

**Benjamin Bogart and Philippe Pasquier**  
**Context Machines//2013**

*Context Machines* are generative artworks whose design is inspired by models of memory and creativity drawn from the cognitive sciences. In a traditional artistic context, the artist works directly in the material that is presented to the audience. In generative art, the artist manifests the concept in a system whose output is presented to the audience. This is a process of meta-creation: the building of systems that create media artefacts. Our development of *Context Machines* is manifest computationally and informed by cognitive models and theory, which are rarely exploited in generative art.

Our initial motivation leading to *Context Machines* is that their output be, to some degree, a surprise to us. Computational theories of complexity, emergence and non-determinism contribute to processes that enable surprising results. The creative behaviour of *Context Machines* is manifest in the generative representation presented to the audience. *Context Machines* are image-makers – but the process by which they generate images is more significant than the images themselves. Harold Cohen describes the significance of cognitive processes in image-making:

An image is a reference to some aspect of the world which contains within its own structure and in terms of its own structure a reference to the act of cognition which generated it. It must say, not that the world is like this, but that it was recognized to have been like this by the image-maker, who leaves behind this record: not of the world, but of the act.<sup>1</sup>

*Context Machines* share a number of core features: they all involve a computer-controlled camera, used to collect images of their visual context, and use computational methods to generate novel representations. [...]

*The artwork should relate itself to its context, without that relation being predetermined by the artist.*

This is our central motivation and informs *Memory Association Machine's* production and remains in the background of all *Context Machines*. The use of an 'intentional stance' frames the work as an autonomous entity that is capable of forming a relation to its context, which includes the audience. In order to form such a relation, the artwork must be embodied – albeit in a synthetic sense: the

world impacts the system through the images collected by the machine, while the artwork impacts the world through the subtle effect of its representation on the viewer. For example, a rich and complex representation may encourage viewers to approach the work, which would increase the number of images of people collected by the system. In addition is the aspect of surprise, where the machine's representation should, to some degree, appear independent of the intention of the artist. This interest in surprise is analogous to the interest in erasing the 'artist's hand' in traditional art. In illusionistic painting, the lack of visible brushstrokes gives the viewer the impression that the work is magical and disconnected from the artist while simultaneously testifying to his or her skill. The creative behaviour of the *Context Machines* provides a similar magical quality: 'The signs of the will of a creator are sometimes less palpable in these objects than a manifestation of a "will" of their own.'<sup>2</sup> [...]

1 Harold Cohen, 'What is an Image?', in *Proceedings of the International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence* (Tokyo, 1979) 24.

2 [footnote 15 in source] Mitchell Whitelaw, *Metacreation: Art and Artificial Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004) 103.

Benjamin Bogart and Philippe Pasquier, extracts from 'Context Machines: A Series of Situated and Self-Organizing Artworks', *Leonardo*, vol. 46, no. 2 (April 2013) 115–16.

**UBERMORGEN.COM, with Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico**  
**Google Will Eat Itself//2005**

We generate money by serving Google text advertisements on our website GWEI.org. With this money we automatically buy Google shares. We buy Google via their own advertisement! Google eats itself – but in the end we'll own it! By establishing this model we deconstruct the new global advertisement mechanisms by rendering them into a surreal click-based economic model. We inject a social virus ('let's share their shares') into their commercial body, hidden under a polite and friendly graphic surface.

Then we hand over the common ownership of Google to the GTTP-community – Google to the People. A bit more in detail: One of Google's main revenue generators is the 'AdSense' program: it places hundreds of thousands of little