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flâneur, a walkthrough:
Locative Literature as Participation and Play

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Abstract

This paper presents an experiment in facilitating public contributions to an experimental system for locative literature called *textopia*. Discussing approaches to collaborative writing and the relationship between games and art, the paper presents the development and testing of a game designed to foster participation in the system. The game is based on the recombination of found texts into literary compositions, integrating the act of exploring the urban environment into the act of writing, as well as into the medium that is studied. Resulting texts are read as a form of situated, poetic documentary reports on the urban textual environment. The experiment also draws attention to the importance of live events in building a literary community.

Introduction

Locative media, such as mobile applications which allow for texts to be geotagged to physical places in the world, make it possible to create locative literature: Texts which can be browsed by literally walking through them. Imagine that you are walking through the

city you live in, on streets that you have passed a hundred times, but in your headphones you are bombarded with texts – stories, poems, little drama pieces – which all take place in the street that you are walking down, portraying the street in an ever new light, bringing out all the possible and impossible lives that have been touched by this very space.

This is the core vision behind *textopia*, a media studies project focused on experimental genre design (Liestøl), rather than theoretical analysis. The *textopia* system offers a set of smartphone applications which find literary texts based on the user's location, and play audio recordings of these texts to the user as she walks through the city. The texts are collected through a participatory web site, a wiki, and consist in part of classic texts (old enough to be in the public domain) and new, user-created texts.[1] Therefore, user contributions are central to the project. The underlying rationale for basing the system on public contributions[2] is not just an ideology of user involvement, but also an aesthetic concern: I am interested in exploring how locative literature may alter and expand the experience of everyday spaces, and this requires a system that contains texts that are geotagged to the user's own everyday space. The only reasonable way to achieve this is to concede the editorial power to the users themselves, giving the users the power – and the responsibility – to fill the system with texts. This also has a democratic side-effect, implying that users will be allowed to define the project to a very large degree. In the *textopia* project, this has been a conscious choice: Allowing users to contribute content means to give up quality control and curation, in order to be able to explore an aesthetic territory which would otherwise be out of reach.

However, a significant discovery in the course of the project is the extent to which user contributions have changed the fundamental nature of the project: Users must not only be *allowed* to contribute, these contributions must also be *facilitated*. This facilitation does not only pose challenges for usability design, but also for the nature of the participation that is being sought after: If "ordinary" users[3] are invited to write the texts for a literary web site, with no editorial and curatorial gatekeeping, can we then assume that the act of writing is the same form of practice as when established authors write literary texts for ordinary publishing? If not, what kind of practice is it, and what consequence does this have for the literary output?

In this article I present an experiment where the act of writing texts for the *textopia* project is re-imagined as a pervasive game (Montola, Stenros, and Waern) called *flâneur*, which takes place partly in the physical environment and partly online. I describe the design process and the testing of the game through several iterations, present some of the texts and the experiences with the players in the game, and discuss the results as a social, literary experiment.

Background: Participatory Literature and Locative Media

The *textopia* project makes it possible to put literary texts on a map so that users equipped with smartphones can walk through the city while listening to literary texts which talk about the places they are passing by. Underlying this effort is the view that participation in the form of user-contributed texts is of fundamental importance to locative media. Such participation has been a core interest for many different kinds of web-based media for a long time (Proboscis; Micallef et al.; Counts Media, Inc.; trAce Online Writing Community). However, this interest in participatory literature predates the Web. One of the most radically participatory literary projects prior to the Web was the *Invisible Seattle* project, organized by participants on the IN.S.OMNIA bulletin board in 1983. The participants gathered a vast amount of text fragments from ordinary Seattle citizens through a variety of playful interventions during an art festival. These fragments were then puzzled into a novel, in several versions, one of which was published in print as *Invisible Seattle: The Novel of Seattle, by Seattle* (IN.S.OMNIA).[4] Rob Wittig, one of the members of the

IN.S.OMNIA board, states that "[t]he first years of IN.S.OMNIA only confirmed that an extraordinary creativity on the part of people who did not consider themselves writers could be tapped under the right conditions" (Wittig, Invisible Rendezvous 128). Seeing this participation in light of de Certeau's analysis of everyday creativity, Wittig asserts that "messages of lasting interest can be produced by people who are not career writers, who don't consider themselves writers at all" (Invisible Rendezvous 129). Scott Rettberg, discussing "architectures of participation" and collective narrative in hypertext, notes that the very idea of hypertext "is based to some extent on harnessing collective knowledge" (Rettberg, "All Together Now"). He goes on to imagine

> *a writing community with robustness [sic] of Wikipedia, dedicated to a collective vision of writing a novel that is in effect many novels with interchangeable parts, written according to sets of specific constraints to ensure a degree of formal unity, and tagged with metadata that would make it possible to easily remix novels in thousands of structured configurations. Such a project would be performance, game, and literature.*

While the ideas of Wittig and Rettberg are compelling when considered in the context of web hypertext and electronic literature, I believe participation and collaboration is of even greater importance for *locative literature*. I argue elsewhere (Løvlie, "Annotative, Locative Media and G-P-S") that the most important novelty of locative media is the possibility to expand the space of art outside of dedicated gallery spaces (or, for that matter, central public squares) and into the everyday spaces of every user. The importance of this change is that this is not just a singular symbolic gesture, as when artworks and literature are presented in unusual public spaces (Fig. 1. and 2.).

Figure 1: The poet Kjell Erik Vindtorn reading poems on the Oslo tram. (Photo: Dagsavisen)
Figure 2: «Manifesto», art installation in advertising monter at Tøyen metro station in Oslo. (Photo: Andrea Hertzberg)

Countless such gestures are made both within and outside of the art institutions, in an effort to connect with wider audiences – but for reasons that are all too understandable, these efforts are nearly always limited in time and space: It is not practically possible to have art and literature installed *everywhere, all the time*. Or at least not without the use of spatial annotation and locative media. These techniques make it possible for texts to enter *my* everyday space, and *yours*, wherever it may be; in other words, a medium that is present in every location where it has an audience. In such a medium, the users of the system can no longer be confined to a role as passive receivers of "content". Since the gallery space has been replaced with the user's own everyday spaces, the users must be granted the maximum possibility to enter into an active role as producers and editors of "publicly created contributions" (Adams 239). In other words, this vision of locative media relies fundamentally on *user participation*.

The vision just described has formed the basis for the design of the textopia system, an open system that allows users to read, write and share texts through an online wiki connected with a mobile, locative reader application. The system is designed to allow the maximum degree of participation from users, being fully open source, and taking as its basis a wiki format where anyone can upload and edit material.

It is essential to emphasize that participation is not just seen as an economical way to create media "content" for the textopia system, but a way to democratize the medium and its aesthetics. For this reason, finding ways to get the public engaged in a sustained interaction with the medium has been an important challenge. The primary goal of this interaction is not to test the usability of the interface, its technical properties or the characteristics of the human-computer interactions taking place in the system – but rather to explore how users may use the system to write locative texts, and perhaps in the process develop a new form of literature. To get some meaningful insight into this question it is necessary to test the system on users who are interested and devoted to the idea of

experimenting with writing literature as geo-tagged texts. And the most important outcomes of this testing would not be measured by the ability of these users to complete tasks within the system or their feedback about the experience of using the system – but rather by the user's creative engagement with the system, as made visible by the texts they would write.

On the other hand, this project does not direct itself towards a small group of lone literary geniuses, but attempts to draw in a larger group of participants, both amateurs and professional writers. How to achieve that? One common way to foster participation is through competitions and games. This article details the development of a game concept for using the urban environment as material for creative writing, in a manner which also maps the written texts back on to the environment through the *textopia* system.

Games and Creativity

Game-like rule systems have long been used for the purpose of facilitating creative processes. Within the field of literature, the group of writers who call themselves "Oulipo" ("Ouvroir de littérature potentielle", roughly translated: "workshop of potential literature") is probably the most famous example of this (although similar techniques were in use earlier by surrealists and dadaists). Harry Mathews, one of the group's members, explains how the freedom of creative writers to say anything – even lie – can be an obstacle in itself: "So much freedom can be unnerving. If you can say anything, where do you start?" The author has something she wants to say, a "writerly object of desire", but needs to find a way to express it, which implies choosing between a multitude of possible conventions and genres, settings, scenes etc. Mathews compares this process to that of translation – while the author knows what she wants to say, she needs to "choose a home ground" – a mode of writing – into which she can translate her ideas. The constrained techniques of the Oulipo provide the writers with such "home grounds", according to Mathews:

> The Oulipo supplies writers with hard games to play. …Like Capture the Flag, the games have demanding rules that we must never forget (well, hardly ever), and these rules are moreover active ones: satisfying them keeps us too busy to worry about being reasonable. …Thanks to the impossible rules, we find ourselves doing and saying things we would never have imagined otherwise, things that often turn out to be exactly what we need to reach our goal.

According to Scott Rettberg, constraints are particularly important for collaborative work, where they are needed to structure collaboration: "Unlike individually authored works, collaboratively authored works are both the work itself and the series of negotiations between subjects that govern the work's creation" ("All Together Now"). In fact, he claims, "[s]ome collaborative electronic writing projects are essentially nothing but constraints", pointing to projects such as *The Noon Quilt* (trAce Online Writing Community), in which participants were asked simply to record what they could see outside their window at noon.

The oulipian strategies are playful, but most of them are not actual *games*, in the traditional sense of having clearly defined goals, and where the players play to win (Juul). One example from outside the realm of writing that does come closer to a game format is Lars von Trier's and Jørgen Leth's quasi-documentary movie *The Five Obstructions* (von Trier and Leth). The central plot in this film is framed as an uneven game between the two directors—one (von Trier) who challenges the other (Leth) to remake the same short film five times according to highly obstructive rules. The movie gets its central nerve from the seeming impossibility of making a good adaptation of the short film according to the rules, and the surprising aesthetic qualities of the outcomes of following them. *The Five Obstructions* serves as a provocative argument for how a rule-based game can aid a creative process.

In both theatre and game studies, Agusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* is often cited as an inspiration for the use of game or game-like structures to make art (cf. Frasca). Elena Pérez, discussing the relationship between theatre and games, contrasts phenomena like Boal's theatre and Allan Kaprow's "Happenings" with the need for games to rely on rules and quantifiable outcomes – that is, creating winners and losers ("Designing Pervasive Theatre"). She points to how Kaprow, while considering *play* as an originator of art, rejected *games* because they subordinated free play under competitiveness. For Kaprow, then, games were incompatible with art. Pérez, on the other hand, is concerned with how games facilitate interaction and participation, and points to Matt Adam's observation that "games give large numbers of people a motivation to interact, [and] a readily understood means to do so" (237). Thus, Pérez paints an uneasy balance between artistic play and rule-based games, in which the competitiveness and quantifiability of games constrain the possibilities for artistic expression, while simultaneously creating a situation that contains the conditions of possibilities for the development of artistic creativity.

In other words: Games draw people in, give motivation and facilitation for interaction, and help overcome shyness and inhibitions. But one must strike a careful balance to prevent that the value-free nature of art is overshadowed by artificial competitiveness.

Designing a Literary Game: *flâneur*

Early experiences with the textopia system produced a significant body of interesting literary material (Løvlie, "Locative literature"), but also revealed significant limitations to the participatory potential of the system.

The first version of the textopia system was ready for users in October 2008. It consisted of an online wiki that contained a geo-tagged collection of traditional literary texts about places in the city of Oslo; and a mobile application which played a recording of the text that was nearest to the user's location. [5] My hope was that users would use the system to create and share locative texts for their own pleasure; at the same time it was clear that I needed some way to make the system known to potential users and to give first users some incentive to try it out. For this purpose, a creative writing competition was arranged, in which anyone who was interested was invited to submit texts and compete for cash prizes of ca. 1300 euro. [6] The texts were evaluated by a professional jury, who awarded prices to three winners. [7]

The competition yielded both a significant number of contributions (forty-six) and significant media coverage, indicating a public interest in the concept. However, I had also hoped that the competition would lead some users to continue experimenting with writing locative texts using our system, and that I could use this activity to develop the system further. This did not happen.

In order to find out why users did not continue creating texts for the system, an informal email survey was conducted among the original participants in the competition, 8 months after the competition. Twenty-four of the forty users contacted responded, and their answers led me to conclude that the main problem was neither usability problems with the system (although they were significant) nor the absence of material awards (i.e. the cash awards in the competition), but the absence of a social context for participation, which the competition had provided earlier.

I therefore decided to experiment with a game format to facilitate participation in the project. The *flâneur* game was developed over a series of experiments and test-runs from the Spring of 2009 till the Fall of 2010. It was very much inspired by similar "collaborative production" games like *SFZero* (antiboredom) and *Chain Reaction* (Pérez, "Designing Pervasive Theatre").

Initially, *flâneur* was conceived as a very fast and simple, live event to take place during a poetry festival in Oslo. In this event, the focus was not on experimenting with the locative technology, but rather just on finding a way to make the participants engage with a literary exploration of their physical surroundings in the city. In order to achieve this, I set up some simple rules: Every participant would be given a physical location (e.g. a street corner) which she would have to visit and search for pieces of text physically present at the location – such as signposts, advertising, graffiti, overheard conversations, etc. They would then have to document these texts with photographs, and compose their own texts as a mosaic of fragments from the texts they had documented. (As an additional rule, participants were allowed to include three words of their own.) Afterwards, the participants would all gather and read their texts to the group, and a vote would decide the winner. [8] In other words, while this event retained the competitive element, I did not continue the use of an expert jury, as it seemed to run contrary to the non-hierarchical spirit of the project.

Forming part of the programme at the 2009 Oslo International Poetry Festival, this live event gathered a small group (18) of young, highly engaged participants, and was deemed quite successful as a first test of the game concept. The participants engaged with the idea, scavenged their given locations and returned with a selection of odd, quirky and highly varied texts which were read out loud and voted over with great enthusiasm.

Immediately after the live event, a second round of the competition was initiated online: All the texts, as well as recordings of the live readings, were uploaded into the textopia system by the researcher, and an online vote was initiated. The purpose of this was to make the participants consider their texts as parts of the locative system, and encourage them to share the experience with other users. However, this part of the experiment was only partially successful – while a fairly large number of votes (285) was registered in the poll (which took place on Facebook, in order to connect to the participants' social network), this however did not seem to engender any further engagement with the *textopia* web site.

Since drawing activity to the web site was an important part of the goal, it was necessary to rethink the game in order to connect it more tightly with the online system. As part of a separate evaluation of the usability of the textopia web site, I had concluded that the wiki format, which is primarily created for facilitating collaboration between a large amount of separate users, was too complex and not well adapted to the individual creative activity that literary writing normally is. Therefore, a new web site was set up for the specific purpose of supporting the *flâneur* experiment, based on the popular blogging platform WordPress. This also made it possible to integrate the web site more closely with social networks like Facebook, hopefully making it easier to connect to the users' pre-existing social contexts and better facilitate communication between users.

As part of the development process of the new web site, a new game was staged with a small group of seven test users. The users were recruited through our university network, and the group was dominated by academics and artists with limited technical competence. In this event, at the request of the participants the competitive element was dropped entirely, and it was framed simply as an aesthetic experiment. However, the game also served to test the redesigned web site, and led to a radical redesign and simplification of the audio recording system.

In summer 2010, the final version of the flâneur game was ready to be launched as a purely online event. Now the live element had been removed entirely, and instead all social interactions were to take place through the game's web site. This decision was made in full awareness of the apparent fact that getting together in real life seemed to have been an important element of why the participants had enjoyed the earlier events. However, this move was considered a necessary evil in order to achieve the goal of making the users engage more directly with the *flâneur* web site and the *textopia* system. The rules of the game were posted on the web site, and the game was announced through social media networks as well as media coverage of the event. The challenge was simply to compose

texts from fragments found at some place in the city, and post them online. After having posted a text, users received a quota of points that they could award to other participants. In other words, participants had to earn the right to vote for other participants' texts by uploading texts themselves. This way, the game would not be decided by who could mobilize the largest number of outside friends to vote for their texts. It also gave participants a reason to leave comments under each other's texts, thus initiating communication between participants who had not necessarily met in person.

Finally, as a change from the previous competitions, and in spite of the fact that funding was available, the option of giving cash prizes was dropped. Instead, the only prize offered was that the texts that got the most points in the competition would be printed in a simple fanzine, to be distributed for free in 200 copies. This was done in order to reduce the level of external motivation for participating in the project – in the hope that the participation that was achieved, would be more related to the participant's intrinsic pleasure in taking part in the activity, and therefore lead to a more sustained engagement with the project. This was in part inspired by the experience of taking part in several games organized by SFZero in San Francisco, where rewards always were symbolic and of no material value, something which inspired the idea that monetary rewards might actually be disruptive when trying to foster long-term engagement. This belief was further strengthened by the debates over the effects of external motivation in psychology (Deci; Deci, Koestner, and Ryan).

The *flâneur* Texts: Literary Affordance Mining

Judged quantitatively against the goal of increasing the level of contributions to the textopia project, the *flâneur* game was no thundering success. The game ran from 5 August 2010 until 1 October, and despite a significant amount of positive feedback and interest, it did not garner the same amount of contributions as our earlier efforts did – altogether, only thirteen texts were contributed. Nine of these were given points by other users, and the five with the most points were printed in a fanzine. As a test of our design, however, the game experiment did show that the system was sufficiently easy to use so that participants could carry out the relatively complex task of creating multimodal, geotagged texts with little or no help from the researcher.

However, the most important outcome of the game was the texts produced in it. Judging these texts, it is important to keep in mind Rita Raley's observation that "mobile media poetics must be understood as a practice, one with clear analogies to performance and conceptual art" ("Mobile Media Poetics", 3). Thus, the *flâneur* texts should not be read as ordinary literary texts, but rather as traces of a relatively fast-paced activity – as the outcome of an individual's maneuvering through a game. The experience of taking part in this activity, both as expressed by users and as experienced by this author in his own testing out of the concept, is remarkably similar to that described by Scott Rettberg, in his experience of putting up the stickers that make up the experimental novel *Implementation*:

> In a Situationist sense, the city becomes both a canvas and a kind of playground. …I am seeing the city in a new way. I am noticing the signs of graffitists and street artists. I am observingand thinking more intensely about what is at my eye level and what lies beneath my feet, the manhole covers and the details of streetlights, hidden conversations between the official languagesof civic life in the city and its subcultures. (10)

The experience described by Rettberg echoes my own, when testing the *flâneur* concept: I start reading the environment around me, noticing all the textual elements that urban life has trained me to ignore: Unusual place names, advertising posters whose glossy and oversexed invitations enter into absurd juxtapositions with the sometimes dreary environment, the incessant onslaught of prohibitions and the ominous fragments that can

be picked up in overheard conversations of random passers-by: "But without that it is not possible to live!" (Løvlie, "Grønland Basar"). Once I had started work on the *flâneur* game [9]. I could not walk by a wall such as the one pictured below without trying to figure out how to puzzle the names of the shops into a story – even though I had passed by that wall countless times before, always ignoring its contents.

Figure 3. Advertising wall, downtown Oslo. (Photo by the author.)

The text resulting from my creative play with these textual fragments is not one that I, as a literary critic, would consider "good" as in "a good literary text" – even in the midst of the creative moment, I am fully aware that what I am creating does not measure up to what I could write if unconstrained by the need to use the texts I find in the environment[10]. Nonetheless it seems not just like a fun game, but also somehow meaningful – perhaps as a recombinatorial exercise in taking ownership over the public space the texts are embedded in, stating my right to enter my own voice into the cacophony of the urban landscape without engaging in graffiti art or physical vandalism. Several participants in the test runs and live events of the *flâneur* competition expressed sentiments in the same direction.

And Rettberg reports similar feedback from participants in the Implementation project:

> *Somewhat counter-intuitively, the fact that the relationship between the implementer and the narrative artifact is not greatly mediated by sophisticated hardware or software, but instead by the physical act of adhering a sticker to a place in the physical world, many participants have reported that the project provides them with a more visceral experience of interaction than those they regularlyengageonline. ("Implementation in Contexts" 10)*

Borrowing an expression from Jane McGonigal, one could say that Rettberg, myself and the other participants in *flâneur* found ourselves engaging in "affordance mining" – that is, we were reimagining previously overlooked details of the urban environment as new opportunities for interaction and play (67–84). This reimagining is a central quality of what McGonigal calls "ubiquitous games" – games which aim to radically expand the space for play to include the real world as well as all kinds of media:

> *The genre, which includes both commercial and grassroots projects, ask [sic] players to take up two core mechanics: first, searching for and experimenting with the hidden affordances of everyday objects and places; and second, exhaustively seeking to activate everything in one's immediate environment. This activation is, in fact, mutual. Game structures activate the world by transforming everyday objects and places into interactive platforms; game structures also activate players by making them more responsive to potential calls to interaction. This is because the act of exposing previously unperceived affordances creates a more meaningful relationship between the actor and the object or the space in the world. (80)*

The most important outcome of the *flâneur* game, then, is not in the literary texts as they appear on screen, but in the exploration of a new way of perceiving and interacting with the urban environment. Thereby, the texts take on a certain documentary quality – in that they are produced from raw materials that are found in the urban environment. For instance, Vita Melinauskaite's winning contribution to the flâneur game could be read as a portrayal of the multi-linguistic nature of the immigrant-dominated neighbourhood Grønland in downtown Oslo, where the location of the text is placed:

> *Welcom! Welcom Grønland, here there is someone for anyone, here there is shelter for friends. Can I feel welcome here? Yes! Ja! Da! Oui! Sim! Yes! Here it's easy to play! Easy to win! Here it's wild & beautiful. Here it's Bistro de Paris. Here it's Italy. Best regards, the City of Oslo. Now on Facebook[11].(Melinauskaite)*

Figure 4. Pictures accompanying the text "Welcom!". (Photos: Vita Melinauskaite)

As in any other documentary genre, the documentary aspect of the *flâneur* texts seems to invite social commentary. For Barbro Rønning, encountering a boat named "Blessed" parked illegally outside a missionary organization's headquarters, the situation somehow seems to offer its own parody (Rønning). Another participant, Elena Pérez, uses the texts gathered from a historical churchyard by the Nidaros cathedral in Trondheim to comment on the social structures manifested in the titles on the tombstones:

> *-What is happening here?*
> *-You see… du står her/you are here. Before you: General, Director, Priest, Architect, Captain, Composer.*
> *-And wives?*
> *-What? What is happening here?*
> *-Wives born as Wiel, Vangen, Bryn, Ovale, Jenssen, Krogh. Just Mrs Madame. (Pérez, "What is happening here?")* [12]

Fig. 5. Pictures accompanying the text "What is happening here?" (Photos: Elena Pérez)

Taken as a whole, the corpus of texts reveal certain qualities about the texts that fill our public spaces. First of all, a large number of texts consist of a mix of Norwegian and English words—both due to the use of English in advertising, as well as bilingual signposts for tourists and the use of English in slang and graffiti. Secondly, verbs are always hard to find —most of the verbs found in public space are imperative and either contain strong requests (usually asking you to buy something) or direct orders (mostly prohibitions, such as "do not smoke"). These imperatives often transform the verb to a noun, as in "no parking". These imperatives point to another important tendency, namely a tendency towards direct address, often through the use of second person: "You are here", "you ring, we bring." Heli Hannele Aaltonen's contribution to the game may serve as an illustration of all these observations. Inspired by a fence covered in posters advertising upcoming concerts and events in the city, she repurposes the incessant imperative requests of advertising language into a surrealist chant:

> *discover reality*
> *4 season of the event*
> *horizon wolf in sheep's clothing*
> *discover reality*
> *Ziggy in the myspace sky*
> *express shows datarock*
> *discover reality*
> *dark city presents*
> *striptease at the shock festival*
> *discover reality*
> *Trøndersk rock in jazz*
> *clothing dreams*
> *standupshow*
> *discover reality*
> *mass circus presents great bloody feature story*
> *discover reality* [13] *(Aaltonen)*

Figure 6. Picture accompanying the "discover reality" text. (Photo: Heli Hannele Aaltonen)

Conclusion

In quantitative terms, the *flâneur* game has been a limited success: It has not facilitated a sustained, active user community around the *flâneur* web site. However, the experiment offers some important insights into what is clearly a challenging task. Regarding the technical design, it seems clear that redesigning the web site based on a blog tool rather

than a wiki tool has lowered the practical threshold of participation: By the help of this tool a number of contributions have been solicited from participants who did not attend any live event, were not in contact with the project and did not receive any instructions other than those available on the web site. This shows that the flâneur concept is comprehensible and practically possible to participate in. At the same time it is clear that the complexity of contributing is still a major obstacle to broader participation, and requires more work to overcome.

Regarding the game format, the basic concept does seem to be engaging to users, and is an activity which users like to participate in. Participants are clearly able to engage with a fairly limiting framework of rules to compose creative and surprising texts in a very short amount of time. However, it seems that intense competition is not important to the users – they are motivated more by the social aspects of the activity, rather than competing to win. Furthermore, throughout the project all live events have engendered more participation (and enthusiasm) than the purely online game. It seems clear that liveness and presence is an essential component in building the kind of literary community that has been aimed for in the *flâneur* game experiment.

If that observation holds more generally, it poses important challenges for future work into collaborative, online literature: How can we combine an interest in exploration of collaborative writing through online interfaces, with the necessities of building a sustained community? This is a question which must be investigated further in future experiments.

Acknowledgements

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Footnotes

1. In addition, the project contains a small amount of commissioned work by established poets, which form part of a set of installations created in collaboration with the Oslo International Poetry Festival (Løvlie, "You are the one thinking this"). back

2. The term "user-generated content" is avoided in this paper, due to the rather instrumental view of user contributions implied by the phrase (cf. Adams). back

3. By "ordinary users" is here meant simply users who are not do not normally produce literary texts back

4. While I here attribute the book to the IN.S.OMNIA board, the printed version of the book is ostensibly attributed to the city of Seattle. The author bio states, in language characteristic of the project: "The author, who has also dabbled in software, airplane-manufacture, and "grunge" music, continues to haunt the shores of Puget Sound in the Pacific Northwest." back

5. Details of the design are presented in (Løvlie, "Textopia"). back

6. In Norwegian currency, 10 000 NOK. This sum was taken from the funds of the research project *Inventio*, which *textopia* is a part of. back

7. The competition was arranged by myself in collaboration with the Norwegian publishing house Gyldendal and the Inventio project. The jury included Helene Uri (author and jury leader), Bjarte Buset (author and director of information at Gyldendal) and Gunnar Liestøl (professor and leader of the Inventio project). back

8. The winners of the vote would receive a cash prize of 2500 NOK (ca. 300 €). The winner of the online vote (see below) received the same. These prizes were funded by the Inventio project. back

9. Strictly speaking, I did not participate in the game, since my position as organizer and point-counter seemed to require impartiality. However, I did produce several texts to serve as test cases for myself, and examples of the concept to others back

10. The resulting text is also fairly untranslatable, but readers who understand Norwegian can read the text at http://tekstopia.uio.no/flanor/2010/08/guner-i-hus/ back

11. Translated by the author of this article from a mix of Norwegian (Bokmål) and English. Original: "Velkomme! Velkomm Grønland, her er det noen for enhver, her er det tilfluktsrom til venner. Can I feel welcome here? Yes! ja! da! oui! sim! Yes! Her er det lett å spille! Lett å vinne! Her er det vilt & vakkert. Her er det Bistro du Paris. Her er det Italia. Hilsen Oslo kommune. Er nå på Facebook." back

12. Translated by the author of this paper from a mix of Norwegian and English. Original text: "-What is happening here?/ -You see… du står her/you are here. Before you: General, Direktør, Præsten, Arkitekt, Kaptein, Komponist./ -Og hustru-er?/ -Hva? Hva skjer her?/ -Fruer født Wiel, Vangen, Bryn, Ovale, Jenssen, Krogh. Kun fruhustru." back

13. My translation from a mix of Norwegian and English. Original text: "oppdag realiteten/ 4 season of the event horizon/ ulv i fårekler/ oppdag realiteten/ Ziggy in the myspace sky express shows datarock/ oppdag realiteten/ dark city presents striptease på sjokkefestivalen/ oppdag realiteten/ Trondersk rock i jazzdrekt dreams standupshow/ oppdag realiteten/ massesirkus presents great bloody reportasje/ oppdag realiteten." back

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0 Comments