

THREE RAILS LIVE

Combinatory Digital Video

Roderick Coover, Nick Montfort, Scott Rettberg



THREE RAILS LIVE is a combinatory narrative film designed for installation. The collaborative data-base driven video project concerns memory, mortality, alienation, and regret. The filmmaker and authors wrote recursively, exchanging texts in response to images and images in response to texts, evolving themes such as "Landscape and Fate", "Death by Snake", "Toxic", "Flight", and "Flood." Spoken word narrative and image are then assembled and juxtaposed by the system into segmented stories such as "Empty Glass," "Between Stations" and "Passing Cars". These reconfiguring fragments are interrupted by "perverbs", in which proverb fragments combine oddly familiar but corrupted phrases such as, "where there's smoke, there's mirrors" or "nothing ventured makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Running continuously, the system never generates the same narrative in the same order twice, but nevertheless produces a coherent holistic story of a man's late search for meaning among the detritus of his life and environment.

Technical Description

Three Rails Live uses a combinatory, or "data-base", system that results in the production of short narrative videos, stories with a moral to them. The three collaborators put the system together at some remove from each other. Coover sent a selection of short video clips and images to Rettberg and Montfort. Rettberg viewed the clips and sorted them arbitrarily into themes such as "Landscape and Fate" or "Death by Snake"; he then wrote three short narratives for each theme, and recorded readings of each of these narratives. Together the narrative segments fit into an overall first-person story. Montfort selected particular images, and, borrowing a technique from Harry Mathews, wrote "perverbs"—remixes of two different proverbs that subvert the original—for each of the texts paired to an image. Montfort also produced a title generator that arbitrarily creates a title for each run of the work. The system the authors constructed selects two videos and two of the narrative recordings from a constrained random selection. A proverb with a moral to the story is then assigned and the process begins anew. The system thus results in short narrative videos with new juxtapositions of images, texts, and perverbs each time it runs. All of the texts and images emerge from this aleatory but thematically determined method. The work is designed for HTML5 browsers and includes HTML, image, movie and audio files.

Format

Computer-based installation for monitor or projection. Tested browsers: Safari or Google Chrome. Color video, Mono-Audio, Min. Resolution 854px × 480px.

Credit:

Roderick Coover: Artistic design, video, photography.

Nick Montfort: Perverbs script, title generator, digital code and combinatory design.

Scott Rettberg: Voice, narrative script, digital code and combinatory design.

Additional Voices: Lynne Innerst.

Sound mastering by Joseph Kramer and Roderick Coover.

Links and Contacts

Contact roderickcoover@gmail.com

Information and exhibition history visit: roderickcoover.com