

## THE LOOP AS A NARRATIVE CONTINUUM

Abstract by Michael Johansson and Thore Soneson

Since new media itself has matured, the process is no longer depended on the predecessors more traditional and linear methods of authoring, instead every part of the process is constantly changing the way we author, program and express a multi-threaded open work. When working with moving images we choose from a partly new, partly reappropriated, palette of narrative tools as the loop. Were the timebased linearity can be substituted with other means of dramatic tension.

In loop-based scenarios we can employ parallel and repetitive elements, we can establish and create an open narrative field were creative input from the user can add new storythreads to the experience. The loop in its basic version can be seen as a tool for reflection, a moment to revere the constant streams of attractions and desires created and recreated in every digitally performed action and story. A room for expectations. Desires, needs and urges. Dreams and Memories.

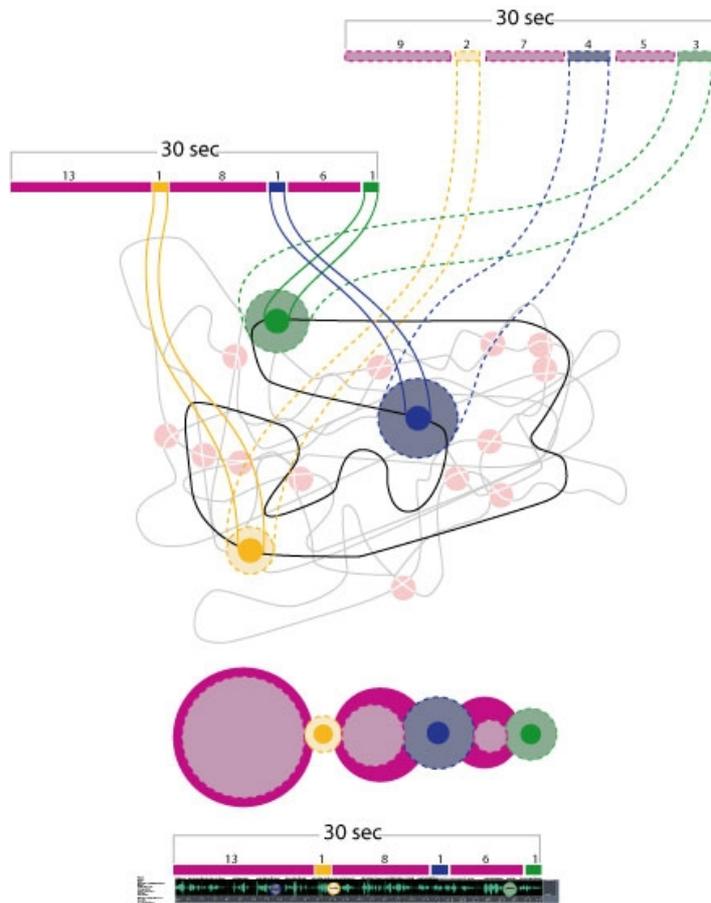
While the major part of research on interactive narratives has been aimed toward the exploration of interactivity in user experience of finished art works, we aim at also exploring the perspective of collaboration in production of new media. Content dealing with narrative structures and its expressions often overlook the actual complexity of writing and prototyping the content fitted for the chosen media. Our long-term aim with research in new media is to formulate a set up of narrative tools that can be used in a creative, collaborative process.

In this paper we will look at the loop as a narrative engine in especially the field of the moving image and interactive installation, which both demand new forms of screenwriting and prototyping activities and that support the design of the expression of the final artwork itself.

We point out the need for a more profound relationship to digital materials and tools. We believe that increased complexity in creative development calls for both disciplinary depth and integrative skills. The loop used as a narrative method can then be applied to and iterated in all media creation; a story told with moving images, abstract elements, sound and in a game play setup.

We discuss the narrative esthetics of the loop and we will describe the process in a practical setup, as part of a project entitled *abadyl* by Michael Johansson. Here a series of sixteen Formula one track was used as framework for a ongoing collaborative artwork (the creation of the city of *Abadyl*). A formal structure is used to let the authors write their work into it. At the same time the layout of the text input and the programming structure generates consequences for the author as they progresses in their work, the programming structure is so to say reviled as the authoring process continues.

The concept here is to control a certain expression at the loop level and create discrete transfers between the loops that creates unpredictable, but in the some time on the loop level, controllable expressions. Here the limitations and constraints of our setup support the creation the artistic expression itself.



One of the early score prototypes for using the formula tracks as a narrative engine

- Lev Manovich *Language of new media*  
 Bernhard Tschumi *Architecture and Disjunction*  
 Janet Murray *Hamlet on the Holodeck*  
 Sergei Eisenstein *Montage of Attractions*  
 Jeffrey Shaw *The cinematic Imaginary after film, Future Cinema*

- Authors published papers / writings  
*Commonplayground* Kajo Johansson 2001  
*The city of Abadyl Maps scales and theories* Publikation 17 2003  
*Speed – the paper* Sonesson 2001

## PROFILE MICHAEL JOHANSSON

### BACKGROUND:

I have studied at the royal academy of fine arts in Copenhagen. Where I started working with digital media in the late 80` s. In the beginning I used the computer as a kind of sketch tool for his paintings, sculptures and installations. Later I have specialised in doing works that experiments with several interaction methods in conjunction with different kind of both physical and digital representations. I have been a part time researcher at The Interactive institute Space studio in Malmö Sweden and today I work and conducting research at the interaction design department at the school of arts and communication at Malmö University Sweden.

### RECENT WORKS THE CITY OF ABADYL (from the exhibition Catalogue Gallery skanes konst 2003)

Against the self-evident – a thorough indefiniteness, a defined obscurity

A “wild thinking” aiming to undermine the present and prevalent must nevertheless have a starting point, and a location in which to perform its laboratory work. Such a location was placed unintentionally on the map of the possible in the mid-seventies when Swedish Public Broadcasting, educating their listeners how to manage the new stereo technique, were establishing that:

my voice will now be coming from the right  
my voice will now be coming from the left  
my voice will now be coming in between the loudspeakers  
my voice will now be coming from an indefinite location in the room.

This indefinite location in the room is something completely different than the outside location of the natural sciences, the point from which reality is measured and translated into objectivity. Then instead an indefiniteness within the room, and a voice imperatively calling forth its own elusive presence. *Within* the room but not clearly *where*, in many ways resembles the location of *the potential* in the prevalent, given. A floating possibility hidden in the persistently present.



### RECENT PAPER FIELDASY PIXELRAIDERS CONFERENCE SHEFFIELD UK 2004

**Fieldasy** is a process for engaging multiple perspectives in the creation of a world, and the mapping of its virtual space. While the final outcome lies ahead, the process has already produced a series of artistic expressions that drives the overall project forward.

**Fieldasy** refers to the methods of field working and invoking imagination by using physical objects. The objects constitute a shared ground for collaborative creativity, serves as nodes in a complex narrative and as a basis for the creation of the world. In

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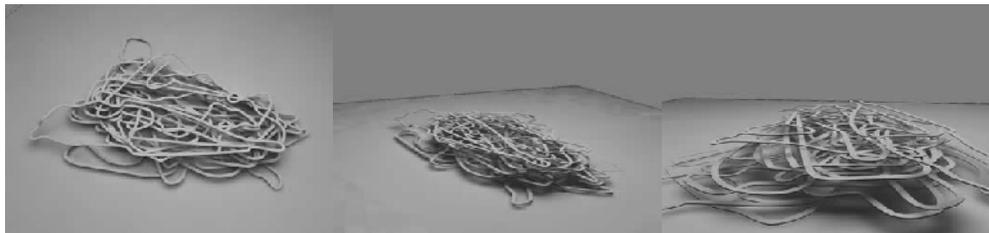
the paper, we describe the process, methods and the artifacts developed in this project. We also show how this approach can host and facilitate artistic development in a complex production environment such as the one of digital media, supported by invited artists, researchers (computer science) and students (interaction design), enabling diverse parties to transfer their knowledge into the project in an ongoing manner.

## FUTURE WORK AND DEVELOPMENT

*We often find ourselves in the middle of the conflict between the two ways of look at and represent the world. One is the narrative that creates a cause and effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events) and the database that represent the world as a list of items that refuses to order itself.* Lev Manovich the language of new media.

My overall research focus is how to create meaningful expressions from databases of different content and formats and how to use this in artistic contexts which both aim at the creation of art objects as well as research.

How can a dialogue between the space, narrative and the database support activities in a mixed reality environment? I will continue to develop methods to successfully combine artistic practice, tools development and theoretical research. The collaboration is centred on shared tools, formats and the exchange of experience and knowledge from the ongoing development of the city of Abadyl. In 2005 I and my team will use the formula one based narrative engine to drive a set of voices inside of a series of physical objects, a kind of extracted architecture from the City of abadyl, with acoustic components inside of them to amplify the voices. After that in 2006 we will build a physical model of the different formula one tracks as a space to facilitate user interaction.



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**SHORT CV Education** • Royal academy of fine arts Copenhagen 1984 – 1990 **Exhibitions** about fifty solo and group exhibitions both in Scandinavia and abroad Represented Moderna Museet Stockholm, malmö art museum and rooseum **Teaching** interaction design master program Malmö university since 1998 **Research** Malmö university art & technology and interactive institute space and virtuality **Papers** Games for architecture, common playground, Designer or artisan and fieldasy.

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## PROFILE THORE SONESON

### PRIOR WORK :

#### SPEED

My prior interactive film projects – the cd-rom based production SPEED and the proposed project THE STORY OF A - can be seen as artistic experiments, investigations of how the digital media has expanded the narrative possibilities of the moving image. From traditional story-casualty towards associative and hyperindexed models of remapping and recombining story elements and images.

The artistic core of these particular works was a belief that the digital narrative could learn a lot from patterns and traces set up by the human memory and the associative structures constantly reinvented in our dreams. Fundamental in this process is to create and assemble narrative "rooms" where every visitor / participant can shape an individual and unique experience, based on a specific narrative content stored in a database. These cinematic "rooms" can be two-dimensional on a screen or three-dimensional in an installation, an interactive environment.

#### RETHINKING

##### NARRATIVE TIME AND SPACE

Questions I would like to investigate further are linked to both physical space and narrative time. Can you recreate the associative patterns of the human memory ? Can you learn to trigger them ? How can the cinematic media with its mechanic linear structure be used in these models ? Can the filmmedia like the human dream / memory edit new versions of an event simultaneously with experiencing them ?

ONE valid theoretical reflection I have used as a basis for my experimental works are to be found in the following quote:

"Because top-down processes are active in watching a film, a spectator's cognitive activity is not restricted to the particular moment being viewed in a film. Instead the spectator is able to move forward and backward through screen data in order to experiment with a variety of syntactical, semantic, and referential hypotheses; as Ian Jarvie notes, 'We cannot see movies without thinking about them'."

Branigan, Edward "Story World and Screen" Narratology; An Introduction s239-240 (Longman London and New York, 1996

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**SHORT CV Education** • Malmö University - Art and Communication, creative producer, Master class. 1999 / 2001 • University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre, Stockholm, Film & TV direction 1985/ 86 • **Professional experiences (selected film / media)** • THE STORY OF A, interactive movie script, 2002-4 (work in progress) • IN SEARCH OF THE MILITANT CODE scenario contribution to Michael Johanssons project FIELDASY 2002 • NEMESIS DIVINA, feature film script 2002 (preproduction phase) • SPEED interactive CD-rom, producer, 2001 (Exhibited at NIC 2001, Nordic Interactive Conference, Copenhagen) • MAN short film, script/director/producer, 1998 • THE SEVENTH SHOT feature film, scriptwriter, 1998 • PASSION multimedia performance MALMÖ KONSTHALL, scriptwriter, videodirector, 1995 •

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