3 X 3: New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence

EN

This essay is part of "New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence," a series of three texts about works from the Turbulence.org archive written and translated by members and affiliates of New Media Fix. Each is published in three languages: English, Italian and Spanish. The series includes "The Body in Turbulence" by Josephine Bosma, "Narrating with New Media: What Happened with *What* has Happened?" by Belén Gache, and "Turbulence: Remixes + Bonus Beats" by Eduardo Navas; translated by Lucrezia Cippitelli, Francesca De Nicolò, Raquel Herrera, and Ignacio Nieto. "New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence" is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

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IT

Questo saggio fa parte di "New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence" una serie di tre testi dedicati ad alcune opere archiviate in Turbulence.org ed è stato scritto e tradotto da alcuni membri e collaboratori del collettivo di New Media Fix. Ogni articolo è stato pubblicato in tre lingue: inglese, italiano e spagnolo. La serie include "Il corpo in Turbulence" di Josephine Bosma, "Narrare con i nuovi media: che succede con ciò che è successo" di Belén Gache e "Turbulence: remixes + bonus beat" di Eduardo Navas; tradotti da Lucrezia Cippitelli, Francesca De Nicolò, Raquel Herrera e Ignacio Nieto. "New Media Fix(es) on Turbulence" è stata finanziata dal National Endowment for the Arts.

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ES

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narrating with new media: what happened with *what* has happened?

narrando con i nuovi media: che succede con ciò che è successo?

narrando con nuevos medios: ¿qué pasa con el qué ha pasado?

by Belén Gache

on narrative structures, ideologies and strategies

de estructuras narrativas, ideologías y estrategias **ES**

Certo è che i nuovi dispositivi elettronici implicano tanto una nuova forma di scrivere e narrare, quanto una nuova grammatica ed una nuova semiotica. Oggi il testo non è più concepito come una linea progressiva di parole, quanto piuttosto come uno spazio pluridimensionale, a partire dal quale si configurano differenti possibili storie.

There has been much talk about the relations between printed books, modernity and metaphysics; and about the relation between new writing applications and philosophical schools such as poststructuralism and deconstruction. The fact is that electronic writing applications involve a new way of writing and narrating, a new grammar and a new semiotics. These days, text is no longer conceived as a consecutive line of words but as a multidimensional space which shapes different possible stories.

I will analyze three specific works from the Turbulence archives: *Digital Nature: The Case Collection* (Tal Halpern - 2002), *Apartment* (Marek Walczak and Martin Wattenberg - 2001) and *Ground Zero* (John Cabral - 2001). In these three works the story is based in a secret to be disclosed. A question is posed in all three cases: *what* has happened? However, in each case we must deal with a different kind of secret and a different kind of narrative strategy.

A narrative structure is a process of meaning creation. Its purpose is to provide a specific view of events. Narration acts as a dimension which shapes and transforms the chaos of these events in a significant totality and therefore is always related to a particular ideology. We will see how *The Case Collection* and *Apartment* create their writing resorting to metatextual strategies. *Ground Zero*, on the other hand, is based on the idea of a presented time, a very different notion from that of representation of time.

Lo cierto es que los nuevos dispositivos electrónicos implican tanto una nueva forma de escribir y de narrar como una nueva gramática y una nueva semiótica. Hoy el texto no es más concebido como una línea sucesiva de palabras sino como un espacio pluridimensional a partir del cual se configuran diferentes posibles historias.

there are no facts, only interpretations of "facts" themselves

no hay hechos sino sólo interpretaciones de los mismos **ES**

In his essay *+Estructura del suceso*, (1) Roland Barthes refers to the "fascinating and unbearable lapse of time which separates the fact from its cause." For example, the traditional detective story will make use of this lapse of time for the plot. In this model of story, the detective has to fill the gap of time backwards in order to reveal the enigma. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, (2) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari pick up this literary model based on the question: "whatever has happened?"

Nel modello tradizionale, il detective risponde alla domanda seguendo una causalità logica e cerca di ricomporre la linea cronologica degli eventi. Sarà lui a guidare il lettore nel momento in cui tenta di organizzare un ordine temporale di sequenze che diventi significativo.

In the traditional model, the detective solves the question following a logical causality and tries to recompose the chronological line of events. He will be the one to lead the reader while s/he tries to organize a temporal order of sequences that becomes significant. The reader of the traditional model follows a logic which establishes that meaning stemming from a consecutive and irreversible causality and tries to solve a mystery. This logic does not admit drifts, ambiguities or loose threads. It does not a admit a plurality of meanings or simultaneous experiences either. Obviously, both the *Nouveau Roman* and the postmodern novel found the traditional model of the detective story very appealing to deconstruct, leaving gaps and emphasizing the fact that there is no specific ontological answer to the question "*what* has happened?" simply because there are no facts but interpretations of facts themselves. But how does this narrative model work in new media? These narratives are characterized by non-linear presentations, the use of different semiotic systems (linguistical, visual, sound-based), and the fragmentation of information unities -- the *lexias*, to employ another Barthesian term (3) -- without a specific order, where the parts and the whole appear as relative categories. Here is where the reader doubles as detective. The ways s/he solves the enigma will be plural and conditioned by the different reading paths s/he chooses. Now, how might the kaleidoscopical information s/he receives be useful in reconstructing an event? Which kind of structure will s/he be faced with? What will the pieces s/he will have to combine to solve the puzzle be?

metatexts

En el modelo tradicional, el detective resuelve la pregunta siguiendo una causalidad lógica y trata de recomponer la línea cronológica de los eventos. Será quien guíe al lector mientras trata de organizar un orden temporal de secuencias que se vuelva significativo.

IT metatesti

metatextos **ES**

Un metatesto può funzionare secondo differenti modalità: può essere interno o misto; può essere un discorso critico, una struttura speculare, una categoria narrativa, una figura, ecc. Il metatesto contribuisce

We have stated that both *The Case Collection* and *Apartment* have resorted to metatextual strategies, each in a particular way. The concept of metatext is defined by Gerard Genette as a text that talks or instructs about another text (4). A metatext might work in different ways: it can be internal, external or a combination of both; it can be a critical discourse, a specular structure, a narrative category, a figure, et cetera. The metatext contributes to the coherence of the text and provides the reader with clues for reading. By avoiding the linear setup of their texts and the classical tripartite Aristotlean structure of beginning, middle and end, alternative writing models have frequently resorted to metatexts in order to organize narrative experiences.

Un metatexto puede funcionar de varias maneras: puede ser interno, externo o mixto; puede ser un discurso crítico, una estructura especular, una categoría narrativa, una figura, etcétera. El metatexto contribuye a

Many metatextual structures have been based on spatial premises. For instance, the text of Jacques Roubaud, *Tokyo infra-ordinaire* (5), is structured from a cartographical layout; the map of the Yamanote subway line, which goes through the center of Tokyo, functions for the narrator as a way of constructing a "subway poem". George Perec presents us in *La Vie mode d'emploi* (6) with the life of the people inhabiting a Parisian building. The reader goes over all the different apartments, which are arranged in the form of a Latin bisquare, and serves as a sort of game board through which the story advances according to the movements of the chess knight. As a matter a fact, game boards have been used several times as privileged metatexts. To offer some examples, in Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, following the model of the hopscotch game in which the player jumps from one box to another trying to reach her/his goal, the characters jump from one chapter to another similarly to the reader that goes into the reading of the text; or *Through the Looking Glass (and what Alice found there)* by Lewis Carroll, where Alice is a white pawn in a chess game, and the game can be won in eleven moves.

The Case Collection: the secret and history

The personal belongings of Sir Francis Case, requisitioned by the State, are found years later in the National Archives. They consist of a series of objects that work as textual fragments. Analyzing these objects partly allows us to reconstruct a dark secret in the life of this character.

Tal Halpern | *Digital Nature: The Case Collection* | 2002
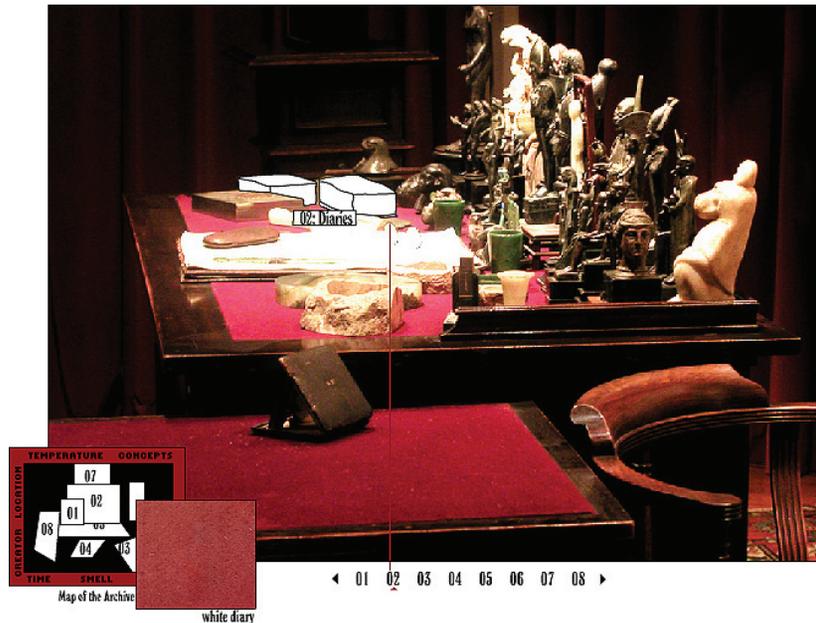
la coherencia del texto y provee al lector de claves de lectura.

In *The Case Collection*, the desktop is presented as a sort of board that works as a structure for the different game pieces. The pieces (two personal diaries, an illustrated children's book, some audio recordings, some medical files, some films) are the objects of the naturalist's personal collection. Each one of them carries a particular testimony, a particular fragment of the story. In this instance we face a dark secret: something terrible has happened. Whatever happened to Sir Francis Case? Was he in his right mind? Whatever happened with the flood? The personal effects of Case and the objects in his collection will be the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle we try to fit together in order to solve the mystery. Each one of these objects offers a narrative by itself. The story of Arloz is the adventures of a little rhino who left home to travel throughout the world; the Black and White diaries compare different narrative records of Sir Francis' travel, the psychiatric notes of Dr. Gerstein are focused on obsessive neurosis, reporter Nancy Lois makes her interviews, and they all belong to a general narrative unknown to us, which appears broken into small pieces; we are never going to know it as a whole. The reader tries to fill the narrative gaps these objects do not speak of, the gaps supposed to hide the secret that gave place to the story, but to no avail. The narration of *The Case Collection* becomes a metaphor in opposition to the motives of the flood and the colonial narrative, so to speak, the destruction of all possible meanings versus a unique and closed meaning.

Apartment: the cartography of the event

In *Apartment* we are also confronted with a spatial metatext. A cursor at the bottom of the screen invites the reader to write words that will go on to become stories. In their turn, these written words will end up acquiring their own topology and they will become apartments and cities, invoking personal memories and creating packets of time-space.

Marek Walczak and Martin Wattenberg | *Apartment* | 2001

While time acts as a constrictive element only allowing us to move in one direction, space on the contrary is presented as free and with a wide array of possibilities, full of deviations and intersections. Text and space are indissolubly connected. By being related to the spatial and visual dimension (unlike the oral word, which is related to time and hearing), writing will unfold in space and this is where it will draw its figures and movements. This relation has been widely emphasized in the course of history. For instance, to create a mnemonic, rhetoricians imagined their speeches inscribed in the rooms of the villas, and they would pronounce and memorized them as if they were going through the spaces, mentally walking through them. For his part, Ludwig Wittgenstein identified language with the layout of a city (7). In *Apartment*, it is the cartography of the different apartments which doubles as a metatextual element to structure all the stories. Here, the reader her/himself is the one who gives shape to the buildings through the writing of the texts. In their turn, the buildings will construct cities according to their particular linguistic relations.

Regarding "*what* has happened?" *Apartment* deals with very different kind of secrets: personal and intimate secrets, daily life secrets. The reader goes all over the rooms, buildings and cities like some sort of *voyeur*, sneaking into spaces and memories which are alien to her/him. The underlying idea here is that each memory, as well as every story, is just a subjective construction.

presented time

In *Apartment*, la cartografia dei diversi appartamenti agisce come elemento metatestuale strutturante delle narrazioni. Qui è lo stesso lettore che dà forma agli edifici mediante la scrittura dei suoi testi.

En *Apartment*, es la cartografía de los diferentes apartamentos la que actúa como elemento metatextual estructurante de las narraciones. Aquí es el mismo lector el que da forma a los edificios mediante la escritura de sus textos.

IT tempo presentato

tiempo presentado ES

Modernity has conceived a one-dimensional, continuous, homogeneous time that goes forward from the past to the future, toward a point of no return. This conception has prevailed in the Western narrative, at least until the beginning of the 20th century, when theories of relativity deconstructed the unified and casual notion of time, opening up, accordingly, a chance to conceive multiple and simultaneous temporalities.

In the seventies, Roland Barthes denounced the idea that the traditional narrative mistook the securing of something for its consequence, which later came to be read as something which is "caused by" (8). Traditional narrative therefore becomes a systematic application of the logical fallacy pointed out by scholastics in the expression "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*", which means "after this, therefore, because of this". Besides, in this kind of narrative, the representation of time, ordered with a beginning, a middle

La modernità ha concepito un tempo continuo, omogeneo ed unidirezionale, che avanza dal passato verso il futuro senza possibilità di ritorno.

La modernidad ha concebido un tiempo, continuo, homogéneo y unidireccional, que avanza del pasado hacia el futuro, sin punto de retorno.

and end, will be the one to create a whole of meaning. We should realize that while the present "presents" itself, past and future can only appear in the discourse as represented times. Thus, narratives in the present time correspond to anti-representative aesthetics.

Beyond avant-garde experiments with narrative time, Barthes refers to postmodern texts as texts that are not describing facts of the past but things that are happening in the now of the story. There is no other time than the now of speech, and every text is eternally written in the here and now of the reading. This means that writing does not attempt to "represent". The "now" dismantles the difference between story and discourse.

In the third case I am going to analyze here, *Ground Zero*, the alternative use of the temporal element will demonstrate the crisis of traditional representation. This work breaks the conventional model playing with the absence of a narrative whole and with the construction of different versions of *what* has happened or whatever is still happening there.

Ground Zero. ¿*what* happened to Ratzo?

This work presents Ratzo, the king of rats, immersed in the space-time of a mythical forest and reacting according to the different moments of the day. There, Ratzo will bump into characters such as the hunter, the voodoo queen, the wolf, the cow, the dove, and so on. All of them have ambiguous personalities. Will they try to warn Ratzo about the dangers that lie in wait him? Will they become sources of danger themselves?

John Cabral | *Ground Zero* | 2001
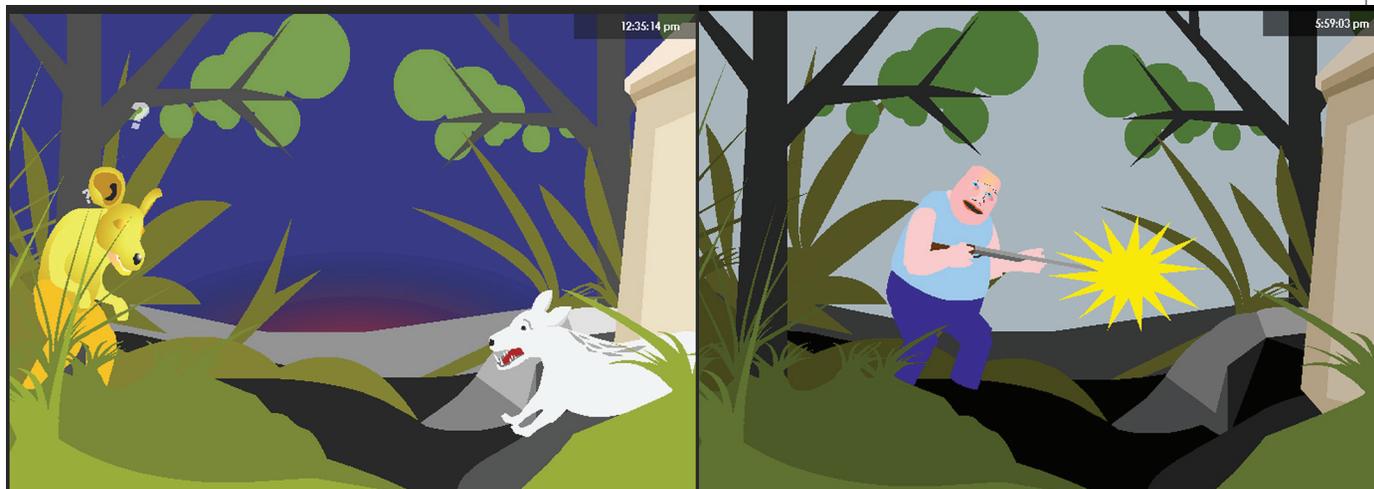
In *Ground Zero*, the enigma is: "*what* happened to Ratzo?" As in the traditional narrative model, we try to answer the question about the luck of the main character. Jorge Luis Borges said that there are time mazes as well as space mazes. *Ground Zero*, a 24-hour narrative, is set up as a big maze of time. Ratzo is defined as an "archetypal creature which walks through the mythical forest in the outer limits of civilization". As a character from a painting by Poussin, he wanders around an atemporal burial mound and finds other archetypal characters. Ratzo inhabits a parallel universe, a parallel time which differs from linear modern time.

The crisis of the representation time (that is to say, the crisis of history) has been expressed through different media. In his *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), Douglas Gordon presents Alfred Hitchock's film *Psycho* (1960), slowing it down so that its running time is extended to the 24 hours of the day. Obviously, no viewer is able to watch a film for 24 hours, every viewer is going to have her/his own narrative experience according to events that, in any case, s/he cannot completely understand (this is nevertheless possible thanks to the metatextual element of the original film, widely known by the audience). With a logic opposed to modern omniscience, where the viewer's look takes in everything, from the beginning to the end, the viewer of *24 Hour Psycho* is immersed in a true nearsightedness of the present time (as we all are in our daily lives), knowing only a part and a perspective of the story and not knowing where is it going to end. Something similar happens to the viewer of *Ground Zero*. From our sheltered place, behind the monitor screen, we observe the facts unable to understand the whole plot, but sensing the multiple hazards (the hunter, the wolf, the powerful light emanating from the burial mound) Ratzo is exposed to. Each viewer will have different experiences and perceptions; each viewer will be able to tell her/his own story. As a narrative of uncertainty, we are witnesses to what is happening in *Ground Zero* among the shadows and bushes, and we have to deal with characters who speak without words, most of the time using exclamation points, question marks or asterisks, referring to a non linguistic communication and implying a continuous urgency or confusion, depending on the case, that cannot be reduced to words.

The use in the work of white (or black) screens is reminiscent of the whites in Stephan Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, so that we are aware of the silences and noises of the message; of the inconsistencies, fragmentations and discontinuities of the plot that involve those of life itself. We only see fragments of the whole story, if there was a complete story at all. Here, as in Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, the whites constantly threaten to swallow the meaning of the story.

to conclude: writing differently, reading differently

In the traditional crime model, the action of the detective creates the narrative movement that advances towards the establishment of a meaning and allows the reader to reconstruct the story in a coherent and understandable totality. However, one of the main subject matters that emerged from posmodernism was relativism and the plurality of possible meanings of a text, and the deconstruction of the notion of totality or completeness. As Barthes also suggests, a story never exhausts whatever has happened. Causality is always fragmentary and altered, or, at least, suspicious or misleading. Every event is constructed from our subjectivity; it is never an objective reconstruction of the facts. Thus, *what* happened only leaves the different versions of the story.

We have also stated that a narrative structure is a process of meaning creation, and that this process is always related to a specific ideology. *The Case Collection*, *Apartment* and *Ground Zero*, as narrative structures emerging from the new electronic writing devices, imply a new way of telling a story and a new grammar. Writing in a different way means reading in a different way. And reading in a different way means, in this instance, to understand the world differently.

Belén Gache.

The Case Collection, Apartment e Ground Zero, con tali basi narrative sviluppate in conseguenza all'uso dei nuovi dispositivi elettronici di scrittura, implicano un nuovo modello narrativo ed una nuova grammatica. Scrivere in altro modo implica leggere in un altro modo. E leggere in altro modo significa, a sua volta, capire il mondo in altro modo.

The Case Collection, Apartment y Ground Zero, en tanto planteos narrativos surgidos a partir de nuevos dispositivos electrónicos de escritura, implican una nueva forma de narrar y una nueva gramática. Escribir de otra manera implica leer de otra manera. Y leer de otra manera, significa, a su vez, entender el mundo de otra manera.

NOTES

(1) Roland Barthes, Critical Essays (Evaston: Northwestern University Press, 1972). Cited edition: "Estructura del suceso", *Ensayos Críticos* (Barcelona: Seix-Barral, 1983). Original text: Essais critiques, (du Seuil: Paris 1964).

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(8) Roland Barthes, "Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits", in *Poétique du récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

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