Super Atari Poetry

Yucef Merhi
Universidad Los Andes
Conjunto Residencial Los Chorros.5D
Calle Los Jardines. D.F. Venezuela.
+58 414 900 0231

www@cibernetic.com

ABSTRACT

Super Atari Poetry is an interactive multiplayer poetry game-installation based on Atari 2600 consoles. It emphasizes the importance of cultural and historical values on game programming, showing the intrinsic relationship between natural language and machine language. Using the joysticks, players can create up to one thousand poems from verses that were previously written by the artist.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

J.5 [**Arts and Humanities**]: Fine Arts

General Terms

Experimentation.

Keywords

New Media Art, Poetry, Social Networks, Video Game.

1. INTRODUCTION

In words of Christian Paul, author of the book Digital Art1 and Adjunct curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum, digital art was developed thanks to previous movements such as DaDa, OuLiPo, Fluxus, and Conceptual Art. The importance of these movements for digital art resides in their emphasis on formal instructions and their focus on concept, event, and audience participation, as opposed to unified material objects.

Paul points out that Dadaist poetry aestheticized the construction of poems out of random variations of words and lines, using formal instructions to create an artifice that resulted from an interplay of randomness and control. This idea of rules being a process for creating art has a clear connection with the algorithms that form the basis of all software and every computer operation. Just as Dadaist poetry, the basis of any form of computer art is the instruction as a conceptual element.

The combinatorial and strict rule-based processes of Dadaist poetry also resurfaced in the works of OULIPO (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle), the French literary and artistic group founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and Francois Le Linnais, who argued that all creative inspiration should be subject to calculation and become an intellectual game.

2. DESCRIPTION OF WORK

Super Atari Poetry is a multiplayer game installation consisting of 3 Atari 2600 consoles (see Figure 1), joysticks, self-manufactured cartridges, and TV monitors. Each cartridge holds a group of verses that are constantly changing colors which can be manipulated using a joystick. The reading of the 3 verses printed on the screens produces a coherent poem that's always changing its meaning and chromatic structure.

Figure 1. Atari 2600 VCS.

By playing and changing the content, participants can make hundreds of original poems. Similar to the haikus, these poems are always comprised by 3 sentences. For Example:

> TV1: Memories melt away in the womb of distance
>
> TV2: Mysteriously suspended from rambling words
>
> TV3: Beyond violet wails disguised as tramps

This kind of environment encourages the establishment of social networks based on the experience of poetry (see Figure 2). After few minutes of interaction, participants tend to start playing with words by choosing and combining the text. The spontaneous performance made by players renovates and access the essence of poetry.

Figure 2. View of players creating poems.

Here, programming language plays a major role in the construction and exhibition of poetry. Both, programming and natural language take part of the same experience. In order to build the game cartridges, sentences had to be translated from English to Assembler, also known as Machine Language. In contrast, the Atari interprets the code and displays an image that becomes language that people can understand and, once again, interpret.

2.1 Historical Reference

Due to the important role of Atari on the advance of many technological concepts and devices, the use of this machine transcends the meaning of nostalgia. For many people, Atari was the bridge to globalization. More than 30 million units were sold from 1977 to 1992[2]. The overwhelming production and distribution of Atari game consoles around the world caused a collective similar experience that influenced an entire generation; from Sunny Valley to Sao Paulo, Caracas, Paris, Berlin, etc.

2.2 Conclusion

Super Atari Poetry is an invitation to feel and celebrate the linkage between the history of media and the history of art; the nexus between programming language and natural language, technology and literature, film and poetry.

3. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

4. REFERENCES

[1] Paul, C. 2003 Introduction. Digital Art. Thames and Hudson, London, 13-15.

[2] Highland D. 2004 Video Game Price Guide. Universal Publishers