Reading as Playing: 'Wandering Rocks' as 'Labyrinth-Spiel'

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Introduction

Using the paratextual apparatus of a board-game called 'Labyrinth-Spiel' which contributed to the composition of the 'Wandering Rocks' episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, I will play with the concept of 'Wandering Rocks' as *un jeu de société* (a board-game) and the cognitive act of reading as playing.[1] According to Fernand Gobet, there are two characteristics of a board-game:

> First, it is concerned with rules. Board games are games with a fixed set of rules that limit the number of pieces of a board, the number of positions for these pieces, and the number of possible moves. [. . .] Second, there is indeed a board with pieces on it. This aspect also states that moves or placement of pieces may influence the situation on a board and that pieces relate to each other on a board.[2]

Methodology

In four moves, I will take turns outlining the 'Wandering Rocks' episode in relation to Gobet's definition of a board-game proving the play of reading Joyce's paratext, avant-texte and text is an active, performative role.[3]

First move: The Rules of 'Wandering Rocks'

According to Frank Budgen, and expanded by Ronan Crowley, we know of a board-game Joyce 'bought at Franz Carl Weber's toyshop on the Bahnhofstrasse (Weber's 1914 catalogue gives the name of the game as "Labyrinth-Spiel")', which he 'played every evening for a long time with his daughter Lucia' during his illness from January – February 1919.[4] Crowley succinctly expands this by explaining the structure and rules of the game:

> The playing board for this game [...] is a honeycomb of interlocking but unclosed hexagons that form a multicursal route from one side of the board to the other. The object of the game was to traverse the field and then return to the starting point, the player being occasionally obliged to miss a go or two when his (or his daughter's) token was moved into a hexagon marked with one or two dots.[5]

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[1] I use the French word for board-game – *jeu de société* – at various points in the essay in order to play with the idea that 'Wandering Rocks' can be appropriated to a board-game as well as (literally) a 'game of society'/'society game'.

[2] Fernand Gobet, *Moves in Mind*: *The Psychology of Board Games* (New York, Psychology Press, 2004), p. 2.

[3] For a deeper understanding of reading as 'performance' see Peter Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 153-163.

[4] Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of* Ulysses (London: Oxford University Press, 1934; rpt. 1972), p. 125, hereafter *JJMU*; Ronan Crowley, "The Hand that Wrote *Ulysses*' and the *Avant-Texte* of 'Wandering Rocks'', *Genetic Joyce*, Issue 7 (Spring 2007) <http://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/GJS7/GJS7crowley.html> [accessed 25 March 2010]; The Weber catalogue and the rules of the game are reproduced in Thomas Faerber and Markus Luchsinger, *Joyce in Zürich* (Zürich: Unionsverlag, 1988), p. 83.

[5] Crowley, *loc. cit.* See Figure I in Appendix I.

Second move: The Board and Pieces of 'Wandering Rocks'

I will understand this episode as Joyce moving the pieces 'Objects, Places, Forces, Ulysses' across a board which is 'The Hostile Milieu'.[6] That is to say: how Joyce moves the pieces of Father Conmee, the viceregal cavalcade and the H.E.L.Y'S sandwichmen across Dublin from the first section to the nineteenth section of 'Wandering Rocks' via 'interpolated actions that are temporally simultaneous but spatially remote from the central action in which the interpolation occurs'.[7] Interestingly, if one observes the genetic development of 'Wandering Rocks' through the Rosenbach Manuscript, a visual representation of pieces appearing on the board can materialise. We can see, for example, the glimpse of Leopold Bloom in the Boylan sub-section is already in the draft.[8] Moreover, several others are added in the marginalia of the draft such as the extensions of the repeated H.E.L.Y'S men and the 'throwaway' interpolation.[9] This suggests pieces already existed or were created at later stages to be put into play. This can be seen pointedly with the Maginni interpolation in the first sub-section (*U* 181.56-60) added in the proofs *after* serialisation.[10] Also, as Crowley points out, some pieces were discarded all together: such as the two old women in section twelve and thirteen of the Rosenbach Manuscript (*U-syn* 514.23–25 and 518.24–27).[11]

Third move: Playing the *Jeu de Société*

Budgen records that on winning or losing the board-game 'Labyrinth-Spiel', Joyce catalogued 'six main errors of judgement into which one might fall in choosing a right, left or centre way out of the maze'.[12] Extrapolating this to the 'Wandering Rocks' episode, Clive Hart has

> been unable to reconstruct Joyce's 'six main errors of judgement', [yet he thinks] it is possible to distinguish four types: explicit cross-references (including both true and false congruencies), implicit cross-references, linguistic and nomenclatural ambiguities, and apparent errors.[13]

As a result, the errors of judgement in *playing* 'Labyrinth-Spiel' can be appropriated to the errors of judgment in *reading* 'Wandering Rocks'. Examples of each trap in the game can be seen as thus:

Explicit Cross-Referencing – See how the object 'chessboard' is premodified in order to create an explicit translation from one section to another: 'From a long face a beard and gaze hung on a chessboard' (*U* 190.425) and 'They chose a small table near the window, opposite a longfaced man whose beard and gaze hung intently down on a chessboard' (*U* 204.1050). There is postmodification in the third explicit cross-reference to 'chessboard': 'darkened the chessboard whereon John Howard Parnell looked intently' (*U* 208.1226).

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[6] James Joyce, 'Appendix A: The Gilbert and Linati Schemata', *Ulysses*, edited by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.738. Quoted text is from the Linati Schema.

[7] Don Gifford, with Robert J. Seidman, "*Ulysses" Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's""Ulysses"*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 260. Hereafter *UA*.

[8] 'A darkbacked figure under Merchants' arch scanned books on the hawker's cart' in James Joyce, *Ulysses*, edited by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (London: The Bodley Head, 1986, rpt. 2008), p. 187, line 315-316. References appear as *U* followed by page and line number.

[9] James Joyce, *Ulysses: A Facsimile of the Manuscript*, 3 vols. (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), vol. I, pp. 210-44.

[10] Rosenbach Manuscript "Wandering Rocks", see James Joyce, *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, Hans Walter Gabler *et al.*, eds. (New York; London: Garland, 1986). References appear as *U-syn* followed by page and line number.

[11] Crowley, *loc. cit.*

[12] Budgen, *JJMU*, p. 125.

[13] Clive Hart, 'Wandering Rocks', *James Joyce's "Ulysses": Critical Essays*, edited by Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkely: University of California, 1977), p. 189. Hereafter 'WR'.

Implicit Cross-Referencing – This occurs throughout the chapter. Let us take Molly's brief appearance in this episode as an example. 'The gay sweet chirping whistling within went on a bar or two, ceased' (*U* 185.249) is implicitly connected to the address on page 192, lines 542-3: 'A Card *Unfinished Apartments* reappeared on the windowsash of number 7 Eccles street'.

Linguistic Ambiguities and Nomenclatural Ambiguities – Observe how the linguistic ambiguities start on the very first sentence with the words 'superior' and 'reset' inviting differing paths for the reader/player to take (*U* 180.1-2). Joyce's narrator plays with error of judgement here by revealing the potential of 'superior' to be both a noun and an adjective. Moreover, 'reset' may mean to put the watch back into the pocket of Conmee or to change the time of the watch itself. In addition, the ambiguity of names and identities can be succinctly seen in a spectrum with Bloom the dentist (*U* 205.1115-17) not knowing Mr Leopold Bloom to the Carlisle Bridge (*U* 197.747) being the same as O'Connell Bridge (*U* 198.779).

Apparent Errors – The 'Royal Canal bridge' is indeed the Grand Canal (*U* 10.1273). However, of course, this *would be* a Royal Canal bridge if 'His Excellency' (*U* 209.1278) passes over it. Moreover, on another humorous turn, Mrs M'Guinness's 'fine carriage' (*U* 181.65) does not refer to her vehicle, but her gait.

Fourth Move: Reading as Playing/'Wandering Rocks' as 'Labyrinth-Spiel'
With such 'errors of judgement' in play, Joyce has created a labyrinthine narrative – a labyrinth-spiel – of nineteen sections where the reader has to negotiate interpolations laden with errors and traps because the episode's anfractuous and ambagious nature.[14] The reader/player performs the role in which they 'skip a page' or 'miss their go' and then 'reread a page' or 'retake their turn' simply because their token is placed on a hexagon with two dots. Within this *jeu de société*, it seems that the player plays their move *out of time* from when they are playing. Arguably, Bloom mimics this behaviour when reading the erotics of *Sweets of Sin* opening a page at random, turning to the end and then rereads the ending (*U* 10.607, 613, 618). Thus, Joyce forces the reader to read (to perform) the text *out of time* from when they are reading: much like how Conmee should have read nones before lunch (*U* 184.191). Therefore, the form of the episode is reflected in the structure of its discourse with twists and turns, convoluted processes and evasive speech. Exemplification for each can be seen here:

Twists and turns – A map in Don Gifford's *Ulysses Annotated*; a chart by Clive Hart concerning 'Wandering Rocks' and an animation collapsing these two representations of the 'pieces' moving across the 'board' are attempts to visually capture the game in play, that is: the twists and turns of action, plot and trajectory within and across Dublin.[15]

Convoluted processes – Section six (*U* 10.338-66) convolutes the flow of logic within the English language narrative by incorporating Italian idiomatic phrasal structures such as '*Speriamo . . . Ma, dia: retta a me. Ci refletta*' (*U* 10.350-1) and '*Ma, sul serio, eh?*' (*U* 10.355).

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[14] I am playing with the dual meaning of the word 'spiel' within German context as 'play' or 'game' and in the English context as in 'Talk, a story; a speech intended to persuade or advertise, patter'. See 'Spiel', *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, online version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50233313?query_type=word&queryword=spiel&first=1& max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1> [accessed 25 March 2010].
[15] Gifford, *UA*, p. 259; Hart, 'WR', chart; John Barger, 'Maps: WRocks', *IQ Infinity: the unknown James Joyce* <http://www.robotwisdom.com/jaj/ulysses/wrocks/wr327.gif> [accessed 25 March 2010]. See Bugden's quote that 'Joyce wrote the *Wandering Rocks* with a map of Dublin before him on which were traced in red ink the paths of the Earl of Dudley and Father Conmee. He calculated to a minute the time necessary for his characters to cover a given distance of the city', *JJMU*, p. 124-125. Incidentally, the paths of the Earl of Dudley and Father Conmee do not cross.

Evasive Speech – This can relate to the discourse of the narrator, character or narration itself. Bloom and Stephen Dedalus are evasive characters in this episode. See the convoluted processes of Stephen's speech in the sixth section. Bloom may evade the reader with a potential mention early in section five under 'Merchant's arch' (*U* 187.315). Within section ten, Bloom seemingly evades his context by navigating the text-world of *Sweets of Sin* rather than the text-world of Dublin in *Ulysses*.[16]

Consequently, these examples show how the sense and meaning of the labyrinth 'figure formed matter, matter available to formed, or sheer matters' throughout the nineteen sections of 'Wandering Rocks'.[17] This creates 'The Hostile Milieu' in which the pieces and players are positioned influencing the situation and relationships on the board. The reader/player must navigate this as they would with the streets of Dublin: turning their heads to recapture a glimpse of a face or a sign-post, then retracing steps, double-backing and facing cul-de-sacs and dead-ends.

Discussion

These four moves have positioned a Swiss board-game in relation to the tenth chapter of *Ulysses*. Let us focus upon the cognitive aspect of *playing* and *reading*. To become an expert or even a novice *player* at a board-game such as 'Labyrinth-Spiel' – or *reader* of the 'Wandering Rocks' episode or even *Ulysses* itself – one must *know* the rules, the pieces and the board: that is, how to play (read) the game (episode/novel). 'The information processes enabling knowing, where knowing varies in degree, time, and context', as Gobet states, relates to the cognitive psychology of playing 'Labyrinth-Spiel' or reading the 'Wandering Rocks' episode.[18] Compounding Richard Brown's argument, it is the variations of degree, time and context seen as *moves on the board* or 'synchronisms' – that is, the simultaneity or pointed temporal recapitulation of each nineteen sub-sections – 'which radically condition the reading experience of the episode.[19] I argue that the reading experience of 'Wandering Rocks' and *Ulysses* itself is essentially a playing experience: a performative act.

Conclusions

As a result, the *jeu de société* presented by Joyce figures 'errors of judgement' in which the reader/player must negotiate. This is done through the cognitive process of knowing. Joyce plays with the process of knowing by juxtaposing his documentation of reality with spatio-temporal interpolations. Thus, it is the experience of reading as playing – navigation of the interpolations via a 'trial and error' approach – that the reader/player may traverse the labyrinth-spiel and survive the wandering rocks.

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[16] See Joanna Gavins, *Text-World Theory: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).
[17] Charles Martindale, *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste: An Essay in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 98.
[18] Gobet, *Moves in Mind*: *The Psychology of Board Games*, p. 2-3.
[19] Richard Brown, 'Time, Space and the City in "Wandering Rocks"', *European Joyce Studies 12: Joyce's "Wandering Rocks"*, edited by Andrew Gibson and Steven Morrison (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2002), p. 65.

APPENDIX I
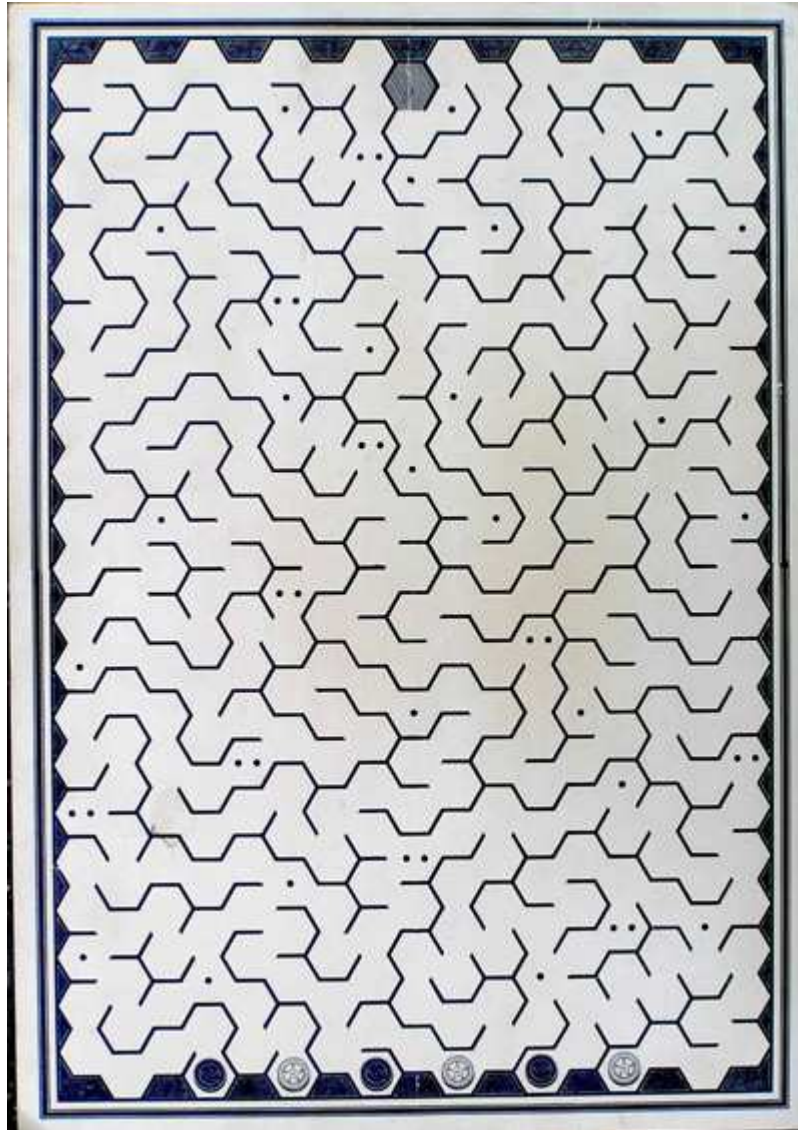
Figure I: A photograph of the board and pieces of 'Labyrinth-Spiel'.

Cited from Ronan Crowley, ''The Hand that Wrote *Ulysses*' and the *Avant-Texte* of 'Wandering Rocks'', *Genetic Joyce*, Issue 7 (Spring 2007)<http://www.geneticjoyce studies.org/GJS7/GJS7crowley.html> [accessed 25 March 2010].

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