

# **The Transnarrative Novel**

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# Transmedia and Narratology

Novel writing is a matter that requires the fortitude of endurance along with the creativity of the artist. Over the course of several years, the one question that has consistently interested me has been of the nature of narratives and the most delicate, intricate of subversions of said established forms. As such, when embarking on a deeper understanding of transmedia storytelling, my primary purpose was to enrich my knowledge of storytelling and further my abilities to redesign them.

This paper explores the concept of the transnarrative, a reapplication of transmedia storytelling through the breaking down of the narrative form. It begins by elaborating on the basic theories of storytelling, narrative, and transmedia storytelling, continuing thereof to analyse the possibilities for the transnarrative and express the meanings given into it when put into play.

What follows the complete definition of said work is an experimental overview of the numerous approaches one can have to creating a transnarrative novel.

Ultimately, the paper is in itself an experimentation into the boundaries of a new narrative form, an appraisal of the possibilities this form brings to the medium, and a study of the rudiments of other media and how those fundamentals can be brought into other streams of consciousness. Thomsen, in his article on the novel over the duration of the twentieth century, from Joyce to Kundera, concludes: “reinventions of the tales of the body and the mind wandering through life become interesting, both as works of literature and as models for grasping the historicity of existence”<sup>1</sup>. This paper embarks on another reinvention of the novel, one that does not stretch the external limits of the genre but, instead, breaks it apart internally.

## Narratives and storytelling

One of this writer’s earliest studies of narrative and storytelling lead to this simplistic, simplified definition of the complex, elaborate, and largely limitless subject:

“The word narrative is defined as the form of storytelling, aside from the dialogue (sometimes including the dialogue). Even when new forms of storytelling are developed and utilised, the definition of the term expands to encompass them.”<sup>2</sup>

The Oxford dictionaries is a little less specific:

“*noun*

- a spoken or written account of connected events; a story
- [*mass noun*] the narrated part of a literary work , as distinct from dialogue
- [*mass noun*] the practice or art of telling stories

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<sup>1</sup> Thomsen 2004, p.299

<sup>2</sup> Bou Nassif 2010

- a representation of a particular situation or process in such way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values”<sup>3</sup>

Narrative is, however, much broader than a simple series of connected events in a story, and is definitely not limited to a singular medium (although it has been, traditionally). J. Hillis Miller defines narrative quite abstractly, allowing plenty of legroom for interpretation: “first of all, an initial situation, a sequence leading to a change or reversal of that situation, and a revelation made possible by the reversal of the situation. Second, there must be some use of personification whereby character is created out of signs [...] without personification there can be no storytelling [...] third, there must be some patterning or repetition of key elements.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, storytelling is more than Oxford’s implication<sup>5</sup>: it is the comprehensive experience of the expression of the story. It may be mediated by a particular teller, although the vastness of possibilities from which that teller may emerge gives it a much broader sense. Today, with the interconnectedness of narratives, the sheer immenseness of communicative methods, facilitated (and coerced) by the technological advancements of our age, a story may even be told without a teller.

It is of high importance that the reader’s understanding of both narratives (or narrative forms) and storytelling be broad and all-encompassing for the duration of this text.

### **Transmedia versus crossmedia**

Prior to technologically infused electronic communication channels, media had limited means to intermingle with one another. The written could not communicate what the painted would, the audible was distinct from the visual, and much else (in the spaces of communication) had strictly delineated dimensions. The second half of the twentieth century changed that, allowing us to now communicate in a multitude of ways. Through multiple media.

Henry Jenkins has a very idealised vision of transmedia as it relates to storytelling: “each medium does what it does best - so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption.”<sup>6</sup>

In that particular article, a simplified commentary on transmedia thought, not a comprehensively researched academic study of transmedia, Jenkins describes the very essence of what is relevant to the current understanding of media storytelling, or: the difference between transmedia, crossmedia, and media.

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<sup>3</sup> Oxford 2011: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/narrative>

<sup>4</sup> Miller 1990, p.76, 77

<sup>5</sup> Oxford 2011: <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/storyteller>

<sup>6</sup> Jenkins 2003

That the stories must be self-contained while also merging is what makes transmedia not crossmedia; that they must be across multiple channels is what makes neither one just 'media'.

Crossmedia storytelling is not a new phenomenon: Jenkins ends his article with the reminder that we have, historically, transmitted the same stories across mediums. Paintings, murals, poems, oral histories, mythologies, and other texts have been used to describe the same stories of the same characters (fictional or otherwise) for centuries.<sup>7</sup>

What distinguishes transmedia storytelling from crossmedia is that "each medium does what it does best", allowing every element to describe a distinct aspect of the story, where only through combination would the full experience be permitted – although each sequence/scene/chapter would be self-fulfilling.

We will, for the purposes of this paper, apply transmedia practice, not crossmedia.

### **Narratology applied to transmedia storytelling**

According to Mieke Bal in her *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, narratology is "that agent which utters the (linguistic or other) signs which constitute text"<sup>8</sup>.

*Transmedia storytelling* attempts to evolve from the original thoughts of Henry Jenkins and several other influential thinkers on the subject.

A merging of the two brings us closer to the idea of the transnarrative. This paper defines narratives and storytelling as (to simplify) the scenes and 'chapters' that combine to transmit a cohesive thought, called a story, that represents a particular 'space' (time, place, experience). Transmedia, in this context, works to bridge and break apart the different sectors of said story across multiple media, allowing each to inform the reader (Barthes's reader, born with the Text and at the death of the Author)<sup>9</sup> of a separate but related aspect of the same story.

So, in defining the transnarrative, let us bring to the forefront that agent which utters the signs, across platforms, which, individually and together, constitute a text. Let us also, however, understand that the transnarrative's pulse and underlying rhythm is predicated upon the three parts of narrative defined by Hillis Miller: sequential resolution, signifier personification, and key pattern.

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<sup>7</sup> Jenkins 2003

<sup>8</sup> Bal 2009, p. 18

<sup>9</sup> Barthes 2000, *From Work to Text*

## Defining Transnarrative Theory

Transmedia describes the use of various channels to tell one story. Transnarrative theory attempts to simulate this concept by allowing several channels to co-exist in one medium. In this particular case, that medium is the novel.

The transnarrative, as defined herein, relies on Barthes' theories of the text and semiotics and Baudrillard's simulation and simulacra. The transnarrative is a Text<sup>10</sup>, its parts distinctly signifiers, its simulation evident through the hyperreality it creates.

### Towards a novel activity

The paradox here is that transmedia relates specifically to the transmission of the story across the various agents – the narrative, as such, is segregated although consistently complete – while transnarrative distinguishes itself by breaking this very aspect: it brings together the dissected agents under one flow, thus revoking the transition that had been implemented by Jenkins et al.

Cycling through narrative storytelling, to transmedia storytelling and back to the transnarrative story seems to imply that we have gone back full circle, which is somewhat true. The transnarrative story is a subgroup (so to speak) of the narrative storytelling. However, what differs here is the narratology: the narrative voice is transmedial, not singular; it is flows from the plurality of Text that Barthes defines: “not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing”<sup>11</sup>.

This can be better expressed, or applied, through the simulation of a reality, as described by Baudrillard. Let us pose his same question, then: “Is the simulator sick or not, given that he produces ‘true’ symptoms?”<sup>12</sup>

The simulator here is the transnarrator, producing the symptoms of a transmedia story without actually creating such a story. The transnarrative is a simulation of the transmedia, with the entities of the story being the simulacra implemented in the development of the story. In its simulation, the multiplicity of channels involved in the transmedia give the transnarrative its irreducible plurality. Its experience is in its reaction to the sign (its simulacrum), giving it its presence as a signifier.

So let us then summarise: transmedia is the reality of multi-platform storytelling; the transnarrative as text is a simulation (or hyperreality) of the real; the various platforms as written for the transnarrative are the simulacra of the simulation, they exist as a map from which the simulacra proceeds, creating the

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<sup>10</sup> Barthes 2000, From Work to Text

<sup>11</sup> Barthes 2000, From Work to Text, point 4

<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard 1994, p.7

simulation.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the transnarrative is no longer simply a representation of the transmedial story, but a simulation of it, a hyperreal variant of the pre-existing mode of existence, its signifier.

## **Writing for multiple media**

The problem we face then is in delineating the simulacra themselves, or deciding what would be mapped and what that mapping would require. For the purposes of this paper, we will maintain only three possible modes for simulation: the film, the game, and the online story. This can be expanded, in practice, to include a variety of other communicative channels.

We shall define these three (and any other media chosen to transmit a transnarrative story) as channels. However, “can the narrative be entirely segmented into functional units?”<sup>14</sup> For, although we attempt to inscribe in each section a particular reference (the inscription here being neutral, acting as vessel for whatever the scriptor of the transnarrative novel might ascribe to it), we cannot be certain if each of these is adequately transmitted. Barthes argues that “art does not acknowledge noise”<sup>15</sup>, or everything carries meaning and that meaning is understood according to the reader’s subjectivity. It is this subjectivity that could be problematic, or rather must be taken into account, when addressing the particular intricacies of the channels in use.

The references we attempt to inscribe should simply give the reader the proper, necessary, or adequate cues for him to comprehend the framework from which the text occurs. Also, the scriptor of the novel herself would require these references as a guide to allow the text to play its part.

Writing for film has been studied and compressed into a form of scriptwriting, playwriting, defined as screenwriting, alongside the function of the director, or auteur. Much has been written about the subject, the process, and its production, and will be used to contemplate the insertion of the film into the transnarrative. The chapter following this one will tackle the tasks necessary to map screenwriting into a workable channel for the processing of the transnarrative.

Writing for the game is a much more recent conceptualisation that has only briefly been formalised as a method of narrative, especially since this particular game genre we refer to (narrative games) is, primarily, a modern, post-digital-age production. Chapter four will dissect the game narratives and game narrative writing as needed to produce it as a channel within the transnarrative.

Finally, we shall pose the question of the validity of the online universe as a storytelling genre and its transmutability as a channel for the transnarrative. This shall be considered in the fifth chapter of this paper. The advent of Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube has invoked a plethora of new age storytellers, under the banner of YouTube’s “Broadcast Yourself™”, who have embarked on the ‘game’ of mixed media conversations and playful constructions of fictional environments.

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<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard 1994

<sup>14</sup> Barthes 1994, p.104

<sup>15</sup> Barthes 1994, p.104

## **From transmedia to transnarration**

The transmedial process as implemented in the transnarrative applies writing for each of the aforementioned media into a single trajectory that allows the producer to merge the methodologies of transmedial writing into what can be called transnarration.

The task at hand becomes simplified and yet difficult due to its simplicity: mapping the mediums into channels for use in the narration of the story would begin by breaking down the essential dichotomies of each writing style into a heterogeneous collage of scenes. Thus, we bring about the application of the Text as defined by Barthes, particularly in its unconsumable nature, in its practice. To successfully, or presentably, simulate the transmedial into the transnarrative, the scriptor must will playfulness into the text being conceived, so that the reader produces the images and variables necessary for the channels to be experienced. The transnarrative and transnarrative is no passive consumption: it is a perpetually reproduced mechanism for encountering a story and a plurality.

## **The benefits of a transnarrative model**

Baudrillard's simulations refer to what he defines as a hyperreality, extending the concept of the representative aspects of simulations into something deeper, more persistent. The transnarrative is a simulation that is a hyperreality: it extends the concept of the transmedia story by consolidating it into a singular medium (in our case, the medium of the classic novel), by allowing the alternate media (which are really simulacra) to act as channels (signifiers), such that they would 'model' the otherwise mixed media project that would have been a transmedia story.

Therefore, what we would be creating would be a system of signs that would allow us to describe the signified (the actual content of the stories) through literary signifiers (words) that would simulate a comprehensive reality that could later be applied as a full transmedia project, where the simulacra would no longer map the reality they portray, but actually become that reality.

## **The elements of the transnarrative novel**

To recap, the transnarrative novel would have to include:

- the standard elements of the novel (a beginning, middle, and end, incorporated to display a coherent story with characters and a world in which those characters interact);
- scenes that could (or do) exist as separate stories that would be written in the form of the mediums they attempt to emulate;
- characters that are perceived as one and the same across channels, and whose stories are consistent throughout – this would be especially easier in the transnarrative than it would in transmedia storytelling, since the transnarrative tells the multiple stories in parallel to each other, but could also cause confusion if certain events, in a particular channel, would have to happen before they happen in other channels;

- most importantly (is it?), each story should be told in the same channel that was used to introduce it: story one would be a film, its sequel (two) would be a game, and the third would be a novel – therefore, the original story would be described in the transnarrative as a film, with the sequel always being iterated as a game, and the finale would be in the standard descriptive style of the traditional/modernist/postmodernist novel.

That last element will also be questioned in the chapters that follow, in an attempt to decide whether or not the transnarrative can break the boundaries of the transmedia story to such an extent that it would displace it, or become a separation from the original. It could also be that the transnarrative that conforms to the limitations of the physical transmedia would be used as a model for large, complex transmedia projects while those narratives that do not would be maintained in their singular channel.

The relationship between narrative and transmedia being now assimilated into the transnarrative allows us to consistently use that one descriptor to refer to the activity of both concepts, merging the two into the one, and fulfilling the eventual motive of this theory.

As the following chapters unfold, keep in mind that the scope of this paper does not include the construction and elaboration of the elements of story, since it is presumed that an undertaking of the transnarrative would be attempted by an 'artist' who is already aware of those constituents that define the story and expound upon it. What follows is the path the artist would take to produce a transnarrative novel, above and beyond the general journey or endeavour of novelistic creation.

## Filmmaking and Scriptwriting

To be able to introduce the elements of filmmaking and the script of the screen into the work of a novel, into the model of the transnarrative, one must be able to comprehend what it means to create a film.

The making of a film would, however, vary depending on who you are: Scorsese, Tarantino, Kubrick, Fellini, Coppola, Woody Allen, or whoever else might be your favourite director, each had their own approach to their work. The elements that constitute a film, however, are known. Script, acting, photography/cinematography, lighting (which really falls under the former), sound, and their complements. There must, however, be a script and a camera for there to be a film.

One matter of film that is overlooked here, out of obligation, is the relevance of the realtime, or the continuous ticking of a metre of time, that is inherent in the 'watching' of a film. Due to, again, the nature of the book, the development of a film scene in written word cannot be given to the reader in the same way said reader would experience it in film: physical objects must be described, forcing time to freeze long enough for the reader to draw the picture in her mind. The unavoidability of this particular encourages us to completely ignore that aspect and focus instead on more transmittable elements of filmmaking and scriptwriting.

### A quick overview of filmmaking

In our attempt to understand the art of the film for the purposes of the transnarrative, we must at once acknowledge the history and art of the process that creates it.

Film is much more than just a visual representation of a story. As Martin Scorsese says of Alexander Mackendrick in his foreword to the book *On Filmmaking*, Mackendrick knew "that it was about storytelling, and that it was also about images, that it was about acting *and* editing, action *and* words. And that more than anything else, it was about practice. Theories are fine, but practice is everything."<sup>16</sup> So, in our attempt to summarise what filmmaking is for the purposes of our work, we will have to be unfaithful to the full breadth of what it is as considered by its practitioners: we will have to be theoretical. Then again, we are not filmmakers and the transnarrative is not about filmmaking: it is a simulation of, it is a literary creation that emulates the activity. Our focus will have to be on storytelling and words, within the context of acting, editing, action, images, and practice.

What distinguishes transmedia storytelling from the novel is that it requires a varied and difficult to consolidate set of skills and talents, a combination that is rarely present in one particular individual. However, the transnarrative aspires to do exactly that: give one the ability to singlehandedly define the story across mediums, which is almost inconceivable to the artist who creates a novel or a film.

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<sup>16</sup> Mackendrick 2005, p.ix

## **Production or story?**

There is one space, however, where the novelist might be able to adequately create a film without acquiring the skills of the filmmaker, while F. Scott Fitzgerald is one example where that has failed<sup>17</sup>. Still, there is a lot to learn from his misfortune.

The process of creation, not production, essentially, demands two skills: writing and directing. Once production enters into play, acting, along with many other technical skills and talents, become involved in the process.

This, however, goes beyond the means and requirements of the transnarrative. Our concern is the pre-production, the conception, aspect of filmmaking. As such, we must cohesively distinguish between production and story for the purposes of this work: production occurs once the story is set, the casting is complete, and the director has 'figured out' how she will be filming the sequences; it happens after the script has been written and agreed upon, after the director has been 'inspired' towards the direction he shall be embarking upon.

So it would be story, not production, that would be effective in projecting the necessary thoughts onto the paper that would provide the audience with the necessary tools to construct the image of the transnarrative and interpret its story.

## **The difference between scriptwriting and directing**

"The novel and the screenplay do have one very important thing in common, however. They both have the same underlying story structure."<sup>18</sup>

The director's task is more than just the application of a screenplay, an idea that could be attributed to the work of French critics, cemented with the development of the auteur theory: "directors as having special ways of seeing".<sup>19</sup> The importance attributed to the director in modern thought is not without cause, and nobody can quite say if the chicken came before the egg, but auteur theory is primarily the most viable way to express the distinction between the scriptwriter and the director.

It is also why many directors write their own scripts, and some of our most beloved directors' films have been also written by them.

But we stray from the point here. Scripts are written, films are made, and directors have an almost absolute influence on the story of a film, just as novelists would on the story in their book.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Field 2005, pp. 15-30

<sup>18</sup> Bonnet 2011

<sup>19</sup> Kolker 2006, p.135

<sup>20</sup> Bonnet 2011

Does it therefore imply that, as a novelist creating a transnarrative, one must conform to the standards of the director – become the director as novelist – for the duration of a ‘to be filmed’ scene in the story of the novel, or would it suffice to write the story and allow the director (in the cases where the transnarrative would later be applied as a transmedia story) to take liberties with it?

### **The ultimate aim of screenwriting**

Ego is the domain of the artist (and let us be clear here that an artist is a person with talent, a voice, a resonance, and undeniable skill, not someone who can paint, write, or sing – anybody can do that), it is what gives the artist the desire and perseverance necessary to continue to produce, despite rejection and in the face of hopelessness. That might sound rather desolate, but most artists have faced numerous put downs before they finally realised their goal to be ‘published’. As such, they are forced to build their own egos for them to ultimately achieve ‘success’ (although some would say that success is the death of the artist) <sup>21</sup>.

So when the clash between the writer and the director comes to light, it is a clash of the egos of two artists, and such conflict must be avoided.

The purpose of the script (besides presenting a story) is to allow the director the creative control necessary for him to do his job.<sup>22</sup> As such, while informing and being as helpful to the director as possible, the screenwriter must stay out of the way: express the dialogue and the setting, without giving explicit directions to the person who should be making compositions and executing scenes.

The novelist doesn’t do that, and must be aware of the need to step back when writing for the transnarrative: the film is not her domain and must be respected as such.

Still, the novelist is the auteur of the transnarrative, not the director.

### **Screenwriting as part of the transnarrative**

“there is also great strength in not defining *every* moment too descriptively, or investing *every* action with emotional background.”<sup>23</sup>

Charlie Moritz had different intentions when he wrote that statement than we do here. He was referring to the adequate process of writing a script for a screen that will be controlled and developed by a cast and a director. The goal here is not to write for production.

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<sup>21</sup> James Baldwin: “The world has many labels for him, of which the most treacherous is the label of Success.”

<sup>22</sup> Moritz 2001, p.44

<sup>23</sup> Moritz 2001, p.45

The transnarrative is the final output of the work. There is no filming that will happen after the text has been written (or at least no filming is intended by the writing of the text). As expressed at the start of this chapter, time is forcibly ignored for our purposes, and this brings in the distinction Moritz here attempts: there is great strength in minimal description, but that is only possible when visibility is created without description. This is not the case in the novel.

The novelist is the auteur, he defines the beginning, the middle, and the end, and does not need concern himself with the actions of a director or the desires of an actor. Also, the director and the actor have the visual nature of film on their side, the novelist does not. Still, the scenes meant for the screen in the transnarrative must conform to screenwriting conventions sufficiently, while also being self-aware of their own final incarnation being that written word. A true script will be translated into a performance, whereas a transnarrative script will not. Moritz states that it is “essentials you’re after, not needless detail”<sup>24</sup>, and that is perfectly valid even in the context of the novel in question.

However, what is essential in this framework is significantly unlike what would be in a performed script. The transnarrative film scene is not a script, it is prose. Effectively, it is a narrative observation of the filming of a scene, although it could also be a traditional script with adequately descriptive mid-scenes.

Principally, as we shall see in the following chapter, character development and setting establishment are the most vital elements to the depiction of the transnarrative.

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<sup>24</sup> Moritz 2001, p.55

## Game Narratives

“Gamers want to have the idea that their actions are meaningful and influence what happens next, even though the overall outcome of the game stays the same.”<sup>25</sup>

That is the primary concern of the transnarrative as it relates to video games and gaming scenes, and will be the subject of interest for this chapter. The ability to simulate the experience of the interactive narrative in a medium that is by no means interactive, to express dynamism in static form, is the struggle of the game writer within the grounds of the novelist.

### A brief history of narratives in video games

Sports simulators, simulators, first person action-adventure, action-adventure, role-playing games, online role-playing games, strategy, card/board games. According to Lambert and Rider<sup>26</sup>, those are the different types of narrative games in circulation today.

Obviously, many of the lines and boundaries we use to differentiate between these genres are vague, tenacious at best: they can be seen as simulators, action-adventure games, or otherwise. Many of us have played at least one of each of these, or something that resembles them. Titles like FIFA, SimCity, Half-life, Assassin’s Creed, Deus Ex, Everquest, or Warcraft, even if you haven’t played them yourself, have invaded our collective memories and managed to circulate into mainstream media – or have generated clones that have become known to you (FarmVille?).

Aside from their impeccable gameplay, the interaction the user has with them, what made them really strike through, especially games like Warcraft, Assassin’s Creed, and The Sims, are the well developed story-lines that embedded them into their players’ consciousness, alongside the meticulous interactivity that characterises their gameplay, making gamers come back for more – to know more, prove more, explore more, to finish the game, but most importantly to enjoy the play.

This desire to sustain play is not present in the novel: people do not interact with the static medium of the book. This entirely contradicts the fundamental purpose of gameplay, which is an interaction between the player and the game,<sup>27</sup> bringing us to the issue of interactivity within the transnarrative.

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<sup>25</sup> Veugen 2011, p. 219

<sup>26</sup> Lambert & Rider 2001

<sup>27</sup> Salen & Zimmerman 2004, p. 33

## **The issue of interactivity and its absence in static media**

In tackling the issue of interactivity, let us first consider two conditions that bring meaning to the game narrative and embed purpose and entertainment to the play involved in the design and development of a 'successful' (enjoyable) game:

"Every action a player takes is woven into the larger fabric of the overall game experience: this is how the play of a game becomes truly meaningful."<sup>28</sup>

Interaction is defined by Salen and Zimmerman as quad-modal: interpretive, utilitarian, designed, and cultural participation, with the game narrative itself primarily providing the designed participation, or explicit interactivity, allowing the player to bring his own 'interactivity' into it through the three alternate connections he makes with the game: the functional, mental, and cultural.

Within the strain of both of these conditions (the explicit and the three implicits), we find that direct action from the user is required for the game to proceed and for the story to unfold. Most of this action is in the form of choices made by the player during the course of the story.

With a static medium of the book, we are incapable of giving the reader that choice unless we reconsider the design and form of the book (which is not entirely unrealistic, considering the current ventures being made within the [information] design field at large, but is beyond the scope of this paper)<sup>29</sup>. We must, instead, develop our simulation of the game narrative into a deeper simulation: one that simulates choice as well as story, experience, and environment.

## **Game writing, transmedia storytelling, transnarrative, and story**

One of the most powerful elements of game writing is the possibility for growth and exploration infused into the alternate realities (or virtual worlds) created for the player to immerse himself in; fictions that, although sometimes based on present day realities, or some tangible human world, are individually unreal, created. While some video games<sup>30</sup> have expanded and experimented with pervading our actual reality, most rely exclusively on the imaginations of the writers and their abilities to create these universes, their realities.

In other genres, or types, the primary driving force behind the success of a game has been the depth of character, the relationship the player develops with their avatar.

Both instances bring an interesting element of focus to the transnarrative, giving the transnarrative novelist the incentive (or possibly even forcing her) to create character and world centric stories that would fulfil the predominantly simulated experience of gameplay within the storytelling.

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<sup>28</sup> Salen & Zimmerman 2004, p. 35

<sup>29</sup> ISTD 2011, p. 7; [www.visual-editions.com](http://www.visual-editions.com)

<sup>30</sup> Mini Cooper hunting game, Stockholm, 2010 <[http://youtu.be/WMWu1h\\_6OfE](http://youtu.be/WMWu1h_6OfE)>

By ensuring that the game within the transmedial story and the transnarrative both meet the three conditions set by Miller<sup>31</sup>, we create a realistic simulation of the original game without being limited by the static nature of the novel.

A richness of activity between the characters of the game and the world in which they exist confirms the “patterning and repetition of key elements”<sup>32</sup>, along with the key character writing traits of normal story construction (such as fostering character believability, among other fundamentals). Conflict, [character/unit] habits, uncertainty, and purpose all add volume to the story and, thus, actualise the first condition: a plot, story, or incident is recited to the audience/reader. Finally, the medium chosen to disclose the story, the written word, realises the second condition.

What remains is to correlate the narrative of the book to that of the game: find (or create) similarities between the narrative as it is designed essential to the game and as it can be retold in the book. Projecting the actions and choices of the player into the story as if they were calculated decisions made by the reader would seem unrealistic, and therefore it would probably be more pragmatic to allow the reader to be observing a user at play, rather than playing herself.

Naturally, there could be a myriad of approaches to this, as there would to film writing as a channel of the transnarrative, and much creative investigation and experimentation would have to be undertaken for the multifarious approaches to be produced.

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<sup>31</sup> Miller 1990, p. 76, 77

<sup>32</sup> Miller 1990, p. 76, 77

## **Online Storytelling and the pseudo-Narratives**

The difficulty of channeling game narratives into the singular medium of the mono-narrative is not mirrored in that of online storytelling.

Social networking and the rise of the Web 2.0 (circa 2004) brought to the masses what Usenet and the pre-WWW generation of computer and network users had been immersed in for almost two decades: personalised, computer networked story creation and the pseudo-narratives of the late twentieth century. The cyberworld had a different way of telling stories, and the ubiquity of online communication made it more prevalent and allowed transmedialists to introduce it to their projects and narratives.

### **Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and the evolution of online storytelling**

Social networking has enabled everybody, from twelve year olds to senior citizens, to have an audience, to be watched by people they know and have met as well as people from across the planet who they've never spoken to and never will.

Trends are the new thing, the new variant of Andy Warhol's 'It' girl, and words like tweeting, facebooking, blogging, texting, and chatting have been coined or expanded to introduce a new means of conversation.

With the broad definition that Miller used to explain the narrative<sup>33</sup>, the Internet and technology have evolved new stories and systems, with YouTube ultimately giving the average user a stage for telling virtual stories, creating films, and displaying them to everyone with an Internet connection.

This new tradition of exhibitionist narrative, an intermingling of public interfaces for the purposes of telling a consolidated story, has permeated our culture: read a tweet that links to a Tumblr post of a YouTube video that you then use your iPhone to share on your Facebook wall, which is then read by your Facebook friends and commented on, shared on Twitter, and blogged about by their peers. This click-through functionality of the Internet is a key element of online storytelling, and would require a concordant representation in the transnarrative, one that can easily but impractically applied through jump-throughs in the text.

This evolution of narrative across applications to enable a collaborative effort of storytelling has even developed its own language, a bastardisation of language into cyberspeak.

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<sup>33</sup> Miller 1990, p. 76, 77

## **Re-segmentation of thought and the primary linguistic discord of cyberspeak**

Let us now break away from the discussion of narrative, for a moment, and approach the writing styles of the cyberworld, from Usenet to Twitter and phone texting and email. Modern day written communication has generated the new language of cyberspeak: “brb”, “lol”, and a mixture of words that do not belong in an English dictionary that have become common knowledge among all of us. Especially with Twitter’s 140 character limitation forcing tweeters to reduce and abstract words and language for them to communicate their expressions and messages.

For the simulation to be most successful when channeling online storytelling, this particular element of writing will have to be modelled: cyberspeak must be part of the transnarrative. It would, more importantly, require a transitional, or cross-textual, approach to narrative: moving from Twitter to Facebook and Tumblr, onwards into YouTube in the space of a single page of text would break the impracticality of the click-through nature of Internet surfing and communication, allowing us to ‘jump’ without subjugating the reader to flipping an incessant number of pages.

These are the fundamental artefacts, possibly even the signifiers, of the evolved contemporary storyteller. It is through the diluted, minimalist, corrupt re-imagining of language coupled with the disarrangement of events, scenes, dialogue, or narrative that we find the current narrator shining through, giving the reader a new script to decode.

Does that mean that the new lingo would have to replace and supersede the native language of the writer? Observation proves to us that, while cyberspeak has found popularity among some, it has not entirely overcome the realm of the cyber. Natural, proper language still pervades the virtual world.

## **Transnarrative, digitised**

So it must be that the transnarrative will only be able to absorb the online world in its most direct form: as a transcript of the postings of its users, in the simulated outreach of the disorder of stories and thoughts that is particular to the medium.

The transcription of YouTube videos (and their like) poses a unique challenge, but one that can be resolved by a simple merging of two methods of transnarrative writing: film-writing conjoined with the cyberspeak bouncing transcripts of the example. Ultimately, the idea would be equivalent to a more immersive variation of the simulation introduced to channel transmedia stories into the transnarrative; it would be two channels simulated into one.

## Applied Transnarratives

Thomsen declared the novel sufficiently reinvented, but allowed for the possibilities of more. The project embarked upon here was exactly for that purpose: it was not so much a study of transmedia and the narrative as it was an elaboration of a new venture within the genre of the novel.

Whether this venture will or will not be successful is still to be seen, considering the lack of examples to study and the inability of this writer to procure the necessary skill set or the adequately skilled team needed for the realisation of the transnarrative novel (as yet). To have taken the initial statements of narrative, storytelling, and transmedia and allow them to merge into what was termed transnarrative has allowed us to see the novel in a different light.

As aspiring novelist, as writer, I have, through the course of this paper and the research that preceded it, found many intriguing approaches to the possibilities of taking the novel into new spaces. Since then, ideas for novels that could conform to the transnarrative have found their way to my creative consciousness and I now have a small story to tell that could perhaps serve as an example. Let's call that story *Hill of Beans*.

### Script analysis, four media, three scenes

Broadly, the story is set around two characters: Karl K and Holly Golightly. Karl converses (sometimes metaphorically, sometimes through their writings, and sometimes in physical form) with Martin Amis and Charles Bukowski. He goes through stages of a psychosis that involve him struggling with himself while his muse and lover, the Holly Golightly borrowed from Truman Capote's novel (who might or might not be a figment of his imagination), brings passion (positive or otherwise), thrill, and confusion to his life, pushing him further and further towards his artistic influences and the people and writers who he has borrowed from over the years. Conversations, interactions, surprises, and otherwise ensue, until he eventually creates a painting that consolidates the tension and chaos that had brought him to the brink, with its completion marking his realisation that his problems "don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world"<sup>34</sup>.

Part of *Hill of Beans* will, naturally, be the hyperreality of the classic novel, or the contemporary one. However, for the purposes of the transnarrative, there will be film, game, and online scenes.

Karl will be part of discussions online, will spend time reading and surfing, and all that information will be given life and the reader will be experiencing the reality of 'being' Karl for the duration of the online snippets, be they transcripts or actions, film or audio. Excerpts from his Twitter account, feeds from his news reader, and other such modern-day normalities will be expected and included.

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<sup>34</sup> IMDB

The film narrative faction of the story would be very fitting for the more surreal, hallucinatory moments in the story: from incidents of conversation with Bukowski to drinks with Hemingway, and little snapshots of Coco Chanel breaching his world and Kafka lamenting his metamorphosis in the trial. Some will be narrated by a different voice, some will be described as a scene in production (as the director calls for specifics), others based on a simple screenscript. The various means and methods described in the chapter on filmmaking will be explored, and others like them.

Game narratives are persistently the trickiest of the bunch, but could be simplified through the playful interaction between Karl K and Holly Golightly, as well as the twisted games that Bukowski throws at Karl. However, this particular method of storytelling has proven difficult to write and will have to be explored further before a schematic of the possibilities can be described.

The above summarises the stages of transnarrative that this paper has managed to develop. Clearly, much more work is necessary for the form to become applicable, but the preliminaries have been conditioned and the grounding and starting point for the practice is now set. The simulation of each of the channels will have to be experimented with until such a time as something of value can be produced for it to be assessed and henceforth re-positioned.

### **The outcome of transnarrative in its spaces**

Simulations are used across disciplines and in industrial and military applications to assist in visualising, experiencing, or understanding proposed objects or subjects, as seen fit by the agents involved in their development. It generally refers to a computer model that is reflective of the actual final product.

Allowing one book to contain a full blueprint for a particular transmedia project enhances the capabilities of newer, larger projects, setting precedent for other books to follow. In the context of a truly transmedial project, the transnarrative can become a method for the creation of the project - a tool, to be conveniently utilised as needed.

Implementing a system of signs and simulations as complex and intricate as the transnarrative into a prosaic form such as the novel is both difficult and hard to assess. With today's influx of postmodern literature that attempts to consistently violate the narrative form of the novel, any work that proceeds to produce something of deeper meaning, to bring about true play into the text, or to genuinely subvert the established narrative will, unfortunately and possibly unrightfully, fall into the category of postmodern prose, while transnarrative is not (exactly) such a form.

Yes, it stems from a postmodern/poststructuralist perspective, its approach is largely intellectual and seems to be another of the gimmicks of the contemporary novelist, but the real effect targeted here is not that of the gimmick, but of a true understanding of where the form (be it the narrative or the transnarrative) can evolve to.

With projects such as the ISTD's suggestion for students to use the work of Jack Zipes to 'subvert and redefine' the book in form and function<sup>35</sup>, with the advent of tablets and their ability to allow the reader to truly interact with the text, the transnarrative becomes a method that is really a box of opportunities for the writer and reader alike, a true incarnation of the writerly Text as Barthes explains it.

There is, however, the issue of creating a narrative that is so diverse: the craft of writing is merged with a myriad of other skills that the novelist will have to acquire for him to succeed in breaking into the totality of the transnarrative.

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<sup>35</sup> ISTD 2011, p.7

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