Crossing Boundaries? Defining Boundaries!

An Introduction

JOACHIM FRIEDMANN

1 INTRODUCTION OF AN INTRODUCTION

Frodo, who must cross the border into Mordor to destroy the Ring of Power.[1] Little Red Riding Hood, who sets out from her cozy home to cross the dark forest where her grandmother lives.[2] Lara Croft, who must pass through the gate to the mythical ruined city of Vilcabamba in search of the Scion.[3] Heroines and heroes who cross borders to follow their destiny.

Important narrative scholars, such as the semiotician Juri Lotman,[4] have described this movement. He formulates a minimal definition of a narrative. For him, this consists of two spaces separated by a border and a protagonist, whom he calls "hero."[5] The most important and defining step in the plot is the hero-agent's crossing of a border. The anthropologist Joseph Campbell also sees the crossing of the

1 Frodo is the protagonist in J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, *The Lord of the Rings*, hereafter referred to as J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel was originally published as three separate volumes between 1954 and 1955: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2012 [*1954]; *The Two Towers*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2012 [*1954]; *The Return of the King*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2012 [*1955].

2 Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm: *Little Red Riding Hood*, Bell, Anthea (trans.), New York: Penguin Random House 2020 [*1967].

3 TOMB RAIDER (UK, 1996, O: Core Design/Eidos Interactive).

4 Lotman, Jurij Michajlovic: *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Department of Slavic Languages and Literature 1977, p.240.

5 Ibid.

border by the hero from the mundane world of everyday life into the magical world of adventure as a defining moment of the narrative.[6] In his research on the monomyth, also known as the Hero's Journey, Campbell demonstrates this defining moment of crossing borders—among other stages of the Hero's Journey—in myths, fairy tales, and legends from all over the world. One can therefore assume that the crossing of boundaries is a transculturally effective motif. It is associated with breaking taboos and dangers, but also with setting out into new spaces of experience, with the potential for growth, transformation, and gaining knowledge.

The latter hopefully also applies to the border crossings addressed in this anthology, even if these refer to phenomena of border crossing other than spatial. First, I'll refer to interdisciplinary approaches in narrative research, which have opened up new spaces of thought by crossing borders between academic disciplines, enriching the examination of the narrative form to a high degree. This phenomenon has been observed since the turn of the millennium at the latest and is summarized by Kreiswirth under the term "Narrative Turn."[7] In the context of this anthology, however, 'interdisciplinarity' does not only refer to scholarly discourse. Both renowned scholars as well as innovative practicing storytellers—game designers, animation artists, and screenwriters—will have a platform to demonstrate how scholarly findings can fruitfully impact practical applications and vice versa.

In addition, transmedial phenomena are to be considered—since the days of antiquity, in which stories were primarily conveyed orally, a variety of media have developed that act as carriers of a narrative and can significantly influence the shaping of the story. Above all, the computer game should be mentioned here, which enables completely new narrative experiences through its interactivity. In addition, the theoretical examination of this relatively new medium has significantly influenced academic discourse and enriched narrative studies. It is true that certain distinctive forms of narrative were already realized in antiquity, which are still valid and understood today. Epics such as the *Iliad*[8] or the *Odyssey*[9] are also received today through a wide variety of media, so one can identify a multitude of

6 Campbell, Joseph: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press 2004 [*1949].

7 Kreiswirth, Martin: "Narrative Turn in the Humanities," in: Herman, David/Jahn, Manfred/Ryan, Marie-Laure (eds.), Routledge *Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, London: Routledge 2008, pp. 377-382.

8 Homer: *The Iliad*, Fagles, Robert (trans.), New York: Penguin Classics 1998.

9 Homer: *The Odyssey*, Wilson, Emily (trans.), New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2018.

transmedial and transhistorical features of a narrative text form.[10] Nevertheless, stories in literature, comics, film, and games are realized in media-specific ways so that the effects of a border crossing between the different media are deserving of attention.

And yet another boundary is to be considered: The ontological border that separates the storyworld of the narrative and the world of the recipient. By means of this boundary crossing, we explore the potential of stories to significantly influence human behavior and social discourse.

In the following, I will describe these three areas in more detail in order to classify not only the topic but also the individual contributions to the anthology. First, however, I will give a brief outline of the history of narrative research because it is precisely in the development of this discipline that many of the boundaries we are discussing have been defined, transgressed, or even dissolved.

2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF STORYTELLING RESEARCH

2.1 From Narrative Research to Narratology

In the beginning, there was the Word, and soon after, the Drama followed, and with the Drama came Aristotle and his *Poetics*,[11] the work that in the 4th century BC marked the beginning of the theoretical examination of narratives in the Western tradition. Aristotle's reflections were further developed in Germany in the 18th century by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in a collection of essays published as *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* in 1769.[12] At the end of the 19th century, narrative research increasingly emancipated itself from drama theory and began to take

10 Friedmann, Joachim: *Storytelling for Media*, München: 2021. Here, I do not only refer to literary-verbally mediated communicates as text, but to all media texts in the intermedial sense, which is defined by Kindt and Köppe as semiotic productions that deal with something narrated, i.e., also visual or audiovisual media texts such as films, comics, or even computer games in their article: Kindt, Thomas/Tobias Köppe: *Basic Problems of Contemporary Narrative Theory*, Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG 2014.

11 It is not known when exactly Aristotle's *Poetics* was originally conceived or published. One of the first documented versions of it dates back to 1498. See: Aristotle: *Poetics,* Malcolm Heath (trans.), London: Penguin Classics 1996[*1498].

12 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim: *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, Lange, Victor (trans.), New York, Dover Publications 1962[*1796], reprint of Helen Zimmern's 1890 translation.

other literary forms into account.[13] In Russia, Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, published in 1928,[14] was the first systematic study of a narrative genre. Since the 1950s, these considerations have been further developed above all by French structuralism—which takes up approaches of Russian formalism—on the one hand from literary studies[15] and on the other hand from linguistic and semiotic perspectives.[16] From this interdisciplinary approach, Todorov coined the term "narratology" for this discipline.[17]

The vast majority of structuralist researchers at this time refer to narratives mediated by literature. Todorov examines *The Decameron,*[18] the myth of the Holy Grail, and, with reference to Propp, Russian folktales.[19] Genette develops his narratological terms primarily on Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.[20] Roland Barthes analyses texts from the *Bible* as well as stories by Edgar Allen Poe.[21] However, theorists such as Barthes and Bremond emphasized as early as the 1960s that narrative is, in principle, an intermedial phenomenon:

"Among the vehicles of narrative are articulated language, whether oral or written, pictures, still or moving, gestures, and an ordered mixture of all those substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drame [suspense drama],

13 Spielhagen, Friedrich: *Beiträge zur Theorie und Technik des Romans*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1967 [*1883].

14 Propp, Vladimir: *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd edition, Scott, Laurence (trans.), Austin: University of Texas Press 1996[*1928].

15 Cf. e.g., Genette, Gerard: *Figures of Literary Discourse*, Sheridan, Alan/Logan, Marie-Rose (trans.), New York, NY: Columbia University Press 2082 [*1966-1972].

16 Cf. e.g., Greimas, Algirdas Julien: *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, McDowell, Daniele/Schleifer, Ronald/Velie, Alan (trans.), Lincoln. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press 1983.

17 Todorov, Tzvetan: *Grammaire du Decameron*, Den Haag: Mouton 1969, and: Todorov, Tzvetan: "The two principles of narrative," in: *Diacritics* 1, 1971, pp. 37—44, here p. 44.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 G. Genette: *Figures of Literary Discourse*; Proust, Marcel: *In Search of Lost Time*, Davis, Lydia (trans.), New York: Penguin Classics 2021[*1913-1927].

21 Barthes, Roland: *The Semiotic Challenge*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1994[*1985]; Bremond, Claude: *Logique du Récit*, Paris: 1973.

comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news, conversations."[22]

Barthes, for example, in his *Mythologies* [*1957],[23] examines phenomena of mass culture such as advertising, comics, or television series at an early stage, and Umberto Eco also takes comics and the JAMES BOND (1962-1964)[24] films into account in his semiotic research.[25] But despite these approaches, there was initially no systematic, transmedial narratological research.

This has been changing since the turn of the millennium when narratology experienced a methodical and thematic expansion. This becomes particularly clear in the example of interactive narration or, using a term by Aarseth, "ergodic literature."[26] A larger number of scholarly works on this topic have only emerged in recent years, as before the development and especially the popularization of computer technology, the text corpus of interactive narrative remained too limited. Exceptions are early examples of interactively narrated literature, such as *Composition No. 1* by Marc Saporta,[27] which were certainly noticed by researchers. The genre of pen-and-paper role-playing games or tabletop role-playing games such as DUNGEONS&DRAGONS,[28] which emerged from the mid-1970s onwards, did not find resonance in academia for a long time, despite their commercial success. The

22 Barthes, Roland/Duisit, Lionel: "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," in: *New Literary History* vol.6. no.2 (Winter 1975), John Hopkins University Press 1975, pp. 237-272, here p. 237, https://doi.org/10.2307/468419, accessed 20 Jan. 2023.

23 Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies*, Howard, Richard (trans.), New York: Hill and Wang 2012 [*1957].

24 Although the James Bond films are still in production, Eco would not have access to more than the first three. Those titles are: DR. NO (GB 1962, D: Terence Young), FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE (GB 1963, D: Terence Young), and GOLDFINGER (GB 1964, D: Guy Hamilton).

25 Eco, Umberto: "Narrative Structures in Fleming," in: Irons, Glenwood (ed.), *Gender, Language, and Myth: Essays on Popular Narrative*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1992, pp. 157-182.

26 Aarseth, Espen: *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore/London: 1997.

27 Saporta, Marc. *Composition No. 1*. London: Verso 2018[*1963].

28 DUNGEONS & DRAGONS (US 1974, O: Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson—Tactical Studies Rules, Inc.).

so-called text adventures[29] such as ADVENTURE[30] or ZORK,[31] which were created in the seventies, also found little academic resonance, although they were mainly created and distributed at universities in the beginning. It was not until the advent of audiovisual computer games that scholarly debate began on a broader basis in the 1990s.

The question of whether or how computer games or interactive media tell stories and in which form this can be analyzed practically and theoretically has been the subject of a controversial discussion within the scholarly community for many years. Since this dispute raises and develops important questions of narrative theory and is also important for the development of transmedial narrative research, I will briefly describe the debate below.

2.2 Narrative Computer Games

Do computer games tell stories? Has a new narrative medium emerged here; has the media boundary been overcome? Intuitively, one would probably be inclined to answer these questions with 'yes.' Computer game protagonists such as Lara Croft or Super Mario have become pop culture icons. The numerous successful film adaptations of computer games, e.g., LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER (1996-

29 Text adventures, also known as interactive fiction, are a type of computer game that primarily relies on text. The players are guided through a story presented in written form and navigate through the plot by entering commands in natural language to advance the story and solve puzzles.

30 ADVENTURE was originally written in 1975 by Will Crowther. The first official release was under the name COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE in 1976: COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE (US 1976, O: Will Crowther and Don Woods). See: Consalvo, Mia: *Atari to Zelda: Japan's Videogames in Global Contexts,* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2016.

31 It is commonly known that ZORK (US 1980, O: Tim Anderson, Marc Blank, Dave Lebling, and Bruce Daniels—Infocom) was originally released among students within MIT in 1977, then published in 1980. Many articles, interviews, and books cover this. One such source: Loguidice, Bill/Barton, Matt: *Vintage Games: An Insider Look at the History of Grand Theft Auto, Super Mario, and the Most Influential Games of All Time*, Amsterdam: Focal Press 2009.

2018),[32] SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (1991),[33] or the RESIDENT EVIL (1996-2021)[34] series, point to a high narrative potential. Above all, adventure games and the so-called MMORPGs[35] such as EVERQUEST (1999)[36] or WORLD OF WARCRAFT (2004)[37] repeatedly draw on narrative sources in their settings. Themes include the motif of the quest, mythological conflicts, or magical worlds that draw their inspiration from classics of fantasy literature such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2014[*1954]).[38]

Game designers also repeatedly emphasize the important role of narrative in the creation of a computer game. For example, Dan Houser, the developer of the successful GRAND THEFT AUTO (1997-2013)[39] series, in an interview with Carsten Görig for *Spiegel Netzwelt*, says: "We just have to manage to establish Games as a fluid narrative medium."[40] Game designer Chris Klug states, "Game developers also need to be expert storytellers because we are telling stories even if we think

32 The LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER series presently encompasses fifteen titles, from: TOMB RAIDER (UK, 1996, O: Core Design/Eidos Interactive) to: SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER (USA 2018, O: Eidos Montreal). See "Gameography" at the end of this article for the full list.

33 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (JPN, 1991, O: Sega).

34 The RESIDENT EVIL series presently encompasses fifteen titles, from: RESIDENT EVIL (JPN 1996, O: Tokuro Fujiwara—Capcom) to: RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE (JP 2021, O: Morimosa Sato—Capcom). See "Gameography" at the end of this article for the full list.

35 MMORPG is the abbreviation for Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game. Here, a large number of players play together in a shared storyworld, which they can access via servers. Players can act alone or organize themselves into groups with other players.

36 EVERQUEST (US, 1999, O: Verant Interactive/Sony Online Entertainment).

37 WORLD OF WARCRAFT (US, 2004, O: Blizzard Entertainment/Activision Blizzard).

38 J.R.R. Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings.

39 The GRAND THEFT AUTO series presently encompasses five titles, from: GRAND THEFT AUTO (UK, 1997, O: DMA Design/BMG Interactive) to: GRAND THEFT AUTO V (US, 2013, O: Rockstar North/Rockstar Games). See the section "Gameography" at the end of this article for the full list.

40 Houser, Dan/Görig, Carsten: "GTA-Macher Dan Houser: Weil wir Männer sind," *Spiegel Netzwelt*,2008,https://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/spielzeug/gta-macher-dan-houser-weil-wir-maenner-sind-a-550474.html, accessed 24.04.2023. My translation.

we aren't."[41] Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, who wrote *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, devote more than forty pages to the topic of "Games as Narrative Play."[42] Thus, at least from the perspective of the authors and designers of games, there seems to be no doubt that computer games do indeed tell stories, even if the term 'story' is used rather intuitively by creative minds and is not defined further.

In this respect, it is not surprising that in the course of a scholarly examination of computer games, the level of storytelling in this new medium is also explored. Initially, this takes place within the framework of a classical narratological perspective. Thus, the theoretical discussion from a scholarly standpoint concentrates on the possibilities of interactive narration in hypertext in digital media.[43] One of the objects of study of these approaches is the early adventure games. These computer games, for example, ZORK, were often conveyed exclusively in the written-verbal form. Thus, an investigation of these games from a literary perspective is entirely appropriate. However, in the course of further technical development, computer games became more and more graphically sophisticated and thus developed greater proximity to audiovisual media texts. GRAND THEFT AUTO I—V or the LARA CROFT: TOMB RAIDER series are examples of this. Nevertheless, even these more complex, audiovisual games were initially described by means of narratological literary studies and drama theory, for example, in 1997 and 2004 by Janet Murray[44]—which was soon to lead to vociferous criticism and a drawing of boundaries.

2.3 Ludology vs. Narratology

This criticism is formulated by a circle of scholars around Gonzalo Frasca and Espen Aarseth, who have been researching computer games since the late 1990s.

41 Klug, Chris: "Implementing Stories in Massively Multiplayer Games," *Gamasutra*, 16.09.02, https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/implementing-stories-in-massively-multiplayer-games, accessed 24.04.2023

42 Salen, Katie/Zimmermann, Eric: *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2003.

43 Cf., Landow, George P. (ed.), *Hyper/Text/Theory*, Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1994; E. Aarseth: *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*.

44 Murray, *Janet: Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace,* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997; Murray, Janet: "From Game-story to Cyberdrama," in: Wardrip-Fruin, Noah/Harrigan, Pat (eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2004.

They demand that computer games be perceived and taken seriously as a medium in their own right, which, in their view, precludes an adaptation of the existing theory of scholarly research. In addition to Aarseth's work, Frasca's studies—in particular, his essay "Ludology meets Narratology: Similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative"[45]—must be seen as the igniting spark for independent computer game research.

Frasca also points out structural similarities between stories and games: "The fact is that these computer programs share many elements with stories: characters, chained actions, endings, settings." But for him, this is only another reason to find an independent approach to his object of study: "However, there is another dimension that has usually been almost ignored when studying this kind of computer software: to analyze them as games." For this, Frasca proposes the creation of a new discipline: "We will propose the term ludology (from *ludus*, the Latin word for 'game'), to refer to the yet non-existent 'discipline that studies game and play activities.'"[46]

While Frasca still sees structural similarities to narrative and later relativizes his distinction from narratology,[47] for a group of mainly Scandinavian scholars around Aarseth, Jesper Juul, and Markku Eskelinen, the term 'ludologists' becomes a battle term with which they want to distinguish themselves from narratology. In so doing, they not only postulate the independence of the game but, in some cases, even negate any relevance of narrative in computer games. Eskelinen writes: "Stories are just uninteresting ornaments or gift-wrappings to games, and laying any emphasis on studying these kinds of marketing tools is just a waste of time and energy."[48] Three years later, he reiterates his position polemically: "Luckily, outside theory, people are usually excellent at distinguishing between

45 Frasca, Gonzalo: "Ludology meets Narratology: Similitude and differences between (video)games and narrative," 1999, http://www.ludology.org/articles/ludology.htm, accessed 05.06.2014.

46 Ibid.

47 Frasca, Gonzalo: "Ludologists love stories, too: notes from a debate that never took place," 2003, http://www.ludology.org/articles/Frasca_LevelUp2003.pdf,accessed 24.10.14.

48 Eskelinen, Markku: "The Gaming Situation," *Game Studies* Volume 1, Issue 1, 2001, https://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/ , accessed 25.04.23.

narrative situations and gaming situations: If I throw a ball at you, I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories."[49]

Aarseth's point of view is more differentiated but similarly radical. For him—in contrast to narrative representation—simulation is the defining mode of a computer game, a simulation in which the recipient participates: "Simulation is the hermeneutic other of narratives; the alternative mode of discourse, bottom-up and emergent where stories are top-down and pre-planned. In simulations, knowledge and experience is [sic] created by the player's actions and strategies, rather than recreated by a writer or moviemaker."[50] However, Aarseth's argument undercuts the fact that the recipients constantly interact with the representative parts of the simulation, which are not created by them, but by an author or game designer. It is the author or game designer who creates, as a narrator, if you will, the preconditions and conditions under which the simulated actions and events can take place. Thus, the reception of a computer game could also be interpreted as a transgression of boundaries—as the dissolution of the boundary between author and recipient in the creation of the story.

Jesper Juul distinguishes computer games from narratives on another level. With reference to Chatman[51] and Brooks,[52] he assigns narratives a fundamental independence of media and, with it, the possibility of translating a narrative from one medium into another.[53] However, Juul denies this possibility when translating a film or book into a computer game. As an example, he cites the inaugural STAR WARS game from 1983,[54] which is based on the 1977 film of the same name by

49 Eskelinen, Markku: "Towards Computer Game Studies," in: Harrigan, Pat/Wardrip-Fruin, Noah (eds.) *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Cambrigde, MA: 2004, pp. 36-44, here p. 36.

50 Aarseth, Espen: "Genre Trouble: Narrativism and the Art of Simulation," in: Harrigan, Pat/Wardrip-Fruin, Noah (eds.), *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, Cambridge, MA: 2004, pp. 45-55, here p. 52.

51 Chatman, Seymour: "Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film," in: Heath, Stephen (ed.), *Narrative Reader*, London: Methuen 1985, pp. 202-217.

52 Brooks, Peter: *Reading for the Plot,* Cambridge: 1992.

53 Juul, Jesper: "Games telling stories?," in: *Game Studies*, Vol. 1, issue 1 (2001), https://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/, accessed 24.04.23. However, the fact that a narrative can cross a boundary without loss or unchanged and be transferred from one medium to another is also strongly doubted in transmedial narratology, for example by Ryan in her works from 2004 and 2014.

54 STAR WARS (US, 1983, O: Atari).

George Lucas.[55] He shows that the game only covers a small part of the film plot and that some scenes in the game do not correspond at all with the film. Moreover, according to Juul, the game has no narrative coherence because, after the final destruction of the Death Star, a new Death Star appears, making the game potentially infinite. Thus, there can be no question of translating the film into a game because: "Most characters from the movie are missing, and the few events that are included in the game have become simulations where the player can either win or fail."[56]

Even if Juul's description is accurate, he does not provide any evidence to support why the inadequate translation of the film into the game in this individual case can be generalized. Juul also ignores the fact that in 1983, for technical reasons alone, it was not possible to reproduce the film STAR WARS comprehensively in a game. With today's possibilities of digital media, however, such a scenario is quite conceivable. It is ultimately the game designers' decision which characters and scenarios they consider appropriate in a game. Games like THE LAST OF US (2013)[57] or HEAVY RAIN (2010)[58] show that complex plots and interactive features are not mutually exclusive. THE LAST OF US was released in 2023 as a streaming series on HBO. Neil Druckmann, who also wrote the script for the game, is one of the creators of the series. Especially at the beginning, the series closely follows the storyline in the computer game, and some scenes are even staged in an identical way. This also shows that crossing the border from medium to medium is entirely possible—albeit, in this case, in the opposite way.

Nevertheless, the arguments of the ludologists do carry weight on a scholarly level—the interactive reception of a computer game and the possibilities of intervention by the players stand in the way of some typical narrative design strategies: for example, a linear conveyance of information and the associated generation of subtext. Depending on the degree of interactive intervention, a consistent transformation of the characters or a coherence of the narrative can be prevented. Furthermore, the clear demarcation between literary and narrative studies also emphasizes the media-specificity of the computer game—an important point that positions the computer game as an independent medium with specific artistic possibilities of expression in the scholarly and cultural debate. In this respect, this

55 STAR WARS (USA 1977, D: George Lucas).

56 Ibid.

57 LAST OF US, THE (US, 2013, O: Naughty Dog/Sony Computer Entertainment); RESIDENT EVIL (JPN, 1996-2012, O: Capcom).

58 HEAVY RAIN (FR, 2010, O: Sony Computer Entertainment).

demarcation becomes fruitful—precisely because it calls the apologists of narrative studies to the scene.

2.4 Game Studies and Transmedial Narratology

In this context, the work of Marie-Laure Ryan is particularly noteworthy. Ryan, an accomplished scholar who has also worked in the software industry, became interested early on in the possibilities and structures of computer-generated narrative, which she explores in her foundational work *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory* (1991).[59] The emphasis is not mainly on computer games, which were still in the early stages of development in the 1990s, but rather on computer-generated prose narratives that are conveyed verbally. Ryan attempts to systematize the possibilities of creating meaning and plotting in computer-generated narratives, developing models for describing fictionality, as well as for generating narrative conflicts, which in turn lead to narrative plots. Even though the examples presented by Ryan originate primarily from verbally mediated narration—entirely in the tradition of narrative scholarship—she later develops a media-independent concept of narrative in the sense of transmedial narratology.

In 2001, together with Aarseth, she founded *Game Studies*, an online journal dedicated to the academic study of computer games. The title of this publication also becomes the generic term for the academic study of computer games and displaces the term 'ludology.' In contrast to ludology, the exploration of the narrative potential of computer games is one of the central concerns of game studies, as can be seen in the first issue of the magazine, which is entirely devoted to the question of the narrativity of computer games.

Ryan posits that narratives have a foundational independence from media, which allows them to transcend boundaries between different forms of media. She explicitly applies this idea to computer games, where she identifies several different manifestations of narrative that distinguish her position from that of the ludologists:

- the narrative script that is designed into the game
- the actualization of this narrative through the interactive reception of the player
- cut scenes that lure the players into the game or reward them after the successful completion of a mission

59 Ryan, Marie-Laure: Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory, Bloomington 2004.

- micro stories told by non-player characters
- the narratives that players produce with the recordings of their games as 'Let's Play.'[60]

Concurrently, Ryan arrives at the conclusion that certain media are better suited than others to convey narrative content and that, in McLuhan's sense, the medium also always shapes the content: "A core meaning may travel across media, but its narrative potential will be filled out, actualized differently when it reaches a new medium. When it comes to narrative abilities, media are not equally gifted; some are born storytellers, and others suffer from serious handicaps."[61] In this respect, it is only consistent that she later introduces the concept of "media-conscious narratology,"[62] with which she emphasizes the elemental potential of narratives to transcend media boundaries, but also keeps the media specificity of narrative in mind.

The synthesis of these two aspects is becoming increasingly important in the following research after the media specificity of narratives was initially the focus of the research interest. For example, Jan-Noël Thon shows how certain forms and elements of narration are realized transmedially when he examines the role of the narrator[63] or strategies of subjectivity representation[64] in different media. The

60 *Let's Plays* are documentations of the gameplay of a computer game, often involving editing and narration, in the sense of a demonstration of the gaming experience of a specific player, uploaded in audio-visual form on video platforms. Ryan, Marie-Laure: *Avatars of Story*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2006, p. 201.

61 McLuhan, Marshall: *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man,* Routledge 1964; Ryan, Marie-Laure: "On the Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology," in: Meister, Jan Christoph (ed.), *Narratology beyond Literary Criticism*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2005, p. 1.

62 Cf. Ryan, Marie-Laure: "Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instrument of a Media-Conscious Narratology," in: Ryan, Marie-Laure/Thon, Jan-Noël (eds.), *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 2014, pp. 25-50.

63 Thon, Jan-Noël: "Toward a Transmedial Narratology. On Narrators in Contemporary Graphic Novels, Feature Films, and Computer Games," in: Alber, Jan/Hansen, Per Krogh (eds.), *Beyond Classical Narration. Transmedial and Unnatural Challenges*, Berlin: De Gruyter 2014, pp. 25-56.

64 Thon, Jan-Noël: "Subjectivity Across Media: On Transmedial Strategies of Subjective Representation in Contemporary Feature Films, Graphic Novels, and Computer

conception of characters in film and computer games,[65] transmedial fictionality models,[66] or multimodal narratives,[67] are also explored.

3 CROSSING THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY BORDER

The development of specific research interests on selected elements of narrative design also reveals a fundamental insight into transmedial narratology—that the definition of a given media text as a narrative depends on the design of certain elements on a semantic level. Many of the arguments used by ludologists against analyzing computer games from a narratological perspective were based on inadequate definitions of narrative or on media-specific features.

In his attempt at delimitation, Eskelinen cites definitions of narrativity by Genette and Prince, in which a narrative situation is required for narrative texts, i.e., at least the existence of a narrator and a recipient. Eskelinen concludes from this that games do not tell stories because: "I think we can safely say we can't find

Games," in: M.-L. Ryan/J.-N. Thon, (eds.), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, pp. 67-102.

65 Schröter, Felix: "Don't show it, play it! Filmische und nicht-filmische Figurenkonzeption im Computerspiel," in: *Rabbit Eye—Zeitschrift für Filmforschung*. no. 5, 2013, pp. 22-39; Schröter, Felix/Thon, Jan-Noël: "Video Game Characters. Theory and Analysis," in: *DIEGESIS. Interdisziplinäres E-Journal für Erzählforschung*, Vol. 3, no. 1, 2014,pp.40-77,https://www.diegesis.uni-wuppertal.de/index.php/diegesis/article/view/151, accessed 24.04.23.

66 Zipfel, Frank: "5. Fiktionssignale," in: Klauk, Tobias/Köppe, Tilmann (eds.), *Fiktionalität: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch,* Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2014, pp. 97-124.

67 Hallet, Wolfgang/Neumann, Birgit: "Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur. Zur Einführung," in: Hallet, Wolfgang/Neumann, Birgit (eds.), *Raum und Bewegung in der Literatur*, Bielefeld: 2009, pp. 11-32. For Ryan and Thon, a narrative is multimodal if it is bound to a singular media object, but uses different semiotic or technical channels, e.g., children''s books, with sound effects or computer games, that imitate other media—for example, if a yellowed treasure map or literary-verbally mediated written documents appear in the course of the narrative. Another example is so-called multimedia reportage. Ryan and Thon point out that the term multimodal is replacing the term multimedia in Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon: "Introduction," in: M.-L. Ryan/J.-N. Thon, (eds.), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 2014, pp. 1 -21.

narrative situations within games."[68] However, the necessity of a narrator or a narrating instance—as classical narratology with its focus on literary or verbally mediated narratives often demands[69]—is more than controversial. Bordwell already points out that a narrator does not necessarily have to be present in the film.[70] The same position is taken by narratologists who emphasize the media independence of narrative and thus see no need for a narrating instance.[71]

As an author who writes stories for television, comics, and interactive media, I can strongly agree with this view, not only from the perspective of the practitioner but also from an academic standpoint. The preoccupation with intermedial forms of narration has become one of the central fields of research since the turn of the millennium at the latest, and thus one of the first interdisciplinary boundaries to be crossed. One can go even further: Only the transgression or questioning of the traditional boundaries of narrative research with a view to new narrative media emancipates narrative theory from the corset of literary mediation and allows a new, more detailed, and above all, more precise form of determining the narrative text.

This is not least due to the fact that a large number of scholars from various disciplines are developing an interest in a theoretical examination of the narrative form.[72] These different perspectives generate different interests that go far beyond a focus on literary form. In recent years, narratology, which was originally oriented towards structuralism and literary studies, has thus experienced a

68 M. Eskelinen: "Towards Computer Game Studies," p. 36. However, Seibel and Thon, in 2002 and 2014 respectively, show a variety of examples in which computer games also establish narrators and narrative situations. As early as 2002, Klaudia Seibel points out that narrativisation through a framing narrator can be found not only in the classic narrative area of role-playing and adventure games, but also in action and strategy games. See: Seibel, Klaudia: "Cyberage-Narratologie: Erzähltheorie und Hyperfiktion," in: Nünning, Ansgar/Nünning, Vera (eds.), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002, pp. 217-236; J. N. Thon: "Toward a Transmedial Narratology. On Narrators in Contemporary Graphic Novels, Feature Films, and Computer Games," pp. 25-56.

69 Cf. G. Genette: Figures of Literary Discourse; Prince, Gerald: Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1982.

70 Bordwell, David: *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press 1985.

71 M.-L. Ryan: Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory.

72 M. Kreiswirth: "Narrative Turn in the Humanities," pp. 377-382.

considerable expansion, both methodologically and in terms of content. Two currents, in particular, can be distinguished here.

On one side, narratological concepts are being transferred to other disciplines in interdisciplinary border crossings, and narrative-theoretical insights from other scholarly disciplines are finding their way into narratological works. Examples of this can be found in Hayden White's history studies, in Richard Gerrig's and Jürgen Straub's works on cognitive psychology in 1993 and 1998, respectively,[73] and in the cultural-anthropological perspectives expressed by Walter Ong in 1987.[74] This list could be continued and supplemented by approaches from jurisprudence, economics, or philosophy.[75]

On the other side, narratology, which has so far focused primarily on literary studies, is broadening its perspective and describing manifestations of narrative in other media. While the narrativity of film was examined relatively early on,[76] since the turn of the century, there has been an increased examination of the storytelling

73 White, Hayden: The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation, Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1987; Gerrig, Richard: Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading, New Haven: 1993; Straub, Jürgen: "Geschichten erzählen, Geschichten bilden: Grundzüge einer narrativen Psychologie historischer Sinnbildung," in: Straub, Jürgen (ed.), Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewusstsein: Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte, Vol. 1. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1998, pp. 81-169.

74 Ong, Walter: *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* 2nd Edition, New York, NY: Routledge 2002.

75 Herman, Luc/Vervaeck, Bart: "Postclassical Narratology," in: Herman, David /Jahn, Manfred/Ryan, Marie-Laure (eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, London/New York: 2008, pp. 450-451.

76 Cf. Metz, Christian*: Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1974; S. Chatman: "Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film," pp. 202-217; D. Bordwell: *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 1985.

potential of other media, such as comics,[77] poetry,[78] or music.[79] Furthermore, as already outlined, with the dynamic development of digital media, the possibilities of interactive narrative are also being explored.

David Herman encapsulates these interdisciplinary approaches to narratology as 'Postclassical Narratology.'[80] He uses this term to distinguish his position from structuralist narratology, since this "has been reproached for its scientificity, anthropomorphism, disregard for con-text and gender-blindness,"[81] as summarized by Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck.

77 See: Schüwer, Martin: "Erzählen in Comics: Bausteine einer plurimedialen Erzähltheorie," in: Nünning, Ansgar/Nünning, Vera (eds.), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2002, pp. 185-217; Ewert, Jeanne: "Art Spiegelman's Maus and the Graphic Narrative," in: Ryan, Marie-Laure (ed.), *Narrative Across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln/London: 2004, pp. 178-194; Stein, Daniel (ed.), *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, Berlin: de Gruyter 2013; Kukkonen, Karin: *Contemporary Comics Storytelling*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2013; Klein, Christian/Martínez, Matías/Wolff, Lynn L.: "Introduction. Narrating Reality in Comics," in: *DIEGESIS. Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Narrative Research/Interdisziplinäres E-Journal für Erzählforschung* 8.1 (2019), pp. 1-5, URN: urn:nbn:de:hbz:468-20190607-090345-4, http://www.diegesis.uni-wuppertal.de/index.php/diegesis/article/download/344/548; accessed 24.04.23.

78 E.g., Müller-Zettelmann, Eva: "Lyrik und Narratologie," in: Nünning, Ansgar/Nünning, Vera (eds.), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2002, pp. 129-154.

79 Despite the attribution of narrative qualities to music, particularly in the 19th century, its narrativity remains highly controversial among scholars. Additionally, Werner Wolf points this out in his 2002 article, where he examines the narrative potential of music. See: Wolf, Werner: "Das Problem der Narrativität in Literatur, bildender Kunst und Musik: Ein Beitrag zu einer intermedialen Erzähltheorie," in: Nünning, Ansgar/Nünning, Vera (eds.), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2002, p. 76ff; Tarasti, Eero: "Music as Narrative Art," in: Ryan, Marie-Laure (ed.), *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 2004, pp. 283-304.

80 Herman, David: *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, Ohio: Ohio State University Press 1999.

81 L. Herman/B. Vervaeck: "Postclassical Narratology," pp. 450-451, here p. 450.

The dichotomization between classical and post-classical narratology postulated by Herman, however, remains to be critically questioned. Even before the "renaissance" of narratology proclaimed by Nünning,[82] interdisciplinary approaches existed in narrative research. In this sense, the emergence of narratology could already be seen as the first interdisciplinary border crossing between semiotics and literary studies. Furthermore, there were earlier, important reflections on narrative research in other scholarly disciplines that fertilized classical narratology, for example, the cognitive-psychological work of William Brewer, the reflections on methodological problems in the historical sciences by Arthur C. Danto, and the influential sociolinguistic studies on oral narratives by Labov and Waletzky.[83] In addition, there are important narrative-theoretical findings from other disciplines that have also received little attention from post-classical narratology, for example, the studies of mythological narrative structures by the anthropologist Joseph Campbell.[84] His concept of the monomyth and the Hero's Journey is of siginificant practical relevance today and had a great influence on the development of Hollywood cinema and, thus, on narrative structures in cinema worldwide, especially through the adaptation by Christopher Vogler in 1998.[85]

In order to do justice to these different approaches, it is necessary to take a look at the narrative form, which also includes the consideration of other storytelling media. The focus here should therefore be on the definition of narrative on a semantic level, independent of the used narrative medium. Following this, I will give an overview of the history of the definition and the solutions offered, as it is

82 Herman, David: *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*, Lincoln: 2002.; Nünning, Ansgar/Nünning, Vera: "Produktive Grenzüberschreitungen: Transgenerische, intermediale und interdisziplinäre Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie," in: Nünning, Ansgar/Nünning, Vera (eds.), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier 2002, pp. 1—23., here p.i.

83 See Brewer, William: "The Nature of Narrative Suspense and the Problem of Re-Reading," in: Wulff, Hans J./Friedrichsen, Mike (eds.), *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Explorations*, Mahwah: 1996, pp. 107—128; Danto, Arthur: *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1965; Labov, William/Waletzky, Joshua: "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," in: Helm, June (ed.), *Essays on Verbal and Visual Arts*, Seattle: 1967, pp. 12-44.

84 J. Campbell: The Hero with a Thousand Faces.

85 Vogler, Christopher: *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, California: Michael Wiese Productions 1992.

the determination of boundaries that makes the description of boundary crossings possible and meaningful.

Despite the long tradition of narrative studies, it has not been possible for a long time to establish a consistent definition of narrative. Meir Sternberg, for example, laments "the absence of anything like an accepted definition of narrative."[86] Although this statement is more than thirty years old, the expansion of the research field of narratology in that same period to include transmedial forms as well as other scholarly disciplines has rather exacerbated the problem.

First, there is the attempt at a minimal definition, such as that offered by Barbara Herrnstein Smith: "We might conceive of narrative discourse most minimally and most generally as verbal acts consisting of someone telling someone else that something happened."[87] But this is likely to apply to any conversational situation, which is not satisfactory as a definition. Gerald Prince is more specific when he describes narrative as follows: "Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails each other."[88] Even this definition is still rather vague; it would apply just as well to a cooking recipe. In a similar definition, the film scholar David Bordwell also promotes the criteria of causality and spatial location when he writes: "The fabula embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field."[89] Even though this definition already contains more elements, it also applies to media texts to which one at first glance would not necessarily attribute narrative potential—for example, instructive texts such as manuals. In contrast, narratologist Wolf Schmid calls for even greater openness of definition: In any case, causality and other forms of motivation need not be included in a minimal definition of narrativity.[90] A text is already a narrative if it contains only temporal connections, in his opinion.

Taking into account the mentioned criteria, practically every media text that depicts events or happenings becomes a narrative. But is this really the case with a sports report, a weather forecast, instruction manuals, etc.? As early as 1992, Marie-Laure Ryan attempted to define narrativity by identifying certain elements

86 Sternberg, Meir: "Telling in Time (II): Chronology, Teleology, Narrativity," in: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), Durham, NC: Duke University Press 1992, pp. 463-541, here p. 464.

87 Smith, Barbara Herrnstein: "Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories," in: Mitchel, William John Thomas (ed.), *On Narrative*, Chicago: 1981, pp. 209-232, here p. 228.

88 G. Prince: Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative, here p. 4.

89 D. Bordwell: *Narration in the Fiction Film*, here p. 49.

90 Schmid, Wolf: *Elemente der Narratologie*, Berlin: de Gruyter 2008, here p. 6.

on a semantic level, which she calls "Building Blocks" of narrativity and which, for her, represent "basic conditions of narrativity."[91] She starts with three categories. First, there is a narrative world populated with characters and containing objects. Second, this world must have a temporal dimension in which—usually through the actions of the characters—a change in the world takes place. Third, the narrative text must allow interpretive inferences about goals, plans, and causal links. Ryan expands on this approach until she arrives at an eight-part definition of "Building Blocks," which in turn are grouped under four categories:

"Spatial Dimension

1. Narrative must be about a world populated by individuated existences.

Temporal Dimension

2. This world must be situated in time and undergo significant transformations.
3. The transformations must be caused by non-habitual physical events.

Mental Dimension

4. Some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world.
5. Some of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents, motivated by identifiable goals and plans.

Formal and Pragmatic Dimension

6. The sequence of events must form a unified causal chain and lead to closure.
7. The occurrence of at least some of the events must be asserted as fact for the story world.
8. The story must communicate something meaningful to the recipient."[92]

In fact, this comprehensive definition helps to make it much easier to distinguish stories from non-narrative texts. However, Ryan's definition would also apply to texts that one would not intuitively classify as narrative, such as certain historical chronicles or descriptions of sporting events. In this respect, from an application-oriented perspective and as a writer of narrative content, I have supplemented her

91 Ryan, Marie-Laure: "The modes of narrativity and their visual metaphors," in: *Style*, Vol. 26, no. 3 (1992), p. 371.

92 M.-L., Ryan: *Avatars of Story*, p. 8.

definition with further distinguishing features, building on Ryan's categories, in order to determine the specificity of narrative more precisely.[93]

In my view, the narrative text is characterized by the following specific design strategies:

1 *The semanticization of narrative space*: Space in a narrative is not only the mere setting but also the bearer of meaning. Little Red Riding Hood must leave her safe home for the dark, dangerous forest. In *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo has to leave the idyllic, green Shire for the dark Mordor. In DEATH IN VENICE (1971),[94] Gustav von Aschenbach travels from the orderly, Appolinian Munich to Dionysian, sensual Venice. The crossing of boundaries between these semantic spaces by the protagonists is also a characteristic of narrative.
2 *The design of narrative figures in a mimetic, synthetic, thematic, and intertextual dimension:* Narrative figures not only represent humans or (e.g., in the case of fables) humanized beings (mimetic) in a naturalistic way but also shape them as functionaries (synthetic) within the framework of the plot, just as the hero, Frodo, in *Lord of the Rings* is supported by his helpers Sam or Aragorn and advised by his mentor Gandalf. Antagonists such as Sauron or Saruman want to prevent him from fulfilling his goal. In *Pride and Prejudice*,[95] protagonist Elizabeth Bennet finds in Mr. Darcy both her antagonist and an object of love. In addition, many characters in a narrative have a dimension of meaning (thematically), such as in *The Magic Mountain*,[96] where Hans Castorp is confronted with different concepts of life and the world via different personalities: the soldierly, disciplined Joachim, sensual Clawdia Chauchat, humanistic Settembrini or vigorous, immoderate Mynheer Peeperkorn.
3 *The setting of binary narrative oppositions that thematically structure the text:* The plot of a story develops from a conflict between two opposed semantic principles, the binary narrative oppositions. In some cases, these are already

93 J. Friedmann: *Storytelling for Media*; Friedmann, Joachim: *Transmediales Erzählen*, Konstanz: UVK Verlag 2016.

94 DEATH IN VENICE (IT/FR 1971, D: Luchino Visconti).

95 Austen, Jane: *Pride and Prejudice*, Stephen Arkin (eds.), Barnes & Noble Classics 2019[*1813].

96 Mann, Thomas. *The Magic Mountain*, Woods, John E. (trans.), Vintage International 1996[*1924].

recognizable from the title of the story, as in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*.[97]

4 *The goal-orientation and the triggering of actions and events through conflict:* The protagonists of a story act in a goal-orientated way, which means that at the beginning of the story, a goal is communicated, which the character wants to achieve in the course of the story. Little Red Riding Hood wants to bring her grandmother wine and cake, Frodo is supposed to destroy the Ring of Power, Lara Croft is on a mission to find the Scion. However, achieving this goal never goes smoothly; the characters are prevented from reaching their goal by external circumstances or antagonists, which creates a conflict that the character must resolve in the course of the narrative and which triggers their actions.

5 *The coherence of the text through the transformation of binary narrative oppositions:* Every book, every film, every narrative has an end. But the impression of closure only arises when the question of whether the hero or heroine has reached their goal has been answered, and the binary narrative oppositions have been completely transformed: Frodo destroys the Ring of Power and thus ends the tyranny of Sauron. Elinor Dashwood marries Edward in *Sense and Sensibility*, emotion ultimately triumphing over calculation and class conceit. Joel is able to save Ellie in the end in THE LAST OF US—albeit at the cost of sacrificing the future of humanity.

6 *The setting of semantic turns, in the terminology of film dramaturgy: the placement of turning points:* Again and again, there are surprising turns in the plot of narratives, mostly related to the binary narrative oppositions. When Luke fights his supposed arch-enemy Darth Vader in the STAR WARS film from 1977, the latter reveals to him that they are father and son. Elinor, in *Sense and Sensibility*, is surprised to learn that Edward's fiancée left him when he was disinherited, so he is available again. Dr. Crowe, who in THE SIXTH SENSE[98] tries to help young Cole, is plagued by ghostly apparitions—and finds out that he himself is a ghost.

7 *The emotionalization of the narrative*: In legal texts, such as police reports, instructive texts, or instruction manuals, actions and events are presented as factually as possible. However, in a narrative, the aim is always to evoke

97 Tolstoy, Leo: *War and Peace*, Pevear, Richard/Volokhonsky, Larissa (trans.), New York: Vintage 2007[*1869]; Dostoyevsky, Fyodor: *Crime and Punishment*, Ready, Oliver (trans.), New York: Penguin Classics 2014[*1866]; Austen, Jane: *Sense and Sensibility*, Ballaster, Ros (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press 2019[*1811].

98 SIXTH SENSE, THE (USA 1999, D: M. Night Shyamalan).

emotions.On the one hand, the emotions of the protagonists should be described and experienced, on the other hand, certain feelings should be triggered in the recipients. The importance of the dimension of emotional experience in the reception of stories is shown by the fact that many narrative genres are defined by the feelings they are supposed to evoke, e.g., the romance novel, the horror comic, the erotic film.

8 *Causal relationships that condition the linking of the actions and events of the narrative*: The actions and events do not follow one another at random but are causally linked, forming a chain of impulses, and thus establishing the context of meaning: Romeo and Juliet cannot marry because their families are enemies. Therefore, Juliet is to be married to another man. To avoid marriage, she takes a drink which puts her into a death-like sleep. Because Romeo then believes she has died, he chooses suicide. Juliet does not want to go on living without her lover and stabs herself.[99] One action follows the next and would be inconceivable without the previous one.

9 *A prototypical narrative structuring of the story*: The actions and events are usually organized in a certain structure, which can be seen, for example, in the three or five-act structure of classical drama or in the so-called Hero's Journey or the monomyth, the pattern of which can be found in a multitude of myths and fairy tales from all over the world. Verbally mediated everyday narratives also tend to organize themselves in comparable structures, as sociolinguists Labov and Waletzky show.[100]

10 *The participation of recipients in the production of meaning through so-called gapping:* In contrast to academic or instructive texts, narrative texts deliberately leave informational gaps in order to involve recipients in the production of meaning through conjecture and assumption. This is particularly evident in the crime genre, for example, where information is deliberately withheld or false leads motivate recipients to speculate about the further course of the story.

11 *Semantic Object in the center of the narrative*: In many narratives, certain objects are at the center of the action or serve as a goal of the narrative figure,

99 Shakespeare, William: *Romeo and Juliet*, London: Penguin Classics, 2000 [*1597].

100 W. Labov [J. Waletzky]: "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience," pp. 12-44.

such as the sword Excalibur,[101] the Holy Grail,[102] or the Ring of Power. In narratives, objects are semanticized to varying degrees—non-functional objects, plot-relevant objects, plot-driving objects, and semantic objects, the latter binding the binary narrative oppositions and symbolizing and reifying certain core themes of the narrative. In everyday life, we encounter this strategy in the form of marketing campaigns or in social rituals such as sports tournaments, where a semanticized cup stands for triumph and victory.

The provision in question is notably comprehensive, surpassing a simple lexical definition by incorporating perspectives from various scholarly disciplines. By doing so, it enables a thorough exploration of narrative design both in practical applications and in analytical contexts, all within a single framework. With the help of this system, it is possible to clarify the extent to which narrative strategies or narrative design elements are realized in different media. Not by posing the dichotomous and binary question of whether a given text is a narrative or not—but by examining the extent to which certain narrative elements have been used in the design of the text. In other words, does the media text have a low narrative potential, like the computer game TETRIS (1984),[103] for example, where of all the features of narrative text design, only the binary narrative opposition 'order vs. chaos' can be found? Or does it have a high narrative potential, like the computer game THE LAST OF US, for example, in which all the described text design elements are used? Thus, it also becomes clear that it would be far too limited to present computer games sweepingly as narrative media or to deny them their potential as narrative media altogether. Computer games, like other media, are highly diverse in their design strategies and therefore require a differentiated approach to which the described system can contribute.

Accordingly, many of the contributions in this volume refer implicitly or explicitly to individual design elements of narrative with an interdisciplinary approach. Clara Fernández-Vara shows the extent to which the basic conflict of the crime genre and the corresponding information management and gapping integrate the recipients of an investigative computer game into the production of meaning. Florian Nieser integrates insights from Medieval Studies into game

101 Malory, Thomas: *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Baines, Keith (trans.), New York: Oxford University Press, 1976 [*1485].

102 von Eschenbach, Wolfram: *Parzival*, Hatto, A. T. (trans.), London: Penguin Classics, 1980 [*13th century].

103 Original release: TETRIS (USSR [now Russia], 1984, O: Alexey Pajitnov—Soviet Academy of Sciences).

studies to show in which way heroic figures and semantic objects are represented both in medieval literature and in computer games. In a short cultural history of the 'Mad Scientist,' Eugen Pfister describes how this character archetype crosses the boundary from literature to film and finally to computer games.

Particularly with the complex definition of narrative and the transmedial focus of the above-mentioned contributions, it is noticeable that the concept of medium is not yet adequately defined in the context of this anthology. Again, the following applies: the description of a medial border crossing only makes sense if we have defined an understanding of the concept of 'medium.'

4 CROSSING THE TRANSMEDIAL BORDER

This is not a trivial undertaking, as the lack of a uniform and enforced definition is also repeatedly lamented in literature.[104] For example, it could be asked whether an illustrated novel and a graphic novel are to be regarded as different media when they both use the linguistic as well as the visual channel and continue to use the same material carrier, namely paper and printing ink. And can one really speak of the medium of the computer game, as I have done so far, when it is accessed and received on such different platforms as a game console, a desktop computer, or a smartphone?

In fact, the term medium is used ambiguously. It can be used to describe specific communication channels: one speaks of a newspaper, the radio, or the internet as a medium. At the same time, however, the technical side of communication can be referenced when one refers to television, photography, or the computer as a medium. If one considers the computer, one can also speak of media in connection with its applications, for example, the computer game, e-mail, or a blog. Furthermore, the term has a semiotic dimension when one calls language or images a medium. In addition, certain artistic or creative forms of expression are called media, such as literature, music, or dance. Likewise, the material in which meaning-bearing signs are presented can be considered a medium: the oil with which one paints pictures, the clay from which one forms sculptures, and the paper on which one composes written works.

104 Cf. Kloock, Daniela/Spahr, Andrea: *Medientheorien*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 2012; M.-L. Ryan: *Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instrument of a Media-Conscious Narratology*, pp. 25-50; Schmidt, Hanns Christian: "Transmedialität," in: Beil, Benjamin/Hensel, Thomas/Rauscher, Andreas (eds.), *Game Studies*, Wiesbaden: Springer 2018, pp. 251-263.

It is again Ryan who attempts to grasp and systematize the various dimensions of the term.[105] In doing so, she distinguishes between three dimensions of the concept of media:

- The semiotic dimension, which categorizes the underlying sign system, such as language or the image. For Ryan, typical examples of semiotically constructed media are the various art forms such as music, painting, or sculpture.
- The technical dimension, which describes the technical characteristics of media, be it photography, film, or radio. This category also includes the material nature of the message conveyed on a screen or a page of paper. Several levels of technical production can also be combined here; in the case of the book, this would be the creation of the text on a typewriter or a computer and the reproduction of the text by means of technical printing processes.
- The cultural dimension, which includes the culturally shaped perception of media as a means of communication, be it theatre, comics, or the press. These are media that are regarded as such in public discourse, without it being possible to make a clear semiotic or technical classification because the production of a comic is subject to technically comparable processes as that of a book and, as shown, also uses the same channels on a semiotic level as an illustrated book; the comic is however regarded as an independent medium.[106]

Ryan also points out that in most cases, all three dimensions must be taken into account when determining a medium. For example, the computer game semiotically uses the visual, the auditory, and in some cases also the literary-verbal communication channel. In the technical dimension, it is communicated via screen as well as via loudspeakers, similar to sound film. Moreover, unlike film, it is still characterized in the technical dimension by the interactive intervention possibilities. The computer game would share all these characteristics with an interactive multimedia reportage, for example. In this respect, the cultural dimension must be considered here, which has a distinctive effect.[107]

105 M.-L. Ryan: *Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instrument of a Media-Conscious Narratology*, p. 29 f.

106 Cf. McCloud, Scott: *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, New York: Harper Perennial 1994[*1993]; K. Kukkonen: *Contemporary Comics Storytelling*; C. Klein/M. Martínez/L.L. Wolff: "Introduction. Narrating Reality in Comics," pp. 1-5.

107 However, there are scholars who do not regard computer games as a medium. In his contribution to this volume, Gundolf S. Freyermuth determines computer games—introducing a hypernym to Christian Metz's concept of "super-genre"—as a "meta-

Werner Wolf argues in a similar way when he states, regarding intermedia narrative, that in contrast to some media theoretical terminology, 'medium,' in intermediality research, does not primarily mean a merely technically-materially defined transmission channel of information (such as writing, printing, broadcasting, CD, etc.), but a dispositive of communication conventionally regarded as distinct. This is primarily characterized by a specific (e.g., symbolic or iconic) use of a semiotic system (language, image), in some cases also by the combination of several sign systems (as in the case of sound film as a composite medium of language, image and music/sounds) for the transmission of cultural contents, and only secondarily by specific technical media or communication channels.[108]

Wolf continues to say that in light of this explanation, we can also speak of a medium novel, or a medium of narrative literature.[109] He thus also links the technical, semiotic, and cultural dimensions in his concept of media. What seems important here is his emphasis on the cultural dimension when he speaks of a conventional concept of distinction, which also allows us to call comics or literature a medium, for example. In a purely technical or semiotic view, these would hardly be distinguishable as media, but in the cultural practice of production and reception, they differ considerably.

So how is the concept of transmediality and, thus, the question of transgressing media boundaries to be understood in the context of this anthology? Jenkins, who introduced the term "transmedial storytelling" in 2006, defines it as follows: "[a] transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole."[110] The term "transmedial storytelling" thus refers to a singular narrative that is realized in different media. In this anthology, the term transmedial storytelling can refer to a singular story that spans several media platforms, as well as to adaptations of the same story in different media, or to certain elements of narrative design, such as

genre" within the software medium. Nevertheless, this differentiation is not decisive for the main argument in the present chapter and the context of the anthology, because even within the framework of such terminology, the general process of crossing borders would still be present—not from medium to medium, but e.g., from the meta-genre film to the meta-genre computer game: Cf. Freyermuth, G. S.: "Towards the Ludic Cyborg," Chapter VII.1.

108 W. Wolf: "Das Problem der Narrativität in Literatur, bildender Kunst und Musik: Ein Beitrag zu einer intermedialen Erzähltheorie," p. 39.

109 Ibid.

110 Jenkins, Henry: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New media Collide*, New York: New York University Press 2006, p. 95f.

character archetypes[111] that appear in different media. In addition, this term can also include the phenomenon of 'transmedial storyworlds,'[112] i.e., narrative worlds, such as in *The Lord of the Rings*, GAME OF THRONES[113], or the Marvel superhero universe, in which a multitude of stories is told in different media such as comics, games or films, that are all set in the same narrative world.[114]

Sven Grampp refers to these media boundaries in his contribution to this anthology. He describes the ways in which TV series overcome the media boundary to the computer game—and develops a new systematics of serial narration from the description of this boundary crossing. Vanessa Ossa and Hanns-Christian Schmidt explain how the figure of Batman changes by crossing borders into different media—and how it is still possible to speak of a consistent figure.

5 CROSSING THE ONTOLOGICAL BORDER

Regardless of the medium we use, we organize much of our communication narratively. Stories are apparently the most suitable form for the human brain to communicate and process information, as many studies by both scientists and practitioners suggest.[115]

One might assume that there are more logical or efficient ways to organize, structure, and communicate information. Some of the narrative design principles described even seem to stand in the way of the consistent transmission of information. In the case of gapping, for example, the narrative text purposefully leaves empty spaces and often deliberately does not reveal certain information at first. A

111 C. Vogler: *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*; J. Friedmann: *Storytelling for Media*.

112 Cf. M. L. Ryan: "Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instrument of a Media-Conscious Narratology," pp. 25-50.

113 GAME OF THRONES (US 2011-2019, C: David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, the TV series, is based on the series of books entitled *A Song of Fire and Ice* by George R.R. Martin. See the section "Literature" at the end of this article for a complete list of titles.

114 However, in the case of the Marvel storyworld, the comic books differ so much from the film and VOD versions that in the case of the latter storyworld, one now speaks of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in order to distinguish between the two storyworlds.

115 Cf. Gottschall, Jonathan: *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human,* Boston: 2013; Storr, Will: *The Science of Storytelling*, London: William Collins 2019; Breithaupt, Fritz: *Das narrative Gehirn*, Berlin: 2022.

scholarly text, on the other hand, often presents its essential findings in the form of an abstract before the actual essay. What leads to a quick overview and efficiency in scholarly practice would be a 'spoiler' in a narrative mode and considered as breaking the rules. Many fictional texts also fail to meet criteria such as credibility or consistency at first glance. Thus, in narratives such as Aesop's fables, we can encounter talking and thinking animals. They can even be acting household appliances, as in the 1987 Disney film THE BRAVE LITTLE TOASTER,[116] or ghosts and supernatural beings, as in the 2020 Pixar film SOUL.[117] It is perfectly clear to the recipients that the plot could not happen in this way and that a toaster and an electric blanket would not cultivate a loving friendship. These creative choices even seem to emphasize the fictionality of the text. Nevertheless, the recipients can still find the narrative believable on an emotional and spiritual level. Indeed, even fictional stories are highly capable of shaping human worldview and behavior. Be it early, ancient societies that first find a common identity through myths or religious texts[118] or very contemporary examples, which show that narratives have a great influence on human behavior and social discourse—regardless of whether they are considered 'credible' or 'authentic' from a social or scholarly perspective. Thus, even a science fiction thriller like THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW (2004)[119] can trigger significant changes in ecological priorities and have an impact on the political voting behavior of its recipients.[120] A sitcom like LITTLE MOSQUE ON A PRAIRIE (2007-2012)[121] can contribute to the level of tolerance and empathy shown towards religious minorities—more so than proven psychological methods.[122]

The so-called CSI effect has also been well-researched. The crime series CSI, which was broadcast from 2000 to 2015[123] and from which three spin-offs were

116 BRAVE LITTLE TOASTER, THE (USA 1987, D: Jerry Rees).

117 SOUL (USA 2020, D: Pete Docter).

118 Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *The Raw and the Cooked*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1964.

119 THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW (USA 2004, D: Roland Emmerich).

120 Leiserowitz, Anthony: "The Day After Tomorrow: Study of Climate Change Risk Perception," in: *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 46, no. 9, 2004, pp. 22-38, doi: 10.1080/00139150409603663

121 LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE (Canada 2007-2012, D: Various Directors).

122 Brauer, Markus/Sohad Murrar: "Entertainment-education effectively reduces prejudice," *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* Vol. 21(7 (2018), Madison, pp. 1053–1077.

123 CSI: CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION (USA 2000—2015, D: Various).

produced, is considered one of the most successful television productions in the world. For the first time, it brought the criminal investigation work of male and female scientists into focus. Another special feature was the fact that the two forensic scientists on the team, Catherine Willows and Sara Sidle, were female characters. This was unusual in the television landscape and did not correspond to the realities of the profession at the time, where these positions were predominantly held by men. Since the series aired, the forensic sciences in the USA have seen an unusually high increase in female applicants—an effect that is attributed to the portrayal of corresponding role models in the successful series.[124] At the same time, the portrayal of forensic investigation methods in CSI has also produced results that are seen as negative. For example, in court proceedings in the USA today, it is apparently more difficult to convey to jurors as well as crime victims and their relatives that forensic analyses and expert opinions can require days or even months, instead of being available within a few hours or days, as depicted in the series.[125]

While it is understandable that such effects of narratives are not always controllable, the measurement and proof of corresponding effects are also not always unproblematic. But it is evident that the representation of new role models or the breaking of gender or racial stereotypes and, thus, the promotion of socio-political discourses and social change can be an important field of storytelling. This also becomes clear when one considers certain genre designations of narratives, which indicate that they have been conceived to influence the behavior of the recipient: Entertainment Education in the field of TV series and Serious Games in the field of game design. These narratives work by crossing the ontological boundary between the storyworld and the world of the recipient. This is one of the other border crossings addressed in this anthology. Dirk Hoyer describes which kinds of stories are present and which are needed to envision a different and better future for society and humankind. J. Martin examines the conditions under which personal gaming experience has an impact on social transformations, as is the case with other narrative media such as books or films. Jörg Friedrich presents, from the practical perspective of a game designer, how his game THROUGH THE DARKEST OF TIMES[126] can be used to create awareness of the National Socialist era in

124 Marrinan, Corinne: "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Science and Gender in a Fictional Crime Series Format," in: *STEM and Equal Opportunities in TV Drama Formats*, Bonn/Berlin: Berlin University Press 2011, pp. 44-49.

125 Podlas, Kimberlianne: "The CSI Effect," in: *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.40, accessed 24.04.23.

126 THROUGH THE DARKEST OF TIMES (DE 2020, O: Paintbucket Games).

Germany and the dangers that emanate from totalitarian, authoritarian thinking. Ezinne Ezepue shows how the patriarchal structures of the colonizers were transitioned in Africa in the post-colonial period in order to oppress women. This is also evident in the representation of women in African film narratives of the time. But Ezepue also shows how this image of women can be changed through new forms of female representation in order to promote social progress. With a similar objective, Zimbabwean animation artist and game designer Eugene Mapondera shows, from a practical perspective, how indigenous southern African mythology and folklore can be represented and preserved in modern media to reverse the destructive effects of colonization on African culture. Alexander Preisinger and Andreas Endl describe how the representation and simulation of climate and extreme weather phenomena in games can make the real phenomenon of climate change tangible for recipients.

Even more consistent is the transgression of boundaries that Robin Curtis describes—in immersive narrative texts, the boundary between recipient and narrative is not only transgressed but also dissolved, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between (media-) technology and the human body while living in a time where the borders between physical space, material space, and the space of information became blurred. Gundolf S. Freyermuth, in his media-historical text, hence points to a further dissolution of boundaries—that between author and artificial intelligence, resulting in a completely new concept of authorship.

So, follow us as cartographers of narrative as we measure, chart, and transgress the boundaries of our physical and narrated world.

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LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE (Canada 2007-2012, D: Various)
SIXTH SENSE, THE (USA 1999, D: M. Night Shyamalan)
STAR WARS (USA 1977, D: George Lucas)
SOUL (USA 2020, D: Pete Docter)
LITTLE MOSQUE ON THE PRAIRIE (Canada 2007-2012, D: Various Directors)

James Bond

DR. NO (GB 1962, D: Terence Young)
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STAR WARS (US, 1983, O: Atari)
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RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER (USA 2015, O: Crystal Dynamics)
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