Abstracts

In alphabetical order by presenter

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How to Read Henri Michaux’s Asemic Writing Published in Book Form?

Henri Michaux (1899–1984), a Franco-Belgian writer and painter, was a pioneer of asemic writing. Most of his asemic writings that have been published in book form have also been exhibited in galleries or art museums. The process of collecting and editing original handwritten art works as an ensemble of text reveals the conventions of a book form and its layout. It is clear that asemic writing not only looks different, but expresses different things as a part of a printed book compared to an original artwork that is displayed in a gallery space. In this paper, I focus on reading Michaux’s Par des traits (1984) in that viewpoint.

Asemic writing is often defined as a form of literature that looks like writing but cannot be read, a definition created by Tim Gaze. I have used the following definition; asemic means ‘does not express verbal meanings’. I see asemic writing as a concept which makes it possible to extend and to amplify the understanding of differences between the levels of legibility and illegibility of a text. While interpreting Par des traits I will give examples of signs that represent different parts of the scale of readability of asemic writing.

In addition, asemic writing has often been seen as a form of a visual poetry in the field of literature. There are several reasons for this. For instance, the term was invented by the visual poets Jim Leftwich and Tim Gaze in the mid-1990s and it has become known through a subculture of experimental poetry. Also, a well-known publication of asemic writing, Asemic Magazine, is edited by Tim Gaze and its contributors are most often poets. Yet again the pretexts of official publications of asemic writing (such as the publication house, publication series, book’s title, book’s preface etc.) often support that view.

Par des traits is one of the last three books of Henri Michaux’s asemic writing that makes an exception in that regard. The book is published by Fata Morgana which is known for its poetry books but also publishes essays, translations and books which combine literature and art. Par des traits has been classified differently in different places (as a literary and artistic book in Fata Morgana, as a literature and art in Bibliothèque nationale de France, as poetry on the Amazon website etc.) Asemic writing has been published in Par des traits with a lyrical essay which explains Michaux’s desire to make such idiosyncratic signs in writing. The variety of classifications and the pretexts give the reader the possibility to interpret the asemic writing in the book as either poetry or prose; it is not clearly represented as one or the other.

While interpreting the signs of Par des traits, I focus on the contradictions between the pretexts of asemic writing and the question of whether or not it can be a self-contained and self-referential form of literature. I examine if it is fruitful to interpret asemic writing through the conventional literary genres (poetry, prose and drama), or if it would be better to see it as a unique form of literature which is connected to the visual arts.
“Poor books”: Going Back to Adrienne Monnier’s “livre pauvre”

It is commonly accepted to the book of the future will have to be different from the book as we know it today, and whose future in endangered by the digital revolution. The book, in other words, will have to be remediated (as did already Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore in The Medium is the Massage (1967), a publication that revolutionized book design). Most recent and current remediation proposals tend to highlight what makes books different from screens, such as for instance its multiple visual and sculptural aspects. There is of course nothing wrong with this plea for this type of remediation, but it should be possible to stress as well the virtues of other types of books, for instance the type that Adrienne Monnier (the famous Parisian bookseller and co-publisher of the first Ulysses) called in 1931 the “livre pauvre” (“poor book”, all connotations welcome). In this lecture I will first contextualize Monnier’s definition of and plea for such a “poor book” and then try to suggest that this kind of book, which seems to be the opposite of what the remediated book of the post-digital era should look like, can still inspire all book lovers of the 21st Century.
Forging Uniqueness: Books in the Age of Experience

Reacting against postmodern irony and playfulness, some critics claim, post-postmodernism embraces earnestness, sincerity, and authenticity. Other critics argue that postmodernism is followed by pseudo-modernism—a culture that is amnesiac, shallow, vapid, and banal. What is the place of books as objects that morph, change shape, or mimic other artifacts in these and similar narratives of a paradigm shift? What broad scenarios of a profound cultural change can help us explain the widespread tendency to include images of various kinds and to violate the conventions of the graphic surface of the page? The paper offers (partial) answers to these questions by focusing on a range of strategies whose aim is to forge a sense of uniqueness for the reader in his/her encounter with fictional narratives and their physical platform, the codex. Of particular interest is the function of handwriting and authentic-looking documents, as well as (re)productions of stains, imperfections, and errors. The paper references a wide range of fictional texts, some already well-known (for instance S. by J. J. Abrams and Doug Dorst), some less so (City on Fire by Garth Risk Hallberg), and some virtually unknown beyond the circle of readers that the books themselves have created (Being or Nothingness by Joe K.).
The Multimodal Novel and the Ethical Spiral: The Entropology of Theories of Forgetting

Visual devices in literary works have often been considered juvenile or low-culture gimmickry (see discussion in Gibbons 2012: 159-161; Sadokierski 2010: 54-8). To some extent, this is inevitable given that cheaper design and production processes have resulted – in the twenty-first century – in the ubiquity of the multimodal novel. Nevertheless, parallel to the boom of multimodality and multimediality in book design, contemporary fiction also often exhibits an increased conscience and consciousness of the socio-political climate of the globalizing world. This can be seen, for instance, in the multimodal novels *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* by Jonathan Safran Foer (2005), which explores a nine-year-old boy’s struggle to come to terms with the death of his father in 9/11, and *Kapow!* by Adam Thirlwell (2012) which uses concrete poetic designs to defamiliarise and thus raise awareness of the tumultuous events of the Arab Spring. Adopting Vermeulen and van den Akker’s (2010) term, I therefore argue that these parallel investments – in multimodal form and socio-political content – serve to characterise contemporary multimodal fictions as “aesth-ethical”.

Concentrating on Lance Olsen’s (2014) *Theories of Forgetting*, this paper explores how multimodal fiction exploits the unique properties of the printed book to articulate ethical concerns. *Theories of Forgetting* features three interrelated narratives but at the heart of all three – and the structural trope of the book itself – is American artist Robert Smithson’s earthwork *The Spiral Jetty* and his conception (following Levi-Strauss) of “entropology” (see Smithson qtd. in Müller 1996 [1971]). For Smithson, entropology is the destruction of developed structures by mankind. In *Theories of Forgetting*, the multimodal form of the book becomes increasingly fragmented as it engages with the disintegration of the environment, human cognition, and human mortality.

References

Collaboration between Poet and Graphic designer

Finnish poet Harry Salmenniemi has published five anthologies of poetry and a collection of short stories. Markus Pyörälä has made the graphic design for all of them. Both Salmenniemi and Pyörälä have been awarded prices for the works. *Texas, sakset* (“Texas, scissors”, 2010) won the prestigious Kalevi Jäntti Price for young writers, and *Runojä* (“Pöems”, 2011) was nominated “The most beautiful book of the year 2011” by the Finnish book art committee. It is safe to say that the books that Salmenniemi and Pyörälä have created together are special both as poetry and as visual art works.

This presentation deals with the collaboration between the poet and the graphic designer in the process of creating a poetic work. It is based on thematic interviews with Salmenniemi and Pyörälä. I wish to find out how they work together and what the collaboration means to them. Examples will be taken from *Texas, sakset* and *Runojä*. 
"Black block", a square (or a quadrangle) of black printing ink on the book page, leaving blank margins, is a peculiar graphical device. The literary tradition is usually thought to start from *Tristram Shandy* and its renowned black page after the death of "poor Yorick". Still, Sterne’s gimmick can be seen as an allusion to the old typographical tradition of “mourning pages” or “mourning blocks”. This feature was used in books about / for the dead for decades before the publication of *Tristram Shandy*. The connection is parodic, and also later, in modern literature’s black blocks the approach can be considered comical in different respects. We will present examples of this phenomenon mainly from experimental prose works.

The black block shares a family resemblance with other means that take advantage of graphical absence or emptiness (missing signs, empty pages, blurred lines), or other kinds of graphical substitution, grouping, or layering of letters in visually striking ways. The black block is not text, while it is not image either. Still, its connection to these terms is often outlined by interpretation: packed, overlapping print text eventually forms a black surface; and a black box can be interpreted as an iconic representation of, say, a dark room. Thus the black blocks on book pages complicate basic concepts of typography and book design.
Acting as a Reader: Materiality of Books in Everyday Reading Practices

When people are asked to describe their relationship towards books and reading, they often talk about either their favourite books and literature or reading practices and books as objects. Reading practices may refer to the actual moment of reading but also to other activities that are attached to interests in books, such as finding, choosing, collecting and owning them and discussing literature with other readers. When the practices are viewed in this way, in the broad meaning, the format of books in question becomes essential in understanding both reading experiences and the ways in which the format affects the practices, or the ways of acting as “a reader”.

This presentation will focus on the cultural meanings that people who enjoy reading books attach to both printed books and e-books. Reading and other activities that belong to the context of readership are considered here mainly as free time activity and something that is done for pleasure. The theoretical background draws from ethnological studies of material culture and the main questions address the meanings given to different book formats as objects: How is the physical shape or the format considered to affect reading and other book-related activities? As the activities happen more and more online, it is also relevant to view the subject from the perspective of digitalisation: Which digital services are welcomed and which excluded from the everyday reading practices and why?
The Affordances of Reading Poetry on Digital and Printed Platforms – Logic of Selection vs. Close Reading in Stephanie Strickland’s “V-Project”

A typical work of poetry can be circumscribed within the covers of a codex. The covers delineate a whole, a totality, within which are all the elements we need to consider to make an interpretation, and (usually) we can access the text without restriction. Moreover, the codex is static in the sense that the ink marks on paper stay the same from one reading to the next. These well-known affordances suggest a certain type of reading. In contrast, digital poetry often has no clear textual boundaries, nor a need for them. Furthermore, the logic with which the text is accessed is different. It can be retrieved through various filters and encountered singularly, detached from the other elements of the (assumed) whole.

In this talk I wish to compare the affordances of print and digital interfaces and discuss the reading strategies these affordances encourage. I draw predominantly on Stephanie Strickland’s print book V:WaveSon.nets / Losing L’Una (2002) and the Vniverse iPad application (2014; with Ian Hatcher). I argue that the Vniverse iPad application operates on – what I call – the logic of selection, where the reader is offered multiple choices through which to access the desired cultural content. Selection in Vniverse is coupled with temporal transience thus creating isolated poetical moments.

The digital platform easily accommodates interactivity and customisation of choices and therefore this logic is connected to everyday digital online interfaces which offer news, entertainment and even education in the form of selectable content. In a typical codex selection does not play a role, and, in fact, is not even a desired feature. The interface of a codex allows the reader to spend time with the poem, to re-read and “double read” (sensu Calinescu 1993), to compare and juxtapose the elements of the poem freely. It affords a very different means of engagement and a different strategy of reading.

This comparison is intended to both reveal common assumptions of reading on a print interface such as the codex and to investigate new assumptions created by digital interfaces.
Thinking through Unogenesis: The Situated Knowledge of a Text Designer

This presentation introduces my practice-based doctoral project Unogenesis (Epägenesis, in Finnish) – an endeavour in concrete and conceptual writing, published in book format. For me as a designer, Unogenesis is a method for examining the material aspects of text from within my own design practice. It also brings forth questions of authorship, origin, and diverse sites of knowledge.

As the “age of print” is dissolving, interest in the (new) materiality of language is growing in areas such as literary and multimodal scholarship. Their point of interest, however, often remains in textual artefacts. This means the design choices in said artefacts are taken for granted, without questioning where and how they came into being. What is lost, then, is the knowledge and experience embodied in the designer and her practice. In Unogenesis, following Haraway, the act of visualizing written language is considered as skilled practice and situated knowledge. In both its content and form, my book unveils aspects of the designer’s sense of text.

In designerly knowledge, materiality was never “new”: it was always already there. According to Latour, to design is always to redesign: there is always something that exists first. This calls for a definition of authorship unlike those prevalent in literary theory. Unogenesis challenges abstract notions of authorship by creating new texts out of existing ones, by forging poetics out of the mundane, by introducing design as a central mode of textual meaning-making, and by resisting the notion of a book as a closed, curated entity. Thinking through making and writing Unogenesis, I suggest that the authorship of a designer is not her own, but radically distributed between human, technology, and media. This makes the situated knowledge of a designer a modest but vital knot in between diverse networks of production and meaning.
How to Read a Book; or, Towards the Paginal Turn in Criticism

Since the introduction of printing technologies some five hundred years ago, the entities that we are accustomed to calling literary narratives have, with high predictability, entailed signs printed on sheets of paper bound in the codex form so that the leaves fastened together hinge at one side, allowing, miraculously, the pages to be turned. Until digital publishing became possible and eventually commonplace in the 21st century, book was the medium of literature, so unmarked, so self-evident, and so mundane that it easily gained the status of some sort of immaterial transparency. Book as a platform and carrier of literature is almost too ubiquitous, too obvious to be accounted for, and for the same reason its medial quality turns into some kind of immediacy, as if signs were communicated without the material support of the codex.

However, printed books are material objects, with visual, tactile, and even olfactory features. Due to their very materiality, to their three-dimensional, multilayered architecture, books are also apt to be used as writing surface for notes and underlings or to serve as handy folders for loose papers and dried flowers, or to hide cash, drugs, and even handguns in. The unmarked medial characteristics or affordances of books are often foregrounded and exploited in multimodal experimental literature. The basic mechanics or pre-mechanics of reading is consequently hindered, and the very turning of the page can be seriously problematized. To systematically account for this defamiliarization of the most familiar act in the protocol of reading could mark, for lack of a better term, a paginal turn in criticism.
Game, Play and Materiality in Kid E-Lit

There is an increasing amount of digital literature for children, which has mainly gone undetected by literary studies. It is worth noting how many functionalities in digital literature, considered as novelties not present in print literature, have actually been employed in children’s literature (pop-up books, books with audio-extensions etc.) for a long time. During the past decade, the tablet devices, especially, have been employed as platforms for children’s digital literature, which takes advantage of their touch screens, audio-visual capabilities and computing power. These literary apps, as well as various augmented books, follow many of the traditional traits of children’s literature, but also provide new solutions rarely used in adult literature.

In our presentation we will look at children’s digital literature emphasizing the aspects of play, game and materiality in them. We will provide an analysis of a set of works, three literary apps and two augmented books, which are situated in different positions along the ludo-narrative continuum, emphasizing the playful and gaming aspects to various degrees in relation to the narrative content. We also look at the material aspects of these works, especially how they incorporate the bodily user in the reading act.

We will also discuss the implications of children’s digital literature for the wider book and reading culture, as it seems to be approaching digital games and other audio-visual media in some of its aspects.
3 x Kokko²: Omnivorous Poetics of Multimodality in *Varjofinlandia*, *Das Leben der Anderen*, and *Retweeted*

Collage and cut-up are by no means “new” literary techniques, but there is still much to be said about their contemporary applications and implications, that is, the contemporary poetics of found material. Following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, poetics is here understood as the creative principles or techniques informing any literary construction. This also applies, according to the *OED*, to social and cultural constructions, and thus brings a wider scope of human interaction and meaning making on various platforms into play.

What happens to poetics, when a text is first written on and a for a certain internet platform and then later copy-pasted to a different medium, the one of an edited and printed book? What then has the book been eating? What is being transferred, what changes or re-renders itself, what is being created? This presentation focuses on three experimental prose works by Karri Kokko: *Varjofinlandia* (2005), *Das Leben der Anderen* (2012) and *Retweeted* (2016), which are all based on found material retrieved from either blogs, Facebook or Twitter. The aim is to map out the differences in the omnivorous poetics of these works, and touch upon the role the original platform of writing plays in them as well.
Manuscripts Imitating Printed Books

The present paper examines manuscripts that in one way or another imitate the bibliographic codes of printed books. The concept of the bibliographical code, coined by Jerome J. McGann, refers to the socio-historical context and “material” means of production of a work, such as the binding of a book, its size, quality of ink and paper, typography, and illustration (McGann: *Textual Condition*. 1991. 12–15, 15–62).

My research material consist of manuscripts from Finnish authors such as Arvi Järventaus (1883–1939), Simo Korpela (1863–1936), Elina Vaara (1903–19080), and Katri Vala (1901–1944). The manuscripts can be divided into two groups. The first include fair copies that in many cases are also used as printer’s copies. The interesting thing in these manuscripts is that they imitate the bibliographical codes of printed books iconically for example with drawn letters that resemble printed typefaces. The other group of manuscripts comprises handmade books mostly by authors in their adolescence. These meticulously crafted books were probably not intended to be printed or published in the traditional sense, but have most likely circulated within a very limited readership.

Especially the handmade books show how thoroughly the concept of the book determined writing in the first half of the 20th century. Handmade books might have been a hobby activity, but it nevertheless demonstrates how aware budding writers were of the bibliographical code of the printed book. This holds true also for the more experienced writers, who in their manuscripts try to visualize the layout of their texts. Their manuscripts are in many respects prototypes of the coming bibliographic code of the printed book. Both the handmade book and the printer’s copies that imitate printed books recognize text as a visual entity that also brings forth the “material” side of the literary work.
Central to this talk is the ongoing development of one project, *Woman’s World*, a novel collaged from text fragments cut from the pages of vintage women’s magazines and reassembled to tell the 1962 story of Roy and ‘sister’ Norma’s struggle to live up to the prescribed ideals of feminine perfection. The collaged text pieces retain the essence of their original context, which permeates through to the finished piece. Thus Norma’s constructed persona is governed by their editorial opinions and values, while her narration is shaped by the syntax and inflections of the source material’s distinctive voice.

I will briefly discuss my design approach to my other books, how content and form should be inextricably linked and the importance of developing an appropriate visual language to deliver each story effectively. In *Diary of an Amateur Photographer* and *The Card*, the page design aims to provide visual subtext or insight into the protagonist’s character, while in *Overland* (published March 2018) the book structure itself plays a vital role in the story, opening horizontally rather than vertically so that the gutter becomes a conceptual and physical border between two parallel narratives.

I will also discuss most recent developments for *Woman’s World*: a work-in-progress feature-length film of the book composed from thousands of clips sourced from period films, commercials and TV-shows. Employing a similar collage methodology, it continues to experiment with the principles of narrative continuity and discontinuity, while drawing on, and playing with, an audience’s propensity to find a coherent story.
Unreadable Books? Luigi Seraphini’s *Codex Seraphinianus* and Dieter Roth’s *Mundunculum* as Critique of Wittgensteinian Language Philosophy

The subtitle of the Swiss artist Dieter Roth’s artist’s book *Mundunculum* (1967), ‘A tentative logico-poeticum’, is an ironic variation on Wittgenstein’s renown work that asserts a belief in the accountability of the world through language. Instead, the title of Roth’s book suggests that it forms a self-enclosed ‘small world’ (lat. ‘mundum’ + ‘-culum’), which relies on particular, solipsistic poetic logic established in the book itself, and which, furthermore, is not applicable elsewhere. *Mundunculum* is a singular structure that is assembled through a particular code: Roth created a ‘stamp alphabet’ for the work where a stamp image corresponds to a given letter. However, the markings are ambiguous and partially superimposed, rendering the work unreadable in any conventional sense while emphasising its rebus-like character.

This paper will discuss ‘unreadable books’, that is, books that contain text, asemic writing and/or codified images that defy any kind of conventional reading that relies on the assumption of a shared language. I will argue that ‘unreadable books’ establish their own respective (and singular) theories of language while manifesting these theories ‘in action’ and relying on the material, conventional form of the book in order to steer their interpretation. In other words, the verisimilitude with the interface of literature is intended to guarantee that these works of art will be regarded as books even though they contain only few, if any, literary elements. Similar lack of literary elements is evident also in the *Codex Seraphinianus* (1981) by the Italian designer Luigi Serafini who applied asemic writing along with lavish images depicting an alternative natural history. Serafini’s drawings portray imaginary flora and fauna in various states of hybridity while adopting the conventions of a particular literary genre: the encyclopaedia.
How Comics Are Their Own Reading Manuals: Experimental and Experiential Designs of *The Sandman: Overture*

If anyone has ever attempted to read a comic book linearly – or even as linearly as one might read a piece of prose – they must have failed miserably. This is because even the most basic of comic strips endeavor to guide the reader’s attention through fairly complex patterns: zigzags and spirals, zooms and back-and-forths. The elements within a panel and on a page form multimodal compositions, all of which have certain aesthetic or semantic effects, in addition to which elements might repeat or figure across longer stretches of a graphic novel. The lines may flow together into seamless action that reads like a slow-motion film, or the juxtapositions may be jarring and dissonant. A spread could be stripped down to few zenlike elements or it may be dense as a schematic. Experienced comics authors rarely forget to take advantage of the suspense and reveal effects of a page turn either, setting a pivotal point at the bottom corner of the recto and a stunning splash page on the verso. All in all, comics have several means of triggering distinct embodied reading experiences, which impact the interpretation of the story, its themes and its characters.

In my presentation, I demonstrate this by analyzing excerpts from Neil Gaiman, J.H. Williams III and Dave Stewart’s critically acclaimed graphic novel *The Sandman: Overture* (2015). Conceived as a late prologue to Gaiman’s cult fantasy comics series from the 1990s, *Overture* takes the reader to some strange reaches of reality indeed: from the realms of dream to the city of stars, and beyond time. Needless to say none of the dozens of characters encountered on the way are exactly human. Referring to Marco Caracciolo’s theory of narrative experientiality as well as to the methods of cognitive comics analysis developed by Karin Kukkonen, I argue that the comic does not as much represent these fantastical places and beings as coaxes the reader into imagining them with the use of experimental visual designs.
Joyful Movements: Christian Dotremont’s Play with the Page, the Book, and the Space

After a career start in the Surrealist circles during the WW II, Christian Dotremont founded the Cobra group with Asger Jorn in 1948, moving rapidly from what he perceived as Surrealism’s sterile theorisation towards spontaneous experimentation with different materialities. After the end of the Cobra group in 1951, Dotremont engaged with different kinds of intermedial experimentations, before becoming internationally known as the inventor of the “logogrammes” – radical experimentation at the very intersection of writing, image and meaningless form – beginning from the 1960s. In this paper, I am interested in Dotremont’s experimentations from the 1950s to the 1970s that concern the relationship between writing, space, and the physical object of the book (understood in general sense covering reviews and periodicals also). He tried to reconnect the book with geographical locations and movement in space (in “écritures espacés” and the review Le Tressor) on the one hand and to multiply the spatial and temporal sediments in the book (in the review Strates) on the other hand, yet also trying to minimize the temporal and spatial gap that usually separates the creative act of writing from the publication of the book (in “livres d’un jour” and “logogrammes”). In this sense, Dotremont’s work, that anticipates both Derrida’s philosophy of writing and the contemporary Object-oriented ontology, can be seen as a joyful questioning – both intellectual and physical – of the limits and affordances writing, image and the material object of the book have to offer. The book was thrown into space, in order to make it ubiquitous; and it became itself a unique space.