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Millie Niss & Martha Deed, "News from Erewhon"

## News from Erewhon

"News from Erewhon" (Iowa Review Web, 2005) is a digital writing project centered on eight pairs of texts. The texts were generated by a technique of automatic writing known as "guided free association," in which someone prompts the writer with a word or phrase every minute or so. The writer's task is to compose a text, incorporating each word in the given order.

As the texts evolved, we found ourselves creating a bizarre alternate universe, whose characters and settings evoke themes such as war and peace, the workplace, and religion. These themes, as well as many concrete elements (such as skywriters, the moon, cocktails, food, flowers and plants, politicians, trucks, fire/burning, lawyers) weave in and out of the texts like strands in a braid. The two authors can also be seen as separate, interacting strands.

The eight texts are overlaid by 144 images which we have collected on the Internet. By weaving in elements from the web, we have added another level of braiding, in which various image sources/websites combine together to illustrate the world of our stories. The images appear in randomized order and are positioned on top of the texts they illustrate, and appear only briefly so as to affect the viewer in an almost subliminal manner.

## From News from Erewhon to Erewhon 2.0

Web 2.0 is the much hyped "interactive" second generation of websites in which user-contributed content is as important as information provided by the site owner. Web 2.0 has undoubtedly been a commercial success with sites such as Amazon.com, Ebay, craigslist, Netflix, etc. On a crass level, the owners of successful Web 2.0 e-commerce sites exploit their customers twice instead of once by selling customers information that other customers have provided for free. On the other hand, good Web 2.0 sites provide a mutual benefit for the site and the customer, for example, by offering useful book recommendations for free at the customer's request rather than annoying unsolicited advertising of books the customer doesn't want.

In addition to user-contributed content, Web 2.0 includes a related set of equally-hyped new media marketing ideas involving branding, remixing content, blogging, multiple platforms (ie not just web browsers, also mobile devices, etc.), "free" and "freemium" content, use of large collaborative sites (e.g. Tumblr, Youtube, Flickr). These techniques bring in eyeballs and make it possible to spin off a potentially infinite number of products out of the smallest possible investment of creativity and money. Ideally these products should be quick and easy to produce because the new content is made by remixing elements of the previous content with free user-contributed content.



So if there is Web 2.0 is there Web Art 2.0? This is an ongoing issue in digital literature and art with many collaborative projects.

News from Erewhon, in its initial incarnation is an example of Web Art 1.0 with a slight leaning towards 1.1 because we exploit Google Image search. We display *our* text with *our* design. In Erewhon 2.0, we propose to do what older websites have had to do: upgrade from 1.0 to 2.0 whilst preserving the essence of Erewhonicity and without alienating our users. Thus, instead of a single URL in a web journal, there will now be a profusion of Erewhon web installations hosted by us and by others as well as coffee mugs, calendars, phone apps, toothpaste, chapbooks, comic books, software, underwear. . .

## References

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## Project Information

News from Erewhon on our site: [www.sporkworld.org/news/](http://www.sporkworld.org/news/)

*Iowa Review Web* (2005): [www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/mainpages/new/oct05/niss\\_deed.html](http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/mainpages/new/oct05/niss_deed.html)

Please check our main site for upcoming Erewhon 2.0 publications

