

TRANSMEDIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NARREME. A VIRTUAL APEX¹

Abstract: This paper aims to present a brief diachronic and transmedial overview of the development of the features of narration and its atomic unit, the narreme. Across media, narratives change, and so do the techniques and processes involved, giving rise to several distinctions in terms of genre, narreme delivery, audience involvement and relationship between audience and author. This is achieved through an attempt at identifying certain common features of narratives across media and to properly define and isolate the concept of narreme, for lack of a formal definition. The first section of this paper exemplifies and outlines said features, while the second part aims to demonstrate how said features and concepts developed transmedially, as well as how the fairly recent virtual medium provided grounds for a paradigmatic shift.

Key words: narratology, transmedial, narreme, virtual

The way narratives change across media has been studied intensely in the past few decades. From the Russian Formalists who created the distinction between fabula and subject (also known as the story-plot couplet), to Vladimir Propp's (et al.) structuralist theory of thematic narratology and Genette's (et al.) theory of modal narratology (Ronen 817-842), which although focus on different aspects and present different perspectives, do converge and are not mutually exclusive, and some scholars agree that these should not be treated differently (Baroni²). In modern narratology, indeed they are not.

The narreme is the fundamental unit of narration. Conceptually, it is similar to other atomic units, such as the atom in physics, the point in geometry or the phoneme in phonology.

¹This article contains fragments from my thesis, *Narratological Evolution – A Transmedial Analysis with a Focus on the Virtual Medium*. Some of them are published in the forthcoming issue of *Journal of Student Research in Languages and Literatures* (JSRLL), 2016. The present study is an original one, based on previous research. Topics similar to this one and tangentially relevant have been discussed in Marie-Laure Ryan's "Immersion vs. Interactivity", Ted Friedman's "Computer Games and Interactive Textuality", and Brenda Laurel (especially when talking about performativity or landscapes in virtual media).

²As seen in "The Living Handbook of Narratology" (online, University of Hamburg) - "Sequentiality", paragraph 13 (no page mentioned in reference)

Unlike other such units, however, it lacks a proper definition and is difficult to locate or describe in a narrative. For the sake of brevity, a definition shall not be presently formed, but certain aspects of the nature of narremes must be taken into account. *Immutability* is one of them, as it is present in other similar cases. For instance, there is a difference between the arrangement of phonemes in a particular order, such that if one phoneme is swapped for another, a new element is formed (*i.e. io vs. oi*).

Narreme delivery is the fundamental mechanism of narration. Depending on how it is realised, a relationship between the narrative, the narrator and the narratee is created. Active delivery involves conscious effort from the narrator, while the passive one requires none. *Narreme instantiation*³ refers to the way the audience interacts with the delivered narremes. The same rules apply for activity and passivity. Cognitive involvement is a consequence of these two elements. The more cognitively involved the audience is, the more gaps they have to fill in for some part of the narrative (*i.e. imagining how a character looks, connecting any two events, etc.*).

Difficulties arise, however, the more narratives stray from the textual medium. Modern narratology struggles to extrapolate the rigid, almost dogmatic text-based definitions established for written narratives to other media, where narratives persist and prevail. Ultimately, narratives do not change in nature, as much as they do in their expression. Theatrical scripts are still written down, then played, and so are movie scripts. Even video game scripts act much the same way. However, the different expressions raise several arguments among certain groups, such as ludologists' arguments against narratives in video games, or game theorists' adaptations taken from narratology.

For the purpose of this paper, a brief diachronic observation will be made in order to highlight features gathered throughout history, accompanied by brief synchronic observations for the sake of comparison. Shifts within concepts such as performativity, narreme delivery, narrativity, world building, authorial status, and cognitive involvement will be detailed using, hopefully, sufficient material from each medium or genre discussed.

The first medium in which narratives were expressed is the oral medium, as part of oral culture (folklore, traditions, etc.) and propagated cultural values and knowledge.

³ Original concept, presented, detailed and used as a tool for transmedial analysis in presently unpublished thesis paper "Narratological Evolution – A Transmedial Analysis with a Focus on the Virtual Medium", briefly introduced hereby.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, commonly abbreviated as UNESCO, oral traditions are used to preserve “knowledge, cultural and social values and collective memory. They play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive.” (Unesco.org). Also according to UNESCO, oral culture can be identified worldwide, although it suffers from a frail nature, its message possibly being subject to unwanted alterations. Its fragile nature is also threatened by urban culture and the use of other media, such as books, radio, etc. UNESCO, however, struggles to preserve oral traditions, as they do indeed provide invaluable insight into the beginnings of narration, as well as its evolution.

Narratologically speaking, the oral medium is marked by instability, since oral narratives that are not recorded tend to change over time. Authorship is often unclear, while the predominant narrative mode is *telling* rather than *showing*, leaning on *diegesis*. Mediacy is created by a storyteller, who actively delivers narremes to an audience. The audience is cognitively involved via imagination and through visualising the descriptive passages in the narrative. Narremes are actively instantiated by the storyteller, and passively by the audience. The setting may or may not be described, while characters are not static, but may change, along with the narrative, from one instance of storytelling to another, indeliberately.

These ancient narratives, be they myths, stories, chants or tales, do not differ much from modern folkloric tales, as any simple foray into studying these would yield. They would often present few characters, familiar settings, and a rhetoric upon good versus evil. Mystic elements were present, and served to strengthen the heroic character that would lie at the core of the narrative. Due to their educational nature, these stories were often moralising and would portray the forces of good as winners, while evil, in any form, would often be banished. The narrative structure would be fairly simple, rarely convoluted, most often presented from a third person perspective. Some such stories have still retained forms close to their original ones, and can be found in religious texts (see Indian Vedas), Aboriginal oral culture, Native American oral culture and African oral culture. One clear example that was initially part of oral tradition before having been recorded on papyrus is the tale of Anpu and Bata, also known as “The Tale of the two Brothers” (reshafim.org.il), in which a treacherous wife seeks to sow conflict between her husband and his younger brother. Eventually, the wife is slain and the brother prevails as a great leader, later rewarded by the gods themselves, as a form of retribution.

One of the advantages of oral narration is that it is easily accessible and very adaptable. Should a narrative need a new twist, so as to incorporate a new belief or lesson, this can easily be done, even on the spot. Another advantage is that the audience does not require reading skills, thus it can partake in the preservation of culture without prior education, and even in a more engaging way than with reading, for instance. Oral narration is also advantageous in that some (but not full) auctorial and diegetic power is lent to the storyteller, who can improvise, morphing narremes (defined in narratology as the atomic unit of a narrative). These powers are then passed on to the next generation. This process has made the survival of oral narrative possible up to this day, when it can manifest as urban legends and stories in modern societies.

The disadvantages, as previously mentioned, are intrinsic: without a recording system, societies and storytellers have to rely on memory to preserve the narrative structure, which often shifts diachronically and even synchronically. One character may retain its moral backbone, but its description might change drastically (for instance, see the Trickster and its various forms in Native American culture). The fact that they were spoken would also limit dissemination into other cultures, since translation would have been much harder without a reference system.

These disadvantages were mitigated, at least partially, by the invention of writing systems. These permitted humanity to start recording information that would be used by many generations to come, in a way that was more reliable than any other before it. Oral narratives, for various reasons, have been transposed to the textual medium. One of the main reasons was the preservation of the narratives as they were, with credit given where it was due. Thus, the textual medium has brought the following additions to what concerns narratives and narreme delivery: there no longer was a need for a physical narrating instance, narrative rights instead being passed on to an intratextual entity, hence the passive narreme delivery, but active instantiation (through reading).

In those days, in those far remote days, in those nights, in those faraway nights, in those years, in those far remote years, at that time the wise one who knew how to speak in elaborate words lived in the Land; Curuppag, the wise one, who knew how to speak with elaborate words lived in the Land. Curuppag gave instructions to his son; Curuppag, the son of Ubara-Tutu gave instructions to his son Zi-ud-sura: My son, let me give you instructions: you should pay attention! Zi-ud-sura, let me speak a word to

you: you should pay attention! Do not neglect my instructions! Do not transgress the words I speak! The instructions of an old man are precious; you should comply with them!

(Ox.ac.uk)

The implied author can exert diegetic control through a narrating instance that can be complex, taking up different points of view, voices, tones, and degrees of involvement (hetero- vs. homodiegetic). The implied reader's cognitive involvement is high due to the fact that every detail about the narrative, characters and setting is relayed through descriptors, being up to the implied reader's imagination to form a coherent mental image of what is told. The predominant mode is telling, or diegesis, since descriptor and narrative passages, mixed with dialogue, predominate. Authorship is reserved, authors are recorded and credited, creating stable, long-lasting narratives. Written works can be transposed to other media (theatrical, cinematic, virtual) and can originate from other media (virtual, oral, cinematic, theatrical), thus being bidirectionally transmedial. Inherently, textual narratives are not performative.

The theatrical (or dramatic) medium followed soon after, in Ancient Greece. This had brought forth a plethora of narratological innovations, most notably performativity, multiperspectivity, the issue of transmedial narratology, and conceptual changes. Thus, a typical, classical dramatic narrative presents the following characteristics: a linear series of narremes, lack of a clearly defined narrating instance, bringing up the issue of transgeneric mediacy, narremes present and easily identifiable as descriptors within the script, characters are briefly, if at all described, exposition and description relying on *showing* and *diegesis di mimeseos* (*diegesis* through *mimesis*, or storytelling through acting), and multiperspectivity (the worldview is relayed through actors'/characters' points of view).

CHORUS singing

Ten livelong years have rolled away,
Since the twin lords of sceptred sway,
By Zeus endowed with pride of place,
The doughty chiefs of Atreus' race,
Went forth of yore,
To plead with Priam, face to face,

Before the judgment-seat of War! [...](Aeschylus)

One might argue that the Leader should be considered a separate *dramatis personae*. However, that would bring up the debate of whether a single character from a crowd (hereby and otherwise considered a collective character) should be considered a separate, distinct character due to a few interventions. Whether assuming control of the dialogue warrants distinction is beyond the scope of this paper, but the Leader will, however, not be referred to as the Chorus.

Nevertheless, the lexis undergoes a shift at the discourse level: from *haple diegesis*, which is "plain" or unmixed diegesis, as (the Chorus is the authorial "storyteller") to *diegesis dia mimeseos* (the Leader continues the narrative through *mimesis*, i.e. *live* speech, delivered as part of the act). This shift, compared to the *diegesis di' amphoteron* (combined narrative) present in non-dramatic forms (e.g. Homer's epics), tends to create a clear distinction between *haple diegesis* and *diegesis dia mimeseos*. It can be said that Classical Greek drama alternated between *diegesis* and *mimesis*, in a more modern fashion.

Later on, however, narratology would create the distinction between *telling* and *showing*, and their effects on the audience (Köppe, Klauk). The lines between these modes are blurred in the cited excerpts, unlike the clear distinction that can be observed in the case of ancient (and modern) written works (where it is obvious during descriptive passages or narrated action) and, for instance, cinematic representation (where the *showing* mode prevails). This is due to the fact that parts of the story are told (i.e. sung, chanted, recounted, etc.) and other parts are shown (through gestures, dialogue, music, props, etc.). However, a crucial difference can be observed in Eastern dramatic works. While, as mentioned before, Western drama is marked by verbosity (*telling* or *diegesis*), Eastern drama is dominated by motricity (*showing* or *mimesis*).

Currently, the oldest known Eastern works originate in India, being written in Sanskrit. Their origins, as with Western drama, lie in religious beliefs (Vedic writings, specifically Vishnu for the former, and mythology, specifically Dionysus for the latter). Sanskrit theatre (presently referred to as Koodiyattam) is played with actors and is accompanied by an ensemble of musicians playing folkloric instruments. Sanskrit theatre is regarded as the highest achievement of Sanskrit literature and employed well-defined character roles, such as a hero, a heroine or a clown, in which actors would have specialised (Baumer et al., 94-95). The play

would usually be a re-enactment of a story from the Mahabharata or the Ramayana, and would often be preceded by a prologue:

Stage-manager.

With these words, my lords and gentlemen, I have to announce to you—But what is that? I thought I heard a noise just as I was to make my announcement. Well, I must see what it is.

(Voice behind the scene.)

Ho there, take word to his Highness the King of the Angas.

Stage-manager.

Good, I understand. A flurried servitor with folded hands brings word to Karna at Duryodhana's behest that the battle grows tumultuous.

(Exit.)

(Yavanika.org)⁴

One can observe the involvement of a non-character in the narrative. This involvement is mentioned within the scripts, and is not improvisation. This is crucial in understanding that in Sanskrit drama (and modern Koodiyattam) the mode of exposition leans towards *showing* (the apparently natural, scripted involvement of the Stage-manager in the plot) instead of *telling* (the long-winded hymns narrating the background of the story). Also, according to Baumer et al. (105-107), special attention was dedicated to clothing, props, music and gestures, as well as other background theatrical elements, so as to better communicate the plot, removing the need for intricate, detailed exposition. In Koodiyattam, this concept is taken further, eliminating replies and adding extra layers of details to costumes, gestures and props.

This pattern of emphasized *mimesis*-enhanced features is consistent throughout Eastern drama. Chinese Opera (a misnomer, but usually referring to most types of Chinese drama) relies on a limited cast of characters. For instance, in Canjun Opera, there are only two characters: the Canjun and the Grey Hawk (Fu). In Zaju plays, four particular roles can be identified: *sheng*, *dan*, *jing* and *chou*, representing a male, female, "painted face" and clown,

⁴ Translated by A. C. Woolner and Lakshman Sarup

respectively. These characters wore specific colours so as to represent and encode their traits. Each act was marked by a sequence in a musical modal progression and each act focused on one actor (Crump). Accordingly, each such section marked a narreme and psychologically speaking, the audience is involved and immersed in the narrative by being engaged in a process of deduction, having to pay attention not to a narrated sequence, but to cues within the represented universe.

The setting is described by the author in the script, usually very briefly, along with the characters. This is then transposed into the real world as props on the stage, and costumes and makeup worn by characters, through which the implied author communicates with the implied audience, trading narrative accuracy for cognitive involvement. The narratives themselves are delivered by the implied author to the first tier of narratees (actors in this case) through the script (passively), and by the actors to the second tier of narratees (the audience) through acting (passively). Narreme instantiation is done passively, by watching the play develop, yet it is not done so through a conventional narrator, but rather through a bifunctional actor, which takes both the role of a character and that of a narrator (see Greek Chorus, or stage managers). These actors tread the line between intra- and extra-*diegesis*, interacting directly with both the audience and characters. As the entire narrative is performed and written to be performed, it is considered performative by nature. Plays are written by consecrated dramaturgists and playwrights, authorship being reserved. Oral, written and other narratives can be adapted for theatrical performances, but theatrical performances are usually confined to their medium, being considered unidirectionally transmedial.

Regardless of the oscillation between *showing* and *telling*, all instances of drama brought several innovations, narratologically speaking. Among such innovations, some pertain to the dimensional level of the narrative, some to the narratological level, and some to the conceptual level. Dimensionally, which is perhaps the most evident level, drama shifted the existence of (literary) narratives from the confines of an inflexible medium (i.e. paper, clay tablets, papyrus, etc.) to reality. In other words, mediation, characters, and the plot itself are represented corporeally. This changes a few aspects of narratology, raising issues and questions. For instance, ontologically (or even epistemologically, narratology-wise), the character blurs the line between the distant, fictional entity that populates written narratives and oral culture, and a real being that re-enacts, or becomes, “appropriates” or embodies a specific set of descriptors, replies and/or actions. A dimensional “violation” is also committed

by the narrating agent, which finds itself instantiated by functional theatrical elements, such as stage managers or chorus members. This “trespass” leads to the ambiguity of such an agent’s existence in drama.

These lead to the concept of transgeneric and transmedial narratology, hence the innovations on the narratological level. These two aspects appear due to the differences between classical narration (on paper, no live characters, concrete mediacy, etc.) and drama (live characters, focus on choric speeches, prologues, epilogues, etc.) but, as Richardson (142-55) argues, most of the concepts pertaining to classical narratives can be applied to drama (as well as poetry). Moreover, Nünning et al. (329–52) back up the statement that a distinction between mimetic narration and diegetic narration (and, by default, between showing and telling modes) can be made.

Conceptually, drama, is, by its very nature, performative, compared to other narrative modes. Performativity can translate narremes into actions performed by actors, conveying varying degrees of immediacy to an otherwise “distant” story, conceptually overriding narratological features such as characters’ and readers’ points of view and psychological involvement. The former leads to the issue of multiperspectivity (the characters’ worldviews are reconstructed by the audience without mediation from a narrating agent), while the latter results in the audience’s attention being drawn to the narrative itself due to foregrounding. Thus, more involvement and interaction with the story world are required, compared to written narratives, while also calling for less prerequisites, such as the lack of literacy which would have been a requirement. Strong reading comprehension is also no longer a prerequisite for understanding the narrative, which now lends itself to a broader demographic. At the discourse level, dramatic texts would take on the role of perpetuating culture and educating, while assuming little to no shared knowledge between the implied author and the audience.

Obviously, as with written works, dramatic works have specialised over time, exacerbating some of the aforementioned characteristics. Pantomime, for example, eliminates dialogue altogether, while opera focuses on the musical aspect. Puppet theatre eliminates the need for actors, while shadow plays often have neither actors nor dialogue (with the mention that shadow plays exist since ancient times) (Ewart).

In contrast to written narratives, dramatic exposition has ludic potential. From satyr plays (tragicomical plays from Ancient Greece) to Kyogen shows (comical interludes to Noh plays), ludic elements were implemented with the purpose of pure entertainment (belonging to

the mimetic branch, specifically), and this implementation would only resurface later on, in the virtual medium.

Some of the disadvantages of dramatic works are inherent: the quality of the performance is directly proportional with the skill of the actors. The fidelity of the setting is limited by the quality of the props, and although special effects, such as *deus ex machina* were used, suspension of disbelief would still be required of the attendance. Moreover, a play would be limited in time and scope, and so would the imagination of the audience, which would be much less engaged than in non-performative narratives. Finally, due to the focus on *showing*, the audience would be required to have at least some background knowledge of the culture the play was written for, so as to understand what was happening. This was especially true to Eastern drama, but was also applicable to persons who could not speak Greek, for instance. In other words, drama was not as culturally portable as written works could be (*via* translation).

As with written and oral narratives, a solution to the aforementioned issues would be found much later, with the dawn of cinematography. Namely, it aims for a better representation of the setting, characters and narrative coherence than what the dramatic medium allowed. The cinematic medium, thusly, retains features similar to the dramatic one, with a few notable differences: the bi-functional narrative agent is replaced by a more complex audiovisual narrating instance (the first example of a non-language based narrating instance), much higher fidelity in setting reproduction (*mise en scène* or arranging the setting in front of the camera), temporal fidelity (i.e. daytime is realistically reflected in the rendition, so is night time, time passage, etc.). Other features from the dramatic medium are exaggerated, such as the lack of cognitive involvement and eliminating the need for a live performance. . The setting is created with Computer Generated Images (CGI) in order to improve immersion.

Cinematographic works retain most of the narratological features of dramatic ones, while presenting a few key differences. For instance, performativity is not wholly retained, conceptually speaking. The narrative is not re-enacted each time it is invoked, but it is rather constructed through a limited number of enactments which are recorded and need not be further re-enacted. In essence, however, a performance is still a prerequisite for the narratological fulfillment of the narrative itself.

Cinematic productions are also inherently transmediatic and can very well be transgeneric, since movie adaptations from books have been often made. Also, compared to theatrical performances, there is less cognitive involvement on the audience's part, since the narrative is pre-rendered, along with the setting, the characters and whatever else was previously left for imagination. The setting, this time around, is created beforehand, with much greater fidelity, "before the camera" (a process known as *mise en scène*). These lead to much richer scripts, such as the one below:

Space.

But not the dark lonely corner of it we're used to. This is
a glittering inferno -- the center of a distant galaxy.

Suddenly, something **tears** past at incredible speed: a **neutron star**. It **smashes**
headlong through everything it encounters...planets, stars. Can anything stop this
juggernaut.

Yes. Something looms at the heart of the galaxy, hidden
inside the blinding starlight, a dark flaw in the fabric of
existence itself: a **black hole**.

The neutron star is pulled into the black hole's swirl,
spiralling closer and closer to destruction. Finally, it
contacts the hole's edge and **explosion**.

The **explosion** is so powerful that it sends shock waves into
the fabric of space-time itself. We ride one of these waves,
racing back out from the black hole. [...]

(imsdb.com)

Narratologically speaking, narreme delivery is done actively through the actors' performances, and passively through the script itself. Narreme instantiation, authorship, transmedial portability, narrative mode and performativity are inherited from the progenitor medium. Despite this, perhaps the greatest differences can be found when it comes to mediacy. A mediating agent can be hard to pinpoint within cinematic works, but as long as narration exists (and in standard films, there is an undeniable, yet variable degree of narrativity), a narrating agent, responsible for the delivery of the narremes exists. The

narrating agent is different in that it relies on narreme delivery through points of view and musical elements rather than language-based narration.

It wasn't, however, until the emergence of the digital era that narratives took a different turn. Compared to previous media, immersion and involvement lie at the foundation of virtual narratives. Here is where the greatest paradigmatic shift in narreme manipulation takes place. Among the innovations brought by the virtual medium there are: the bifunctional role of the implied audience (which takes the role of 'player'), the involvement of the audience in the narrative, shared authorship, presents various degrees of narrativity (across genres and games), no fixed narrative instance, even higher fidelity in the representation of the narrative world, alternation and incorporation of ludic sequences narrative or cinematic sequences and spatial narration (storytelling through elements of the setting).

Having taken into account the previous media, one can see how virtual narratives lend themselves to narratological analysis. The first to be analysed shall be *Wargame*. The video game is the first of its age to present the capability of generating complex narratives. The narratives were implied rather than explicit, but the criteria were fulfilled: there were two characters to be assumed (the commanders), the premise reflected the diplomatic and sociopolitical situation, is set (locations on the display corresponded to a real life battlezone, creating an equivalent yet virtual topography), actions were performed and consequences resulted over a span of time. Specifically, a narrative would be generated in this manner:

NATO commander chooses to order an airstrike over the enemy's first camp. Casualties are calculated. USSR commander launches infantry to capture NATO commander's ammunitions deposit. The computer calculates the casualties. The computer calculates and allocates resources (petroleum products and ammunition). NATO commander moves troops from France to West Germany. USSR commander moves materiel to the frontline to prepare for an attack. NATO commander orders airstrike to divert USSR troops. Computer calculates casualties and redistributes resources. With ground troops in disarray, USSR commander decides to launch a surprise nuclear attack on Belgium. Computer calculates casualties and assets, decides the ratio of ineffective to active troops is too high for NATO, declares USSR victory. Game ends.

This exemplifies the bifunctional nature of the implied audience: not only do the participants watch the outcomes, but they also influence them. *Wargame* also introduced a new type of non-narrating mediating instance: the computer. Narratologically speaking, the computer is a mediating agent through its involvement in determining outcomes and selecting narrative branches according to and in cooperation with the player's interaction. In this particular case, the computer weighs the impact of each of the general's moves, up to the point of declaring victory or loss. Accordingly, for each action of the player, there is a reaction from this arbiter. Each action-reaction pair constitutes two narremes.

Narremes are thus subjected to a paradigmatic shift. They exist in both their usual, pre-generated status (i.e. predefined, waiting to be either acted, read or otherwise) and in a potential state, through the input of the "player" agent. The "player" agent can assume authorial powers within the world, generating narremes by: creating or triggering an event, making a choice, performing an action, creating a character, modifying the setting, etc. Thus, narremes are instantiated actively by the audience, through cognitive involvement (decision-making or otherwise). Other features from other types of presented narratives may manifest, depending on the genre of the game.

Classically, the point of view would have been bound to a narrator. As mentioned before, however, the concept of narrator has also undergone significant changes in time. From the classical, easily describable textual narrator, to the audiovisual narrating instance in cinematography, the virtual medium employs all of these and more. If the classical parameters for a narrating/mediating instance were complicated by the apparition of an audiovisual agent, they are now further expanded, having become a trifecta of narrative agents that work in tandem to sustain the narrativity of the virtual world.

The first is the classical narrator. This virtual version of the mediating instance, unlike the textual species, acts as an intermediary rather than the primary means of narrative advancement. This entity often works in tandem with an audiovisual narrator, as is the case in *The Stanley Parable*, *Child of Light*, *Homeworld* series, *Baldur's Gate* series, *Geneforge* series, etc. The two work by having a narrating voice accompany a visual presentation, during a cinematic or a cutscene. The tandem also serves as feedback for player action, warning against certain actions or providing advice. In *Baldur's Gate*, for instance, before traversing to a new area, if the player does not have all companions in close proximity to the party member closest to the edge of the map, the narrator's voice intervenes stating that "You must gather

your party before venturing forth”. Another example would be *Fallout 2*’s text-based descriptions of actions (“you pick up the rock”, “you plant the explosives”, “squatter dropped his weapon”) similar to those of *Zork*, and an outstanding case would be that of *Divinity: Original Sin*, where a narrator sometimes intervenes to describe actions of your characters or events that are not explicitly shown, narrates mediates the communication between a mute character and the player (i.e. “Wolgraff looks at you worriedly”, “Wolgraff signs you that he sees a trap”, etc.). This type of mediation is common in text narratives, but absent in performative narration. In this case, the two are combined seamlessly.

Another special case is that of *The Stanley Parable*, where an instance very similar to that of a classical narrator is augmented by audiovisual narration in order to drive the narrative in a surprising way. The protagonist, Stanley, is briefly introduced at the beginning of the game. A glimpse of his workplace is given. The audiovisual support follows this narration and shows Stanley doing his job, at some point even through a surveillance camera. The narrator uses the third person to describe events. At some point, the camera “enters” Stanley and the player is given control of the movements. From that point on, narration is made “a posteriori” or “pre-factum” from the player’s perspective, but “post-factum” from the narrator’s perspective, i.e. when the player reaches a certain corridor with two open doors, the narrator says “When he reached the corridor with the two open doors, Stanley went through the left door” even though the player has not yet made that decision. This feat was previously impossible in other media, especially since the character’s actions are disjointed from the narrator’s discourse. The player is, as such, presented with the option to create their own narrative (to not listen to the narrator) in which case the narrator starts addressing the player directly, utilising second person speech, and changes their tone to either a menacing one or a condescending one. The setting changes accordingly, depending on the player’s actions, constituting solid use of audiovisual cues to build the narrative and guide the player. As the game’s name implies, this parable aims to practically demonstrate the novel possibilities and interactions between the author or authors, character, player, setting and narrative instances, and to illustrate the power (or illusion) of choice.

The third mediating element is new to the world of narratology and serves more than one function. The “player” instance acts, partially, as a narrator, by guiding the narrative and selecting which narrative branches to follow. The player also treads the line between author and narrator in cases of emergent gameplay, whereby a setting with some degree of narrative

(and narrative potential) is presented to the player, who in turn harnesses the given elements in order to weave a narrative. This is similar to the narrative presented in the *Wargame* example, where two players, assisted by the computer, act within the confines of a predetermined scenario. That, however, was a cooperative game. In other games, especially sandbox ones, the player is alone and they interact strictly with the world, with little to no intervention from the other two narrative instances. Such games include those that use procedural world generation (i.e. *Minecraft*, *Starbound*, *Terraria*, *No Man's Sky*, etc.) and others that rely on preset worlds, but present the player with elements necessary for achieving certain goals, such as the case of *Deus Ex*, where a player might choose to utilize objects from the environment to kill an NPC (Non Player Character), go over an obstacle or generally finding creative solutions to presented issues. In role playing games, a player might choose to create a character that, without the express options given by the developer, chooses to defy all given missions and attempts to destroy as much of the world as possible, slaying NPC's and ignoring quest objectives. In the *X* series, at any point during the storyline, the player, should they decide to postpone the given missions, can create enemies from any present faction, or befriend them, as they can acquire any ship and populate, take over, or destroy any sector. In the *Grand Theft Auto* series, a player can choose to drive erratically, which would then lead to an accident, leading to a conflict, leading to the involvement of the police forces. Should the player not surrender, violence escalates, and the player might or might not escape, effectively creating a full, clearly describable narrative from the given tools and elements.

All of the above examples constitute narratological innovations on more than one level. The fact that there is a trifecta of narrating agents, instead of just one or two (in the case of cinematic productions that choose to incorporate a narrating voice) represents an innovation at the discourse level. At the same level lies the addition of a new mode, apart from *telling* and *showing*, or *diegesis* and *mimesis*, namely *acting* or *doing*. The fact that the audience can interact with the setting and influence the narrative represents change on the conceptual level, and the fact that there is shared authorship and inclusion of the audience in the final narrative narrows the gap between the author and the implied audience, changing the representation level. Functionally, the element of interactivity sets everything in motion, enabling true choice-consequence narremes and branching narratives, as well as adding an extra dimension to both settings and inhabiting elements, especially characters. In essence, while *telling and showing* were two separate modes of exposition, *acting-doing* is now

seamlessly integrated as part of narrative (and necessary for plot advancement, such that player input is mandatory). In this case, certain technically predefined player actions are translated into characters actions in the game world. A good example would be the selection of a reply, the destruction or creation of an environmental element or even movement.

Character creation is not limited to protagonists. In some games, the player has the option to create secondary characters, or companions to the main characters, which they can fully customize, as is the case with *Neverwinter Nights* series, or *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition* series, among others. Characters may be named, a biography may be created for them, and some games allow for continuous character development through player input.

Other games present premade characters, but offer a distinct type of freedom: the freedom of choice. *Grand Theft Auto V* boasts three protagonists, each with a very different background and personality. The player has the option to switch between them at any given time, but while doing so, they lose sight and control of the other two. Despite this, the others still continue on with their lives, according to their characterization. Trevor, who is insane, will kidnap people, steal cars and get drunk, while Michael may argue with his teenage children, during which Franklin might be walking his dog. Whenever the player switches between characters, each of them can be caught doing these actions, essentially living virtual lives. During missions, they often reunite and work together, so the player can more immediately switch between them, without losing sight. Accordingly, each character will have their own objective, and will communicate with each other, sometimes forcing the player into controlling a specific character for a specific sequence.

Narratologically speaking, narreme delivery is active, through player involvement. Narreme instantiation is active for the same reason. Cognitive involvement is high, since active participation is required for narrative progression. There can be an assisting narrative instance, but part of the narration is also done through player input. There is also the case of first-person games, where the player can assume the role of the narrator (if the issue of mediacy is brought up), hence the double role of the implied audience. Since the player is able to create their own narrative, authorship is considered shared (with the implied author). Virtual narratives are, by definition, not performative. However, live actors may be used to manipulate virtual characters (motion and face capture technologies, along with voice acting). Video games can be created from established narratives from other media (movies, oral culture and textual) and can also inspire the creation or transposition to other media (movies

and novels). There is a mix between *showing* and *telling* modes, but the main mode of delivery is interactivity, which is novel in regards to narratology.

The narratives themselves can too be influenced. Considering a game is a series of narremes on multiple narrative axes, influencing narratives logically implies some operations made on these narratives: adding, subtracting, modifying or permuting narremes. The question, however, remains as to how can a narreme be defined and isolated in an interactable, non-static environment. The concept of *immutability*, as presented in the introduction must also be maintained for the sake of coherence, as proven above. A solution would be to analyze dynamic narratives from the perspective of relevant story advancement, utilising narremic resolution to determine the logical steps (narremes) in the advancement of the presented narratives. This is why it is important to make the distinction between classical narremic delivery/instantiation (passively activated by the audience) and dynamic narremic delivery (audience activate/instantiate narremes via choices, actions, and passively through experiencing preset bits of narrative). To elaborate, an example of this distinction should be made; let *A* be a narrative consisting of three narremes: *a*, *b* and *c* and consider *A* being a textual narrative. In this case, the author (writer) orders the narremes in a static fashion (*i.e.* *a* will always precede *b* will always precede *c*). The author then "delivers" the narremes on paper. The audience (reader) pick up the paper and, in order to follow the narrative in a coherent fashion, must read (instantiate) the narremes in above order. If *A* is native to the dramatic medium, then the delivery is made two-fold: once from playwright to actors, and then from actors to audience. Again, the order must be respected, while the audience does not partake in the delivery proper (they must only watch, read and listen). However, if *A* is relegated to the virtual medium, there is the possibility of not ordering *a*, *b* and *c* and relying on the audience (player) to order them as they see fit. To be more precise, let *a* be "talk to witness", *b* "observe crime scene" and *c* "communicate decision (regarding crime)". This yields three different narratives (assuming communicating a decision has an impact on the narrative):

1. *Character* immediately proclaims decision, then investigates crime scene, then talks to witness, possibly finding out they were wrong.

2. *Character* investigates crime scene, then talks to witness, then proclaims decision. Here, the character might find out something about the witness not being truthful by investigating the crime scene first.

3. *Character* questions witness, then investigates crime scene, then proclaims decision. The possibility of being misled by the witness appears here, which could affect the conclusion.

All of these would not be possible within other media. Here, the audience is given agency, which can lead to different outcomes.

All of the aforementioned features have been aggregated into the table below, which serves to reinforce the argument for the paradigmatic shifts in narratological concepts across media. This table is by no means comprehensive, however, and further research, in more detail, is warranted. Despite this, it is hopefully enough to highlight the evolutionary path of narratives across media. The criteria within were chosen according to the most important aspects of narration, the relationship between the implied author, implied audience, and the entities between them, namely narrator, narratee, and aspects of the narrative itself.

Medium	Oral	Textual	Dramatic	Cinematic	Virtual
Narreme Delivery	Active	Passive	Passive-Active	Active-Passive	Active
Narreme Instantiation	Passive	Active	Passive	Passive	Active
Cognitive Involvement	Medium	High	Medium	Low	High
Narrating Instance/Agent	Physical Narrator	Complex Narrator	Bifunctional	Audiovisual	Mixed
Implied Audience Functionality	Listener	Reader	Spectator	Spectator	Bifunctional

Authorship	Unclear/ Unreserved	Reserved	Reserved	Reserved	Shared
Performativity	Partial	No	Yes	Yes	No
Transmedial	No	Bidirectional	Unidirectional	Unidirectional	Bidirectional
Predominant Mode	Telling/ Diegesis	Telling/ Mixed	Showing/ Mimesis	Showing/ Mixed	Interactivity

Fig. 1 - Transmedial Narratological Features Comparisons Table

The narrating agent or instance is the functional incarnation of narreme delivery, and is indirectly the representative of the author in the depicted world. It can be physical (a person narrating events), it can take the many forms and attributes of textual narrators, it can share the role of a character, as seen in the first chapter (bifunctional), or it can be predominantly audiovisual, as in film. Virtual narration is a mix between all of these, coupled with “player” agency. The implied audience, which is the receiving end of narration (narratee), can also take several roles, appropriate to the medium. Authorship is the author’s defining mark upon their work, protecting the narrative from further changes (if authorship is strict) or allowing contributions from the audience (if authorship is shared). The author also decides whether their work is meant to be performed on stage or in front of the camera or not, defining performativity. The mode in which the author decides to lean on when delivering narratives can be either *showing* or *telling*, or a mix between these two, explained in the first chapter. Recently, the addition of *interacting* as a mode of narrating has shifted perspectives on narrative modes.

To conclude, this brief analysis serves as proof that narratives have shown remarkable adaptability when it comes to emergent media, and warrants future analyses in order to better determine the specifics of these adaptations. A formal definition for the narreme, as well as building proper tools to isolate and better analyze the usage and distribution of narremes is paramount to the understanding of narratives as a whole.

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