Interfacing literary genesis

A digital museum exhibition of Raymond Brulez’ *Sheherazade*

Elli Bleeker, Aodhan Kelly -- Centre for Manuscript Genetics, University of Antwerp
The Touch Press-edition of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*

The online exhibition of W.H. Yeats at the National Library of Ireland
Key objectives

**Introduce genetic criticism to the general public**
A digital exhibition of ‘genetic paths’

**Evaluate approaches to interface design**
Following the results of a user study and general interface design principles
Kelly (2015)
Ruecker et al. (2011)

**Collaborate with different local parties**
The Centre for Manuscript Genetics (CMG), University of Antwerp
Web designer company ‘Prophets’
AMVC Letterenhuis (literary archive and museum)
Genetic criticism

- Research into the process of writing
- Analysis of textual development

Genetic editing

- Focus on process: not necessarily result an final, critical text
- Provide instruments to further explore the text’s genesis
‘Instead of employing manuscript research in order to make an edition, digital editing can also serve as a tool for manuscript research and genetic criticism’

(Dirk van Hulle, 2016)

**Digital exhibition** as a ‘teaser’ / ‘trailer’ to present the first insights of genetic research
Genetic criticism

Centre for Manuscript Genetics

- James Joyce (Genetic Joyce Studies)
- Willem Elsschot (‘Achter de Schermen’)
- Lexicon of Scholarly Editing (LSE)
- Samuel Beckett (Beckett Archive)
- Raymond Brulez (brulezarchive.org; under development)

Bring forward literary heritage of Raymond Brulez in a meaningful way
Se peut-il qu'un jour, en fin de compte, la pratique aidant, la faiblesse, j'y sois simplement resté, au lieu de sortir, selon ma vieille habitude, passer la journée et une grande partie de la nuit aussi loin que possible de chez moi?

L'Innommable Segment 9, version 2 (MS-HRC-SB-3-10, p. frontflyleafverso)

Se peut-il etc ......
Raymond Brulez (1895 - 1972)
Interface design approach

User study findings applied:

- Tablets for outreach publications
- 74% tablet users used them for learning activities
- Responsive website rather than native tablet application

(Aodhán Kelly 2015)
Interface design approach

‘...the involvement of textual scholars in the provision of new editions for the wider public that are able to support leisure reading, as well as to present some of the aspects of textual variance could be a [...] culturally meaningful and responsible approach.’

(Elena Pierazzo 2015, 153)
Interface design approach

Definitions of ‘interface’

**Interface**

Taken from the words Internet and Face. It refers to someone who is a lot better looking on the internet (eg Facebook Profile Picture) than they are in real life.

(Urban dictionary)
Interface design approach

Definitions of ‘interface’

- ‘a point of contact between a user and a set of embodied information’ (Nowviskie 2000)
- ‘a point where two systems, subjects, organizations meet and interact’ (OED)
- ‘User interface - the keyboard, mouse, menus of a computer system. The user interface allows the user to communicate with the operating system.’ (Webopedia)
Interface design approach

Who are our audience or public?

Museum visitors & website visitors

Where is the threshold of age/education level?

Who can identify the affordances of the interface?
Collaboration with local partners

- Letterenhuis museum and archive
  - Enthusiastic but mostly passive
  - Physical space
  - Provided touchscreen device
  - Material (manuscripts & images)

- Local web design company (prophets.be)
  - Active interest in cultural heritage projects
  - Proposed possibilities
  - Responsible for planning and development

- Centre for Manuscript Genetics (that’s us!)
  - Forge links with cultural heritage institutions
  - Improving dissemination of research and promotion of the centre
  - Learning about the processes of commercial web design sector
Building the Brulez Digital Exhibition

“[...] aesthetic design promotes the perceived usability and therefore the overall usability of a website”

(Kurosu and Kashimura qtd. in Ruecker 2011, 13)
Building the Brulez Digital Exhibition

- ‘RFP’ (request for proposal) and ‘auditions’ with web design companies; introducing genetic criticism
- Balance research objectives with interest of general audience
- Clear communication
- Negotiation: listing our principle needs, prioritise our objectives
Building the Brulez Digital Exhibition

Open source and re-usability

- Code for web interface on GitHub
- Future ‘inhouse’ development possible
- Possible to reuse design for other writers
- CC license?
"Ik beleef geen genoegd aan het schrijven"

Bruelez beweerde in een brief dat hij niet graag schreef anders dan schrijven, net als Sheherazade, de beroemde Nacht. Zij moet van de Sultan verhalen blijven vertellen gedood.
Inspiratie


DE OPSTAND DER VOETNOTA'S
Reflections
Reflections

Make complex research results understandable and accessible

In-house development vs. outsourcing design?

Following interface design principles / results of user study?
Reflections

Classification of digital exhibition:

Not an ‘edition’ but maybe an ‘exhibition of an edition’?

A first entry point for some users to an edition?

Spin-offs for outreach can also be scholarly?
Conclusion

Next Steps

Did it work? i.e. how effective is the interface?

- User testing: on-site and on personal devices
- Refinement of design and content

Promotion/marketing of the exhibition

Possible re-use of application with new content

Integration of application within the finished DSE
Thank you.
We are on Twitter.
@aodhankelly
@ellibleeker
@CMG_UA