Welcome!

Søren Pold

Welcome to Aarhus! At least you'll be here virtually, through your embedded screenness. Through this opening we will try to get you here, there and everywhere from wherever you are located. Because you're not just going to be in Aarhus, even though we would have liked to have you here – and please come back in the future! This conference is Planet ELO, as was one of the working titles of it, and it includes partners from all over the world. It is co-chaired by Scott Rettberg (Bergen Electronic Literature Research Group -UiB) and me, Søren Pold (Digital Aesthetic Research Centre-AU). It's been some wild months since we took on this, but it has been an immense pleasure to work with Scott, his many great ideas and his experience of making things happen. Thank you Scott – I'll be happy to work with you again in the future, even though things you're involved in tend to grow... I'll also mention the important persons behind the scene here in Aarhus, my near colleague Christian Ulrik Andersen, Malthe Stavning Erslev who has done a tremendous job on logistics, conference website, Winnie Soon, Magda Tyzlic-Carver, Gitte Grønning Munk (who has helped out a lot with conference support) and our student assistants here in Aarhus. In Bergen Scott has mentioned the great people, we have Jason Nelson (fantastic exhibition website with Irene Fabri), Astrid Ensslin, Hannah Ackermans (tremendous workshop coordinator), Carlota Salvador Megias and the student assistants in Bergen. We also have excellent partners such as the Electronic Literature Lab, Washington State University Vancouver, USA (Dene Grigar, Holly Slocum, Greg Philbrook, Richard Snyder, Kathleen Zoller, Dani Spinosa, Claudia Kozak) and dra.ft in India (Nanditi Khilnani, Ambika Joshi, Agat Sharma) and Caitlin Fisher who serves as Global Coordinator. Besides all these wonderful people, who have spent hours, days, nights and months of their spare time preparing this, I want to thank the institutions and universities supporting this: Electronic Literature Organisation, dra.ft, University of Bergen, Washington State University Vancouver, USA, York University Canada and my own Aarhus University who has supported with resources and staff support. I also want to thank DARIAH EU for supporting the Covid Exhibition and The Carlsberg Foundation for supporting the conference. Cheers! Unfortunately Zoom doesn't serve beer, but we have the Discord server with its cafe, run by Mark Marino and Talia Devanadero, thanks also to them!

The program runs live 12 hours a day and we have a complicated time schedule, we have noted the time-zones of the organizers – please find your local time through links in the program. After these two days of workshops, we will start the conference program tomorrow. It will consist of panels which will moderate themselves within their schedule and full paper tracks. The paper tracks will be kindly moderated by an appointed moderator. We all suffer from screen or zoom fatigue after more than a year of pandemic lock down. Therefore, we have planned the paper tracks to consist of brief 5-minutes presentations of main points from the submitted papers which will be followed by what we trust will be a lively and enlightening discussion from first the panelists and then everybody. The point is to see this conference as research and artistic work in process, a way to present and develop work and to connect to your communities! We hope and trust you will contribute to this!
You will have to bring your own coffee, but please contribute to these discussions in ways that they become constructive for both new-comers and old-timers. This is a fantastic opportunity to share, contribute and be critical in a constructive way and receive the same attention from your peers from all over the ELO planet. All submitted papers are linked to the program so please read as much as

you can both before, during and after the conference – hopefully these discussions will also nourish your curiosity! All tracks, keynotes and art performances will be recorded and made available quickly after ending, allowing for people across the world to catch up with what has happened during their sleep. They will also be archived at the Elmcip knowledge base after the conference. When submitting you have all accepted this, but if you'd rather not appear on the recording, keep your camera off and if needed also your microphone – and post your comments and questions in the chat.

The theme this year ended up being Platform (Post?) Pandemic and we have a long description that I won't repeat now. However, I'll briefly mention two things:

Post? Pandemic: When Scott and I wrote the first version of the theme description last Autumn we naïvely believed that the pandemic would be more or less over by now. The ELO board liked our proposal, but suggested that we put "post" in parenthesis and with a question mark, in order to underline that we didn't take the disease lightly in any way. Currently, we're in a situation where some countries and societies are relieved and opening up, while others like India and Brazil go through their worst crisis yet, and other parts of the Global South are also challenged. The pandemic hit us all, but our conditions for coping have proven to be very different, and currently this seems to be leaving many countries of the Global South out in the cold, while rich countries are hoarding vaccines. It has been dubbed neo or even covid colonialism, which will continue to widen inequality, spread poverty and keep borders closed. Last week was the week with most infections globally so far!

The pandemic will still have a huge influence on this conference, just by the fact that it is the second virtual ELO conference and the first that was fully planned as virtual. The pandemic has made an impact on our lives, it is the theme of one of our exhibitions (Covid E-lit) and it has affected many papers. It is serious times, and unfortunately it is not only a theme to reflect on. I have received several emails from people from and in India withdrawing because they would have to put their energy into getting oxygen and hospital beds for their loved ones. And our partners in India, dra.ft, have also suffered from the situation in India and it has impacted their possibilities to develop the activities they planned for their part of the conference. Please send warm thoughts and a donation to India and other parts of the world that are currently challenged and in dire situations! You can donate through e.g. Unicef, The Red Cross, Medecins Sans Frontières or Oxfam, and our friends in India have suggested specific more local initiatives that I'll include in my next email.[1] However, as can be seen in the exhibition "freeFall future.text - escaping or excavating platforms" that is open and will be presented Friday, there's a lot of great e-lit going on in India! Which leads me to:

Platform: This is a conference that will critically explore platforms of many kinds, including how we're experiencing platforms culture during the pandemic and how we might envision it beyond. The pandemic has in many ways been a climax and I believe also a turn in platformization. I certainly hope, that we're seeing the beginning of something new and better than the current version of platformization or what Christian Ulrik Andersen and I have called the Metainterface. We're thrilled to see the many ways that the theme of platforms has been taken up, from discussing the history and disappearance of old platforms like Adobe Flash (also a topic of one of our exhibitions, After Flash) to thinking about the e-lit happening on platforms (e.g. as exhibited in our Kid E-Lit

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[1] Apart from that, here are a few options suggested by some known people in the circuit - 1, 2, 3

exhibition), how e-lit is afforded and challenged by platform culture and to developing alternative platforms and alternative ways of thinking – again the topic of one of our exhibitions Platforming Utopias (and Platformed Dystopias). Electronic literature has a history of developing new forms and media of expressions, ever since Christopher Stratchey's Love letter generator at the Manchester University Computer in 1953, the development of hypertext to current experiments with machine learning, just to mention a few examples, and from looking at the program this year, this community is also taking the lead in thinking platforms post pandemic!

But the platforms still have us captured, including this conference. I don't want to apologize but just end by explaining how and why, in order for us to collectively reflect on the conference platform post pandemic. Video conferencing allows us to have this conference during the pandemic with global partners and saving travel and carbon emissions and this is an example of why and how we rely on platforms. Ideally, we would have used an open source platform, but they unfortunately don't have the solidity or scale to fit this conference and besides they're not supported by our universities. Aarhus and Bergen universities have Zoom versions that is running on our own Nordic servers, securing privacy. However, it turned out that we couldn't use these versions either, because they didn't support other partners outside our universities, couldn't make recordings available in an efficient way nor had the possibility for live captioning, all of which depends on Zoom's own servers. As a result, we ended up with a commercial Zoom license that most of the conference will run on apart from this opening and the keynotes. I think this conundrum is a perfect example on how we are trapped and captured by the platforms that we depend on for meeting, communicating, reading, writing, making art, literature and culture. Organizing a conference also teaches you about this.

So, this is the world we live in. It needs a turn to the better. This community is full of ideas. E-lit is about its literary and artistic qualities, but also and simultaneously about the platforms that it uses, explores, criticizes and creates alternatives to. Welcome to Platform (Post?) Pandemic!

And with these words I'll pass you over to a fantastic artistic work, that we have commissioned in order to present you for the wonders of Aarhus, made by Anders Visti and Malthe Stauning Erslev: Aarhus Open Operating System: https://aauos.online/