

***Riverrun: Concept and Process***

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## Concept and Process

### Concept and Working Outline

The name *Riverrun* refers to the first word in the circular work *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce.

*Riverrun* is an interdisciplinary art and science project, involving the collaboration of an artist, scientist and programmer. It functions as an art event, collective online experiment and object of scientific and theoretical analysis.

*Riverrun* is based on the process and result of social interaction involving more than 100 writers who work online together in the production of texts in real time. Each participant, using his own computer (client) to connect to the project for the duration of the event, writes (in the future this may include a facility for importing other types of objects) a small part of the work which is housed in a central computer (server). Writers cannot see the whole text, but the visible neighbourhoods in which they work overlap, affording the potential for the spreading of influence beyond the local.

All experiments active at any given time will be presented as an audiovisual installation in physical space. The creative decisions taking place in each work will be codified as sound.

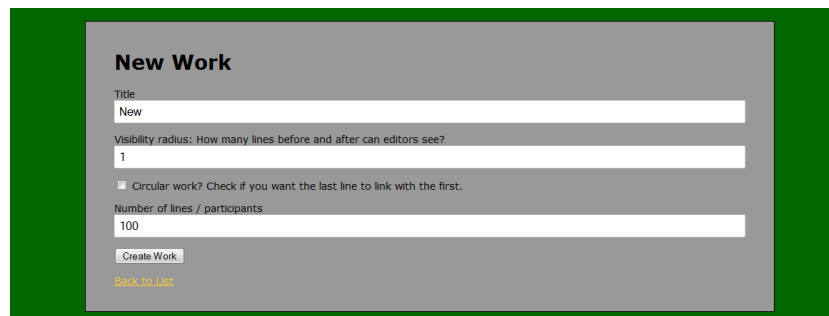
These creative experiments can and will be performed in different languages, and within and across varied geographical and cultural contexts and groupings.

Post event-analysis, both scientific and theoretical, will examine the data gathered in the course of the above processes. The research questions linked to the art events and collective online experiments could be described as follows:

1. Does complexity at the edge of chaos emerge at critical values for variable settings in an online artistic collaboration?
2. If so, does such emergence correlate to positive ratings for artistic merit? (Voters will decide how texts rank in terms of artistic merit)

***Riverrun*: How does each experiment work?** <http://riverrun.herokuapp.com>

Let's suppose that the creative community consists of 100 writers on their respective computers (clients). Each will write one line of the 100 which make up the story. The server randomly assigns a line number, from 1 to 100, to each participant. The writers do not know this number, that is to say, the position of their line in the story as a whole.



**New Work**

Title  
New

Visibility radius: How many lines before and after can editors see?  
1

Circular work? Check if you want the last line to link with the first.

Number of lines / participants  
100

Create Work

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Figure 01: The administrator sets the number of lines, the radius of visibility and the conventional or circular nature of the literary experiment.

For each experiment, we set a radius of visibility; the number of lines above and below their own which they can see in the story. If the radius is, for example,  $R=1$ , and the writer 46, this writer will see, in real time, thanks to the server, how neighbouring writers are changing lines 45 and 47.

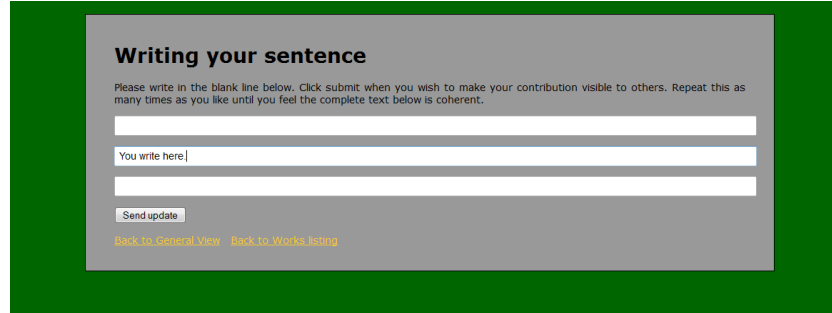


Figure 02: The writers, in a story with a radius=1, see one line above and below their contribution. They have no idea of their position in the story.

Writers will be able to change their sentence, if they feel it necessary and whenever they wish, in order to adapt it to their neighbours modifications.

Me dicen algo de un cuerpo, no se de que va.  
Se topó con una ventana que había sido descolgada para ser reparada. A través de ella se había precipitado al vacío su mejor amigo.  
El filo del cristal estaba roto, por eso no pudo evitar cortarse la mano, mareado, cayó al suelo mientras recordaba sus ultimas palabras...  
como la calle no estaba iluminada, sólo cuando los rayos de la luna se filtraban en el callejón se podía ver el cuerpo tendido  
  
Cuando recobró la conciencia reconoció el bar donde se conocieron. Ahora, en venta, colgaba de la ventana un cartel que decía:  
"cuidado, superficie rota". ¿Puede esta ventana ser un espejo? ¿Puede este espejo mostrarte tu pasado?. Tal vez

Figure 03: Extract from an experiment (Spanish). This global view, accompanied by sound codification, will evolve in the physical space of an audio-visual installation. The typography and visual appearance of each story will adapt to its contents. (The administrator sees a more detailed view of this global story on his computer screen and at the end of the experiment a data sheet is generated for scientific analysis).

If the radius is 0, there will be no interaction or coherence since each contribution will be totally independent. If the radius is the maximum possible, all the writers can see the whole story; their line and 99 others changing continuously. We believe this excess of information would prevent the writers from changing their own line in an adequate way, and the text would never crystallize or come to any final form. We expect there exists a critical value for the radius of visibility, relative to the number of writers, which may produce more interesting stories from an artistic perspective.

The first and last lines are especially relevant. If a writer doesn't see sentences above his/her own, it is obvious that he/she is writing in position number 1, the first line of the story. Conversely, if there are no sentences below, the writer knows that his/her line is the last, number 100. This information would strongly prompt these participants to write a beginning and ending respectively, despite the pressure from their neighbours to do otherwise. However, we can also change these boundary conditions by making them periodic i.e. if we join the beginning and

the end together. In such experiments, number 100 will see 1, 2, etc. below, and number 1 will see 100, 99 etc. above. Consequently, no writers will be aware of their position in the text. Will a circular story emerge, with no beginning or end, or will certain writers insist on writing a beginning or ending for the story?



Electrosmog Festival of Sustainable Imobility (First trial and online debate Medialab-Prado, Madrid)

**Further Details:**

To hear Kevin McCourt and Bartolo Luque describing *Riverrun* in a Radio Exterior de España interview (in Spanish), please follow this link:

<http://www.rtve.es/mediateca/audios/20100923/libro-invisible-bartolo-luque-kevin-mccourt-idioma-sin-fronteras/884556.shtml>