histories and respond to the economic geographies of the 21st century city, but do so through a specifically literary register: Jeremy Hight et al, *34N 118W* (2002), the first locative narrative, and J.R. Carpenter, *in absentia* (2008). (*34N 118W* is situated in the post-industrial rail yards of downtown LA and *in absentia* engages the ongoing gentrification of the Mile End district in Montreal.) However compelling alternative mapping projects such as *PDPal* may be, my argument is that the somewhat rare practice of literary locative media offers a more powerful and productive reframing of what has been termed the “imperial infrastructure” of the Cartesian basemap.

17.20-18.10: Anna Gibbs/Maria Angel (Sydney, Australia): *Memory and Motion: The Body in Electronic Writing*

Abstract: This paper explores the new materialism of the corporeal body in electronic writing and online environments. Mark Hansen (2004) argues that the privilege of literature lies not in its imitation of the flexibility of technical media but in its relationship with the body. We propose that electronic environments have a strong relationship to affective modes of communication highlighted by their appeal to sensory novelty through technological innovation - new media platforms proliferate the potentials for combining visibility with aural and tactile modes. This paper argues for a new materialism of electronic culture, one that has serious implications for the way that we understand memory.

Ca. 19.30: *Dinner at Restaurant Riviera, Bruchstraße 1, 57250 Netphen, phone +49(0)271/79288*

Friday, Nov 21, 2008, 9.30-12.20

Panel III: Beyond Genre: Transformations of Narrative, Poetic and Dramatic Structures

(Moderator: Roberto Simanowski)

9.30-10.20: Francisco J. Ricardo (Boston, USA): *Framing Locative Consciousness*

Abstract: In locative art's practice of layering narrative, image, and sound onto existing architecture and geography, *physical form* becomes the support for a separate *conceptual form* provocatively framing space as an act, rather than as tacit support. This presentation examines perceptual questions posed by and evocative processes central to various works utilizing locative media in architectural, geographical and installation-based instances, and traces conceptual arguments emerging from this new meta-formalism.

10.20-11.10: Jochen Venus (Siegen, Germany): *Beyond Game and Narration: A Morphological Approach to Computer Game Analysis*

Abstract: In spite of the large amount of computer games that are not telling stories in the conventional sense, narrative and descriptive elements can be detected in almost every computer game. In many cases computer games trigger both play and interpretation and therefore can with justice and fruitfully be analysed both as games and as narrations. Yet there is a blind spot in both perspectives: The interplay of game structures and narrative elements is masked out as well as the interplay of the respective receptional practises. The paper argues that if we want to treat the realms of the game-narration interplay scientifically we have to argue beyond the established concepts of traditional media genres (like the novel, the board game, the cinema etc.). The paper outlines a morphological perspective that focuses on the mutual uses of narrative elements and game structures as well as the hybridisation of the practises of play and interpretation. The hybridisation of these practises constitutes one of the most central innovations of the recent media upheaval: the aesthetics of simulation.

11.10-11.30: Coffee break

11.30-12.20: Friedrich W. Block (Kassel, Germany): *How to Construct the Genre of Digital Poetry: A User Manual*

Abstract: Digital Poetry 'is' a young genre. But how can we speak about a genre here? It has been necessary to communicate and spread schemes of invariety and identification to tie together a high variety of artistic practice. Strategically, concepts and names of genre connected with different forms of institutionalization have been useful here. From this perspective I will discuss the systemic development of Digital Poetry and some closely related concepts in the context of earlier conceptual attributions to poetics. And my paper explores whether the genre(s) of what has been called Digital Poetry, or E-Poetry, or (New) Media Poetry (as well as Net Literature) is primarily a construct of curatorial and academic practice.

Ca. 12:45: Lunch

Friday, Nov 21, 2008, 14.30-17.20

Panel IV: Preservation, Archiving and Editing (*Moderator: Patricia Tomaszek*)

14.30-15.20: Joseph Tabbi (Chicago, USA): *Locating the Literary in New Media: The Electronic Literature Organization's Directory*

Abstract: The ELO under my direction this year is redeveloping its Electronic Literature Directory, a directory of over 2,000 works of electronic literature that was developed in 1999 on a database platform which is now outdated. Using the WikiMedia platform (the platform developed for Wikipedia), Semantic MediaWiki, and Semantic Forms, the new directory currently in development will be more flexible, more durable, and more extensible than the original platform. The development of the Electronic Literature Directory involves, in the first instance, identifying the literariness of works, and describing in every case what makes the work 'electronic literature' and not something else--conceptual art, for example, or conventional literature delivered in e-book or other electronic formats. This project, unlike catalogues of established genres in print, needs to create a profile of the field based on descriptions of each work put up for consideration. Moreover, because works of electronic literature often, and perhaps necessarily, link up with other, affiliated work, a vocabulary of electronic literature needs to be devised so that common characteristics can be recognized. Such a taxonomy needs to evolve together with the developing field--but the development should be tracked, the works need to be evaluated, and the evaluation should be to some degree the work of a collectivity that includes authors, readers, and (crucially) readers aspiring to be authors.

In moving forward on the directory, ELO is not just making available a set of works--valuable as this service alone would be. We are also entering a broader discussion concerning the archiving of creative content whose networked character requires building connections among works (at the level of content) and also among affiliated organizations. Creating such a dynamic application involving an active readership and also a consortium of participating institutions is the challenge that a semantic based Directory poses. In this sense, any system of 'preservation, archiving, and editing' (our panel topic in Siegen) must be, also, an engine for the 'transformation of literary structures, interfaces, and genres' that is the topic of the conference as a whole.

15.20-16.10: Fotis Jannidis (Darmstadt, Germany): *Scholarly Editing and the Net*

Abstract: Web 1.0 was mainly used to publish editions on the net. Web 2.0 is also affecting the production of editions. A new generation of tools is coming into existence, many of them as web services, and access to these services and their seamless integration into a GUI which makes them useable for the ordinary scholar are tasks for many projects at the moments. These new tools are not stand-alone products but usually they are part of the new e-humanities infrastructures which are built at the moment. These tools and the emerging infrastructures would allow totally new concepts of editions but a closer look reveals that the traditionally practices of scholarly editing are only in parts determined by the boundaries of the medium book. They are equally if not more determined by the rules how scholars accrue symbolic capital in their disciplines, and these rules haven't changed. The presentation will discuss the project Textgrid in this context. *Digital Editions 2.0*

16.10-16.30: Coffee break

16.30-17.20: Ravi Shankar (New Britain, CT, USA): *Retrospective and Barometer: A Decade of Drunken Boat*

Abstract: In 2009, *Drunken Boat*, international online journal for the arts, will release its special tenth anniversary issue, celebrating a decade in existence. In that time, the journal has charted the incipient field of electronic literature emerge and branch into multifarious shapes. Some early work, such as Yael Kanerak's *World of Awe* or Liz Miller's *Moles*, both works published in our second issue, still retain a true sense of what creating online can do, constitutively, to create a new paradigm of genre, one that uses the materiality of the web as part of its compositional strategy. Other works, such as Emma Braslavsky's *Visual Aphorisms*, published in issue five, are explorations of cognition that extend our inborn notions of narrativity and experience. Outside the textual genres, web art and hypertext coexist in a space with sound, photo and video art and the frame such exhibition posits becomes part of the meaning a reader can derive from navigating the work. Because all our old issues are archived online, *Drunken Boat* intends to supplement its cura-

torial faculty with an archival model of preservation, one that is quite different than the notion of temporality on the blogosphere or on listservs. This panel will look back on and forward from a decade.

20:00: *Dinner at Restaurant Münzwerk, Morleystraße 4, 57072 Siegen, phone +49(0)271/2389950*