

Research Report on *Spine Sonnet*, an iPhone and iPad App and Website by Alicia Rubio

Summary:

The iPhone and iPad app called *Spine Sonnet*, created by artist Jody Zellen, is a work that generates fourteen line poems, where each line is randomly collected from her personal library comprised of scanned titles of books involving art, architecture, and art criticism and theory. This work is also capable of generating a randomized poem in an infinite number of ways that are each unique in their own way. The work began as a commissioned online project by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art which then became an interactive smartphone and tablet application. The purpose of the project was to respond artistically to art in a web-based manner.¹ This manner in particular seems to be a response toward the ever growing use of digital outlets rather than analog work. Both versions of this art project can be refreshed to show a new and randomized poem with very few repeats, and link the elements of both art and literacy in an interesting way.

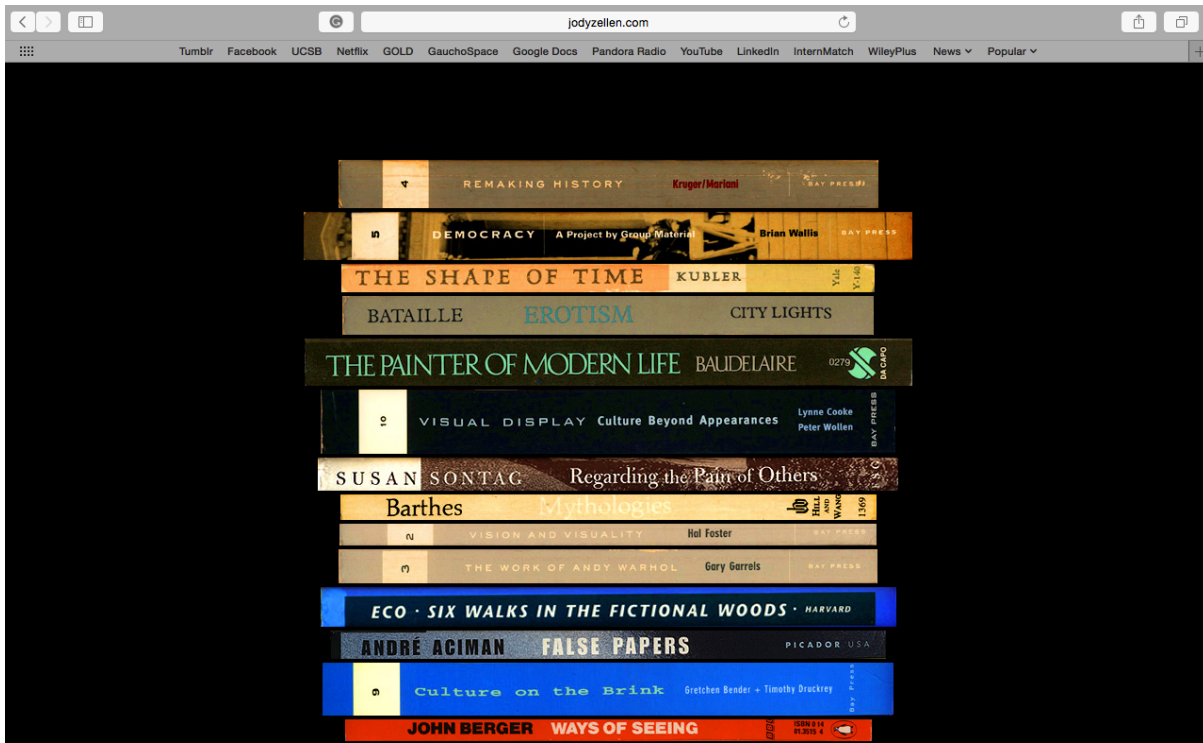
Description:

The web-based version of Zellen's *Spine Sonnet* shows the spines of individual books which are then stacked on top of one another in such a way that each title acts as a line of the randomized poem with the image and detail of the original book spines that Zellen has collected over time. Upon opening the web page, the reader is given a specific poem that can be read. With the tap on the refresh button, the reader can then be given a brand new poem each and every time. From this particular form of the work, the images given show slight imperfections in the spines of the books, which Zellen explains is from environmental wear and tear.²

The second version that Zellen developed is the mobile application version, which shows a similar format to begin with. The mobile application actually develops sonnets without the use of the book spine images and simply composes the poem with digital text that is easily readable. The application also allows the reader to have variations in the text such as different font styles and colors. Though there is this specific difference in both versions of the art project, they both show the creativity and general intention that Zellen presents as an artist.

¹ "Spine Sonnet: Jody Zellen on Steve Wolfe." *Unframed*. N.p., 11 Feb 2011. Web. 07 June 2015.

² ² "Spine Sonnet: Jody Zellen on Steve Wolfe." *Unframed*. N.p., 11 Feb 2011. Web. 07 June 2015.



Sculptural sphere
 Shared perspectives
 Diving trips
 Visible world
 The undiscovered country
 Machine times
 A brief history of curating
 Grotesque
 Anymore
 Empty dress
 The shanghai papers
 Inside space
 Too much flavor
 Recodings

Post-mining landscape
 Another light
 The book of stamps
 Black noise
 Exquisite pain
 9 evenings reconsidered
 Under the sun
 In our own image
 Historic site
 La ville, le jardin, la memoire
 The new normal
 Soliloquy
 Hiding in plain sight
 The anti-aesthetic

Screen shots of web-based version and mobile application version of *Spine Sonnet*.

Research Context:

When looking at this work as a potential source of research for literacy, both forms of *Spine Sonnet* can be addressed in an interesting way despite the project's artistic intentions of archiving

existing works to create a new form of literary composition. Regarding the original web-based version of the work, the type of research process that can be involved would evidently address the work as a piece of art that incorporates a level of literacy from the types of books used in the project. As for the mobile app, the change in text makes the entire project much more readable on a mobile device, so an individual can speculate that the art project also contributes to the growing basis of screen literacy in society by way of existing print versions of literature. Thus, the direction of research for this work in particular is pointing towards archival and retrieval of literary information.

Technical Analysis:

As a whole, the *Spine Sonnet* project was constructed through having actual images of each book that Jody Zellen included into the database, which was then randomized through an algorithm that then creates each of the fourteen lines of a unique poem. The structure and functionality are relatively simple in both forms. For the web-based version of the project, the structure of the website is simple with a black background and the images of the book spines stacked on top of one another. In order to get a different poem, a user must refresh the page which will then generate a random selection of books. As for the app version, the structure seems to be much more simple due to the lack of actual images of the book spines. Instead, a user interacting with the app is simply given a black screen with digital text of each and every title, which can be customized by changing fonts and colors. Refreshing the app results in a new poem much like the web-based version. However, it is clear that this particular user experience is much more interactive than the former.

Evaluation of Research Opportunities:

As discussed before, the type of research that can be conducted on *Spine Sonnet* as a whole can be both artistic and literate when applied to the growing use of digital versions of work that are only available in an analog format. Some opportunities that this work has mainly focuses on new and interesting ways to archive information into the vastness of the digital realm which can then be retrieved and randomized in order to create something new. Another opportunity that this work has involves the realm of literacy in the digital context, for example with the adaptation that the mobile app version takes on in order to improve readability that the web-based version does not need. This particular context has the opportunity to further explain the ways in which digital versions of works affect the literacy of readers in a general sense.

Resources for Further Study:

[Jody Zellen's website and portfolio](#)

[Jody Zellen's similar app called 4 Square](#)

[Interview with Jody Zellen about the work](#)