



Press Packet

For immediate release

EXHIBITION: *Grand Text Auto*

LOCATION: The Beall Center for Art and Technology

PRESS BRIEFING: By Appointment. Contact Eleanore Stewart at 949 824-8945

OPENING RECEPTION: October 4th, 6:30pm-9:00pm

SYMPOSIUM: October 5th, 1:00-5:00pm

PERFORMANCE: October 5th, 6:00-8:00pm

ADDRESS:

University of California, Irvine
Claire Trevor School of the Arts
712 Arts Plaza
Irvine, CA 92697-2775

HOURS:

Tuesday - Wednesday, 12 – 5 p.m.
Thursday - Saturday, 12 – 8 p.m.

GENERAL CONTACT:

(949) 824-4339 or <http://beallcenter.uci.edu>

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Many blogs have become books — from *The Baghdad Blog* to *Belle de Jour*.

But *Grand Text Auto* is the first blog ever to become a gallery exhibition. It opens October 4th and runs through December 15th at UC Irvine’s Beall Center for Art and Technology. The exhibition features the work of *Grand Text Auto* members Noah Wardrip-Fruin, Mary Flanagan, Michael Mateas, Andrew Stern, Nick Montfort, Scott Rettberg, and their collaborators.

Grand Text Auto is a blog about the potential of digital media, from literary websites to experimental computer games. At the exhibition, the blog members will put these ideas into practice, showing a variety of cutting edge works. Some use the latest in artificial intelligence technology, such as Mateas and Stern’s interactive drama *Façade* — of which *The New York Times* says, “This is the future of video games.” The Beall exhibition will feature the first public showing of a life-sized “augmented reality” version

of *Façade*, created in collaboration with Georgia Tech's GVU Center. Virtual reality is also on display, as with Wardrip-Fruin's collaborative work *Screen*, a literary game played with 3D text and never seen before outside of a research lab. On the other hand, some works in the exhibition use decidedly do-it-yourself techniques, such as Montfort and Rettberg's *Implementation*, an experimental novel distributed around the world on mailing labels. Others are quirky, such as Flanagan's [*giantJoystick*], a replica Atari 2600 joystick so large that two people must work together to play (this has its North American debut at the Beall show).

In addition to the gallery show, the members of *Grand Text Auto* are working together with the Beall Center to present a live symposium and performance evening, both on October 5th. The afternoon symposium (1–5 p.m.) will discuss the power of collaborative blogging, new directions for computer games, and the place of language in digital media. The evening performance (6–8 p.m.) will feature the disturbing and humorous interactive cinema experience *Terminal Time* (which automatically creates outrageously biased documentaries of the past millennium) and a live performance of the award-winning hypertext novel *The Unknown* (which tells the tale of a rollicking cross-country book tour).

Online, *Grand Text Auto* (<http://grandtextauto.org>) is a blog with more than 200,000 visitors a month, collectively authored by six artists and scholars. Offline, *Grand Text Auto* members have been shown in major art museums, been written about in leading national periodicals, and shipped games that have met wide acclaim and sold millions of copies. The *Grand Text Auto* exhibition is the first time that these artists will show their work together. Delve into *Grand Text Auto*'s digital depths **October 4 – December 15, 2007** (closed November 22-26), and witness the live debut of blog-meets-reality.

SYMPOSIUM

The symposium (October 5th, 1-5pm) will feature the six members of the blog *Grand Text Auto*, who work as artists and scholars at the cutting edge of computer games and digital literature. The first half of the symposium will include a presentation of the Beall Center show, the work of the blog, and the future of the field as seen through forthcoming projects from group members. The second half will be a discussion with *Grand Text Auto* and the audience on three topics: what blogging has to offer artists and researchers, approaches to crafting experimental games (and other new forms of playable media), and the role of language in digital media.

PERFORMANCE

From 6-8 p.m. on October 5th, there will be a live performance featuring *Terminal Time* and *The Unknown*.

Terminal Time is a documentary of the past millennium that is different at every showing, co-created by *Grand Text Auto* member Michael Mateas. *Terminal Time* is driven by audience interaction and an artificial intelligence model of historical ideology. The UCI audience will get “the history they deserve” — and an immediately-following discussion will outline the concepts and technology underlying this interactive cinema experience.

The Unknown is an award-winning hypertext novel that tells the story of the literary encounters and debaucherous exploits of a group of writers known as The Unknown. *Grand Text Auto* member Scott Rettberg and his co-authors William Gillespie and Dirk Stratton will perform as their characters, while navigating the text as directed by cues from the audience.

BEALL CENTER DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The impact of digital technology on the narrative form is creating one of the most fertile areas of cultural growth today. The Beall Center is proud to present the debut of an influential artists' blog, as a gallery installation. The *Grand Text Auto* exhibition (as does the collective itself) obscures the conventional boundaries of the physical and virtual worlds, creating a "play" ground of narrative structures for our enjoyment.

ARTISTS' STATEMENT:

A note from Noah Wardrip-Fruin

Back in 2002, Andrew Stern and I realized that some of the best conversations we had each year took place in convention centers, hotels, and airports.

These were the places we would get a chance to see the people whose ideas excited us most, whose work pointed in the most interesting directions. We saw them at digital media festivals, computer science conferences, and other international gatherings — but then wouldn't talk to them again for months on end.

We decided to found *Grand Text Auto* to keep the conversation going. It didn't matter to us, at first, whether we had any audience at all. A chance to continue the dialogue was all we asked of the blog form.

But quickly, even before we made any official announcement, we started having visitors — and some of these visitors started contributing very thought-provoking comments. Soon we realized that the blog was in some ways even better than a convention center conversation, because the question and answer session didn't get cut off after 10 minutes. It could keep going as long as we liked.

Now *Grand Text Auto* isn't just a conversation. It's also a community. For the six authors it's a close-knit community, even though we still only rarely see each other in person. More broadly, it's a place that matters to people we've never met, a place to come for discussion of what we can, and should, do with the power of digital media.

Our focus on the power and potential of digital media is what excites me about creating this show, symposium, and performance with the Beall Center. Many blogs become books — and we've certainly talked about it. But our blog isn't about books. It's about new forms of video games, emerging models of literature, and the potential for artworks that employ the processing power of the computer. The best way to show what we mean is to demonstrate it (in the gallery space and the performance hall) rather than publish a book about it.

We think it is important and necessary to get out into physical, public space with these ideas. Especially given where we are with computer games today. Many people still think games can only be about violence. And, in fact, while the game industry has huge economic reach, culturally it is still mostly aimed at the narrow "hardcore" demographic important to the initial economic success of many games. Last year an NPD Group study confirmed what many suspected about this hardcore demographic: it is mostly 6–17 year old boys.

But the potential for interactive digital forms is much greater than the fulfillment of boyhood fantasies of power and violence. The members of *Grand Text Auto* are some of the leading artists exploring these greater possibilities, especially from the perspectives of

story and character — two of the most prominent elements of media that matter to adults. Story and character can't stay the same as they move into digital forms, lest the results be mediocre examples of the same audience experiences available in other media. And to move game forms forward we must de-familiarize them, we must make them visible culturally, rather than focusing on the incremental alterations in form highlighted by industry marketing. These ideas provide the common foundation for the artists in *Grand Text Auto*, who otherwise take their explorations in widely varied directions, working with a diverse group of outside collaborators.

When visitors enter the *Grand Text Auto* exhibition, the most prominent works will be three large installations. First, Mary Flanagan's [*giantJoystick*] recreates the classic Atari joystick of the 1970s as a large-scale playable sculpture, inviting gallery visitors to play classic single-player games through collaborative multi-player full-body movements. The second large work is an augmented reality installation of *Façade*. The original *Façade*, by *Grand Text Auto* members Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern, is the first true interactive drama, a game experience influenced by *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* rather than violent fantasies. The augmented reality version presents the virtual characters of *Façade* inside a real, physical apartment — and was created in collaboration with the GVU Center at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Third, my collaborative work *Screen* is an alternative textual game and fiction, played on a large one-wall virtual reality display, creating a new context for well-known game mechanics and a new experience of touching fiction's text. This was created and is presented in collaboration with colleagues at Brown University and the University of California, San Diego. This exhibition is the North American debut of [*giantJoystick*], as well as the first time *AR Façade* or *Screen* has been seen outside a university research laboratory.

As my description has, hopefully, made clear, the exhibition's three large-scale installations employ interaction quite differently, and this diversity of form continues in the exhibition's screen-based works, objects, and performances. These include Nick Montfort's *Winchester's Nightmare*, the first "hardcover" interactive fiction, published in a limited edition of prepared laptops, as well as his *Book Volume* and *Ad Verbum*. Also included are examples of Stern's ground-breaking work in interactive characters from his time at the game studio PF.Magic. Created a decade before current industry products such as *Nintendogs*, Stern's collaborative works *Dogz*, *Catz*, and *Babyz* point to digital play aimed at exploring relationships, rather than focused on "winning." Scott Rettberg and Montfort's *Implementation*, the first sticker novel, brings web-like atomized narrative into physical space. There is also a physical installation featuring artifacts and text from Rettberg's collaborative hypertext novel *The Unknown*, which is also part of the performance evening. Finally, two projects connect the virtual space of the blog with the physical space of the gallery — a pen plotter that physically writes blog comments on a long scroll of paper, and a new version of Mateas's collaborative *Tableau Machine*, which generates abstract graphical compositions in response to visitor movements through the gallery (which are then featured on the blog).

Together, these elements make manifest the range and depth of conversation about the potential of digital play and narrative that *Grand Text Auto* was founded to pursue. We look forward to continuing the conversation in person!

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Mary Flanagan:

Mary Flanagan investigates everyday technologies through critical writing, artwork, and activist design projects. Flanagan's work has been exhibited internationally at museums, festivals, and galleries, including: the Guggenheim, The Whitney Museum of American Art, SIGGRAPH, The Banff Centre, The Moving Image Centre, New Zealand, Central Fine Arts Gallery NY, Artists Space NY, the University of Arizona, University of Colorado-Boulder, and venues in Brazil, France, UK, Canada, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Australia. Her projects have been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Pacific Cultural Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Flanagan writes about popular culture and digital media such as computer games, virtual agents, and online spaces in order to understand their affect on culture. Her essays on digital art, cyberculture, and gaming have appeared in periodicals such as *Art Journal*, *Wide Angle*, *Intelligent Agent*, *Convergence*, and *Culture Machine*, as well as several books. Her co-edited collection *reload: rethinking women + cyberculture* with Austin Booth was published by MIT Press in 2002. She is also co-author with Matteo Bittanti of *Similitudini. Simboli. Simulacri (SIMilarities, Symbols, Simulacra)* on *The Sims* game (in Italian, Unicopli 2003), and the co-editor of the collection *re:skin* (2007), forthcoming from MIT Press.

Flanagan is also the creator of "The Adventures of Josie True," the first web-based adventure game for girls, and is implementing innovations in pedagogical and values-based game design. Mary Flanagan holds MFA and MA degrees from the University of Iowa, a BA in Film from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and a Ph.D. in Computational Media focusing on activist game design from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, UK. She teaches in the Integrated Media Arts MFA program in the Department of Film and Media Studies at Hunter College, NYC. Her research group and laboratory in New York is called TiltFactor, a lab focused on the design of activist and socially-conscious software. <http://www.tiltfactor.org>.

Michael Mateas:

Michael Mateas' research in AI-based art and entertainment combines science, engineering and design into an integrated practice that pushes the boundaries of the conceivable and possible in games and other interactive art forms. He is currently a faculty member in the Computer Science department at UC Santa Cruz, where he is involved in launching UCSC's game design degree, the first such degree offered in the University of California system. Prior to Santa Cruz, Michael was a faculty member at The Georgia Institute of Technology, where he held a joint appointment in the College of Computing and the School of Literature, Communication and Culture, founded the Experimental Game Lab, and helped create Georgia Tech's game design degree. With Andrew Stern, Michael released *Façade*, the world's first AI-based interactive drama. *Façade* has received numerous awards, including top honors at the Slamdance independent game festival. Michael's current research interests include game AI, particularly character and story AI, ambient intelligence supporting non-task-based social experiences, and dynamic game generation. In addition to frequent paper presentations at AI, HCI and digital media conferences, Michael has exhibited artwork internationally, including venues such as SIGGRAPH, the New York Digital Salon, ISEA, the Carnegie Museum, and Te PaPa, the national museum of New Zealand.

Nick Montfort:

Montfort is assistant professor of digital media in the Writing and Humanistic Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He earned a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in computer and information science. His Masters degrees are from MIT (in media arts and sciences) and Boston University (in creative writing --

poetry). Montfort was an editor of *The Electronic Literature Collection Volume 1* and of *The New Media Reader*. He wrote *Twisty Little Passages: An Approach to Interactive Fiction* (The MIT Press, 2003), and, with William Gillespie, *2002: A Palindrome Story* (Spineless Books, 2002), which was acknowledged by the Oulipo as the world's longest literary palindrome. He is now investigating narrative variation in interactive fiction, the human meanings and machine functions of code, and the role of platforms in creative computing. With Ian Bogost, he is writing *Video Computer System: The Atari 2600 Platform*. The digital media projects (besides *Grand Text Auto*) Nick Montfort has undertaken since 2000 include: *Ream*, a 500-page poem written on one day; *Mystery House Taken Over*, a collaborative "occupation" of a classic game; *Implementation*, a novel on stickers written with Scott Rettberg; *The Ed Report*, a serialized novel written with William Gillespie; and the interactive fiction pieces *Book and Volume*, *Ad Verbum*, and *Winchester's Nightmare: A Novel Machine*.

Scott Rettberg:

Scott Rettberg is associate professor of humanistic informatics in the department of linguistic, literary, and aesthetic studies at the University of Bergen, Norway. Rettberg is the author or coauthor of works of electronic literature including *The Unknown*, *Kind of Blue*, and *Implementation*. He co-founded and served as the first executive director of the Electronic Literature Organization, and is a contributor to the collaborative digital culture weblog *Grand Text Auto*. He is currently working on a book about contemporary electronic literature in the context of the twentieth century avant-garde.

Andrew Stern:

Andrew Stern is a designer, writer and engineer of personality-rich, artificial intelligence-based interactive characters and stories. In 2005 he completed the interactive drama *Façade*, a 5-year art/research collaboration with Michael Mateas. To date *Façade* has been downloaded over 500,000 times, received the Grand Jury Prize at the 2006 Slamdance Independent Game Festival, and critical acclaim from the gaming community and mainstream press including *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New York Times*. Previously Andrew was a lead designer and software engineer at PF.Magic, developing *Virtual Babyz*, *Dogz*, and *Catz*, with over 3 million units sold worldwide. Andrew recently co-founded Procedural Arts, LLC to develop next-generation interactive story games. He has presented and exhibited work at the Game Developers Conference, the Independent Games Festival, SIGGRAPH, ISEA, Digital Arts and Culture, DiGRA, TIDSE, AAAI symposia, Autonomous Agents, Intelligent User Interfaces, Laboral and the American Museum of Moving Image. *Babyz* won a Silver Invision 2000 award for Best Overall Design for CDROM, and *Catz* received a Design Distinction in the first annual I.D. Magazine Interactive Media Review. Andrew holds a B.S. in Computer Engineering from Carnegie Mellon University and a Masters degree in Computer Science from the University of Southern California. He blogs at <http://grandtextauto.org>.

Noah Wardrip-Fruin:

Noah Wardrip-Fruin is a digital media artist, writer, and scholar whose current work is focused on fiction and play. His art/writing has been presented by galleries, arts festivals, scientific conferences, DVD magazines, VR Caves, and the Whitney and Guggenheim museums — as well as discussed in books such as *Digital Art* (2003) and *Art of the Digital Age* (2006). He has recently edited three books: *The New Media Reader* (2003, with Nick Montfort); *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game* (2004, with Pat Harrigan); and *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (2007, also with Harrigan). His monograph, *Expressive Processing*, is forthcoming from The MIT Press. He has been a research scientist at New York University, a creative

writing fellow at Brown University, and an assistant professor at the University of Baltimore. In 2006 he became an assistant professor of Communication at the University of California, San Diego. He is a Vice-President of the Electronic Literature Organization and, of course, he blogs at <http://grandtextauto.org>.

Tours by Beall Interns are available free of charge during business hours

Private group tours available by appointment: contact Cat Moore at cmoore@uci.edu.

“*[giantJoystick]*” image-Mary Flanagan

<http://beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/images/joystick.jpg>

“AR Façade” image-Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern

http://beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/images/ar_facade.jpg

“Screen” images-Noah Wardrip-Fruin

http://beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/images/screen_1.jpg

http://beallcenter.uci.edu/exhibitions/images/screen_a.jpg