Antikythera: Tactile audiovisual poetry app for tablets

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Abstract

Antikythera is a tactile, generative and interactive audiovisual poetry artwork for iPad and other tablet devices. It is based on the Antikythera mechanism, the ancient analog computer from c. 100 BC Greece, found in the Aegean Sea in 1900. It links together poetry, new technology, visual and sound art, and researches and explores new forms and possibilities of digital narratives from broken chronology and randomness to determined paths of reading/viewing and lines which change their meanings by the reader’s touch.

Keywords

Generative art, Disruption, Tactile interfaces, Audiovisual poetry, Digital narrative, Tablet computers, European cultural history.

Extended abstract

Antikythera is a tactile, generative and game-like poetry application for iPad and other tablet devices. It is based on the Antikythera mechanism, the ancient analog computer from c. 100 BC Greece, found in the Aegean Sea in 1900.

Within the context of the artistic research of Storytelling in New Media,1 the application is experimental and voluminous; it contains over 200 poems written for the mechanism. The artwork links together poetry, new technology, visual and sound art, and researches and explores new forms and possibilities of digital poetry: broken chronology, randomness and determined paths of reading, locked poems which open procedurally, games, visual and animated poems, temporality, disappearing and appearing poems, poems where verses change their places from one poem to another, words and lines which change their meanings and react to the reader’s physical actions, her/his touch and movement of the tablet.

Figure 1. “When the dark wakes up, it is too late, a lamp is lit already.” When opened, the Antikythera app will choose a storyworld and daily verse based on the current moon and seasonal phase (according to the tablet’s calendar). The reader may, of course, choose differently. ©Crucible Studio / Shakti Dash 2015.

The Antikythera collection of poems has six parts – or storyworlds, presented as the gears of the mechanism – each part containing 32 poems written for 32 different themes (e.g. love, transition, death etc.). Zeppelin Letters from

Figure 2. “A friend cannot...” Thematic connections between the six storyworld gears (The Witch portrayed) are displayed via constellations that enable reader to move between the worlds. ©Crucible Studio / Shakti Dash 2015.

The Hindenburg (Ilmalaivakirjeet Hindenburgiltaa) is about young Adele and LZ 129 Hindenburg’s last journey in 1937. Labrys, the feminist and feminine version of the story of Ariadne, is set on the Treblinka extermination camp. The Witch (Noita) tells about the 17th century witch-hunt in Finnmark, Vardo Island, Norway. In The Empress (Keisarina), Elisabeth of Austria monologues about restlessness, rage and lack of freedom. Images of Artists (Taiteilijakuvia) is situated in pre-war Vienna and discusses poverty, art, love and artist’s muses via two voices: Oskar Kokoschka’s doll of Alma Mahler and Egon Schiele’s lover Valerie Neutzil. Town Stories (Kaupunkitarinoita) imagines a medieval European town with a whole new set of little ghost and horror stories between poetry and prose – it’s about poverty, evil and horror.

There is also an Oracle in Antikythera, divining mechanism based on the “free verses” of all the poems in the thematically organised database. The database also provides the reader with date, season and moon phase sensitive daily verses via the moon interface traveling in astronomical real-time unless interrupted: the cosmos goes on unless a reader pauses it.

Based on awarded poet Saila Susiluoto’s overall idea and concept, Antikythera presents her latest collection, co-dramatised for New Media by director Mika ‘Lumi’ Tuomola, visual art and interface design by Shakti Dash, sound art & design by Antti Nykyri, and system architecture by Rasmus Vuori. As part of the Aalto University ARTS Department of Media research group Crucible Studio’s artistic research, the app is being technically finalised for the Finnish Apple App Store during Spring-Summer 2015 by the Taiste production company. The public launch – together with Susiluoto’s Ariadne book (published by Otava) that is a transmedial part of the storyworlds of Antikythera – will take place in Media Centre Lume, Helsinki, Finland, on Friday 21 August 2015. Antikythera will also be presented as an immersive installation piece, designed by architect & media artist Jaakko Pesonen, 20-30 Aug 2015 in the Helsinki Observatory gallery as a part of the Helsinki Festival (14-30 Aug) events Poetry Moon (Runokuu) and Media Facades.

The requiring poetic translation of Antikythera into English is expected to take place early 2016. Meanwhile, for both the non-Finnish and Finnish speaking storyworld travellers alike, the app’s tactile mechanism hopefully makes it a pleasurable instrument for playing sound and visual art.
Figure 6. The six storyworlds of Antikythera take the reader-traveller to a journey through the deep-blue cosmos of The Witch to the dark tunnels of Labrys. ©Crucible Studio / Shakti Dash 2015.

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Author biographies
Saila Susiluoto is Helsinki-based, awarded Finnish poet, who has investigated generative poetry since her Huoneiden kirja (A Book of Rooms, Otava 2003) collection. She’s published eight collections of poems and nominated for the Nordic Council Literature Prize in 2012. Her poems have been translated in 14 languages.

Mika ‘Lumi’ Tuomola is internationally awarded writer, dramaturge and director for New Media since “Daisy’s Amazing Discoveries” (Coronet Interactive 1996), one of the first interactive audiovisual narrative productions online, and the co-founder and director of Crucible Studio, the New Media Storytelling research group at Media Lab Helsinki in the Department of Media at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland. September 2015 he will start as professor of narrativity in Scuola del Design, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.

Shakti Dash is a multidisciplinary visual designer (UI-UX-typography) with specialist concentration on New Media Storytelling and experimental sound and music. Currently, he’s lead designer at Tellyo Ltd and visual designer at Nordkapp Ltd.

Antti Nykyri, Helsinki-based Finnish artist, has worked with sounds and music in several contexts such as installation art, contemporary dance, sound art, application design, interface research, theatre, electronic music and artistic research. During 2015 his works will be on display at the Venice Biennale, Prague Quadrennial and Gwangju Design Biennale. Nykyri is preparing his doctoral work for University of the Arts Helsinki, Theatre Academy.

Rasmus Vuori is an internationally awarded systems architect and programmer for New Media productions that have included e.g. the Prix Môbius Nordica 2006 winner Obsession (dir. Pia Tikka). He’s currently the head of studies (MA in New Media at Media Lab Helsinki) and lecturer at the Department of Media, Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture, Finland.