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Authors' accepted manuscript

Web/Comics 2024: Creativity in Small Spaces

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ABSTRACT

Web/Comics 2024 continues the workshop series commenced at last year's ACM Hypertext conference. It focuses on the transformation of the comics medium enacted by hypertext through the emergence of webcomics, or "graphic sequential narratives that are created, published, and read on-line" [6]. The Web/Comics workshop brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from the humanities and technological communities to share work and discuss the latest research on webcomics from the perspectives of multiple disciplines. It wants to act as a bridge to increase collaboration between the comics and hypertext research communities. Researchers and practitioners working with webcomics or hypertext are invited to attend this workshop. The planned event is a half day hybrid workshop with emphasis on opportunities for dialogue and discussion in a roundtable session.

In keeping with this year's conference theme, we particularly welcome discussions that address topics such as

- Webcomics spaces, space constraints and creativity
- Creative intelligence and artificial intelligence in webcomics
- Adaptive and inclusive technologies in webcomics
- Communities of digital practice in webcomics

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → **Media arts**; • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**; • **Information systems** → **Web applications**.

KEYWORDS

Webcomics, Hypercomics, Creativity, Transmedia, Interfaces, Communities

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1 DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP

Web/Comics 2024 expands its ambition to become a focal point for the community of scholars interested in conceptualising and analysing webcomics through a hypertext lens. It targets scholars from various fields in the humanities and in computing, including hypertext studies, comic studies, electronic literature, that explore the interconnections between media and technology.

Web/Comics 2024 wants to investigate whether webcomics exemplify the expansion of hypertext beyond the linearity of information processing systems into a type of interactivity that is nonlinear (multicursal) and ludic. It uses webcomics to explore the boundaries of hypertext, for example by assessing its utility to the reader or user and its effects on "readers' ongoing process of establishing meaning and coherence" [3]. At the same time, it asks how profoundly new tools such as text-to-image models and other forms of generative AI are altering comics production and consumption [5].

Proposed discussion topics include (but are not limited to):

- Webcomics as creative hypertext media
- Webcomics and generative AI
- Hypertext systems for webcomics publishing
- Webcomics and healthcare
- Cognitive processing, hypertext and webcomics
- Constraint development in creative processes
- Webcomics formats
- Page, screen, scroll
- Webcomics and transmedia
- User interface in webcomics
- Reading webcomics as hypertexts
- Authoring webcomics
- Crowdsourcing and crowdfunding in webcomics
- Issues in interdisciplinary webcomics research

2 RELEVANCE OF THE WORKSHOP TO THE HYPERTEXT COMMUNITIES

Comics have always been hypertextual. From their origins in newspapers to their present as pillars of multi-billion dollar media franchises, comics have always existed within networks of texts, images, and other media. Hypertext represents the last in a series of transformations of the comics medium and has the potential of being among the most profound, enabling for example new models of interactions between authors, readers and publishers [1]. In a sense, webcomics in themselves offer a kind of constrained creativity whereby their structure promotes creativity, rather than inhibits it. Webcomics can moreover be "an accessible form of content" [8] not only because of their structure, but also because of a range of accessible tools that allow people to experiment and create.

Through the medium of webcomics and its unique form of storytelling, the Web/Comics workshop will look at how hypertext has transformed and has been transformed. Webcomics are the ideal context through which to challenge and expand theoretical assumptions of hypertext, such as Nelson's visions of the future or Atzenbeck and Nürnberg's proposals for hypertext as method [2], and to connect comics studies to hypertext studies, electronic literature and book studies. The workshop will question the distinctiveness

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of webcomics as a creative medium in the "Blue Age of comics books" [7], when all comics are to some extent digital, and reflect on the role of intelligent technologies such as AI for webcomics creators and readers.

3 MOTIVATION

Considering hypertext in relation to webcomics is akin to going back to the roots of hypertext Ted Nelson in 1974 coined the term "hyper-comics" in "No More Teacher's Dirty Looks." (originally published in 1970) [4]. Nelson described it as "the simplest and most straightforward hyper-medium" and gave it a prominent place in his proposed media revolution. This workshop interrogates whether Nelson's vision for comics has been realised in the twenty-first century from multiple perspectives, including systems, cognition, archiving and creativity (human and artificial).

4 WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS' BIOS

4.1 Francesca Benatti

Francesca Benatti is a Research Fellow in Digital Humanities at The Open University. Her research interests include the history of the book and reading, comic studies and hypertext. She was the convenor of the first Web/Comics workshop at Hypertext 2023, where she was overall Program Chair. She has published on webcomics in the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* and *Interactive Storytelling* and is the author of the forthcoming *Innovations in Digital Comics: A Popular Revolution* (Cambridge Elements in Publishing and Book Culture).

4.2 Linda Berube

Linda Berube is a AHRC Collaborative Partnership doctoral student investigating UK digital comics creation, production, and consumption processes, supported by the British Library and the Human-Computer Interaction Department (HCID) at City, University of London. She has published on reader interaction with web archives and other nonprint legal deposit collections at UK national libraries and is the author of "Do You Web 2.0? Public Libraries and Social Networking" (Elsevier, 2011).

4.3 Ernesto Priego

Ernesto Priego is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at City, University of London. He has researched comics since the early 1990s. As a researcher based at the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design, he explores the role of comics as narrative, conceptual and speculative design tools and applies user-centred, participatory co-design methods to the creation of comics within public health or social interest domains. He leads the "Parables of Care. Responses to Dementia Care" project, which explores the potential of comics to enhance the impact of dementia care research. He co-founded *The Comics Grid: Journal of Comics Scholarship* in 2010 and has co-edited the journal since January 2011.

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