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*From a question sent to the Narrative-L, a mailing list discussing matters narratological:* 

Dear members of the Narrative List:

No real reason for this question, except for intellectual curiosity and a wish to get the list going after the summer. I find that the threads here are often welcome by people who bring to them, and perhaps extract from them, issues related to their own concerns; so getting associations of ideas going is a good thing for many of us... Take it as an excuse, then. My question is:

Can you think of any instances of people (writers, etc.) who have imagined, and perhaps thus helped to bring into existence, new narrative forms, genres or media? E.g. did anyone imagine film before film? (This brings to mind Aldous Huxley's virtual reality films in *Brave New World*, and Matrix-like transmissions of virtual reality programmes are imagined by Olaf Stapledon in *Star Maker*.

I've just begun William Gibson's *Spook Country* and he invents there (I expect they're invented, one never knows) a subculture of artists who recreate famous celebrity events in California (or elsewhere) with virtual reality technology, on the very spot where they took place. That's just an example.

Did anyone imagine the upsurge of fan fiction on the web before it happened?

Has anyone invented a narrative form based on, say, the tracks left by our searches using Google? Or is anyone doing complex multimedia narratives on the Web, combining text, images, video, sound... or is that just a plain old blog?

Or better, none of the above—anything I am unable to even think just now, because it is a kind of narrative that doesn't exist yet, and perhaps never will, but which has been imagined in a suggestive way by some recent science-fiction writer or filmmaker?

Jose Angel García Landa http://www.garcialanda.net

I find that the issue of "the imagination of future narrative" or "future communication" if you want is well worth pursuing, as it promises to hold complex unfoldings and interesting interactions.

By way of interaction between list and blog, I paste here my queries (sometimes some of the most intriguing answers) so as to provide a date or anchoring point, I classify a bibliographical record of the entry, and keep the whole thread in my mail folder for imaginary future use.

(An example of retrofuturistic technology: The Opening Books project).

FROM THE ANSWERS:

Christy Dena:

Great questions Jose!

I'll tackle some. Apologies in advance for the references to my own sites and research -- I'm adding them here in case someone finds them helpful or interesting.

One question was whether narratives have been based on/created (?) by Google searches etc? Just about every single technology on the web and beyond has been employed for storytelling (but more for artworks) now. There is blogfiction, botfiction, SMS fiction, MMS fiction, mobile stories, online comics, search fictions, email fictions and so on. I have a listing of some links on my del.icio.us site (which needs updating):

http://del.icio.us/new\_media\_arts There are some search fictions listed here: http://del.icio.us/New\_Media\_Arts/Creative\_searchfiction

There are also programs being created specifically for online experimentation (non-artificial intelligence) with storytelling. Some programs are covered here in

my post at WRT: http://writerresponsetheory.org/wordpress/2007/04/28/ficlets-literary-lego/

I have another question to add to your one about narratives imagined but not materialized yet. I'd like to know if anyone has any ideas whether the following type of emerging narrative has been prefigured:

I'm researching what I've been calling 'polymorphic narratives' -- which are narratives that are spread across media platforms. A story, for instance, begins in print form and continues on the web. This is a subset of my larger research which is into what media theorist Henry Jenkins has called 'transmedia storytelling'. Judging by the descriptions Jenkins gives, he is actually referring to a transmedia series. A polymorphic narrative is not a series (it is not episodic): they are the equivalent of paragraphs distributed across media platforms. I'd love to hear if anyone has some ideas on this form being imagined.

Emma Kafalenos:

Oscar Wilde in The Picture of Dorian Gray?

Cortazar in his story translated as "Blow-Up"? (But not Antonioni's film of the same title.)

Artworks in one medium that embed artworks conceived as in another medium (whether represented in the other medium or in the medium of the containing artwork--e.g., through ekphrasis) seem to have the power to represent art forms not yet in existence. That is not to say that the writer or artist necessarily foresaw the later development.

My essay "The Power of Double Coding to Represent New Forms of Representation: The Truman Show, Dorian Gray, "Blow-Up," and Whistler's Caprice in Purple and Gold" (Poetics Today 24, 1 [Spring 2003]: 1-33) might be of interest.

## Peggy Phelan:

Thanks Emma for recalling the point about new genres and media within Jose's question. "Machinima" (sometimes spelled machinema) is perhaps one of the most interesting new genres to have emerged from the underbelly of video gaming. Basically, this genre makes use of code from games that has multiple functions but cannot be accessed through the game itself. This 'superfluous' code is then re-programmed into new narratives and new web-based films and visual art. Interestingly, some of the re-coding can be done in live performances, and this in turn creates a new kind of performance art - -so far, all collaborative and interactive. Audiences scream out directions to programmers who are "improving" new code from the stream of code that is being recycled and refashioned from the gaming code. As someone primarily interested in live art and not code, I find the performances sort of transfixing because they are sort of mesmerizingly awkward, 'naive,' and even 'dumb' in terms of narrative complexity or dramatic arc. And yet there is no doubt that they are completely absorbing performances --combining elements of sampling from hip-hop, old school improv techniques, and new media savvy in re: to gaming and coding. And the frenzy with which the directions are thrown out from the audience is something to behold. The best re-programmers are those who can quickly meld one direction into another, and this requires, among other things, adroit fingers, typing, and so on. There are now 'teams' and 'stars' as in sports events. Here is a wiki link for those who would like a more detailed (and probably more accurate) description of the recycled code etc: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machinima

My answer to the list::

Thank you all for so many interesting answers!

Concerning Christy's question about "polymorphic" narratives-i.e. "spread across multiple media platforms", I suppose one obvious source would be the very existence of narratives (e.g. classical myths) which give rise to multimedia representations, say, pictures of Odysseus or narratives about Odysseus. It is a short (and long) step from that to the use of different media platforms to articulate a single work of art by one artist. Long, because although other connective strategies may be easily devised (and perhaps have been used? any suggestions here?) one seems to need a form unified in a digital sequence with multimedia capacity before this kind of work becomes manageable or mainstream. Although perhaps part of what is suggested in the word "spread out" used by Christy refers to a much more disjointed or "distributed" narrative-the kind of thing Jill Walker has been writing on? One thinks of William Gibson's cult videos in Pattern *Recognition* being disseminated across different websites... but then that was only video (which can be multimedia in itself, to be sure). Or an Amélie-like strategy for urban narrative made of clues taking you from one piece of the artwork to the next? Anyway, one major issue, apart from the nature of the pieces spread across multiple media platforms, would seem to be the thread that links them together, or the frame which holds them together: either a unified, marketable object in digital form, or an experiential sequence to be tracked out in different places and disconnected media. Or things in between. But I must look closer into Christy's del.icio.us collection before indulging any further in random musings and speculations.

Innovative concepts or tools

## Other issues Blogs

- Economic consequences of the pandemic
- Let's get serious with Coronavirus
- Notes from Northrop Frye's ANATOMY OF CRITICISM
- ✓ Cooperate with people who cooperate
- The Virtual World We Inhabit
- 🗸 Our internal virtual reality
- My definition of narrative
- The Joys of Teaching Literature
- Reflecting on the Mind
- The Prehistoric Origin of Cinema