

Impact of Digital Media on Comics

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1. Introduction

Digital comics are more than Web comics. Web comics nominally benefit from the affordances of digital interactive media such as distributing comics instantaneously at low cost, storing and exploring an archive, applying animation and sound, and connecting with the comics artist and fan base via email and social media. Digital comics can expand beyond Web comics such as site-specific comics, location based comics (GPS comics), embodied comics (computer vision based comics). Murray identifies the affordances of digital media as “procedural, participatory, spatial, and encyclopedic” [Murray 1997]. When the affordances of digital media are fully used, digital comics offers the comic artist new meaning making strategies.

2. Infinite Canvas

In addition to the inclusion of animation and audio, the emergence of digital media affects the qualities of the canvas itself. McCloud imagines the computer monitor as a window that can be scrolled across an infinite canvas [McCloud 2006]. Even though McCloud claimed in 2000 that the infinite canvas is the essence of digital comics, in 2014, there is almost no well-known example of a comic that literally uses an infinite canvas. The lack of interest in the literal use of an infinite canvas is based on a set of misconceptions such as the impossibility of viewing the infinite numbers of panels, the difficulty of excessive scrolling, the difficulty of creating an infinite number of panels, and the difficulty of loading such a big file. All of these misconceptions imply the lack of procedural thinking in the digital comics field.

3. Site-specific and Location-based Comics

An artist designs a site-specific art piece for a chosen location. For example some of Banksy’s works are site-specific comics as well as graffiti.

Different from a site-specific artwork, a location-based artwork has a technological component that tracks the location of the player, performer, or visitor. Our design *GPS Comics: Seeing thru Walls* (<http://gpscomics.com/>) is a GPS-based comic story that expands the comic canvas and explores the idea of location-based comics. In *Seeing thru Walls*, in order to receive the meaning in a comic frame the player must experience a sensory detail (a smell, sound, breeze, or an object) in her surroundings in the physical world. Players can explore *Seeing thru Walls* with a smartphone or a tablet throughout the 4 mile square area around University of California, Berkeley campus. The comics story develops by referring to the details of the physical world. In the map view, the rectangular street blocks form the comic panels. Players physically walk to the street blocks that contain a comic panel and activate these hot spots. The player can chase the virtual characters, take a walk with them, and have a conversation. Through out the experience the system captures the snapshots and compiles a comic strip.

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4. Computer vision based Comics

Comics narration and conventions can be redefined with the use of computer vision technologies. In our *Embodied Comics: Egg’s Journey* (vimeo.com/46458492) and Nova Jiang’s *Ideogenetic Machine* (vimeo.com/30341877) the participant becomes one of the characters of the story. In *Egg’s Journey* (Figure 1), the participant plays the role of a female egg; and tries to find the best child profile among the sperms attacking to the egg. The frame in *Egg’s Journey* is the membrane of the egg and it is elastic, dynamic and participatory. In *Ideogenetic Machine*, the participant’s gestural poses are captured and rendered into the comic story. The system procedurally connects these images as a meaningful story.

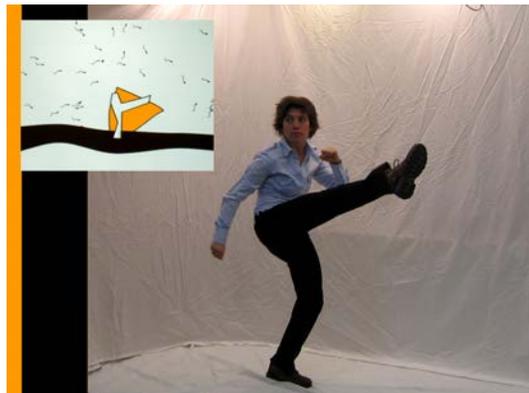


Figure 1. *Embodied Comics: Egg’s Journey*.

4. Conclusions

Exploiting the affordances of digital media for comics narration offers a set of new meaning making strategies. Representational space shifts from two to three dimensions. The content can be generated procedurally yielding a literally infinite canvas. For example, the surface of earth could be a comics canvas. Physical elements can now easily be combined with virtual ones. Instead of one or perhaps two readers of print and screen-based comics, a digital performance can be experienced by a group of viewers positioned in space in various ways. A participant can be made the main character of the comics story. Consequently, the comics and animation frame changes when moved to digital performance spaces. It becomes: elastic, dynamic and participatory.

References

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