

## **You'll Never Write Alone: Online Sharing Economy and the New Role of the Reader**

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Without a reader, literature does not exist. At the heart of the most primitive of fictions, according to Antonio Muñoz Molina, is someone telling a story and someone listening to it (20). Literature, therefore, is a communicational act with an emitter (the writer), a receptor (the reader and the reading public), and a message that is the work itself. From a legal point of view, the work and the author exist even without a recipient; the mere expression of an original idea fixed in a tangible medium generates intellectual property.<sup>1</sup> However, literary texts are generally directed at a reader upon whom the author depends financially (Senabre 16). I refer here not only to the reader who purchases a book in a shop or online—whom we could call the end consumer—but to the reader upon whom the author depends until publication: the editor. The Internet has changed this structure.

Among the many changes the Internet has produced in the editorial field, there are two that are especially significant: first, the possibility that the author may become his or her own editor. With the help of print-on-demand services, the author-editor can constantly adjust the number of copies to cover actual demand for the book. The second change is the ease with which the author and reader can communicate. The creation of blogs has facilitated a more fluent communication among authors and their readers that goes beyond the role of the Web as an alternative and increasingly powerful marketing channel for publishing houses.

In the present essay I will focus on this second change. I will explore how the Internet is challenging the traditional model of production, communication and reception of literary works. More and more, the fruitful interaction of authors and readers leads to the print publication of books in the Spanish language based on materials originating on the Internet. In some limited and interesting cases, the author has offered readers the opportunity

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to complete or add pieces to the puzzle that constitutes the original work, to act as collaborators, as producers and coauthors of his or her work.

As a starting point, I will examine the figure of the author, who constitutes readership, and how their relationship and collaborative process has evolved up until the advent of the digital era. Following that analysis, I will explore the changes that have occurred in their relationship and why the so-called hybrid economy, an economy based on the combination of commercial and community interests, represents an old but also new and necessary counterpoint to the unidirectional, author-reader relationship fostered by multinational publishing and media conglomerates. My study of the transition from blog to book format will demonstrate how blogs have ultimately gone to waste, and how, conversely, wikis seem to be building a bridge capable of spanning the profound breach between the analogic and the digital publishing worlds. It also will expose a certain lack of interest on the part of big publishing houses in the new culture of collaboration; so-called literary blogs seem to exist as a means by which media conglomerates pursue certain business ends.

As in the Gospel according to John, the beginning is the word. Literature originates in oral tradition, where tales are transmitted from one generation to the next throughout the spoken word. Oral cultures preserve certain information by means of participatory and communal practices. Compared to spoken texts, writing, according to Walter Ong, “separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for ‘objectivity,’ in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing” (45).

The spoken word has the peculiarity of allowing the different transmitter to modify the narrative, introducing small variations to the text. This explains the existence of diverse versions, one or more of which will subsequently be put down in writing. In truth, the first authors we can attest to are transcribers, compilers and commentators of oral narrative, writers that, according to Michael North, did not aspire to anything more than a “derivative authority” (1380). This is the realm of Benedictine monks such as Gonzalo de Berceo, on one hand, and minstrels on the other, brought together despite their differences by the letter and the word, versification and theme. In essence, the material on which both feed has a common root: oral tradition. Both ends of the communicative act can eventually exchange roles. The emitter can become the receptor, and vice versa. The relationship is more dynamic than in written cultures. Going back to Muñoz Molina’s comment, one relates and the other listens, but one also repeats, and in that reproduction of the message, the narrative is modified. The receptor becomes the emitter, but also something else: because of the additions to the text, the receptor also becomes an author, another link in the chain of author-auditors that comprise oral tradition.

Modern concepts of authorship arise in tandem with the advent of Gutenberg’s printing press, though author and editor are often confused up

until late in the eighteenth century. It is in the eighteenth century that the first copyright laws are passed to protect the flourishing publishing industry. These recognize, for the writer of a text, a series of moral and economic rights over it. Before these laws, the author sold his or her works to an editor, at the same time losing any rights. The new legal protection of authorship coincides with the focus, typical of the romantic period, on the individual and subjective experience.

The romantic hero is vital, rebellious, and often vulgar, but if one definitive trait were chosen, it would be the depth of feelings and blind faith in intuition as the prime source of originality and genius. The advent of the romantic *génie* supposes, on one hand, a break with the concept of creation based on classical *imitatio*, and, on the other hand, the rise of individuality to the detriment of collectivity. As Bernardo Atxaga points out:

la ideología que todavía hoy es dominante saca al artista de la historia y lo deja aislado, obligado a producir sin cesar cosas originales que garanticen el plus de novedad que se exige a toda mercancía. (144)

(the ideology still held today removes the artist from history and isolates him, forced to ceaselessly produce original material which guarantee the addition of novelty that is demanded of merchandise.)

This isolation will be taken to its ultimate consequences. Following a pendular movement, two centuries later, Barthes proclaims the death of the author while Foucault asks what the author is. Both theorists underline the importance of the reader and the multiplicity of possible readings of a text. Foucault defines the author as “the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning” and makes a case for substitution (209). The author, “the regulator of the fictive” since the eighteenth century, disappears along with the industrial, bourgeois society that birthed him. Fiction and polysemic texts will survive, but what we have come to know as the author will vary in form and complexity, fading into “the anonymity of a murmur” (209–10). Foucault, like Barthes, proposes the dissolution of the nexus between the literary text and individual expression. Interpretation based on authorial intention becomes one among many possible readings, and not necessarily the most relevant. The means and value of a text are no longer restricted by the name of the author, his biography or motivations behind the text. The attempts to redefine authorship and subjectivity seek the primacy of language over the individual. Barthes declares that in works of literature “it is language that speaks, not the author” (143), while in Foucault’s work, subjectivity is presented as a discursive production.

Without debating the arguments themselves, we will return to their refutation of the absolute primacy of the author as support. It would seem that the romantic reification of the author gave credence to the fallacy of the

end of writing as collaborative act. The relevance of the reader as participant in the creation of fiction goes beyond anything previously described. The role of the reader transcends the mere reception of a story, and even surpasses the condition of recreator, which is to say, the possibility of becoming a future narrator.

It may seem necessary to redefine “reader” for the Internet age; however, this would be an error. A reader should not be defined solely as the receptor of a text, a mere passive agent. From the previous discussion, it would seem that writing and the appearance of the printing press mark the beginning of a decline in literature as a collaborative act. This could not be farther from the truth, as Ricardo Senabre points out: an author “cuenta a menudo con el público antes de fijar la forma definitiva del texto” (27) (“frequently relies on the public to fix the definitive form of the text”). The Spanish scholar makes reference here to the circle of friends, family, agents, publishers, editors, and proofreaders that read and propose changes to a work before it is published. This entails a previous and, in Senabre’s words, “private” reading of the text in which the writing is accommodated into a collaborative framework. In this way, the classical and presumptive hegemony of the singular author leads to a “multiple authorship,” a collaborative authorship of writings usually considered the work of a single author (Stillinger 22).

Nevertheless, readers and scholars often overlook this mechanism. In this way, the traditional framework of analysis (where the author and his or her biography take on such importance) and where the public is only surveyed quantitatively persists. Along with this is the attitude of a cultural industry that reproduces, in the literary field, the music and film paradigm of stars and hits based on sales. It is not coincidental that this would occur and become more frequent as multinational media conglomerates continue to absorb publishing houses. In the year 2000, for example, five conglomerates controlled eighty percent of American book sales (Schiffman 14). A consequence of this concentration is the extreme monetization or commodification of books—which become mainly consumer goods (of the author, who becomes a brand, and of the reader who becomes the target of marketing campaigns).

According to Gabriel Zaid, commerce is a conversation (“comerciar es tener trato y comunicación”), and Hermes being the god of both commerce and communication is precisely a response to this etymological coincidence (40). The pressure for increasingly higher profit margins in publishing houses belonging to media conglomerates, three to four times what independent publishing houses made in the past (Schiffman 119), unbalances this equation, breaking the classical relationship between author and reader as described in the first paragraphs of this essay. The book and the author become commodities, and the reader loses his or her agency. With Marxian fetishism of the commodity as reference, Arjun Appadurai develops the

concept of the fetishism of the consumer, who falsely believes him or herself to have agency. It is the producer and the many forces that constitute production that occupy the real seat of agency. Even when global advertising helps the consumer to consistently believe that he or she is an actor, in fact the consumer “is at best a chooser” (Appadurai 229).

What happens then, with the advent of the new technology, and, in particular, the Internet? It is clear that changes do occur, perhaps not as drastic as those forecasted by Neil Postman, when he states pessimistically that a new technology or medium “doesn’t add something, it changes everything” (n.p.). It is probable that the opposite attitude would fall into what Carlos J. Alonso has designated “the Internet sublime,” that is the “euphoria derived from the vertiginous, endless permutations that the medium appears to afford” (1300). At both extremes we find the conviction that technology radically changes reality.

It is obvious that Internet facilitates a more intimate contact with the reader. This is an opportunity that publishers are taking advantage of by creating an online presence, and that some authors are participating in, either individually or backed by their publishers. Javier Echevarría describes paper editions of books as clear examples “de técnica distal, que permite trascender las separaciones espaciales y temporales, garantizando una multidifusión centrada en el autor y en el texto de la obra” (309) (of a distal technique that can transcend the spatial and temporal distances, guaranteeing a multi-dissemination centered on the author and the text of the work). Evidently the Internet multiplies the capacity for interaction with the text. Any reader, independently of where he or she is located, can visit an author’s page or blog. In fact, it allows the simultaneous access of more than one reader without the need for multiple copies of the text.

From a legal point of view, the text uploaded to the Internet is available to the public synchronously, without fixing it in a tangible medium. Digitized works no longer need to be printed, and, as Negroponte suggested, “the distribution of atoms is far more complex than of bits” (83). Absent of the physical distribution of copies, the online work is neither “reproduced” nor “distributed” but “communicated.” By granting online access to a larger audience simultaneously, in terms of intellectual property, reading a blog entry is more akin to going to the theatre or a concert than the traditional reading of a newspaper article. The Internet brings fiction to its earliest roots: the public reading or narration where one relates and the other listens.

Whereas a book presents an asymmetrical communication with little or no interactivity, digital media allows the author, if he or she so chooses, to establish a dialogue with the reader. This interaction is still conditioned by the preponderance of the authorial figure. Blogs begin as digital diaries, and only later assume the possibility that their readers interact with the owner and comment on the entries. The central position of the author dictates the design of the blog, with comments appearing in a smaller font. Despite this,

blogs signify a big step in interactivity and communication between author and reader, which had been previously restricted—as already mentioned—to private readings before publication or personal conversations on the occasion of book fairs and similar meetings. The Internet makes this communication possible without the need for author and readers to coincide in time or space, and opens the interaction up to other readers. Javier Echeverría argues that all these novelties affect not only the relationship between the author and his or her public, but also the very structure of an author's work (310). In this regard, I will show that when a blog's content has been repurposed into a book, in only exceptional cases does it include readers's comments.

I will now examine the lack of interaction between the author and reader shutting down possibilities for collaboration. When I speak of "collaboration," I am not referring to co-authorship. I have consciously chosen a sample of authors of some relevance and left aside works of hypermedia literature, like Doménico Chiappe's, on purpose. These works signal a redefinition of authorship. As the Peruvian hypermedia novelist himself points out, this redefinition is a consequence of a new concept of readership, one that multiplies authors (224). When I use the term "collaboration," I refer to at least one fruitful conversation. The picture our analysis paints is that of an author-driven piece of writing upon which the reader-commentator leaves no mark. The author writes in a manner that erases the reader's presence, both on the blog and in its paper version. As we will see, the author neither writes for his or her digitally-influenced readers nor considers their comments for publication when the blog becomes a book.

This is a panorama reminiscent of Lessig's so-called Read-Only culture, which is an environment of analogic technologies. Lessig conceptualizes the Internet as a shared space of two cultures that coexisted in our past: one, Read/Write (RW) creativity, "from the dawn of human culture," and the other, Read Only (RO), "from the birth of technology to capture and spread tokens of cultures" (116). As one can imagine, the first is bidirectional and the second unidirectional. The oral literature mentioned in the beginning of this article is an example of RW culture while the printed book—putting aside reader-oriented theories—would answer to a RO culture. In the latter there is a clear separation between producer and consumer, or in the case of written works, author and reader.

After a period in which RO gained dominance, both modalities have met again in the Internet, originating multiple legal disputes. Internet allows users to copy, edit, and mix (or rewrite) any kind of content previously digitalized. On YouTube we can find a multitude of videos based on this premise. RW culture also manifests itself in open source software, which anyone can modify and improve as long as the end product is offered to other users free of charge. This type of project is often collective. Wikipedia is the paradigm of this model. In fact, Web 2.0 is based precisely on users

collaborating to create content. This type of user is not merely a reader or consumer of information presented online, but has the possibility of becoming a writer/producer as well.

Rewriting is an essential part of Internet culture, demonstrated by hypertext, an element central to the conception of the Internet. Landow refers to Barthes's distinction between readerly and writerly texts to explain the differences between text based on print technology and electronic hypertext. According to Landow, "Hypertext blurs the boundaries between reader and writer" (4). As such, hypertext is an example of a writerly text, which Barthes defines as one in which the reader is no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. By contrast, Barthes's readerly text is "what can be read, but not written . . . a classic text" (4).

Hypertexts that lead to new text exist alongside classic digitized text, such as the blog entries I will refer to below. In this manner, RO and RW texts and cultures coexist online. Both have given rise to a new economic model, based on the combination of commercial and community interests: the hybrid economy. The hybrid represents a new and necessary counterpoint to the unidirectional, Read-Only, author-reader relationship fostered by multinational publishing and media conglomerates. The blogs I am about to analyze encourage, in different ways, this unidirectional relationship. In the following pages I will also refer to a number of texts that take advantage of the possibilities that collaborative writing and rewriting open up. In these processes readers are not just the writers's personal and editorial circle. Writing leads to a lively debate; culture and commerce are brought together around the idea of a conversation, in Zaid's words.

A clear example of unidirectional relationship is seen in publisher Alfaguara's collection "Libros del Blog," a compilation of texts from the blogs published on the *El Boomeran(g)* Web site.<sup>2</sup> This site, created in 2005, belongs to Fundación Santillana, founded by Grupo Prisa, a Spanish media conglomerate that houses radio stations, TV channels, newspapers, magazines, and publishers such as Alfaguara. Most authors with a presence on *El Boomeran(g)* are signed with Alfaguara.

An examination of "Libros del Blog" leads to four conclusions: first of all, the texts are, in most cases, shorter than a newspaper column, a logical adaptation of on-screen reading. Second, that the few cases of hypertext markup in the original are eliminated. Third, there exists a textual and paratextual reinforcement of the central and hegemonic role of the author, and finally, that reader comments are excluded.

The comparison between newspaper columns and blog entries is useful for two reasons. One is the resemblance between "Libros del blog" and an earlier Alfaguara collection, "Textos de escritor." According to the Spanish ISBN database of publishers, Alfaguara published (between the years 1995 to 2001) more than forty titles under the "Textos de escritor" series, the majority of which are collections of articles by Spanish authors such as

Javier Marías, Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Félix de Azúa.<sup>3</sup> The second reason why I compare the blog to the column is a matter of style. Even though some authors point out the hybridity of the blog genre (Verdú 15) or even its lack of genre (Roncagliolo 15), their writing style refutes these statements.

From the analysis of blogs later published in book format, it is important to note the lack of hypertext.<sup>4</sup> The featured writers do not take advantage of the possibilities offered to them by the digital medium, continuing to write in analog mode. In addition to this, they continue to address a typographic public: the style and language they use indicate that the authors do not take into account that the online reader does not necessarily read in the same way as the newspaper reader. They continue to write in a Printing Age “author-driven style,” with a strong tendency towards lineal content, and not in a “reader-driven style,” that is, one in which authors use keywords, short sentences, etc. to appeal to readers’s digitally-influenced fragmentary, scanning-oriented reading (Nielsen).

This analogic mode of writing produces a textual reinforcement of the central and hegemonic role of the author. But there is also a paratextual consecration of the author. It is notable how both in books and blogs the author functions as a brand, with his or her name and picture appearing prominently on the cover or homepage. The fact that some authors agree to publish a blog can be related to the paradigmatic change of authorship in the globalization age. As Biendarra points out, the monetization of the literary field pushes the author to commercialize both his work and himself as merchandise. An example of this Marxian commodity fetishism is that the author is forced to diversify his or her writing and cover as many literary genres as possible to achieve recognition and dominate the market (Biendarra 261). This is the mechanism Bourdieu denominates “To ‘make one’s name’ [*faire date*],” by which he means both “making one’s mark, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one’s difference from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them,” and “creating a new position beyond the positions presently occupied” (106).

Furthermore and in the same vein, I find that reader comments are left aside. They are mentioned vaguely in prologues, acknowledgements, or in the dedication. Only in exceptional cases are they mentioned by name, as in Félix de Azúa’s book, for example, in which he lists his online readers’ names under the entry called “artistas invitados” (244) (guest stars), or Marcelo Figueras, who quotes four of his readers in his prologue and calls them “personajes” (19) (characters). But these are exceptions. From the content of the published books, it is necessary to come to the conclusion that the effort to establish a link never crystallizes into a real dialogue.

It is certain that “los papeles de recepción y emisión se intercambian” (Verdú 15) (the roles of receptor and emitter are exchanged), but the

conversations are translated into a shared writing as well as in the asynchronous reading of the other's writing, not in an exchange, *per se*. In conclusion, the readers comment on the author's writing, but there is no reciprocity or further correspondence. The author neither replies to the comments, nor does he or she dedicate entries to them. With regards to the Internet, Roncagliolo writes that "produce la indistinción entre autor y lector: todos somos autores y todos somos lectores" (19) (it causes the author and the reader to become indistinct: we are all authors and all readers), and goes even further when defining the blog, by pointing out that the newly created configuration

no es la de un diálogo entre autor y lectores sino la de una asamblea. Se van formando grupos . . . que conversan entre ellos. Llegado un punto, el papel del anfitrión es más bien plantear la orden del día para estimular la conversación ajena. (19)

(is not that of a dialogue between author and readers, but that of an assembly. Groups begin to form . . . and have conversations among themselves. There comes a point when the role of the host is to offer up ideas to stimulate the conversation of others.)

However, some authors (like Figueras or even Roncagliolo himself) highlight the impact that daily contact with their readers has had. I do not doubt this is true, but I can attest to the fact that this impact is not visible in their blogs. It is hard to find any trace of a change in form or content in their writing to differentiate it from a newspaper column. In contrast to Echeverría's ideas, the relations between an author and his public online have not altered in this case the fundamental structure of the work itself.

An extreme example of the exclusion of the reader is Jorge Volpi's blog. The initial purpose and guiding impulse that brought the Mexican author to write the blog excludes the conversation with his readers: "Escribir. Escribir de nuevo. No otra novela—cualquier novela—sino una bitácora, una combinación de memoria, ficción, aforismos" (Write. Write again. Not another novel—any novel—but a log, a combination of memoir, fiction, aphorisms). In keeping with this exclusion, the content of his blog was published outside of the aforementioned series. *El jardín devastado* (2008) is a work whose content is more clearly novelistic than that of "Libros del Blog."<sup>5</sup> In that case, the objective of the editorial strategy that Volpi pursued was to try to restrict the dominance of the blog as a label or brand to a certain type of essayistic texts. Fiction and pseudo-fiction would fall outside this category, although they would have originally been published in the blog format. Their appearance in the blog could be interpreted also as a promotional strategy for the future work. In this way, the blog would function as an epitext for the book, in service to its future reception.

I have arrived at three possible reasons for the exclusion of reader comments in paper publications. It may respond to strictly aesthetic considerations (taking into account the type of project the author had planned out, as in Volpi's case), to economic reasons (because of the savings on paper, distribution and storage costs as a result of less text), and even to legal aspects, given that the authorship of comments cannot be adjudicated to the author of the blog. Fundación Santillana, owner of *El Boomeran(g)*, assumes no responsibility for the comments posted by users of its Web site. Accordingly, in its legal terms there is no specific reference to the authorship of said comments, which any user may post by simply providing a name and an email address.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the site has no interest in retaining copyright ownership or any other related rights over that content. This brings up a slew of issues when taking a blog to paper, since there is no guarantee that the author of a comment will wish to forfeit his or her intellectual property rights. The important question is how to assign legal, commercial, and moral rights when "the author, like the text, becomes dispersed or multivocal" (Landow 368).

One possible but not necessarily satisfactory answer is to be found in the second volume of Arcadi Espada's *Diarios*, published in 2004. The first volume was published two years earlier, after being awarded the Premio Espasa de Ensayo, given by publisher Espasa-Calpe. The critical and public success motivated the author and publisher to continue its publication. The second volume follows the path of the first: the analysis of daily news prompts Arcadi Espada to reflect on the craft of journalism. The difference between the volumes is that the second consists of a collection of texts that appeared originally on the author's professional blog.<sup>7</sup>

Here again, notable features are the brevity of the texts, the elimination of the hypertexts and, related to reader collaboration, the treatment of readers' comments. The case of *Diarios* is almost unique, because reader comments are not eliminated completely when transitioning from blog to paper. In this case they were reduced in number out of sheer necessity, given that Espada's blog was at that moment one of the most widely read in Spain. The "immense conversation" of which the Internet is comprised, according to Espada (271), is whittled down to a series of reader outbursts that in most cases lack depth and relevance to the text.

Without a doubt, most surprising is the transitional material that Espada inserts to present the comments. It functions as a prompt to the reader and, in my opinion, adds little value to the work. Furthermore, it sometimes undermines the words of the reader-commentators. An example of this can be found in the August 14th 2004 entry—out of the one hundred and fifteen comments that day, the author selected a comment from a reader with the name "Cabreao" (a slang term for "angered"), inserting a quip to preface the reader's comment.<sup>8</sup> What follows is the interaction between them: "Cabreao, de espaldas frente a una pizarra, resuelve una suma de dos cifras. Y luego:

‘Todo es extraordinario cuando se habla de oídas’” (249) (Cabreado, facing away from the blackboard, adds together two numbers and then: ‘Everything is extraordinary when you deal in rumors’).

It is notable how the author imposes his presence throughout the book; not only does he select which comments to publish on paper, but he can editorialize as well. This is reflected in the prologue, where Espada affirms that his readers “han sido lo principal del blog” (have been the most important part of the blog) but that he has tried “de defenderse de la influencia perversa que el comentario pudiera tener sobre la escritura” (15) (to defend himself from the perverse influence that comments could have over the writing). Interestingly, Espada’s current webpage does not allow comments and previous comments from closed discussions cannot be accessed via the blog’s archive.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to these unidirectional author-reader relationships that lead to unfruitful collaborations, we may find artistic projects that take full advantage of “editable and creative web spaces” such as blogs and wikis (Berners-Lee). Film—the collaborative medium par excellence—may serve as a perfect example. *La Wikipeli* is an annual endeavor financed by the Spanish brewery Mahou.<sup>10</sup> Online users are invited to co-write and co-direct a short film by voting for their favorite ideas and scenes. A well-known director helms the resulting product. Its 2010 edition rallied more than six thousand users to the aid of Jaume Balagueró, who co-directed the Spanish film *REC*. Together they wrote and directed *Miedo* (Fear). A similar concept in the literary field is Ecuadorian Leonardo Valencia’s and Mexican Eugenio Tiselli’s *El libro flotante* (The Floating Book), where the reader can rewrite the narrative.<sup>11</sup> In this project, the web is used to create an interdiscursive sequel to Valencia’s novel *El libro flotante de Caytran Dölpfin* (2006). Tiselli was in charge of programming for this initiative, which was conceived as a collaboration.

The novel mentions and reproduces fragments of a mythic book, *Estuario*, by the deceased author Dölpfin. In the online “parallel book” the “lectonautas” can write and rewrite *Estuario*. The online user can comment on the fragments included in the novel, add new “apocryphal fragments,” or distort any of the previous texts. Valencia explains in his introduction to the site that the purpose of sharing this space is to test the inexhaustible, “floating” nature of any fiction:

Al final, aunque separados, todos los estuarios están conectados entre sí, y todos forman parte del mismo mar narrativo. Es decir, los vacíos ficcionales siempre pueden llenarse y continuarse. Porque en el mar de las historias, y sus lecturas y comentarios, estas nunca tienen fin.

(In the end, although they are separate, all estuaries are interconnected and all form part of the same narrative ocean. Any fictional vacuum can

be filled and continued, because in the sea of stories, and their readings and commentary, these are endless.)

The so-called “Floating Project” is an attempt to turn the reader into an active protagonist of the fiction generated in the novel. What is more, its rewriting expands the fictional territory of the novel. The existence of real comments, many of them based on the users’ daily experience, manages to revitalize the novelesque fiction wrought around the imaginary figure of Caytran Dölpfin. *El libro flotante*, much like *La Wikipeli*, fulfills two clear ends: the use of these spaces as a laboratory of literary experimentation, but also as a promotional and marketing space. In both cases, there is a central author and work or initial plotline upon which to expand. However, these are only a basis on which an entirely new collective work is raised, opening itself to the reader.

Another project, *To be continued*, is conceptually similar to *La Wikipeli*.<sup>12</sup> This collective multimedia novel project brings together videos that help map the bookspaces, a soundtrack, illustrations, discussion forums, and a jury in charge of selecting the best proposals. The Peruvian Santiago Roncagliolo is in charge of the first chapter and another two professional writers are invited to produce an additional two. The rest of the novel will be the product of reader-writers who build over a period of three months. The result of their collaboration will appear in print.

Both *To be continued* and *El libro flotante* enact a reconfiguration of the synergistic intermedial possibilities. The coexistence and convergence of media is possible: a new medium does not necessarily replace another, just as radio did not eliminate print news nor did television eliminate radio. Without falling into the “Internet sublime” trap, it is important to remember that the Internet, as a repository of all media, opens immense possibilities of dialogue between them. To not use these tools is to let pass the opportunity for a dialogue that promises to be “sometimes divergent but never lacking in important literary results” (Paz Soldán 258).

It is difficult to imagine the Internet compromising the future of the book and of literature. Readers will not disappear and reading will accommodate itself to different formats, but neither the reader nor the writer will play his or her role in the same way. Senabre points out that the printing press coincided with the development of cities, the birth of the bourgeoisie, and the rise of solitary reading, product of the “devotio moderna” of the late Middle Ages. These factors together brought about the decline of oral literature and opened the door to the establishment of the novel as a genre (Senabre 106). The twentieth century closed with the certainty of something McLuhan already suspected when he proposed the concept of the typographical mind: that what we do shapes our brain. The proof of neural plasticity in the brain opens the doors for future authors and readers to further develop the effects that new technology already seems to produce in

us today.<sup>13</sup> Online reading and writing are and will be faster and more fragmentary, adapted and accustomed to an environment and daily experience that permit and promote the essential core of culture: interactivity, exchange and collaboration.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

1. All my statements in reference to Intellectual Property (IP) law are based on the current Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, an international agreement governing copyright. In certain cases national legislations may limit some of its provisions. The current text of the convention can be found here: <[www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/index.html](http://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/index.html)>.
2. Between 2007 and 2008, Alfaguara published in Spain five titles belonging to the series “Los libros del Blog” <[www.alfaguara.com/es/catalogo/coleccion/19/](http://www.alfaguara.com/es/catalogo/coleccion/19/)>. In 2007, Félix de Azúa’s *Abierto a todas horas*, Santiago Roncagliolo’s *Jet Lag*, and Marcelo Figueras’s *El año que viví en peligro*, were published. In 2008, Alfaguara published Sergio Ramírez’s *Cuando todos hablamos*, and Vicente Verdú’s *Passé composé*. According to the publisher’s Web site, these books fall under the category “miscelánea literaria.” This collection was not published in other countries with the exception of Figueras’s and Roncagliolo’s contributions, which were published in Argentina as part of the “Literatura” and “Hispanica” collections, respectively (this information can be found at <[www.alfaguara.com.ar/libro.asp?id=1272](http://www.alfaguara.com.ar/libro.asp?id=1272)> and <[www.alfaguara.com.ar/libro.asp?id=1151](http://www.alfaguara.com.ar/libro.asp?id=1151)>). This disparity exemplifies the desintegration of the traditional single publishing catalogue. A typical phenomenon of these publishing multinationals is to publish different titles for each country, which makes each publishing catalogue country-specific. Titles that cross national barriers are primarily those with very high sales in their country of origin. Add to this that these catalogues are made more and more frequently at the company’s headquarters, which is to say, Spain. García Canclini laments the interruption that this practice has on “la conversación de algunos de los principales novelistas y poetas con su campo cultural inmediato” (87) (“the conversation between some of the principal novelists and poets and their immediate cultural field). The *El Boomeran(g)* blogs are up at <[www.elboomeran.com/blogs/](http://www.elboomeran.com/blogs/)>.
3. The database of publishing houses can be found at: <[www.mcu.es/libro/CE/AgencialSBN/BBDDEdit/BDDEditoriales.html](http://www.mcu.es/libro/CE/AgencialSBN/BBDDEdit/BDDEditoriales.html)>.
4. I have studied the blogs of Félix de Azúa, Sergio Ramírez, and Vicente Verdú as well as Santiago Roncagliolo’s former blog at *Club Cultura*. <[www.clubculture.com/diariode/4/santiagoroncagliolo.html](http://www.clubculture.com/diariode/4/santiagoroncagliolo.html)>. Figueras and Roncagliolo’s blogs are no longer available at the *El Boomeran(g)* site. Marcelo Figueras’s blog can be accessed at the *Internet Archive* <[web.archive.org/web/20080415173142/www.elboomeran.com/blog-archivo/4/marcelo-figueras/11/2005/](http://web.archive.org/web/20080415173142/www.elboomeran.com/blog-archivo/4/marcelo-figueras/11/2005/)>.
5. The bibliographic information can be found at <[www.alfaguara.com/es/libro/el-jardin-devastado/](http://www.alfaguara.com/es/libro/el-jardin-devastado/)>. Jorge Volpi’s blog can be found at: <[www.elboomeran.com/blog/12/jorge-volpi/](http://www.elboomeran.com/blog/12/jorge-volpi/)>.
6. The site’s terms of use are available at <[www.elboomeran.com/aviso-legal/](http://www.elboomeran.com/aviso-legal/)>.
7. The blog was previously housed at this address: <[www.arcadi.espasa.com](http://www.arcadi.espasa.com)>. Some of its content can be accessed via the *Internet Archive* <[www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)>.

8. Entries and commentaries can be accessed at:  
<[web.archive.org/web/20051210090209/www.arcadi.espasa.com/2004\\_08.php](http://web.archive.org/web/20051210090209/www.arcadi.espasa.com/2004_08.php)>.
9. I refer here to <[www.arcadiespada.es/](http://www.arcadiespada.es/)>. The archive for the 2004 diaries can be found at <[www.arcadiespada.es/category/diarios-2004-2007/](http://www.arcadiespada.es/category/diarios-2004-2007/)>. The author also blogs for the newspaper *El Mundo*. These entries do allow comments and can be found at <[www.elmundo.es/blogs/elmundo/elmundopordentro/](http://www.elmundo.es/blogs/elmundo/elmundopordentro/)>.
10. <[www.lawikipeli.com/wikipeli/](http://www.lawikipeli.com/wikipeli/)>. This site includes a description of the project, along with the short film.
11. <[www.libroflotante.net/](http://www.libroflotante.net/)>.
12. <[tobe-continued.com/](http://tobe-continued.com/)>.
13. I refer here to the Maguire et al. study conducted in 1999 on the plasticity of the hippocampus. The hippocampus is the part of the brain mainly responsible for memory. A group of scientists at University College London proved that the volume of the hippocampus is greater in taxi drivers than in the general public. In addition to this, it was proven that more experienced drivers had an even larger hippocampus than their less experienced counterparts. The study can be accessed at <[www.pnas.org/content/97/8/4398.full](http://www.pnas.org/content/97/8/4398.full)>.
14. See “Bridging the Gap: A Genre Analysis of Weblogs” (Herring et al.), a 2004 analysis of writing in blogs (which includes words per sentence, per entry, etc.). A copy of the study can be found at:  
<[www.computer.org/portal/web/csdl/doi/10.1109/HICSS.2004.1265271](http://www.computer.org/portal/web/csdl/doi/10.1109/HICSS.2004.1265271)>.

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