Towards a Genre Analysis of Online Book Discussion: socializing, participation and publication in the Dutch booksphere

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Abstract

Books and writers are an important subject for discussion on many web sites. Book discussion on the web is a field considerably wider than the book blogs and the online reviews on booksellers' sites that it is often identified with. It runs the whole spectrum from professional reviewers, through 'pro-am' and 'traditional' amateurs to occasional commentators. Book discussion takes place on sites as diverse as newspaper sites, online magazines, individual and group blogs, general and specialized social network sites, on traditional discussion boards and book cataloguing sites.

This exploratory paper attempts a genre analysis of the Dutch 'booksphere', the collection of book-related sites on the web. It distinguishes between (i) site genres, which are high-level and necessarily fuzzy concepts, and a number of site facets for more precise site account, between (ii) genre of site and genre of information items on sites, and between (iii) genre of site and of sub-site. These distinctions create the conceptual apparatus for an account of the book discussion landscape and the various sites' affordances.

Keywords

book discussion, online genre, facets, online reviews, affordances.

Books and writers are an important subject for discussion on many web sites. Book discussion on the web is a field considerably wider than the book blogs (Steiner, 2010) and the online reviews on booksellers' sites (Domsch, 2009; Steiner, 2008) that it is often identified with. It runs the whole

spectrum from professional reviewers, through 'pro-am' (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004) and 'traditional' amateurs to occasional commentators. Book discussion takes place on sites as diverse as newspaper sites, online magazines, individual and group blogs, general and specialized social network sites, on traditional discussion boards and book cataloguing sites.

Scholarly interest in online book discussion up to now has tended to focus on individual genres, without taking into account the wider context within which discussion takes place. Researchers have used the discussions as a basis for book recommendations (Dietz, 2010), assessed ratings' effects on sales (Verboord, 2010) and looked into the canonizing role of webloggers as 'public readers' (Grafton, 2010). In the present paper, I will give what is as far as I know the first attempt at an overview of the online book discussion landscape, based on the situation of the Dutch-language web sphere. I will first introduce the web book discussion landscape, then discuss site genres, other site characteristics and site affordances respectively, and draw some conclusions.

The size of what I will call the booksphere – the collection of book-related sites on the web – obviously precludes any attempt at complete coverage. My method of collecting sites has been simple. Based on a list of relevant sites collected over time, I followed links from these sites. I tried to categorize the sites that I encountered in a number of respects. Once I encountered a sort of site I had already seen a number of times, I ignored it, as I was seeking not for a representative sample but for an exploratory overview of the way the web is used for book discussion.

For the purposes of this paper I limit myself to sites that are publicly accessible on the web. Full participation will often require some sort of registration, but if inspection of the site's content is limited to members I will ignore the site. Sites should be either in Dutch or targeted substantially towards a Dutch-language audience. I exclude scholarly discussion. Sites need not be exclusively concerned with books; I include lifestyle-oriented sites where books are one subject among others. The discussed books include non-fiction, but where the subject moved to areas like gardening, body care or sports I lost interest. Textbooks are also out of scope.

Though my interest here is primarily in book discussion, I take into account other book related sites, such as book news sites and book summary sites. The reason for this is that I assume the way people discuss books, with its consequences for books' popularity, is very much influenced by and reflected in other online book coverage. For the same reasons, I take into account both amateur and

expert contributions, both volunteer and more formal organizations and both commercially and non-commercially motivated writing.[1]

Book Discussion Landscape

It is impossible to estimate with any accuracy the size of the (Dutch) book discussion websphere, be it in terms of number of sites, in number of participants or in number of postings. What is more, given the diversity of the sites and the reviews they host, the significance of an overall estimate would be very limited. Some of the sites see themselves as replacing or supplementing traditional newspaper reviews, and for these sites to host 500 reviews or more is clearly significant.[2] This is hard to compare with the numbers of messages on message boards, where a single message may represent no more than one turn in a conversation. Still, the largest message board based book discussion site, *Ezzulia*, contains 340000 messages written by (now) 2500 registered users. There are at least 5 other forums having close to a 100000 or more messages.[3] Two of the book-oriented social networking sites claim a number of 'reviews' (anything between an exclamation and a traditional review) around 17000 and a membership around 7500.[4] But the significance of the phenomenon is as much in its diversity as in its numbers: the sites that host the discussions are quite diverse as to site genre, discussed book genre, sorts of discussion facilitated, and the affordances of participation.

From a literary perspective book discussion sites are often discussed in terms of how they compare to traditional book reviewing and how they may affect it (McDonald, 2007). Sites have been criticized for being superficial (Kirsch, 2007) and for not sufficiently engaging in 'practices of resistance' (Chaves, 2008). In a debate that has at times become quite heated, book bloggers have been accused of being untrustworthy and self-centered (Bendel, 2009; Weber, 2007). An exclusive focus on this question, however, is reductive. The various book discussion platforms have very different characteristics in terms of their potential for information exchange, knowledge creation, discussion and publication. To evaluate all book discussion in terms of literary criticism is to miss much of its point. However, the role of the literary critic as a gatekeeper for literary fame is well established

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1 All websites were checked July 10-15, 2011.

2 *Recensieweb* ('Web of reviews', http://www.recensieweb.nl/): 1100 reviews. *Literair Nederland* ('Literary Netherlands', http://www.literairnederland.nl/): 500 reviews.

3 Numbers as reported by the forums. *Foreign Fantasy*, http://www.ff-leesclub.nl/forum/, *Wizard Zone*, http://www.wizardzone.nl/ipb/index.php?act=idx, *Fantasy Realm*, http://www.fantasy-realm.nl/forum/, *Pure Fantasy*, http://www.purefantasy.nl/forum/, and *Boekmeter*, http://www.boekmeter.nl/forum/.

4 'Entertainment community' *Dizzie.nl* (http://www.dizzie.nl/) and *watleesjij.nu* ('what are you reading now', a 'community for booklovers', http://watleesjijnu.nl).

(Rosengren, 1987; Van Rees, 1983). One of the reasons why the move of book reviewing to the net is interesting is the fact that much of this gate-keeping work is now done in public, and therefore amenable to study. That in the process criticism itself is changing, is another reason why research is appropriate, whether we consider the change to be a form of democratization or as a lowering of standards.

From the perspective of internet studies, book discussions can be seen as user-generated content and can be studied as such. Parts of the booksphere can be characterized along the lines of the produsage process described by Bruns (2008).[5] But book sites can't be adequately described just in terms of the book reviews they produce. There is a number of book talk sites explicitly intended for social networking.[6] Moreover, many of the older discussion forums are social networking sites *avant la lettre*, and the discussions' point is the creation and maintenance of a community just as much as the discussions' content (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). Discussion of books can also be a vehicle for identity work, for which weblogs perhaps provide the most suitable platform (Schmidt, 2007; Van Dijck, 2004). On the other hand, there are also platforms that provide monetary incentives to reviewers. Remarkably, among the paid reviews are those with highest social status (printed literary criticism in serious newspapers) and reviews on consumer opinion portals.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the booksphere is its interconnectedness. In their profiles, members of the *Ezzulia* forum can point to a personal web site, and among these websites we find weblogs, online book shops (self-owned or private corners in large online booksellers), profiles on general-purpose or book-focused social network sites, and writers' sites (of members who are professional writers). Book bloggers refer to other bookblogs in their blog roll. Online magazines commission reviews from book bloggers. The booksphere is like a town, where each person has his own dwelling (weblog), but where people also assemble in larger buildings, to propound and listen (formal reviews), to deliberate (some forums), to chat (other forums), to be entertained (some e-zines) or to sell (bookshops). It is especially the community residing in the connections between sites that should be interesting to study from an internet research perspective (Efimova, Hendrick, & Anjewierden, 2005; Hodkinson, 2007). The present paper can be seen as a preliminary to that research.

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[5] Probabilistic problem-solving, no hierarchy, granular tasks and shared content.

[6] Such as *LibraryThing* and *watleesjijnu.nl* ('What are you reading now', http://watleesjij.nu/).

Book site genres

Genres, according to the definition of Orlikowsi and Yates (1994), are "a distinctive type of communicative action, characterized by a socially recognized communicative purpose and common aspects of form". Recognizing genre is important for efficient document processing (Crowston, 2010). Much of the work on internet genre has been motivated by the desire to enhance automated document processing, e.g. in information retrieval. For the purposes of this paper, however, genre is not primarily used to speed up processing of individual documents or sites, but rather to help form a high-level overview of the booksphere as a whole.

However, trying to catch all relevant distinctions in a single genre hierarchy will create an unwieldy and unusable set of categories. As has been argued by among others (Crowston & Kwasnik, 2004), a single set of labels is not sufficient for describing a multidimensional concept such as genre. Genre includes aspects of content, purpose and form, and an independent description of the separate dimensions creates flexibility and expressiveness. A faceted classification scheme for computer mediated discourse was proposed by Herring (2007). Below I will propose a modified version of her classification scheme for use in describing the booksphere. This faceted description does not do away with the need for genre, however. Faceted classification creates low-level, precise and detailed description; high-level and somewhat fuzzy concepts such as genre labels remain useful for orientation and navigation.

Assigning genre to internet sites is not a trivial undertaking, for a number of reasons. Apart from the fact that individual sites are continually evolving within the context of a web that is itself very much in development, there are four main causes of genre confusion: (i) sites often consist of or contain subsites that have very different genre characteristics from the main site; (ii) researchers have often conflated 'site' and 'page' and created hybrid genre hierarchies; (iii) web sites often do not conform to a single genre but have the characteristics of a number of genres; (iv) technical platform (such as weblog) does not equal genre. We will discuss each of these difficulties in turn.

    i.   Sites and subsites: It is a very common phenomenon for a web site to consist of a number of very different subsites. In the domain under discussion the site *Misdaadromans* ('crime novels') provides an example.[7] The site contains a discussion forum, reference work-like information, book reviews, and more. I will assign the container site to the genre 'theme site'; theme sites can contain subsites of many

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[7] http://www.inejacet.nl/.

different genres. The situation is encountered time and again in the book domain.[8] A complication is that it is not always self-evident whether a collection of pages within a site (say: reviews) can be considered to be a proper subsite within the larger site (i.e. a visually, functionally or topically distinct, reasonably coherent set of pages within a larger site).

ii.   Sites and pages: In analyzing the genre of internet sites, many researchers have talked about the genre of 'web pages'. Meyer zu Eissen & Stein (2004) e.g. place web shop and help document at the same level, as if web shops couldn't have a help document. Web pages, however, can contain multiple sorts of items (Santini, 2007), and in turn many different sorts of items can form part of sites of clearly identifiable genres. The right targets for genre analysis are web (sub)sites and information items on web sites, and there is a many-to-many relation between site genres and item genres. E.g. an online bookseller (site genre) will display catalog information items, review pages, order forms, complaint forms and reviewer profile (information item genres). Conversely, book reviews (information item genre) are used in online booksellers, online magazines, specialized review sites, etc.

iii. Multiple genres: sites can belong to multiple genres if they share the characteristics of two or more genres. An outspoken defender of this view is Santini (2008). Though some of the cases she mentions are better explained by modeling subsites within sites (i) or distinguishing site genre and information item genre (ii), there remain cases where two site genre labels apply. In the book domain some review sites are also e-zines, such as *De Reactor* and *Recensent* ('Reviewer').[9] Some theme sites are also home to a community, such as *Fantasy Realm*.[10] A theme site can be integrated into an online bookshop, as in the case of bookseller *Athenaeum*.[11]

iv.   Software versus genre: software platforms such as weblogs, bulletin boards and wiki's may seem wedded to particular site genres. It is quite common, however, to see them used for multiple purposes. Weblogs can be used for weblogs proper, but also for e-

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[8] E.g. *Literatuurplein* ('Literature Square'; http://www.literatuurplein.nl/), *Ezzulia*, and many others.

[9] http://www.dereactor.org/ ('the reactor') and http://www.derecensent.nl/ ('the reviewer').

[10] http://www.fantasy-realm.nl/forum/.

[11] http://www.athenaeum.nl/.

zines, such as *PinkBullets*,[12] and reference sites, such as *Romantische boeken* ('Romantic novels').[13] *The Chasing Dreams* theme site (about historical romance) maintains a bulletin board for forum discussions (the 'native' use of a bulletin board system) and a bulletin board that is used as a review site.[14]

Taking into account these considerations, the site genres that I distinguish up to now are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Book site genres

Genre	Remarks and/or examples
Author site	There are three main varieties of author sites: sites usually created by a publisher, mainly for marketing purposes; sites created by an author to communicate with his audience; and author weblogs. Sites devoted to a single author by fans I consider to be theme sites (see below).
Book news site	Site specializing in book news. Example: *VPRO boeken*.[15] VPRO is a public broadcasting corporation known for its willingness to experiment with internet applications.
Book SNS	Social Networking Site with book (or entertainment) specialization. Examples: international sites with Dutch participants include Goodreads and LibraryThing.[16] Dutch examples include 'entertainment community' Dizzie.nl (an untranslatable neologism) and Boeklezers.nl ('readers of books'), which describes itself as a 'network for social reading' and uses the slogan 'Discover new books and make friends'.[17]
Buyer orientation site	Also known as consumer opinion platforms. Examples include the international platform Ciao shopping, and BoekenBuzz ('BookBuzz') which describes itself as 'the fun site to order books' and 'the community where you find everything about books'.[18] The site mixes characteristics of a consumer opinion platform and a book SNS.
Community home	Site created by and home to a community. An example is probably the theme site Fantasy Realm.[19] But more research is needed to decide whether a group of people visiting a site can be called a community and the site can be called the community's home.
Edition	Site making available an author's work. Example: De open ruimte ('The open space') where a son is republishing his father's complete works.[20]
E-zine	Online magazine.

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[12] http://www.pinkbullets.nl/.

[13] http://romantischeliefdesboeken.web-log.nl/ ('romantic books about love').

[14] *Romance novels*, http://www.romancenovels.nl/.

[15] http://boeken.vpro.nl/.

[16] http://www.goodreads.com/, http://www.librarything.nl/.

[17] http://www.dizzie.nl/, http://www.boeklezers.nl/.

[18] http://www.ciao-shopping.nl/, http://www.boekenbuzz.nl/.

[19] http://www.fantasy-realm.nl/.

[20] http://www.cornetsdegroot.com/.

	It is hard to define what constitutes a 'magazine' in the online world. I define it as a frequently updated publication that answers to a concept, contains varied contents and is run by an editorial board. An example is Meander, which describes itself as a 'literary e-zine', 'that wants to bring literature to the notice of a wide audience and wants to provide a platform to budding authors.'[21] The site is part of a larger theme site that includes a news letter and an educational site that discusses classic Dutch poems.
Fan Fiction site	Fan fiction is not book discussion in the strict sense, but it is still a reflection of the original books' contents. It also affects the popularity of the original works. A Dutch example is fanfic.nl.[22]
Forum	Discussion forums. Examples were mentioned in note 2.
Online book shop	Might either be a fully online book shop or the online counterpart of a physical bookseller or bookseller chain. The most popular online bookseller in the Netherlands is the German firm Bol.[23] Online counterpart of a physical bookseller chain is Selexyz.[24]
Organization site	Site mainly devoted to supporting an (offline) organization's activities, may include some book discussion or the occasional review.
Print periodical	Counterpart to print newspaper or magazine; book reviews are often accessible online to non-subscribers. Examples: newspaper NRC Handelsblad and magazine De Groene.[25]
Reference work	Either work of encyclopedic nature or collection of data. An example of the latter is Van roman tot roman ('From novel to novel'), a site that attempts a comprehensive listing of Harlequin novels, with images of the front cover and back cover text.[26] Wikipedia is an example of the former; another example is infonu.nl ('infonow.nl'), a content farm (a commercial site that rewards authors based on the ad revenue their articles bring in).[27]
Review site	Collection of reviews. Review sites are often part of a theme site or share the characteristics of e-zines. An example of the former is the site Misdaadromans mentioned earlier. An example of the latter is Recensieweb, also mentioned above.
Summary site	Sites collecting book summaries especially targeting high school students.
Theme site	Multi-purpose site based on a theme, such as a literary genre (chicklit, fantasy, crime), a single author, a period, WW II, etc. Theme sites are not necessarily about books alone.
Weblog	Weblog written by (usually one) individual person(s). Magazines written from a collective or corporate identity are not weblogs. Webloggers may specialize in genre fiction or literature. Weblogs often seem mainly targeted at supporting the writer's reflection (e.g. Boeklog).[28]

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[21] http://meandermagazine.net/.

[22] http://fanfic.nl/.

[23] http://www.bol.com/nl/index.html.

[24] http://www.selexyz.nl/.

[25] http://www.nrcboeken.nl/, http://www.groene.nl/boeken.

[26] http://www.romantotroman.nl/.

[27] http://www.infonu.nl/.

[28] http://boeklog.info/.

Further book site facets

The facets I will use for describing sites in the Dutch booksphere are based on the facets given in (Herring, 2007). Some of Herring's facets do not apply, especially those concerned with medium, as opposed to what she calls 'situation', as all of the sites I discuss are web-based. In our case, message transmission is always asynchronous, messages are always logged, and message size is only rarely limited for technical reasons. Given the fact that we limit ourselves to the book domain, other facets can be filled in with more detail (such as topic or theme). The list of facets is not expected to be complete.

The facets that I will use are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Book site facets

Name	Herring code	Remarks
Participation structure	S1	Herring mentions aspects such as: • number of participants • configurations such as one-to-many vs. many-to-many • anonymity/pseudonymity Important are also: • participants' roles • openness to new participants
Participants	S2	Herring mentions demographic characteristics, status, computer or tool proficiency and other relevant properties. However, not all participants are natural persons, communicating as equals. Many platforms are created by business or organizations, and their interests determine the sites' possibilities.
Topic	S4	For the book domain, relevant aspects of topic are • book content (all, main, some) • book genre • book period • number of books discussed • if a site is only in part about books: what is the wider topic?
Writing	S5	Herring uses the word 'tone' to cover aspects such as playfulness, formality, etc. In the context of book discussion sites it is also important to include: • argumentation type • depth of engagement with discussed books • conversational aspects
Activity	S6	Aspects of site activity are: • genre of information items (as opposed to site genre): review, discussion, comment, etc. • supported functionality: defining profiles, adding friendships, swapping books, cataloguing books, etc. • higher-level affordances. I discuss these in the following section.
Software platform	-	Platform can be weblog, forum, wiki or other.

Participation structures

Not all participants are born equal. People participate in a certain role, and their position depends on that role, more than on the quantity of their contributions. Roles to be distinguished are site owner (often the site originator, perhaps the one who foots the bill), staff (assigned a role and responsibility by owner or community), (registered) member, non-member (can read and sometimes comment) and follower (through e.g. *Twitter*, RSS or mailed newsletter). To describe a site's functioning requires awareness of the participants' roles (Chan & Hayes, 2010; Preece & Shneiderman, 2009). Another important site characteristic is openness: is it possible for non-members to become members without having to go through a selection procedure? From the perspective of literary reviewing, the most important difference between traditional reviewing practice and online book discussion is that traditionally, writing a review was the privilege of a few, while in most online sites anyone can review.

Topic

Not all sites in the book domain devote themselves to books only. The book content facet says whether all, most or some of the content is book related. With respect to the book genre facet: book genres cannot be exhaustively listed, as communities can decide to focus on any group of books that they see fit. Genres might include: all, chicklit, Dutch, erotica, fantasy, fiction, general, genre (suspense, romance, etc., but not high literature), high literature, historical, historical romance, other, poetry, romance, single-author, suspense, young adult, youth.

Writing

An examination of the practices of book discussion should take into account the type of arguments that are used in judging a book's merits. Are books judged by their emotional appeal, by their veracity, by stylistic merit? Do reviewers an explicit view on what constitutes quality in literature? Do they show awareness of the literary tradition surrounding a book? Site genres and sites (and reviewers) differ widely in these respects. A related aspect is the prevalence of reviews (monologue) vs. discussion (dialogue).

Activity

For Herring, activities are 'discursive means of pursuing interactional goals'. It includes information item genres, site functionalities and higher-level site affordances. I discuss affordances below.

The information item genre, in contrast with the site genre, applies to individual items on the site. As discussed above, sites can contain multiple sorts of items, and a single sort of item can occur on multiple sorts of sites. The information item genres that occur most regularly in the book domain are: discussion (message-board type discussion), essay, interview, news item, poetry, personal messages, publisher description (description of book as given by publisher), publisher description-plus (slightly enhanced publisher descriptions), reference work item, response (brief response to book), review, review with discussion, summary (on book summary site), video item. Again, the list undoubtedly will be expanded in the future.

Site functionalities can be described as non-discursive means of pursuing interactional goals. For each site genre, certain functionality is expected. On a social networking site, one should be able to define profiles and probably some sort of 'friendship'. But not all sites where users can define profiles are thereby social networking sites. Functionalities that can be present are, among others: rating of books, buying / selling, cataloguing (either books read, to be read, or owned), commenting, creating profiles, creating friendships, creating subcommunities, discussion, private messaging, review rating, reviewer rating, swapping.

Affordances

An empirical investigation into what motivates people to write about books online, let alone into their reasons for choosing one site type over another, is beyond the scope of this paper. Still, sites with different characteristics provide their participants with different affordances, in the sense of a potential for action (Gaver, 1991). A genre analysis would not be complete without an enquiry into the sort of actions that the various sites facilitate.

The study of online genres in terms of affordances seems to be especially prevalent in the context of computer supported learning. There is also, however, an extensive literature on motivations for online activity, often in terms of gratifications sought or obtained, and gratifications tend to be formulated in terms of actions (having fun, earning money, acquiring status). An overview of motivations to produce user generated content is given in (Stöckl, Rohrmeier, & Hess, 2007).

Based on this a tentative list of online book discussion affordances might be:

- participation: play role in larger literary field

- community: socialize, build and maintain friendships, inform others

- status: publication, win recognition

- self-directed: self-presentation, reflect through writing, documentation of life

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- practical: earn money, build career

There is no simple relation between the affordances listed here and the genres listed above. Review sites Re*c*ensieweb and *de Reactor* show in their motto or subtitle ('New literature. New guides' and 'Platform for literary criticism' respectively) the ambition of playing a role on the national literary scene.[29] Other review sites, such as *Lekkerlezen* ('Delightful reading'),[30] completely lack that ambition, as the name shows. Genre-based theme sites such as *chicklit.nl* do not aspire to social relevance, while the WW II theme site *Go2war2.nl* certainly does.[31]

Those looking for community features are perhaps best served by forums (Ridings & Gefen, 2004) and book SNSs (O'Reilly, 2009; Rutkoff, 2006). Writers and readers on consumer opinion platforms too are to some extent motivated by the sense of community (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004).

Status can probably be earned on all types of sites. While weblogs and the high-end review sites are probably the best platforms for the publication of original thought, status can also be the reward for leadership (Preece & Shneiderman, 2009) on other sites and can even be the result of one's reviews being rated highly on opinion platforms (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007).

For the self-directed affordances, blogging may be the most suitable platform (Tian, 2009), especially for reflecting through writing, honing one's writing skills and documentation of life. All platforms that facilitate personal rather than factual writing (that excludes e.g. the news sites, the reference sites and the summary sites) allow presentation of self, and participants will probably choose the genre that is most congenial to them.

Finally, the very practical affordance of making money is best served by becoming a professional book reviewer at a print newspaper or magazine. A step towards that goal may be writing reviews for a high-end e-zine or review site. Another option would be paid 'blogging' for the low-end e-zines or writing for content farms or consumer opinion platforms.

Conclusions

Anyone who attempts a genre analysis of the booksphere will be confronted with the fact that, except for anecdotal evidence, most elementary information about the book discussion landscape is still missing. As yet we don't know anything about the age and gender distribution of forum site

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[29] 'Web of reviews' (http://www.recensieweb.nl/) and 'The reactor' (http://www.dereactor.org/).

[30] http://www.lekkerlezen.net/.

[31] http://www.chicklit.nl/ and http://www.go2war2.nl/Recensies/.

participants vs. web loggers. We have no idea to what extent participants in book social network sites overlap with those participating in bulletin board discussions. We don't know whether popular fiction is discussed more or less than high literature or romantic fiction more than fantasy. We don't know the education levels of the people visiting these sites. We don't know why they visit the sites.

Books have for ages been important in the creation and transmission of knowledge, ideas and sensibilities. Book reviewing and book discussion have been important elements in this culture of the book. It is hard to predict to what extent and in what form we will still read books twenty or fifty years from now. But it is likely that book discussion and book reviewing will remain relevant, and tracking changes in book reviewing as the practice moves online is important for understanding the future culture of reading.

As we have seen, given the online world's permanent state of flux a genre analysis of the booksphere is a hazardous undertaking. The genres we distinguish now may merge or split or be overtaken by others a few years from now. The value of this paper then may be primarily in having documented the present state of the Dutch booksphere.

However that may turn out, this genre analysis does raise some interesting follow-up questions. The following would seem promising areas for further research: (i) the sites' audiences: demographic properties of site visitors, overlap in visitors between book sites and with other sites; (ii) the books discussed and the nature of the discussions; (iii) the effect of site events and external events on other sites of the same or different genre; and (iv) the effect of online discussions in the various site genres on sales, popularity and reputation of books and writers.

All of these questions focus on the sites themselves and their effects. However, what from a research perspective may be one of the most promising aspects of book discussion sites is what they can tell us about how people read, why people read, and what reading does to them. The study of literature has in the past been dominated by non-empirical approaches, focusing on interpretation of literary works rather than on what literary reading does to readers (Miall, 2006). The availability of large amounts of reader-written material detailing actual readers' responses to books should provide a stimulus to empirical reading research. The various site genres may correspond with different strategies for dealing with the emotional and intellectual impact books can have. Site affordances, like beauty, are in the eyes of the beholder, and age, character or personal history may predispose readers towards certain site genres, as they do to certain book genres (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zúñiga, 2010).

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