

“Read, Imagine, Play”: memory of a kids e-lit exhibition

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ABSTRACT

From 13 to 15 July 2023, the “Kids e-Lit Exhibition: Read, Imagine, Play” was held at the Exploratório – Centro Ciência Viva in Coimbra (Exploratorium). The initiative was part of the official programme of the Electronic Literature Organization Conference 2023, whose theme was “Overcoming Divides: Electronic Literature and Social Change”. Curated by Ana Maria Machado, Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar and Jaqueline Conte, and focusing especially on an audience of children and young people, and reading mediators, the exhibition featured ten digital literary works for multimodal and interactive reading. The aim of this article is to offer a description of this exhibition and the works presented in it, as well as to present the difficulties and challenges of building a relevant selection of digital productions, while seeking to avoid technical issues and ensure a good reading experience.

KEYWORDS

digital children and young people’s literature, digital curation, digital literacy, digital literature exhibition, Electronic Literature Organization

RESUMO

Entre 13 e 15 de julho de 2023, no Exploratório – Centro Ciência Viva, em Coimbra, teve lugar a “Exposição de Literatura Eletrônica para Crianças e Jovens: Ler, Imaginar, Brincar”. A iniciativa fez parte da programação oficial da Electronic Literature Organization Conference 2023, que tinha como tema: “Overcoming Divides: Electronic Literature and Social Change”. Sob a curadoria de Ana Maria Machado, Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar e Jaqueline Conte, e tendo como público-alvo, especialmente, o público infantil e juvenil e os mediadores de leitura, a exposição apresentou dez obras literárias digitais que permitiam a leitura multimodal e interativa. Este artigo tem como objetivo registar a memória dessa exposição e das obras nela mostradas, bem como apresentar as dificuldades e desafios de se construir uma seleção de produções digitais relevante, ao mesmo tempo em que se busca evitar problemas técnicos e garantir uma boa experiência de leitura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

literatura infantil e juvenil digital, curadoria digital, literacia digital, exposição de literatura digital, Electronic Literature Organization

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2023, the Electronic Literature Organization Conference was held in Coimbra, Portugal. With the theme “Overcoming Divides: Electronic Literature and Social Change”, the event brought together around 200 artists, teachers and researchers between July 12th and 15th for four days of socializing, lectures, panels, workshops, artistic performances and exhibitions¹. Among the official activities was the “Kids E-Lit Exhibition: Read, Imagine, Play”, held on July 13th, 14th and 15th at the Exploratório – Centro Ciência Viva (Exploratorium)². Curated by Ana Maria Machado, Ana Albuquerque e Aguilár and Jaqueline Conte, respectively, professor and researchers in the Doctoral Program in Materialities of Literature at the University of Coimbra, the exhibition presented ten digital literary works that allowed for multimodal and interactive reading.

The target audience for the digital children’s literature exhibition was not primarily conference participants. This exhibit’s focus was on external audiences, especially children, young people and reading mediators.³ The aim of this article is to record the memory of this exhibition and the works presented in it, as well as to present the difficulties and challenges of building a relevant selection of digital productions, while seeking to avoid technical issues and ensure a good reading experience.⁴ We will now present the criteria for selecting the works.

1 See <https://www.coimbra.pt/2023/07/coimbra-acolhe-evento-sobre-o-papel-da-literatura-eletronica-de-12-a-15-de-julho/>, and <https://ucpages.uc.pt/events/overcoming-divides-electronic-literature-and-social-change/recortes/> [31 August 2023]

2 <https://www.exploratorio.pt/> [31 August 2023]

3 People who facilitate children’s contact with literature, such as parents, educators, librarians, storytellers, among others. It is interesting to note that today, in Portugal, there is a network of school libraries and local library networks that are very active in promoting books and encouraging reading. Sometimes in conjunction with the National Reading Plan – Plano Nacional de Leitura – an organisation based on an inter-ministerial commission made up of members of the ministries related to Education, Culture, Science, Technology and Higher Education and Territorial Cohesion (Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 48-D /2017).

4 There were other exhibitions aimed for kids and young people in the ELO’s context, as the one held in Bergen, Norway, in 2015. “Kid E-Lit: Electronic literature for children and adolescents” was organized in collaboration with Bergen Public Library and is funded by Nordic Cultural Point. The exhibition included six works of experimental electronic literature for children and teenagers, as well as eight popular Nordic children’s and young adult’s book apps, selected by a network of scholars, such as

PREPARATION

The first step taken by the curators was to map more recent works that were fully working (without bugs or any malfunctions). It had to be works that had aesthetic quality and could be enjoyed by children and adolescents — even though some may not have been originally produced with such focus.⁵ It was important to have works in Portuguese, as the exhibition would be held in Portugal, but also productions made in different countries and available in other languages, as it was part of an international event. In order to show the diversity of aesthetic possibilities and languages in digital literature, it was also interesting to choose works that used different resources and formats, as well as some free access productions. Also, the experimental aspect was not forgotten, as works developed in the context of academic research and creation were presented.

The theme of ELO 2023, which focused on overcoming divides and barriers, was also evidently an important idea to consider. The Conference’s thematic proposal was thus described in the Call for Papers, available on the event’s website:

During this conference, we aim to explore how electronic literature uses its critical media approach, as well as its close affinity with computation, to assume a socially engaged stance. In a time when walls are being raised once again, this conference examines electronic literature’s role in the dismantlement of new and old barriers between people. (University of Coimbra website, 2023⁶)

Among the topics suggested for the workshops and panels were, for example, language barriers, translation and linguistic diversity; digital literacy and societal transformation; migrations and border enforcement.

Scott and Jill Rettberg See: <https://elmcip.net/event/kid-e-lit> and https://issuu.com/bergenbibliotek/docs/e_litt_book_issuu_real. During the ELO 2017 Conference, in Porto, Portugal, 14 works, from picture book apps to interaction fiction, were presented in the “E-Lit 4 Kids Exhibit”. It was curated by Astrid Ensslin, Maria Goicoechea, Lucas Ramada Prieto and Mark Marino. See: <https://elit4kids.blogspot.com/2017/11/e-lit-4-kids-exhibit-in-porto.html>. For ELO 2021, which was carried out during the pandemic, a virtual exhibition was organized, curated by Maria Goicoechea and Mark Marino. It presented 17 works of different genres: augmented and virtual reality, interactive fiction, visual novels, apps, role-playing games, walking exploration simulations, wordless story-games, and other games. See: <https://eliterature.org/elo2021/kidelit/>. [23 May 2024].

5 Such as ‘Oráculo’, which was developed by the wr3ad1ng d1g1t5 collective (Ana Gago, Diogo Marques and João Santa-Cruz) for the 1st edition of the Bruxa d’Arruda Visual Arts Award, organised by the Arruda dos Vinhos Municipality in 2019. In this case, the work reinterprets, in a combinatorial production, a regional legend (the legend of the Witch of Arruda), with no specific focus on children and young people (Marques and Gago, 2020).

6 See <https://ucpages.uc.pt/en/events/overcoming-divides-electronic-literature-and-social-change/call-for-papers/> [21 August 2023].

So, for the kids e-lit exhibition, we looked for works that could at least partially meet the ideal requirements set by the conference chairs, through research into the most recent collections of digital literature from the ELO (Electronic Literature Collection⁷ — ELC 3 and 4); on the websites of companies that produce apps; in digital app stores and digital children's libraries; in academic works; and consulting other researchers in the field, as well as recommendations from the conference chairs themselves, who already had experience in exhibitions and presentations of digital literary productions.

Of the dozens of works (re)searched, some that had potential were discarded because they were no longer fully functional.⁸ Moreover, the timeliness of the productions, in terms of release date, had to be put into perspective, as not many recent productions were found that fit the criteria established for the exhibition. In addition, from the beginning, the curatorial team wanted the exhibition to be very playful and hybrid, allowing young visitors to experiment with both digital and analogue means.

A determining factor for the final definition of the works, however, was the material conditions available to the organization, as the exhibition was held at the Exploratorium, a Science Centre of the University of Coimbra. Although this allowed the works to get to different publics (children, parents, teachers, general visitors), in practice, it made impossible or restricted the use of works that depended on more expensive technological devices or equipment, such as virtual reality productions, for example, and even works that depended on specific mobile devices (tablets or smartphones of a given system). The curators had at their disposal five desktop computers, four Huawei tablets (on which, due to incompatibility, it was not possible to download some of the desired works) and two iPads.

Taking into account what was desirable and what was available, ten productions were selected and presented, from Portugal, Brazil, France, Germany and the United States. Works available in one or more languages, mainly Portuguese, English, and French, but also in Spanish, German, Dutch, Italian, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese and Korean.

⁷ See <https://collection.eliterature.org/> [21 August 2023].

⁸ Obsolescence is a known feature of electronic literature. As Hayles (2007) points out, electronic literature routinely becomes unplayable or unreadable because it is dependent on both hardware and software. Equipment and programs become obsolete, migrate to new versions that are incompatible with previous ones, or operating systems change. ELO has made efforts to debate and guide authors and other agents who work with electronic literature towards the best practices for preserving born digital literary works, as can be seen with the publication of "Acid-Free Bits", a working paper released in 2014 (Monfort and Wardrip-Fruin, 2014). Another important initiative is the Electronic Literature Lab, which allows researchers to access obsolete digital works on suitable equipment and also carries out experiences in preserving literary applications (See: <https://labs.wsu.edu/grigar-ell/>). [24 May 2024].

The works chosen were (Fig. 1) “Moi j’attends” (“I can’t wait”), by Serge Bloch and Davide Cali (Bachibouzouk); “Crianças”, by Manoel de Barros and Márcio de Camillo (Webcore Games); “Un point c’est tout”, by Xavier Deneux (Bayard Jeunesse/ Bayam); “Oralengas”, a work in progress by Ana Maria Machado, Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar, Júlia Andrade, Thales Estefani and Luís Lucas Pereira, with consultancy from Rui Torres (University of Coimbra); “Oráculo”, by Ana Gago, Diogo Marques & João Santa Cruz (WREAD1NG D1G1T5); “Amal and the most important journey of her life”, by Carolina Montenegro and Renato Moriconi (Webcore/ Editora Caixote); “Song of Bloom (a story in pieces)”, by Philipp Stollenmayer (Kamibox); the Portuguese translation by Ana Maria Machado, Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar, and António Oliveira (University of Coimbra) of two episodes of “Inanimate Alice”, by Chris Joseph, Andy Campbell, Ian Harper and Kate Pullinger (BradField Narrative Designs Inc. Production); and “Bury me, my Love” (“Enterre-moi, mon Amour”), by Pierre Corbinais and Florent Maurin (Pixel Hunt and Figs & ARTE France). These works are briefly presented below.⁹

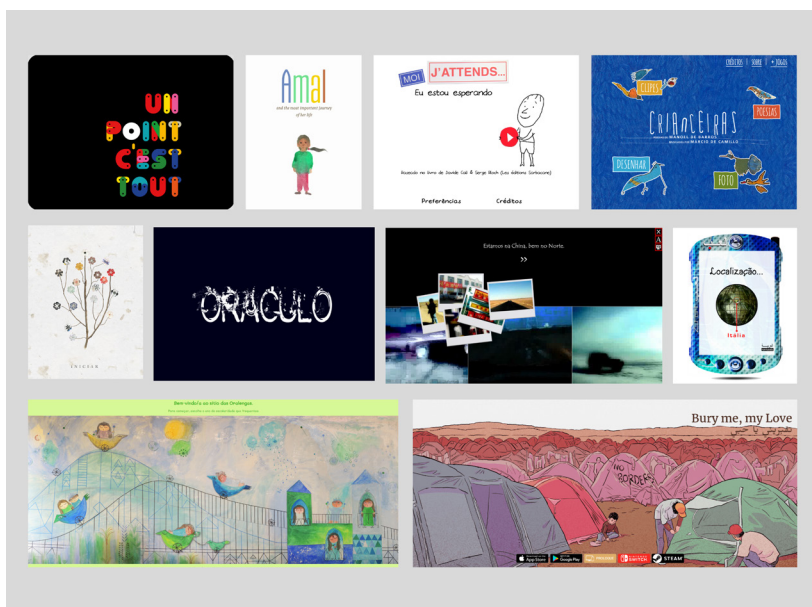


Fig. 1: Montage with printscreens representing the ten works shown in the Exhibition

9 See: <https://youtu.be/4Ho0WdLmytY?si=FRy4pGbGJT7hGaCu> [25 August 2023].

EXHIBITION

The French app “Moi j’attends” (“I can’t wait”), developed by Bachibouzouk, in partnership with La Station Animation, Les Editions Sarbacane and France Télévisions, was produced in 2013 for iOS devices and made available in 2020 for the Android system.¹⁰ It is a tactile narrative experience that intersperses animated sequences and interactive scenes that capture the attention of young children and adults alike. The app is an adaptation of the graphic novel of the same name which tells the story of an artist’s life, in a delicate and moving way, from a red thread that moves through different scenarios with the help of the reader, who unravels it, stretches it, connects it to some other element, until the end of the story. “I can’t wait” was also made into an animated film (2D with stopmotion) produced by Claire Sichez. It is the work, among those presented at the Exhibition, that has the most language options. In the version downloaded (2.1 for Android), updated in December 2021, one could choose different languages for text and narration, including French, Portuguese, English, German, Dutch, Italian, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese and Korean. The app costs €1.99 (iOS) or US\$3.49 (Android).¹¹

“Crianceiras”, by Manoel de Barros and Márcio de Camillo, is a Brazilian app produced in 2016 by Webcore Games, with sponsorship from a telephone company. Only available in Portuguese and for both iOS and Android systems, the app is free and suitable for all ages. At the exhibition, as the Android version was not up to date, version 1.1 for iOS (2016) was downloaded onto an iPad. The work features ten poems by the Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros, set to music by Márcio de Camilo, with illustrations by the poet’s daughter, the artist Martha Barros. It is divided into four sections: “Clipes” (musical clips of the poems, with animation), “Poesias” (the texts of the poems “Sombra Boa”, “Bernardo”, “O menino e o rio” and “Se achante” are presented in an interactive way, with sounds, images and a glossary), “Desenhar” (presents textures and illustrations to manipulate, draw and play with) and “Foto” (it is possible to capture or use photos of the user-reader, available in the mobile device’s gallery, to personalize them with themes and stickers of the characters in the poems, and save the composition). According to the creators¹², the app, which complements

10 As indicated on the work’s sales page on Google Play: “Lançado em 3 de nov. de 2020” (Released in 3rd Nov. 2020): <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.francetv.mojattends> [30 August 2023].

11 All prices listed in this article refer to August 2023. To download the app from the developer’s website: <https://www.bachibouzouk.net/catalogue/moi-j-attends> [25 August 2023].

12 In the app description on AppStore: <https://apps.apple.com/br/app/crianceiras-poemas-musicados-de-manoel-de-barros/id1151435252>. [07 October 2024].

the project of the same name — which since 2012 has included a CD and a musical show — illustrates what the poet wrote: “What I wanted was to make toys with words¹³”. The songs have different rhythms — for example, ballad, pagode de viola (a type of Brazilian country-folk traditional style of music), guarânia (a style of music created in Paraguay), arrasta-pé (a particular rhythm of “forró”), waltz, minuet — which adds an extra and important dimension from the point of view of education for musical diversity.

“Un point c’est tout” is a 2021 adaptation of the homonymous illustrated book written by Xavier Deneux. The French production, by digital studio Bayard Jeunesse, plays with numeracy, abstraction and sounds. It is available on the educational app “Bayam”, which offers animations, games, audios and a series of digital activities aimed at children aged 3 to 10, on a subscription basis. The app can be downloaded on computers or mobile devices of both systems, iOS and Android, and it is possible to access the work “Un point c’est tout” even without a subscription. The Bayam application installed for the Exhibition on a desktop computer was version 6.5.14 released in 2023.¹⁴

Indicated for ages 3 to 6, this visual and audio narrative deals with number counting and playing with the construction and naming of different animals. When you click on a number from 0 to 10, dots appear in the centre of the screen and they are enumerated orally (“un, deux, trois...”). The same number of clickable elements then appears on the right-hand side, with colours and characteristic sounds of the animal that will be assembled with the reader’s help. So, for example, clicking on number 5 will bring up five clickable elements in shades of brown, accompanied by trotting sounds. Clicking on each of them will bring up the figure of a horse. A female voice says “cheval” (‘horse’) and the word appears written at the top of the screen, while the animal moves in a sonorized (with a neigh) animation. Each of the animals moves and produces its own voices. Available only in French, the work can also be interesting for readers of other languages, who can learn the numbers and vocabulary relating to the ten animals presented. This project won a special mention in 2022 for the Crossmedia category at the Bologna Ragazzi Awards.¹⁵

“Oralengas”, on the other hand, is an experimental combinatorial work started to be developed in 2018 as a project by the University of Coimbra,

13 “O que eu queria era fazer brinquedos com as palavras.”, wrote Manoel de Barros in “Livro sobre nada” (BARROS, Manoel (2013). *Poesia Completa*. São Paulo: Leya: p. 303).

14 It is necessary to download the app from <https://bayam.tv/fr/>, clicking on “Télécharger l’application” and then on “C’est parti!”. Then, to view the work without the need for a subscription, you must click on the age group “3 – 6 years”. On the magnifying glass icon, search for “point” and then enter “De 1 à 10: un point c’est tout!”. See the teaser of the work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRkJlqXPkY> [24 August 2023].

15 See <https://www.bolognachildrensbookfair.com/en/awards/bolognaragazzi-crossmedia-award/braw-crossmedia-the-2022-winners/11614.html> [31 August 2023].

coordinated by Ana Maria Machado, with participation of Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar, Júlia Andrade, Thales Estefani, and Luís Lucas Pereira, and with consultancy from Rui Torres. Free of charge and available on the website, the production was developed from the murals painted in 1958 by the Portuguese artist António Costa Pinheiro (1932-2015), commissioned for the kindergarten rooms of the Bissaya Barreto Maternal Institute in Coimbra (today transferred to ANIP – Associação Nacional de Intervenção Precoce¹⁶). The authors used the painter's images as a starting point, creating short animations and exploring texts from children's literature from the oral tradition within the possibilities offered by combinatorial textual generation. Seven texts were worked on at three reading levels, according to age: first and second graders; third graders; and fourth graders. Text generation was used to create new texts that were more or less similar to the originals, depending on the number of variants introduced into the combinatorial poetry editor "Poemário", designed by Rui Torres and programmed by Nuno Ferreira.¹⁷ The verses and nursery rhymes used for the combinatorial work, selected from Portuguese traditional children's songs, are "Papagaio louro", "A barata diz que tem", "Era uma vez um cavalo", "Doidas andam as galinhas", "Coelhinho", "As pombinhas da Catrina", and "Todos os Patinhos".¹⁸

"Oráculo" ("Oracle") is a 2019 Portuguese production by three members of the WREADING DIGITS collective: Ana Gago, Diogo Marques and João Santa Cruz. The work, in Portuguese only, is free and accessible on any device or computer via the collective's website.¹⁹ The saying "Whoever tells a tale raises a point" is the basis for the combinatorial narrative, inspired by the traditional Portuguese legend of the Witch of Arruda. Each reading experience is different, but the structure of the narrative formulas is maintained. For example, in one reading, the first sentences could be: "A fama da Bruxa de Arruda chegava a todo lado. Um dia, um médico de Valença, não sabendo como havia de tratar a filha de um estranho quebranto [...]" ("The fame of the Witch of Arruda reached everywhere. One day, a doctor from Valença, not knowing how to treat his daughter for a strange ailment [...]"). In another reading: "[...] um médico de Alcochete, não sabendo como havia de tratar a filha de uma torta espinhela [...]" ([...] "a doctor from Alcochete, not knowing how to treat his daughter for a crooked spine [...]"). Joining the ritualistic formulas, a video with a rippling image of a dark water surface and the sound of falling water drops awakes concentration and tranquillity,

16 In English, Early Intervention National Association.

17 Available at <http://luislucaspereira.net/costapinho/> [25 Agosto 2023].

18 In English, "Blond parrot", "The cockroach says it has", "Once upon a time there was a horse", "The chickens are crazy", "Bunny", "Catrina's doves" and "All the ducklings".

19 Available at <https://wreading-digits.com/bruxa/> [24 August 2023].

reinforcing the mystical idea of the Oracle and the magical healing. After each reading, it is possible to instantiate the generated text and share it via e-mail. The work received an Honourable Mention in the 1st Edition of the Bruxa d’Arruda Visual Arts Award, promoted by the Municipality of Arruda dos Vinhos, Portugal.

With text by Carolina Montenegro and visual narrative by Renato Moriconi, “Amal and the most important trip of her life” is a Brazilian literary app released in 2019 by Caixote and developed by Webcore. Using text, narration options, soundtrack, sound effects and some animations, the work was developed with support from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). It tells the story of a 12-year-old Syrian girl who leaves her country alone to escape the war. Her goal is to reach Italy and find her uncle. In her journey she crosses the seas and borders of four countries. The 96-page printed book version created in parallel with the digital version was also exhibited. With original soundtrack (by Arthur de Faria), illustrations and animations, the free app aims to reach as many people as possible as a way of informing and raising awareness of the refugees’ issue. The work, developed with Unity and available for both iOS and Android systems, won first place in the 2020 ComKids Interactive Award in the “digital book” category. There are two versions for the reader to choose from, Portuguese and English, with narration options in both languages, including recordings made by refugees, with their respective accents. The app is free, with one audio in each language. If you want to unlock extra narrations, you can do so by donating to UNHCR. In the “Help” option, you can also make a financial contribution to the cause. The work was presented at the exhibition on two different tablets, one in each language, in version 1.4 – 2020.²⁰

“Song of Bloom (a story in pieces)”, by Philipp Stollenmayer (Kamibox), was released in 2019 on iOS and in 2023 on Android. The German app won, among other awards, the Apple Design Award 2020 and the Deutschen Computerspielpreis 2020 (for best mobile game). According to the developer, the app is available in English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Dutch, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, Spanish, Thai, Chinese, Turkish and Vietnamese. The one made available at the exhibition, downloaded in Portugal (version 1.03 for iOS), had narration only in English and text in Portuguese. The age rating in the app stores is “PEGI 3” – for all age groups – (Google Play) or 12+ (iOS), and it costs €2.49 (Google Play) and US\$1.99 (App Store).²¹

20 Book page on the publisher’s website: <https://www.editoracaixote.com.br/apps-amal-e-a-viagem-mais-importante-da-sua-vida/> [24 August 2023].

21 Official website: <https://www.kamibox.de/songofbloom>. Further information at <https://developer.apple.com/news/?id=q9fq8jkq> [24 August 2023].

It is a narrative in the form of a puzzle, which uses the different potentialities of the digital device, different interaction resources and multi-sensoriality. The user needs to understand the clues provided during the reading and explore the materiality of the device to find out what they need to do to unlock new experiences and reach the end of the narrative. Featuring original music, the app challenges the reader to think of different solutions and act with patience and perspicacity to discover and carry out the necessary actions, such as drawing with their fingers at specific points, arranging pieces in certain ways, shaking the device or – something unusual – even plugging the charging cable. As each challenge is completed, a flower bud blooms on one of the branches of the tree shown on the home page and the reader returns to the beginning of the narrative, now with new clues.²²

Just like “Oralengas”, the two Portuguese episodes of “Inanimate Alice” presented at the exhibition are the result of a project carried out by the University of Coimbra. The translation was made in 2018, in a collaboration between the producers of the original work and a team of Portuguese researchers: Ana Maria Machado, Ana Albuquerque e Aguilár, and António Oliveira. The original work was created by Chris Joseph, Andy Campbell, Ian Harper and Kate Pullinger (BradField Narrative Designs Inc. Production). The first episode, in English, was released in 2005, followed by five more episodes until 2017, and a seventh one, a separated production called “Perpetual Nomads”, made in virtual reality.

“Inanimate Alice” is a digital fiction developed for computers (PC and Mac). It tells the story of a girl called Alice, who travels the world with her parents and dreams of one day becoming a game designer. In the first episode, which takes place in China, she is 8 years old and creates her character Brad, a kind of imaginary digital friend, who always accompanies her. With each new episode, the girl grows up and gets to know new places, while developing new artistic and technical skills. Having been developed over an extended period of time (12 years between the first production and the most recent one), the episodes also reflect the changes in technology and multimodal storytelling, from simple 2D print emulation to fully immersive virtual reality.

With age indication of 10 years and up, the work in English is marketed for individual users and in classroom licenses, accompanied by guidelines and suggestions for teachers. The set of episodes 1 to 5 costs US\$ 19.99 and US\$ 199 (classroom); the sixth episode, US\$ 4.99 or US\$ 49.90; and “Perpetual Nomads”, US\$ 9.99 or US\$ 99.90.²³ In addition to Portuguese, the work has already been translated into Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Indonesian. At the moment, the Portuguese version is only experimental

22 Available at <https://www.kamibox.de/songofbloom> [24 August 2023].

23 To download the episodes in English: <https://inanimatealice.com/> [August 25, 2023].

and non-commercial. At the exhibition, episode 1 and episode 2 were made available on two separate computers.

“Bury me, my Love” (“Enterre-moi, mon amour”), by Pierre Corbinais and Florent Maurin, developed by ARTE France and The Pixel Hunt and Figs, was released in 2017.²⁴ This French work is an interactive fiction based on real events. Developed for mobile phones, it emulates conversations in applications such as Lifeline and WhatsApp. “Bury me, my Love” tells the story of Nour, a refugee who leaves Syria for Europe on a dangerous journey. She stays in touch with her husband, Majd, in his homeland, via smartphone, where they exchange messages, emojis, selfies and other photos (represented there with illustrations). Themes such as love and hope run through the plot, which may present some violence. The title refers to a Syrian phrase used in farewells, which means: “Take care and don’t even think about dying before me!”. The reader’s choices in interacting with Nour interfere with the story, which can lead to 19 possible endings and a journey that can pass through different locations, among the 50 available.

The story can be read in “real time”, when messages and notifications arrive at varying intervals that can last for hours. It is also possible to opt for a faster reading, with no pause between replies. It was the winning app for Best Meaningful Play at the 14th IMGA – International Mobile Gaming Awards and as Best Emotional Mobile & Handheld Game at the Emotional Games Awards 2018. In the same year, it also won the Google Play Indie Games Contest, among other awards.

Suitable for ages 10 to 12 and up, accordingly to Google Play and App Store (some sites classify it as 16+)²⁵, the app sells for €2.99 and has reading options in English, French, Spanish, German and Italian. Although it was designed to be read on smartphones, it can be accessed on other iOS and Android devices and one can also read the prologue for free on desktop computers (in German, French, English or Japanese). As it is a work that requires more time to read, only the prologue was made available at the exhibition, on a computer and an iPhone, which were side by side²⁶, so that the difference in reading between one or another materiality could be seen.

As one can notice, works with a variety of languages, proposals and resources were presented. From poetry and traditional oral texts to novels, from simulations of conversations via messaging apps to animation and combinatory text, from simple interactions to intense use of the materiality

24 To download the app from the developer’s page: <https://www.arte.tv/digitalproductions/en/bury-me-my-love/> [25 August 2023].

25 For example, on the Fuze Forge website: <http://fuzeforge.com.br/wrapper-product-page/life-simulation-management-bury-me-my-love?idCampaign=4338&idRubric=268864&idContent=4029509> [25 August 2023].

26 To access the prologue for free: <https://burymemylove.arte.tv/prologue> [25 August 2023].

of the device, from commercial projects to free and experimental works. Through the presence of “Amal” and “Bury me, my Love”, the theme of ELO 2023, “Overcoming divides: Electronic Literature and Social Change” was highlighted because both apps, inspired by true stories, deal with the crisis of migration caused by war. They seek to humanize the issue and make readers aware of the struggle refugees face in search of freedom and a better life. In the case of “Amal”, the intention is even more explicit, with the use of refugees’ voices in the narrations and the possibility for readers to contribute to the cause by donating to the UNHCR.

Visitors were also given the opportunity to compare materialities and languages, by reading the printed versions that inspired three of the digital works depicted in the exhibition: “Moi j’attends” — Portuguese version, published by Bruaá (Figueira da Foz, 2008); “Un point c’est tout” — French and Spanish versions, published respectively by Milan (Toulouse, 2017) and Combel (Barcelona, 2018); and “Amal” — in Portuguese, published by Caixote (São Paulo, 2019). The books were available next to the devices that showed the digital piece. In the centre of the room, a space covered in rubber mats was set up, where small tables were placed with papers, coloured pencils, crayons, blunt scissors and metallic tacks. In this workshop space, children could paint, cut out and assemble an articulated animal, based on the work “Un point c’est tout” (FIG. 2). This set of activities and proposals inspired the name of the exhibition: “Read, Imagine, Play”.



Fig. 2: Children reading the printed book “Eu espero”; a boy reading the app “Amal”, with the book next to him; detail of the workshop based on “Un Point c’est tout” and table with the app and books in French and Spanish. Photos by Jaqueline Conte

In addition to the curators, three trained volunteers took turns assisting readers during the three days of the exhibition, always in pairs, to guide visitors and organize the workshop activities. As a precaution, these monitors also had to sanitize the headsets and devices frequently to avoid possible contamination²⁷. To make reading easier, the computers and mobile devices were organized on tables in a large room, arranged so that the works most suitable for children were on one side of the room and those most suitable for teenagers on the other. The power points had to be close by and with enough extension cords to charge the equipment (this was usually done between exhibition shifts). At each table there was a chair, a device with its headphones, labelled with the name of the work (so that it could be easily identified if a child took the device to another table) and a printed sheet with the title, synopsis and all the technical information about that work.

At the entrance door, a TV monitor looped a video with information about the exhibition and the works, alternating between Portuguese and English versions.²⁸ To record the memory of the event, a Book of Attendance was also placed at the entrance.

There is no way of knowing the exact number of visitors the “Read, Imagine, Play” exhibition had over its three days, since not everyone registered their visit. However, 122 people from 14 countries signed the Book of Attendance, an extremely significant number, according to the curators’ evaluation. Also, the wide age range of the visitors, as well as their connection to electronic literature — from people who discovered it for the first time to worldly renowned experts — was considered very positive (FIG. 3 and 4).

Having been held during the school summer vacations, and despite the event being publicized by the press and other institutional channels, the exhibition was only able to reach the desired external audience thanks to partnerships. The main one was with the Exploratorium – Centro Ciência Viva. As well as receiving a good flow of spontaneous visitors, especially families and educators, this public facility receives groups of children and adolescents during the vacations for its “Science doesn’t go on vacation” program and for the Coimbra City Council’s school vacation program. Thus, in addition to families of visitors, the Exhibition received six organized groups, each one with 10 to 12 children aged 6 to 12, accompanied by monitors from the Exploratorium itself.

Another partnership was with the Centre for Portuguese Literature of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra, which was holding its

27 Health practice “inherited” from the preventive protocols of the COVID 19 pandemic (2020).

28 The two versions of the video are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ho0WdLmytY> (English), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-t-GqzZQy0k> (Portuguese) [23 August 2023].

Summer School courses at the same time. One of them, “Narrative Studies for the Formation of Reading Competence”, was taught by Gabriela Mendes and Ana Albuquerque Aguilar. One of the course’s four classes was held on July 15 at the Exploratorium, with a guided tour through the exhibition, reflection on the works, and discussion on their pedagogical potential.

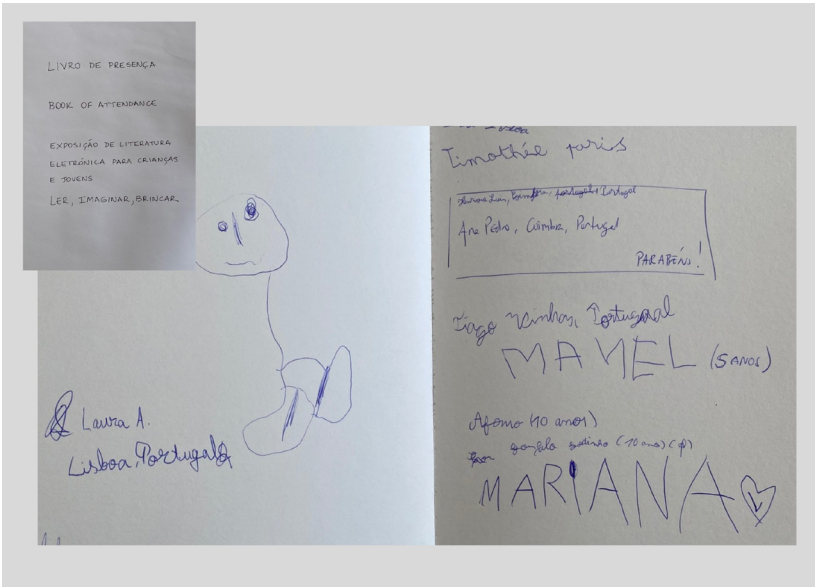


Fig. 3: Details of the Book of Attendance. Photos by Jaqueline Conte



Fig. 4: The exhibition’s audience: teachers, children, teenagers and ELO participants. Photos by Jaqueline Conte and Ana Albuquerque e Aguilar

As the event took place in the context of ELO Conference Coimbra 2023 and was part of the official programme, the exhibition welcomed the conference participants on its opening day, the afternoon of July 13. Two buses with around 60 people interested in electronic literature, either academically or artistically, came from the main ELO event venue, the Convento São Francisco, to the Exploratorium, to see the exhibition of children’s and young people’s digital works.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN PRESENTING WORKS OF DIGITAL LITERATURE

Following on from the above, we now point out some fundamental issues for reflection by those who intend to work with digital children’s literature, in exhibitions, shows or even courses and lectures.

Audience and organization

As with any activity related to literature, it is necessary to define the audience you want to reach, in order to select the works, choose and treat the location and make the productions available, as well as for publicizing the event and organizing the visits. It is important to estimate the number of children you will be receiving at the same time, as well as their ages, in order to facilitate the flow by arranging the devices/works according to age groups (FIG. 5). Depending on the number of children, their interests and the number of works, not all of them will be able to interact with all the productions available. And that’s not a problem, *a priori*. In order to guide the readers and also avoid possible damage to the devices due to unexpected movements (children can move the works around unnecessarily), it is always advisable to have a compatible number of volunteer monitors. They have to be previously instructed in the processes and trained so that they know the works well. It is also important to have tables and devices labelled with the title of each production. Good publicity — broad but also targeted — and prior partnerships with schools or other institutions can guarantee a desirable audience, regardless of the spontaneous flow. Digital literature does not usually arouse a natural interest among the general public, possibly due to a lack of knowledge about the subject.

Each digital work runs on a device (tablet, smartphone or computer), which needs its own charger or power source. It is important to check the power points in the room and whether there is a need for power strips or extension cables. Also, when there are many devices from different systems, it is advisable to identify the cables so that they can be accessed quickly. It

is worth remembering that some devices have a single input for headphones and chargers, so it is necessary to allow for charging breaks (preferably during lunch breaks and overnight in the case of events lasting more than one day).



Fig. 5: Views of the room, with the wall where the work suitable for young children has been placed and the workshop space. Photos by Jaqueline Conte

The screen lock time on devices should be increased or disabled, so that there is no need to unlock them all the time. If possible, the need for a password to unlock should be disabled. If not, one needs to make sure that all monitor volunteers know the password and can unlock any device quickly.

Most of the works cannot be fully explored in a few minutes. Some require hours or even days (such as “Bury me, my Love”). Moreover, children often linger over the complementary drawing and interaction activities offered by some productions. The aim of these exhibitions is therefore to give an overview of the possibilities and different proposals. Thus, for the flow of an exhibition with many visitors, it is often necessary to invite the child to try another work, for them to experiment different aesthetics.²⁹

²⁹ Reading practices in electronic literature are different from those related to printed literature. In print, reading speed can at least be estimated according to the number of pages and the reader’s expertise. In digital literature, this time varies according to multiple factors, including the variety of media and resources used (an app can offer, for example, the possibility of listening to the narration in audio, of recording the narration itself or of the reader just reading the text mentally. Each of these

Headphones facilitate the reader’s immersion. For this reason, and to avoid noise in the exhibition room, it is advisable that all devices have external headphones (not those that are inserted into the ear cavity) frequently sanitized. Computers, tablets or smartphones also need to be cleaned and sanitized, not least because they quickly get fingerprints on their screens. As headphones are for individual use, in the case of many visitors at the same time, it is sometimes necessary to gather two or three children around the same work — taking turns to interact — and dispense with the use of the headphones. In this case, it is worthwhile to do this with works that are at a certain distance from each other, with the others remaining with the equipment for individual use.

Once a reader has manipulated a work, it is necessary to return to the initial interface or reset progress (as in the case of “Song of Bloom”, for example, whose clues influence the progress of the reading journey), so that the next reader can start their own experience³⁰. Each work has a specific way or place to do this, and the monitors have to know how to do it quickly.

Most literary apps, once downloaded, do not require internet access for reading. However, some invite the readers to search the web for information, and therefore, require internet connection. So, it is crucial to know the app and the connection quality of the exhibition room. If the connection is not good, it is not recommended to have a large number of these apps. In the “Read, Imagine, Play” exhibition, some productions were not selected for this reason and precautions were taken with regard to a specific app, “Amal”. In this case, two different devices were available for reading, so that one would display the work in English and another in Portuguese. As the narrative is long (as are the audios), switching between languages slowed down the reading process. Besides that, sometimes the audio took too long to load and the app crashed, because the internet did not always work as fast as needed at a specific place in the exhibition room (the wall furthest from the door, where the apps aimed at young people were located). With two devices available, the problem was minimized, and the offer expanded. Portuguese speakers used one version and non-Portuguese speakers used the English version.

options — or all of them combined — changes the reading time); the number of routes available in a hypertextual or interactive reading, for example; whether there are games to explore, in addition to the main narrative; the reader’s digital literacy (whether and how easily they know how to interact with the story); the speed of the user’s connection (in the case of works that depend on the internet), etc.

30 Moreover, the whole experience with children and young adults’ digital literature challenges their print literature reading skills, creating new horizons for literature reception. The length of time they need to understand how to read this new art form is an excellent pedagogical exercise to interact critically with the digital world.

It is also important to emphasize the care that must be taken with the evanescence of the works³¹. Even if the productions have been chosen in advance, they need to be downloaded onto the very device that will be used in the exhibition, at the risk of the work eventually being removed from the app store due to an update not carried out by the producers, for example. This is what happened at the exhibition with the app “Crianceiras” on the Android version, which made it compulsory to download it on an iPad in order to secure the use of the work. This usually happens when an operating system is updated (new versions of Android and iOS). Yet, it is also possible that a work that had already been downloaded would suddenly start displaying errors due to an unpatched bug. It is therefore always necessary to download and to carefully test apps in advance, and also on the eve and on the day of the event, always having other options of works to show, just in case.

Choosing the works

We discussed earlier how the works for the exhibition were chosen, taking into account aesthetic perceptions, themes, material and technical-operational limitations. It is worth noting, however, that it is not always easy for both untrained people and experts to search for digital literary works. In app stores, for example, even the classification of works makes the search difficult. Having different proposals and resources, productions with narrative features have different labels. Some are classified in the “Books” category, but many appear in the “Education” category (as is the case of “Crianceiras”), games (such as “Bury me, my Love”) and even “Puzzle” (“Song of Bloom”). That is why, besides trying your luck searching for random indications in app stores, digital libraries and on the internet, it is interesting to look for new productions from companies that have already presented good works (some examples are the publishers and companies that produced works already mentioned here, such as the Brazilian ones Caixote and Webcore — and also StoryMax³²); to pay attention to awards in the field (e.g.: Bologna Ragazzi Crossmedia Award³³, Festival comKids Interativo,³⁴ etc.); to consider the indications in scientific essays that discuss Digital Literature for Children (DLC); and to electronic literature selections

31 See Conte, 2020 and 2023.

32 Important company producing literary apps in Brazil, winner of relevant prizes in the field: <https://www.storymax.me/> [25 August 2023].

33 See <https://www.bolognachildrensbookfair.com/en/awards/bolognaragazzi-crossmedia-award/10693.html> [25 August 2024].

34 See <https://www.comkids.com.br/> [25 August 2023].

such as those from previous exhibitions³⁵ organised for ELO Conferences.³⁶ But having mapped out the productions for prior reading, how do we select the best children’s works beyond personal criteria?

Thus, we present some material that could be useful for parents, teachers and reading mediators who are not familiar with the subject but want to explore children’s digital literature. Developing a consultancy project with the participation of external experts³⁷, researchers Aline Frederico (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) and Giselly Lima de Moraes (Federal University of Bahia) designed two criteria matrices: one for evaluating and selecting works of Digital Literature for Children and another one for making DLC (Frederico & Moraes, 2023), taking into account aesthetic aspects, quality of technical execution and access security.

We will focus here on briefly presenting only the first matrix³⁸, which aims to help reading mediators get to know digital children’s literature

35 E-lit works for children and young people in previous ELO Exhibitions:

2021 (online) – *Walden* (Tracy Fullerton and the USCAGame Innovation Lab, 2016); *Florence* (Mountains Studio, 2018); *Luna* (Robin Hunicke, Martin Middleton + Funomena, 2017); *Paperbark* (Paper House, 2018); *Perpetual Nomads 360* (Mez Breeze and Co, 2017); *But You Seem Fine* (KJAM, 2019); *Mortimer and the Dinosaurs* (David Rodríguez + Màriam Ben-Arab, 2016); *¿Amigos?* (Charlotte Gastaut, 2017); *When Rivers Were Trails* (Indian Land Tenure Foundation + Michigan State U, 2019); *Mud Warriors* (Ryan Veeder, 2020); *Tengami* (Nyamyam, 2014); *Sky: Children of light* (Thatgamestudio, 2019); *Tong Jyun* (npckc and sdhizumi, 2021); *Under a Star Called Sun* (Cecile Richard, 2020); *Ya apaga esa tableta* (ochogallows, 2013); *Mi robot lunático* (María Goicoechea, 2020); *The Land Down Under* (The Marino Family, 2020).

2017, Porto (Portugal) – *Switcheroo/El cambiao* (The Marino Family & María Goicoechea, 2015-17); *The Sailor’s Dream* (Simogo, 2014); *Metamorphabet* (Patrick Smith / Vectorpark, 2015); *Árbol con patas* (José Alfonso Ochoa Aguilar, 2013); *80 Days* (Inkle Studios, 2014); *Inanimate Alice Episode 6: The Last Gas Station*, (Kate Pullinger, Chris Joseph, Mez Breeze – The BradField Company / Dreaming Methods, 2016); *Lil’ Red* (Brian Main, 2013); *Flewn* (Gabriel Smetzer, 2016); *Spot* (David Wiesner, 2015); *Boum!* (Les inéditeurs, 2015); *Ten* (Stella-Charles Fisher, 2017); *Snapchat elit* (Harriet Fisher, 2017); *Augmented beasts: AR pop-up book* (Wallace Edwards, 2017); *Poemas de Brinquedo/Toy Poems* (Álvaro Andrade Garcia, 2016).

2015, Bergen (Norway) – *Alla barns rätt* (Pernilla Stalfelt, Spinfy, 2010); *Jakob og Neikob* (Kari Stai, 2011); *Kubbe Lager Skyggeteater* (Åshild Kanstad Johnsen, 2015); *Moomin, Mymble and Little My* (Tove Jansson, Spinfy, 2013); *Mrs. Wobbles and the Tangerine House: The Mysterious Floor* (Mark C. Marino, Marino Family, 2013); *My Own Alphabet* (Aleatory Funkhouser, 2015); *Poetracking* (Baptiste Ingrand, Florine Morestin, Jorge Andrés Gómez, 2014); *Taro at the Center of the Earth* (Timo Parvela, 2010); *Tavs* (Camilla Hübbe, 2013); *The Computer Wore Heels* (LeAnn Erickson, 2014); *The Sailor’s Dream* (Simon Flessner, Magnus “Gordon” Gardebäck, 2014); *The Tower of Jezik* (Ana Abril, Mario Aznar, Émilie Barbier, Leja Hočevár, Luis Javier Pisonero, 2014); *Typomatic* (Pierre Fourny, Guillaume Jacquemin, Serge Bouchardon, Luc Dall Armellina, Hélène Caubel, 2015); *Wuwu & Co/* English translation (Merete Pryds Helle, Tim Garbos, Kamila Slocinska, Aksel Kjøie, 2014).

36 Another possibility is the sites that make critical reviews, such as “Common Sense Media” (in the “Apps” category, you may choose only the option “Books”): <https://www.commonensemedia.org/> [August 31, 2023]. See also <https://www.commonensemedia.org/lists/best-book-apps-for-kids-and-teens>.

37 Jaqueline Conte (University of Coimbra), one of the curators of the “Read Imagine, Play” Exhibition, and Mônica Daisy Vieira Araújo (Federal University of Minas Gerais). This work was funded by Itaú Social.

38 Available at <https://www.itausocial.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Leia-para-uma-Crianc%CC%A7a-Matriz-de-criterios-Literatura-Infantil-Digital.pdf> [25 August 2024].

and look at it critically, “enabling them to select quality works and helping readers to access, enjoy and value this art form, according to their own criteria, based on personal taste, but knowing as much as possible about the aesthetic possibilities of current works.”³⁹ (Frederico & Moraes, 2022: 9-10) As these guidelines emphasize, this is not a set of rules to be strictly followed, but just a reference that, by drawing attention to some dimensions and parameters, helps readers to analyse productions and build their own selection criteria.

The first dimension is literary quality, which includes among the parameters of analysis: the aesthetic experience (perceiving the creative use of multimedia resources for an interactive and playful reading experience); the presence of multimodality — image, verbal language, sound, gestures; interactivity; the integration (or not) of game elements; poetic language; narrative; treatment of the theme; extra content; personalization.

The second dimension is quality of access, security and transparency, which includes transparency of information about the production, authorship, the system of acquisitions (demo, freemium, premium, sale in chapters, etc.), security policy, privacy and advertising.

The third one is the quality of execution, thinking about the full functioning of multimedia and interactive elements, interface design, loading speed and ergonomics, taking into account the child’s body.

The document also includes a glossary with the main terms related to digital literature and its access. Although very short, this matrix is an interesting reference for a more grounded reflection on children’s digital productions.

FINAL REMARKS

It is important to acknowledge that, unlike printed books, digital literary objects are resources that intrinsically depend on the physical materiality of the electronic devices to which they are linked on a complex production, distribution and updating network. In this article, we have tried to present the experience of the “Kids e-Lit Exhibition: Read, Imagine, Play” in an almost didactic way, so that it is possible to understand the nuances of the whole process. Thus, the memory of the event and its construction process is recorded, which can be of particular help to those who intend to hold similar exhibitions and shows, as well as classes and debates on the subject.

Despite the challenges and the intense work involved in the whole process, we believe that digital children’s literature, if chosen carefully,

39 Translated from Portuguese.

is a powerful tool for engaging children and young people with literary narratives and poetry. We were particularly moved by the reception of this exhibition by children and teenagers, who verbally expressed to the curators, to the guides, and to their parents that they wanted to spend more time in the room in order to experiment with all the works and activities⁴⁰.

Digital children's literature fosters new reading practices and unveils a new poetics, expanding the literary repertoire of this audience and reinforcing multimodal literacy, an important skill in the digital era. To bring children's electronic literature to public (and unexpected) places is a way to democratize the access and to amplify the artistic and literary experience of these readers.

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40 Children who visited the exhibition in groups stayed for around 30 minutes. It was visible that children under the age of 10 tended to manipulate the devices in search of the quick answers that are typical of digital games. The need to educate for a different reading paradigm and a pace that can be much slower was very noticeable. When there were teenage visitors, they tended to linger longer and try to complete their reading.

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