

Pre-Socratic Postmodern Self-Help Manual

Richard Smyth
Independent Artist
rsmyth64@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article describes the theoretical matrix from which this particular work of interactive media emerges while also expounding on how the subject matter and content of the piece relates to the ACM conference theme of “Creative Intelligence.” It is suggested that Creative Intelligence is shaped and made manifest by the medium of an artistic creation – in this case, the particular hypertext tool employed to compose the work (Twine). Comparison is made to the author’s previous work in Storyspace, a late 20th century hypertext authoring software available at the dawn of digital literature. The author suggests that these different modes of composition allow for a particular assemblage of self, a result of medium-specific peculiarities of the authoring tools themselves.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → Arts and humanities; Media arts; • **Human-centered computing** → Human computer interaction (HCI); Interaction paradigms; Hypertext / hypermedia.

KEYWORDS

hypertext, hypermedia, twine, philosophy, selfhood, mental health, trauma, recovery

ACM Reference Format:

Richard Smyth. 2024. Pre-Socratic Postmodern Self-Help Manual. In *35th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Social Media (HT ’24)*, September 10–13, 2024, Poznan, Poland. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 2 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3648188.3680249>

1 OVERVIEW

The “Pre-Socratic Postmodern Self-Help Manual” [10] (hereafter abbreviated as SHM), explores a Deleuzoguattarian / Delandan psychology of mixtures based on how the four fundamental elements of ancient science (earth, air, water, fire) materially interact (e.g. earth + fire = lava; earth + water = mud, etc.). While the “psychological questionnaire” may come across at times as irreverent and absurdist – based as it is on personal experiences of trauma recovery; a newly invented, cross-disciplinary area of study I am calling “ergonomics” (a blend of cosmology, astronomy, physics, botany, nutrition, and electrophysiology that rests upon a foundation of Delandan assemblage theory); and the pervasive pop-psychological personality testing paradigm with results that reflect the absurdly reductive categorization of what emerges from the most complex

phenomenon in the universe (the human mind) into some number of types you can count with one or two hands – the test result explanations are poetic explorations of my very own dysfunctional matrix of abandonment and neglect. Ultimately, the interactive, multimedia experience provides four possible pathways with eight different outcomes, depending on how the questions are answered. As it turns out, I, like “the psychiatrist” in Machado de Assis’s novella of the same name, end up studying only myself [1].

1.1 Connection to Creative Intelligence

The conference theme of “Creative Intelligence” is manifest in the work insofar as it provides a new “image of thought” [4] that results from the proposed Neo-Presocratic cosmology of “parameterized concepts” [3]. The SHM is also a paean to the idea of electrate identity formation [11], which itself is made possible by the fluid nature of algorithmic text. Twine is recognized as open-source software that democratizes the process of interactive storytelling; its output is a single HTML file [6]. Ulmer’s conception of grammatology, which explains how subject formation emerges from a matrix of communications technology and institutional practices [12], helps us to get a handle on the historical moment at multiple stages of its unfolding.

In a way, the software that I used to compose the SHM, Twine, is an example of how Creative Intelligence is facilitated by the compositional tools at our disposal; the celebrated transgender ambassadors for the platform – Porpentine and anna anthropy – exemplify an increasingly complex expression of creativity when they take up this tool and compose with their knowledge of programming [2]. Creative Intelligence becomes possible and manifests, that is, when people experiment with new media. Ulmer’s insight concerning the “pleasure / pain” axis of the electrate epoch (overlaid on the “right/wrong” axis of the oral epoch and the “true/false” axis of the literate epoch, thereby creating a fully three-dimensional matrix in which the rhetorical self can gestate) [5], incorporating as it does the heretofore neglected recognition of emotional and social intelligence as equally important aspects of a creative intelligence, provides a filter for understanding 21st century directions in mental health care, the integration of Eastern religions and their techniques of mindfulness at all levels of society, and the proliferation of addiction and trauma treatment paradigms.

1.2 Connection to Previous Work

In many ways, the SHM follows my previously published hypertext, *Genetis: A Rhizography* [9], which was written in early recovery about a psychotic breakdown that had occurred a decade prior. I composed this earlier work in Eastgate’s Storyspace as a way to mine the new medium for its therapeutic potential; considered equally democratizing for its time and place, the Twine interface, however, invites a more methodical approach, with its invitation

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HT ’24, September 10–13, 2024, Poznan, Poland
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ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-0595-3/24/09
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3648188.3680249>

to program simple conditional algorithms. In both cases, the compositional medium itself encouraged the ultimate form that the narrative ended up taking.

Returning to the SHM five years after composing it, I am surprised by the degree to which it is a direct but highly poetic expression of my own states of mind while coping with a second separation and impending divorce. Twine as a medium has allowed me in the 21st century to do what Storyspace allowed me to do in the 20th century, before the World-Wide Web (defined as a “multimedia interface to the internet”) was available: assemble a self that makes sense of my experience in the context of my theoretical reading while also “matriculating” in an alma mater of my own imagination, one that replaces my own dysfunctional mother. Within this “bubble” [8] and in the context of Internal Family Systems theory [7] as well as five years of recovery work in Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families, I have gradually developed a nurturing parental figure in which to enwomb my traumatized inner child.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Mark Anderson for his assistance in preparing this paper for publication.

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