



CASE STUDIES OF COLLABORATION

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AN IDEA, a phrase, an image awakens writers' imaginations, sending them on a journey in which they are, more often than not, joined by others. In fact, one could argue that almost all literature stems from some form of collaboration—between writer and publisher, writer and editor, writer and colleague, writer and mentor. With electronic literature the collaborative relationship may be more obvious, but it still works to accomplish the same goal—refining the elements that vivify literature. Take a look....

SETTING

With *Noon Quilt* (www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/quilt), a project sponsored by the online writing community trAce, Teri Hoskin, Sue Thomas, and Ali Graham issued an open invitation to writers all over the world to submit a short passage about what they saw when they looked out their windows at noon. Hundreds of responses were combined, and the finished work appears on the screen as a quilt, a cohesive whole, composed of patches that, when clicked on, reveal one writer's take on time and place. The Web, where one has a tangible sense of

being everywhere at the same time, is the perfect forum for *Noon Quilt*. And the Web may be the only place where a work of such immensity can be stored and organized in a way that allows readers to navigate it.

CHARACTER

Friday's Big Meeting (www.tank20.com/fbm), a Web-based work of electronic fiction, uses interwoven text and images to tell a story about virtual romance. The author, Rob Wittig, gathered friends, photographers, actors, and Web designers to pose as his fictional characters for photographs, which he planned to use as the images in his piece. While his initial story influenced the staging of the photographs, the resulting images influenced the final version of the text, as Wittig used them to inform the development of his characters.

TONE

With *The Ed Report* (www.edreport.com), Nick Montfort and I wanted to create a work that reads like an authentic government document. It was crucial to the credibility of the piece that its

tone be impersonal and bureaucratic. We first planned, then divided the 27 sections of the piece between us and took turns drafting and revising the text until each section was complete, reworking each other's writing so many times that nearly every sentence has a collaborative dimension. This process diluted our individual styles so that we achieved the Newspeak tone we were after.

MUSICALITY

Down Time (Eastgate Systems) is the result of a six-year collaboration among writer Rob Swigart, composer Allen Strange, and programmer Patrick Milligan. Strange read Swigart's text, which became the conceptual basis of his score. Both Strange and Milligan worked closely with Swigart, continually revising the scope of the project based on technical possibilities and limitations to create the final form: interlinked short stories, each with a musical score and optional voice-over narration. *Down Time* is a book you can read, listen to, or both.

POINT OF VIEW

Six German and two American writers document in text and images a cross-

country journey in *Rude Trip* (www.mcs.net/-ittielli/rudetrip). Each of the trip's events—such as a visit to a college bar in Champaign, Illinois—is recorded by a different author. The result? A juxtaposition of various, often warring points of view that reflects the project's theme: how culture influences perception. The rough seams between writers' contributions are essential to the intention of the work.

NARRATIVE ARC

In writing *The Unknown* (www.unknownhypertext.com), Scott Rettberg, Dirk Stratton, and I each, at various points, acted as author, editor, and designer. Some of the scenes were written by two or three of us taking turns at a computer, but most sections were written by one of us and usually edited by another. The story is told from multiple points of view, in a variety of styles, all of which creates a parataxis that stands in for narrative arc. The story is meant to be fragmented, more of a mosaic than a portrait. Like many novels, it is replete with flashbacks, flash-forwards, digressions, foreshadowing, and elisions. And it is the

reader who assembles these elements into an order.

MAKING HISTORY

Newspoetry (www.newspoetry.com) is a poetry collection that records the turn of the American millennium. The poems take as their subjects local, national, and international news that occurred during 1999 and 2000. And there is a poem that corresponds to the news of each day during that period. The wide range of styles, forms, voices, topics, and opinions works toward making the documentary record more complete. Most of the poems were gathered from the Associated Poets (AP), an electronic community in which socially concerned poets share poems, encouragement, feedback, suggested topics, and writing assignments through e-mail. The members of AP also respond to each other's work, write poems in pairs and threes and fours, and write sequels to one another's poems, sometimes even using the same titles. It is as if the thriving mailing list, the collaboration, is itself the artwork, and the Web site an edited digest. <<