IPAD AS A PLATFORM FOR LITERATURE

Final Assignment in Dikult303: Digital Media Aesthetics

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CONTENT

1 IPAD AS A PLATFORM FOR LITERATURE

Ever since Kay and Goldbergs vision of the *Dynabook*; a portable computer with long battery life, there has been a steady development of digital reading tablets. Some will claim that the speed of the development has been slow. When the iPad was launched, many thought that this could be a new era for the digital book: "[The iPad] has the potential to transform the experience of reading" (Roush 2011) because of its rich multimedia capabilities. To explore this transformational claim, I have studied a scope[1] of different applications for the iOS. Although there are several different types of reading tablets on the market, the focus in this paper is on the iPad because it is still the best-selling tablet[2]. What are special for the iPad in comparison to e.g. the Kindle are the multimedia possibilities. Applications have more room for experimenting with multimedia than a publication through EPUB 3.0[3] or similar formats, which are why the works of literature in this paper are applications, bought via iTunes Store and not e-books bought via e.g. iBooks.

Literature is defined as "writings in which expression and form, in connection with ideas of permanent and universal interest, are characteristic or essential features, as poetry, novels, history, biography, and essays" by Dictionary.com (2013). An aspect important to any literary encounter is the experience of immersion into a world constructed by ideas and associations. My analysis of the literary applications shows that it is not the number of multimedia aspects used, that decides how immersed a reader becomes into the work – the importance is on how well integrated these aspects are into the overall idea of the story.

2 IMMERSION

Because the medium is not the same, there is a difference between reading in a traditional printed book and reading a digital document. Moreover, distance to the device one is reading from has significance to how the text is experienced (a computer screen versus a book / an iPad which you can hold in your hands). "When reading digital texts, our haptic interaction with the text is experienced as taking place at an indeterminate distance from the actual text, whereas when reading print text we are physically and phenomenologically (and literally) in touch with the material substrate

of the text itself" (Mangen 2008). Consequently, to read from an iPad will not give the same experience as reading from a book. This will also affect the degree of the reader's immersion.

Mangen explains two types of immersion. One is the technological immersion one can experience in for example computer games. The player is then immersed into a fictional and virtual world "which is to a large extent created and sustained by the technological features and material devices involved in its display" (Mangen 2008). The other type of immersion, she calls a phenomenological one. Here one is immersed into a fictional world which is largely "the product of our own mental, cognitive, abilities to create that fictive [...] world from the symbolic representations: the text". This type of immersion is one that has always been important for a literary experience, and is therefore an important aspect to look for in an analysis of the literary applications for the iPad. Mangen suggests that the physical and technical features of the material should ideally be transparent in order to facilitate, and not disturb, this immersion (2008). Subsequently, the literary applications need to use the multimedia possibilities in a way that does not overshadow the content in a way that puts more emphasis on the medium than the content itself. Imagination and fantasy creates this type of phenomenological presence in a fictional world, but it seems more difficult to obtain this presence from reading digital texts: "digital technology is made for technological immersion whereas it seems less compatible with phenomenological immersion" (Mangen 2008).

Whenever a page or screenview do not sufficiently hold the reader's attention, new stimuli are only a click away. In contrast the book is static and fixed and does not provide us with options for attentional switching and for autostimulating our attentional response (Mangen 2008). Do some of the literary applications hold our attention long enough to create phenomenological immersion? To study this, I explored today's market for "iPad literature".

3 THE MARKET FOR LITERATURE ON IPAD TODAY

A reader will find a lot of different literature in the iTunes Store. The span ranges from graphic novels to letterist poetry. The applications are referencing a broad scope of

literature, from "choose your own adventure"-books to the more Oulipo-inspired works. Still, many of the applications cling to a way of portraying text similar to the traditional printed book. One commentator put it this way: "[W]hy, if you're doing all you can to disrupt the notion of what a book entails, do you require readers to "turn the page"?" (Watters 2011). The design of the printed book came out of limits in that medium: bookbinding and printing. An iPad is a different medium, with its own limits and possibilities, "a **new medium**, not an amendment to an existing one. Or at least that's how it should be" (Bjoran 2011). The book is a technology that has had hundreds of years to mature. Therefore, it seems reasonable that it takes time to figure out a new platform's strengths.

I have chosen 26 applications that seem to represent the variations in literary applications for iPad today (spring 2013). It is a collection of both fiction and non-fiction work. *Attachment 1* and *2* is a visualization of the applications. It shows the linkages between the works and in what year they are published, in which genre and language they are written, and by which author. A table of this information is found in *attachment 3*. Looking at the clusters in the visualization, they indicate that most of the applications are published in 2012, in English and most of them are in the poetry genre. These three (2012, English and poetry) are the largest clusters in the figure.

What can make a literary application different from a more traditional e-book, is the use of the multimodal possibilities. The table in *attachment 4* shows the applications' use of iPad specific aspects. The aspects I have chosen to include are: Wi-Fi, GPS, motion sensitivity, camera, video, audio, microphone, locked reading position, static illustrations, multiple ways of reading, motion graphics and all the different gestures one can use on the iPad. *Our Choice* is the application that uses most of the aspects, in this selection of works. It is the only application that uses the microphone that is built into the iPad. The application was published in 2011, as one of the earliest in the sample. Subsequently, it does not seem like more media specific aspects are incorporated into the applications as time goes by. This may suggest a possible of two things: A) It is complicated and expensive to make such applications and/or B) A large number of media specific aspects are no guarantee for a good result.

Our Choice has gotten a lot of praise. By the critics, it has been said to set a new bar in digital publishing[4]. The design choices made is said by some to have "privileged

the message over the medium" at every point (Roush 2011). The application is also claimed to have *re-imagined* the book, "a digital reading experience that matches a book for ease and outdoes it in ways that Gutenberg surely never imagined" (Lee 2011). Others claim that all the technical finesses drown the actual text itself. Perhaps because of all the stimuli they bring, it becomes more difficult to experience the phenomenological immersion Mangen is referring to. The video, photographs and infographic can enlighten and bring about knowledge, but to find what can cause phenomenological immersion on the iPad, one is bound to look elsewhere than fancy infographics. So, how can one enhance a literary experience on the iPad?

Analyzing these 26 applications suggests that the struggle in making good literary applications is to find out how to use the media specific aspects in a way that enhances the literary expression, without overstating the content or clubbing the text down.

The 26 applications could be categorized into mainly four categories[5], although the boundaries between them may be slightly blurred:

Enhanced versions of old classics

Old classics get a revival on the iPad, enhanced with extra content such as author interviews, notes, earlier version of the text and audio with the author or e.g. an actor reading. Examples of such applications are *The Waste Land* (figure 1) and *On the Road*.
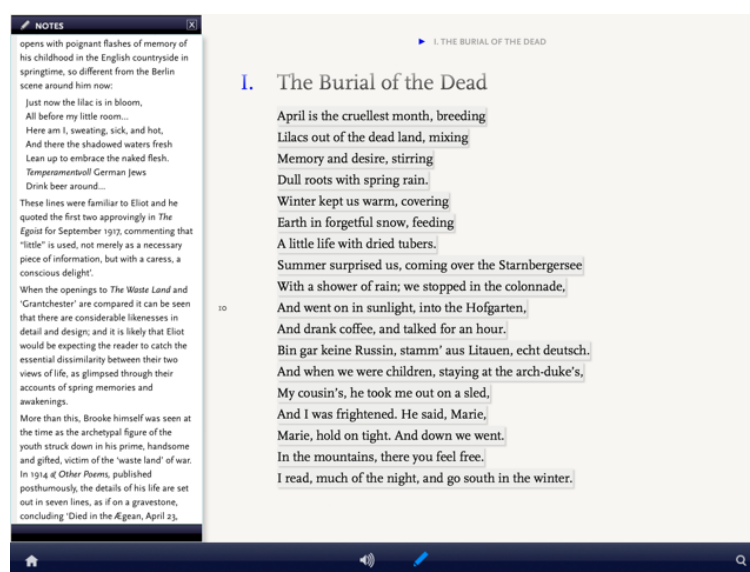

*Figure 1: Screenshot from The Waste Land*

One could argue that this creates "a new way of reading" since the background information is enlarged. Wade Roush (2011) explains that this can be used to "make a book's core textual content much more interesting and memorable." On the other side, the text is the original and it is not the piece of literature itself that is enhanced with the extra content. The extra content is mostly a helpful tool to study and analyze the text. Thus, the medium which it is portrayed through (the iPad) is not used in order to get the reader more phenomenological immersed into the text.

Another application that could be placed in this category is *Composition No. 1*. The application is based on a little known classic by Marc Saporta about a group of Parisians and their interconnected stories. *Composition No. 1* lets the reader shuffle through independent pages and choose his or her own order to read the book. It is difficult to hold the page stationary for the time needed to read it through; the text is literally trying to escape from under the reader's fingers. This is disrupting a phenomenological immersion. However, it is done deliberately and is using the qualities of the medium to portray the text in this way.

The writers behind these books are dead, and so others (programmers) are making the applications. This can explain why the text itself, in the enhanced versions, is not linked more tightly to the possibilities of the medium itself. In the next category, the text has a closer link to the medium, and this may be because the authors are being more than just authors. They are *designing* a *work*, instead of merely writing traditional text:

E-literature

Applications like *Smooth Second Bastard* and *Touchwords* are referencing an e-literary tradition, as well as a Dadaistic approach to literature. In *Touchwords* each gesture makes words appear (Figure 2), using the touch interface directly to create the text itself.
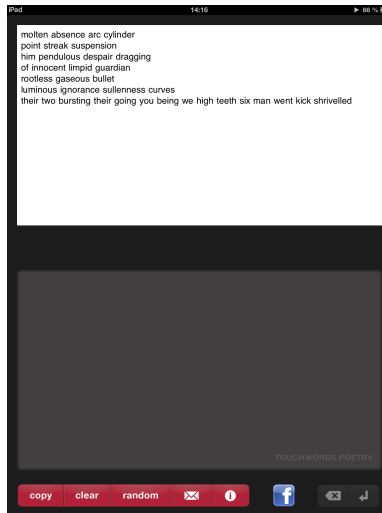
Figur 2: Screenshot from Touchwords

Smooth Second Bastard, as well as *The Great Migration* and *Buzz Aldrin Doesn't Know Any Better* by the same author, are applications that creates a space for immersion – both technological and phenomenological. For instance *The Great Migration* has a limited number of interactions possible, and closes the reader into the work. Every action the reader takes is attached to the evolving of the poem (the text itself). The fishes with word tails can flee or the reader can catch them and "squeeze" words out of them. Instead of wanting the next new stimuli elsewhere, one gets stimuli by immersing oneself into the work with interaction. Hence, the technological and phenomenological immersion complements each other.
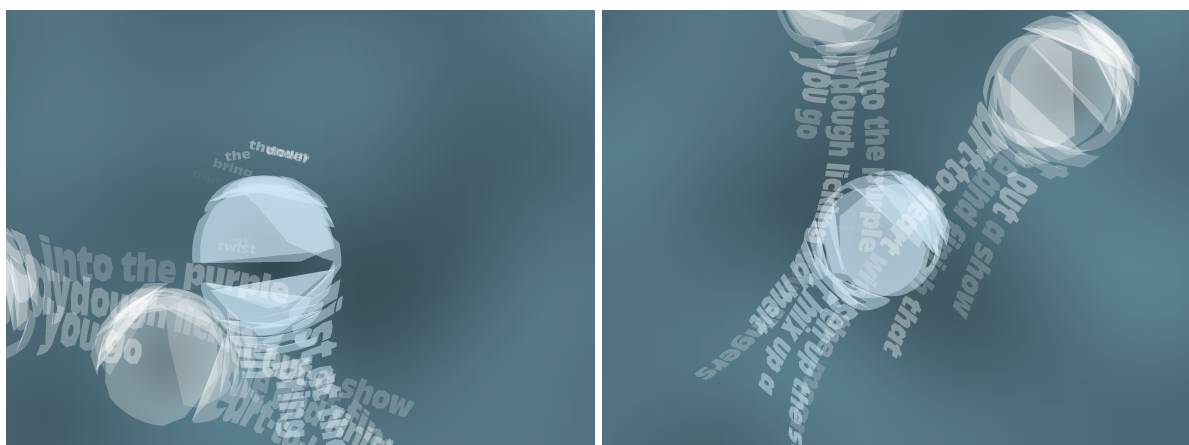

Figure 3: Screenshots from The Great Migration *by Jason Edward Lewis*

Konsonant is a work of e-literature for the iPad that makes sound poetry. Here again the reader takes part in building the text, and the work is exploring new ways of working with letters and literature. The immersion one finds here is similar to what one can experience while reading poetry.

Under this category, the authors have an interest and knowledge about the medium not just literature in itself. E.g. Erik Loyer being an interactive designer, Jörg Piringer has a master degree in computer science, Jason Edward Lewis is a Software designer and Jody Zellen a web designer. Indeed, this is clearly shaping the works in a different way than how the programmers are shaping the reading experience in the enhanced classics. However, the *Composition Nr. 1* is a work that could have been in both categories, because of its inventive use of telling the book by Marc Saporta.

Hybrids

A lot of the applications are experimenting with the border between the setup of a traditional book (e-books) and what can come to be the digital book. Here the numbers of media specific aspects in use (hereafter referred to as: msa) are ranging from Al Gore's *Our Choice* with 15 msa to *Stjernetime* with 4 msa. Both are quite traditional in one sense. *Our Choice is* designed as a non-fiction book with explaining illustrations. The text is static, set up in paragraphs as in a magazine. The high number of msa is a result of the explaining illustrations. *Stjernetime* is a short story, told one slide at a time. The amount of text on each slide is not the same and the illustrations are simple. The *hybrids* have often a fundament in the traditional ways of writing, and tweak them a little to fit and work with this new platform.

These works are often collaborations between a writer and other artists and programmers. E.g. Stjernetime is written by Merete Pryds Helle (a writer) and illustrated by Anne Marie Ploug (an illustrator). Combining these two artists creates a new way of testing and experimenting with the medium, different from the above categories. Perhaps more similar to the next:

Graphic novels

It exists a lot of different graphic novel applications in the iTunes Store. Many of them are applications in which you can buy graphic novels that are mostly static. However, there are coming more and more graphic novels that are exploring more of the

possibilities in the medium. *Upgrade Soul* and *Bottom of the 9th* are examples of such. They are incorporating different media aspects (audio, video, gestures) to build the visual world and story. The table in attachment 4 shows that these graphic novels have an average number of media specific aspects in use (8 and 9). Under the next subchapter, I will explore these two works in order to find what will be important aspects in bringing a phenomenological immersion in these.

4   FINDING PHENOMENOLOGICAL IMMERSION

To find out more about the literary experience of phenomenological immersion on the iPad, I have studied closely four of the applications. Two pairs – the first with a low amount of msa, the other with a high amount. The analysis suggests that it is not the number of msa that is important for such immersion; it is how the different aspects are fitted together. I will argue that *Upgrade Soul* and *Stjernetime* manage to use the aspects to create a whole that is immersive, whereas *Bottom of 9th* and *Choice of Games* are using aspects which battles each other, and therefore makes the reader aware of the medium instead of being immersed into the story.

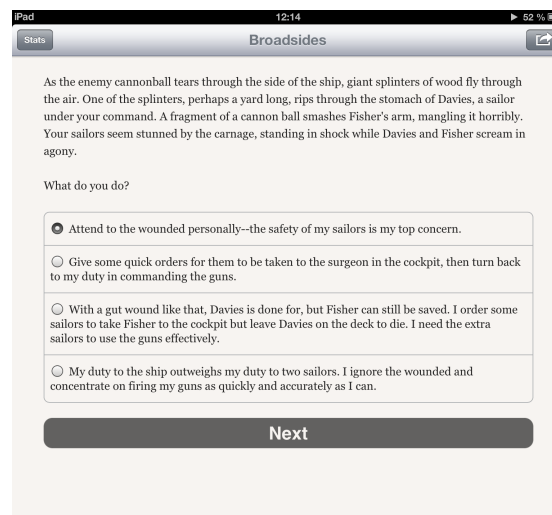*Figure 4: Screenshot from Choice of Games*

Choice of Games (5 msa) are a number of applications based on the concept "Choose your own adventure"[6]. The reader has many choices to make, and does so by choosing from a list (figure 4) before pressing *Next*. This type of reading resembles the hypertexts of the early e-literature works. In these works the *Next*-click is important,

and can be a hinder for phenomenological immersion. According to Anne Mangen it is "incompatible with phenomenological immersion" (2008). The option to change and make decision can overshadow the story in itself, and the reader can end up clicking without reading the story. Ben Shaul writes it this way: "[T]he behavioral option is restlessly often activated, resulting in the user/viewer being neither here nor there" (2004, 157). This is a result of the possibility to click, because our attention is then already partly directed towards our intent to click, instead of being fully directed towards the content of the text itself and hence "the potentially immersive impact of the narrative fiction" (Mangen 2008).

What then is the difference between clicking in a *Choice of Games*-application compared to *Stjernetime* (4 msa)? Both require a tap (or swipe) on the screen to get to the next slide.

In *Stjernetime* the action in the narrative is not connected to the gesture itself. There are no visible clues for where to click. What happens when the reader click is nothing more than what happens when turning a page. For the next slide to be interesting, it is essential to have read the slide before. Whereas in the *Choice of Games*-applications, the choosing is intriguing in itself and can therefore take focus from the story as a whole.

Figure 5: Screenshot from Stjernetime

Another difference between the two is that *Stjernetime* has striking visuals (figure 5). The illustrations are simple and geometrical with small, almost imperceptible changes in the colors as time goes by. There is a continuation of the illustrations from one slide to the next, subtly binding the frames together. The simplicity of the illustrations correlates well with how the language is short and effective. In this application the visuals are strengthening the text and the text is strengthening the visuals. "The word and the image are in permanent tension with the "thing" they describe without ever meeting it" (Saemmer 2010). *Stjernetime* uses this tension between the word and the image in a thoughtful way, and creates a space for the reader's own fantasy by keeping the illustrations abstract and simple. In this application the platform does not become a hinder for immersion, neither does the visuals. They are combined in a way that complements each other. In contrast is the interface of *Choice of Games*. A reader's attention is easily distracted by the table of choices (figure 4), and the table thus highlights the possible action of clicking.
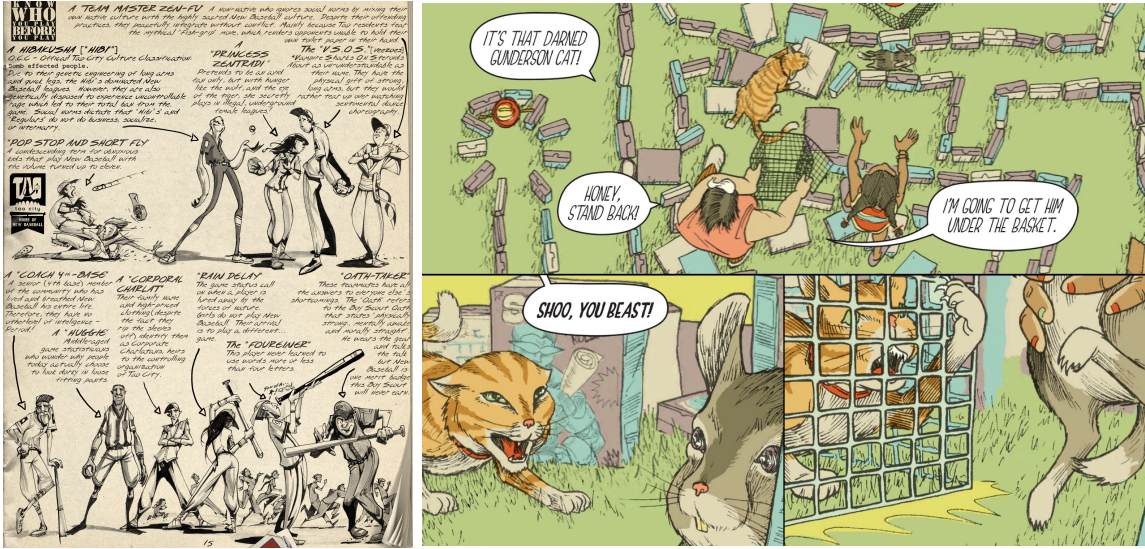
Figure 6: Screenshot from Bottom of 9th (left) and Upgrade Soul (right)

In both *Upgrade Soul* (8 msa) and *Bottom of 9th* (9 msa) the visuals are a key feature. They are graphic novels, taking into account the medium by using aspects like the motion sensitivity (*Upgrade Soul*) and video (*Bottom of 9th*). As shown in figure 6 they look different. *Bottom of 9th* is more similar to a traditional cartoon and can feel a bit crowded information wise, by comparison to *Upgrade Soul* the frames appear one at a

time and has a maximum of four frames on the screen together. In *Upgrade Soul* the frames appear at the stroke of one's finger, one by one, effectively guides the reading, because one cannot see more frames than how far one have gotten into the story. This forces the reader to focus on each frame, since he/she can only see one at a time. In *Bottom of 9th* one can get lost when first seeing a new page with lots of information, as in figure 6 (left screenshot). It is not possible to zoom in on the text. This creates a friction that makes phenomenological immersion difficult.

Although *Upgrade Soul* uses a lot of movie like ways of telling the story (with the sound, the shift in perspective and the organic feeling that comes from the use of the motion sensitivity), there are no video sequences in the application, whereas *Bottom of 9th* has video sequences inside many frames. What are the videos adding? In reality, not so much. One video shows a car driving downhill, where the static frame already had shown a car driving. Readers automatically fill in the open space between frames with his or her own imagination, as Scott McCloud writes about in his book *Understanding Comics* (1994). When a drawing shows what seems to be a moving car, and the next frame supports this thought, the reader does not need a video to show that. The problem with the videos in *Bottom of 9th* is that they are not telling anything more than what is already told by the still drawings. Furthermore, they are disrupting the reading pace and the illusion of being *there*, as in a phenomenological immersion.

Figure 7: Turning a page in Bottom of 9th

Lastly, the tapping for the next frame in these two applications has been solved in different ways. In *Bottom of 9th* it is very similar to turning a page: Down in the right

corner you swipe to get to the next page (figure 7). Meanwhile, in *Upgrade Soul*, the swiping to a new frame becomes a part of the story itself – especially at one point where the word balloon says: "please tap your finger once if you understand me" (figure 8). To get to the next frame, the reader has to tap his or her finger. In this way the reader becomes a part of the story. This is in sharp contrast to the *Choice of Games*-application, where the gesture of pressing the *Next*-button is completely separated from the content and text itself and thus hinders the phenomenological immersion.

Figure 8: Screenshot from Upgrade Soul

As a result, this analysis shows that phenomenological immersion is not dependent on more or less media specific aspects used, but on how well these aspects are incorporated into the whole experience of the story. When the different aspects are struggling with each other, like in *Bottom of 9th*, it creates a frustration that breaks the illusion.

5 CONCLUSION

Today's literary applications for the iPad show a wide array of different ways to use the platform, from the enhanced classics to movie-like graphic novels. From my analysis, I have found some important aspects to consider, in order to create a possibility for phenomenological immersion. Firstly, it is important to *not* create attention grabbers that pull the reader's attention away from what is being told. Secondly, the aspects used to enhance the story need to add value to the content; not just illustrate what has already been communicated by other means. Thirdly, one should consider what is enhancing phenomenological immersion as well as being critical to what will disrupt it. Lastly, the main idea and the text need to have a special position in the work, in order to bring about literary immersion and experience.

6 References

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8 Notes

[1] The studied literary applications are listed in *Attachment 5*

[2] http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/technology-science/technology/apple-ipad-still-best-selling-1569843

[3] EPUB is the distribution and interchange format standard for digital publications and documents based on Web Standards. EPUB defines a means of representing, packaging and encoding structured and semantically enhanced Web content — including XHTML, CSS, SVG, images, and other resources — for distribution in a single-file format. (source: http://idpf.org/epub)

[4] E.g. here: http://www.148apps.com/reviews/choice-review/

[5] For a list of the applications in the different categories, see *attachment 5*

[6] http://www.cyoa.com/pages/about-us

ID	Title
1	4 square
2	Alice for the iPad
3	Beside Myself
4	Bottom of 9th
5	Buzz Aldrin Doesn't Know Any Better
6	Careless Observations
7	Choice of Games
8	CIA : Operation Ajax
9	Civil War Today
10	Composition No. 1
11	Frankenstein
12	History of a Pleasure Seeker
13	iPoe Vol. 1
14	Kaos
15	Konsonant
16	Kvinden ved siden af
17	Our Choice
18	Smooth Second Bastard
19	Spine Sonnet
20	Stjernetime
21	Strange Rain
22	The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore
23	The Great Migration
24	The Waste Land
25	Touchwords
26	Upgrade Soul

ID	Author
106	Jody Zellen
105	Jeff Gomez
104	Jason Edward Lewis
112	Robert Hudecek
113	Stephen Kinzer
111	Richard Mason
102	Dave Morris
108	Marc Saporta
116	Ursula Andkjær Olsen
107	Jörg Piringer
114	Svend Åge Madsen
101	Al Gore
104	Jason Edward Lewis
106	Jody Zellen
109	Merete Pryds Helle
103	Erik Loyer
117	William Joyce
104	Jason Edward Lewis
115	Thomas Stearns Eliot
110	Peter Kay
103	Erik Loyer

ID	Genre
204	Poetry
203	Novel
203	Novel
201	Graphic Novel
204	Poetry
203	Novel
204	Poetry
203	Novel
202	Non-fiction
201	Graphic Novel
203	Novel
204	Poetry
204	Poetry
205	Short story
202	Non-fiction
204	Poetry
204	Poetry
204	Poetry
205	Short story
204	Poetry
201	Graphic Novel
204	Poetry
204	Poetry
204	Poetry
204	Poetry
201	Graphic Novel

ID	Publicat	ID	Language
303	2012	401	English
301	2010	401	English
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	401	English
302	2011	401	English
304	2013	401	English
302	2011	401	English
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	401	English
302	2011	401	English
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	402	Danish
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	402	Danish
302	2011	401	English
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303	2012	402	Danish
302	2011	401	English
303	2012	401	English
303	2012	401	English
302	2011	401	English
302	2011	401	English
303	2012	401	English

Title	Wifi	GPS	Camera	Motion sens	Video	Audio	Microphone	Locked pos	Static ill	multiple ways	Motion Graphi	Drag item	Flick finger	Tap	Tap & hold	Nudge	Pinch	Spread	Slide finger	Sum
Strange Rain																				12
Konsonant																				9
Our Choice																				15
Frankenstein																				7
Kaos																				4
Smooth Second Bastard																				11
The Great Migration																				11
Buzz Aldrin Doesn't Know Any Better																				11
Spine Sonnet																				5
Stjernetime																				4
4 square																				7
Upgrade Soul																				8
Kvinden ved siden af																				4
Touchwords																				8
Alice for the iPad																				12
Careless Observations																				7
The Waste Land																				8
Composition No. 1																				8
The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr.																				10
Choice of Games																				5
CIA : Operation Ajax																				11
Civil War Today																				8
History of a Pleasure Seeker																				9
Beside Myself																				7
iPoe Vol. 1																				8.1
Bottom of 9th																				9

Enhanced Classics

Alice for the iPad

The Waste Land

Composition No. 1

The Road

E-literature

Strange Rain

Konsonant

Smooth Second Bastard

The Great Migration

Buzz Aldrin Doesn't Know Any Better

Spine Sonnet

4 square

Touchwords

Hybrids

Our Choice

Frankenstein

Kaos

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Careless Observations

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Beside Myself

Graphic Novels

Upgrade Soul

CIA: Operation Ajax

iPoe Vol. 1

Bottom of 9th