Spreadsheets, Sitemaps and Search Engines

Why Narrative is Marginal to Multimedia and Networked Communication, and Why Marginality is More Vital than Universality

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Media Studies both benefits from and is overdetermined by its double origin, among sociologists increasingly convinced of the centrality of communication to modernity, and among literary schools diminishingly persuaded of the relevance of past literatures to the lived experience and likely futures of their students and themselves. The clash of cultures has been immensely fruitful. But the dialectic of humanities and social sciences approaches has occasionally broken down: one critical example is the failure of ‘ethnographic’ audience studies to square off with qualitative and statistically-based analysis of audiences (though see the forthcoming work of Andy Ruddock), leaving a yawning gap between micro-studies of ‘real people’ and macro-studies of whole populations. Studies of the new media are beginning to bridge the gap through the wide-scale interactive dialogues that have begun to break down the impasse. A second unfortunate effect has been the felt necessity to preface any methodological proposal with a diatribe against whatever the author perceives as the previous dominant discourse in the discipline (see Gauntlett’s introduction to his otherwise useful web.studies). One thinks here of Barry Salt’s attack on Screen, maintained long past its polemical sell-by date in the second edition of Film Style and Technology, or Bordwell and Carroll’s assault on interpretative criticism. The vitality of the field – since this is a necessarily interdisciplinary zone – depends, on the contrary, on the recognition of what has been achieved to date, even as we test and contest the premises, principles and, increasingly of late, the objects that constitute it. In this vein, I do not want here to decry the achievements of narratological analysis, or to claim that it has no place in critical understandings or creative dispositions in computer-mediated communications. Rather, I want to suggest that narrative is only one among several modes of organisation characteristic to new media, that this has an impact on certain universalist claims for narrative analysis, and that one crucial measure of value, the relation to narrative models, therefore does not hold good in assessing new media texts and practices. On the other hand, I also want to point up the importance of narrative’s temporal imagination in a spatialised world of communication, and insist that its very marginality allows it a special role, which otherwise it could not occupy.

There are three particular discourses of narrative that need to be reassessed if we are to grasp the nettle of new media’s temporalities. The first is the notion that almost any mode of human cul-
ture can be understood as narrative. In this discourse, we read of the essentially narrative form of memory, of history, of myth, of news, of psychology, of politics and of science. While such literary readings of non-literary discourses can be illuminating (for example the analyses offered in In Dora's Case by Bernheimer and Kahane), the claim underlying this discourse is that all human activity is fundamentally structured like a story. Yet some key narratological analyses demonstrate that even apparently narrative forms (the myth and the western among them: see especially Lévi-Strauss and Wright) are better understood as structures, spatial rather than temporal formations. This spatialisation of narrative analysis anticipated the spatial turn of cultural analysis, prominent in the work of geographers like Lefebvre, and Harvey in cultural studies. At the same time, however, the geographical imagination altered the terms under which narrative could be deemed central to human experience. A journey, for example, may be recorded in a more or less picaresque narrative, but it may also be transcribed as a map or a geographical information system.

A second objection to the universalist claim for narrative analysis is that it restricts itself to a more or less strictly chronological model of temporal experience. There is only an apparent contradiction between this chronological critique and the criticism of spatialisation. The chronological narrative proposes to us a protagonist who always occupies a perpetual present (without which such effects as suspense and expectation would be impossible) as a point moving along a line whose dimensions have however already been mapped: the protagonist of the chronological narrative is caught in a story whose beginning and end have already been determined, and which therefore constructs story time as the unfolding of destiny rather than the passage from past certainty into an uncertain future. This sense of preordination constructs narrative as timeline, as a spatial organisation, and its protagonists as variants moving through rule-governed moves, as in a game of chess. That this is in itself a specific and historical expression of Western culture is only one aspect of its imperialist gesture. The other lies in its negation of the plurality of modes of consciousness and discursive formations through which we experience the present. As I hope to show, alternative modes of temporality are particularly important in the study of digital media.

The second discourse in which narrative takes a central position derives from Lyotard’s critique of the grand récit or ‘master narrative’ as that characteristic of modern culture whose loss marks the entry into the post-modern. Lyotard and his later acolytes make three critical errors. Firstly, there is a failure to register the most significant political and communicative discourses of the late twentieth century: post-coloniality, feminism and the green movement. More forgivably, Lyotard wrote too early to confront the emergence of ‘techno-boosterism’ as a worldwide cultural discourse running directly counter to his thesis. Nonetheless, discourses of technology, anti-imperialism, gender and ecology pose an empirical challenge to the observation that the ‘narratives’ of progress, emancipation and truth have ceased to exercise the political and social aspirations of contemporary society. Born of the betrayal of such aspiration by the Parti Communiste de la France in 1968, the bitter anti-Marxism of key post-modern theorists like Lyotard, Baudrillard, Virilio and Deleuze does not validate the attempt to ascribe to modernity an exclusively and uniquely narrative foundation, nor the insistence on the failure of the form.
The third weakness of the argument, again crucial to the critique offered in this chapter, is the confusion surrounding the definition of narrative as a necessarily teleological form. Certainly, Marxism has historically pointed towards the future as the site of the ‘realm of freedom’, which the third volume of *Das Kapital* moots as the beginning of history after the ‘pre-history’ of class war. Equally, certainly Stalinism (and to a lesser extent Leninism) posited a definite content for the realm of freedom. But both Trotskyism and the new political movements of the late twentieth century paint a picture of the future without definite content, even when the future is imaged as the result of a stark and immediate choice, as so often is the case in the more impetuous shades of green. The difference is that between faith and hope, teleology and eschatology. In this way, the critique of the *grand récit* misinterprets progressive politics as Aristotelian narratives with a beginning, a middle and an end. Not only do such political movements not define themselves in terms of conclusion: their goals are not even necessarily conceived of as states of equilibrium. Instead, the discourse of the End is peculiar to post-modernism itself, and to post-structuralists like Barthes, Baudrillard and Lyotard, with the only difference being that each awards himself the Hegelian privilege of reading history from the vantage point of its (successful or unsuccessful) conclusion. By thus deploying a narrative strategy to emphasise the twin issues of narrative’s centrality and its conclusion, the critique of the *grand récit* entered a circular logic that defeats its attempt to present itself as a philosophical account of the social world.

The third discourse significant to the current analysis belongs at once to avant-garde critiques of narrative and to the implicit evaluative frameworks of media studies. Vanguardist criticism received an immense fillip from the writers associated with *Tel Quel* in the late 1960s and early 1970s, those associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique* in the same period and the translations that became available in the pages of *Screen*, *New Left Review*, *SubStance* and other small journals in the mid-1970s. In common with earlier avant-gardes, the poststructuralists around Boulez, Sollers, Resnais and Godard instigated an attack on the dominant culture. Identifying narrative as a characteristic of the dominant, they proposed anti-narrative, alongside anti-illusionism, as a key strategy for radical art practice. As vanguardist strategy this was fruitful. But as the language in which it had been couched became accepted as the basis for North Atlantic ‘theory’, the terms of the narrative/anti-narrative distinction became normative. On the one hand, narrative was assumed to be dominant, while on the other opposition to dominance has been taken as an assumed but rarely explicit criterion of evaluation. Production practices, texts and reading strategies are praised for being oppositional, resistant or subversive. Yet all these terms not only assume domination but also define themselves exclusively in relation to it. Thus, oppositional practices become dependent on the dominant they oppose. In the immediate context, anti-narrative defines itself through its dependency on narrative. This has two consequences. Firstly, narrative once again becomes universal by assimilating all aberrations from itself as merely oppositional. Secondly, the possibility of alternative forms, rather than simply oppositional ones, is elided. Put more formally, narrative/anti-narrative is a binary opposition incapable of producing a new term beyond their polarity. The emergence of alternative media forms, by contrast, demands not dualism but a dialectical under-
standing capable of producing something new. The themes critiqued here — of universal narrative, the end of grand narrative and anti-narrative — share the paradox that narrative analysis produces a static and spatial model in place of a dynamic and temporal one. Is it possible or desirable for narrative to regain a place in the critical and practical vocabulary of the emergent media? I believe so, but under a new guise, that takes account of the fact that narrative is no longer — if indeed it ever was — the central mode of modern communication.

The very universality claimed for narrative indicates the poverty of the category as a historical tool. Although, as Williams observes, the rise of the popular press, film, radio and television has led to the proliferation of narrative texts way beyond the experience of earlier generations, the larger history of modernity is better traced through its more fundamental innovations. The remarkable persistence of narrative in twentieth-century media can only be apprehended as remarkable if we apprehend the environment in which it is now performed: a landscape of other modes of documentation and dissemination. Crucial among them are forms of data storage and retrieval that are not structured in time, as is the narrative, but in space. Modernity’s key social formations — capitalism, the state and imperialism — cannot be imagined without the data systems on which they depend: book-keeping, record-keeping and cartography.

In their digital forms, spreadsheets, databases and geographical information systems are core facets of new media usage, an importance underlined by their significance to the history of workplace computing. Moreover, the convergence of these three core systems in popular packages like Microsoft Office and AppleWorks indicates a far higher degree of integration than that claimed for sound, image and text in multimedia and networked communications. The lack of emphasis on workplace media is a legacy of the division of labour executed between sociology and cultural studies in the late 1960s and early 1970s; largely motivated by the slogan ‘the personal is the political’. Feminist criticism of the exclusivity of class analysis derived from work as object of study led the turn towards the more gender-oriented, less class-defined politics of the domestic and of leisure. But that emphasis on the media as home- and leisure-based has become misleading in a period in which the same machines occupy similar spaces at home and work, or are physically carried between them, while the very distinction between work and leisure is becoming increasingly blurred. The emphasis on narrative derives in part from a failure to address instrumental media techniques like databasing into hobby culture, spreadsheets into voluntary culture and cartography into the life experience of an increasingly mobile population.

One factor which is particularly germane to this discussion is the way in which digitisation adds a certain additional dimensionality to the existing physical media from which digital forms derive. Not only multiple drafts but also multiple linkages become available whereby a single mode of ordering and retrieval — alphabetical, chronological or co-ordinate for example — is supplemented by others. A database can be searched through any of its fields, a property leading towards the highly-integrated forms of contemporary informatics. At the consumer end, these might look like
geo-positioning systems accompanied by a gazetteer of hotels and restaurants, service stations and retailers. At the industrial end, it might involve combinations of loyalty-card data from superstores with credit card transactions and postcode- or zip-code-based market research. In between lie specialist services like geo-ecological surveying for prospective house buyers. These processes and many others help to build the impression we have of the computer screen as a window or even a doorway into a complex and multidimensional space.

The critical metaphors applied to this newly three-dimensional interface — navigation, search, surfing — have incidental and contingent connotations of some specific narrative genres, but they are neither purely nor only narrative, and this for two reasons. Firstly, as already emphasised, they are spatial rather than temporal metaphors; and secondly they are eschatological, not teleological. If we take the example of record-keeping, the move from the ledger to the filing cabinet not only introduces an important division of labour allowing great intensification of bureaucratisation in the imperial state, but also introduces a new criterion for data storage: ease of retrieval. By contrast, during this same period the gigantism of narrative from Don Quixote and Tom Jones into the nineteenth century, along with the eclipse of verse as the natural medium for epic, indicate that narrative was in the process of losing its oral role as popular memory, and that novels and plays ceased to function as repositories of popular memory. That task was remitted to either the imperial bureaucracy, guardian of genealogies and associations with the land, or to the almanacs and other popular compendia of herbal, meteorological, astrological and similar traditional lore. That authors of the calibre of Calvino and Borges could ‘experiment’ in the twentieth century with forms which were already entrenched throughout Europe and the Americas in the seventeenth is testimony to the remoteness of literary and narrative cultures from the actualities of life.

Parallel with the demands of bureaucratisation, the accumulation of knowledge in books began to demand a radical overhaul of library design. The introduction of classified catalogues led directly to the first designs in the 1930s for taxonomies based on semantic principles, origin of the familiar keyword search. Boolean operators, providing for inclusive or exclusive searches, depend on a logical rather than narratological sense of what constitutes the semantic domain, and ‘invisible’ elements of documents, like HTML (hypertext mark-up language) metatags, are as determining of the semantic value of a page as its apparent content, narrative or otherwise. Even within sites the use of graphical or textual sitemaps, navigation bars and selection buttons indicate that to some extent the retrieval mechanism internal to the book, the index, has taken over from narrative as the key relay of textual organisation from the literary to the digital.

Two facts need to be noted about the prevalence of search, retrieval and three-dimensionality in this key formation of digital media. Firstly, they derive from a model of efficiency associated since Weber with the bureaucratic-rationalist ethos, and in the conceptualisation of the Frankfurt School with the instrumental reason typical of late capitalism. This efficiency model, mercifully, has plenty of loopholes to allow for serendipity in searching. The circumscription of that serendipitous connectivity in enclosed domains like AOL (America Online) or Microsoft Network in some ways approximates even more closely to the fully bureaucratised form of the library in which stacks and
reading spaces have been separated and retrieval of books from shelves professionalised. Nevertheless the instrumentality of the logico-semantic models deployed in spreadsheets, search engines and GIS systems (Graphical Information Systems) to some extent defines the landscape in which the new media narrative must operate, if it is to operate at all.

The second outstanding fact is that this logico-semantic model of information storage is explicitly and consciously designed to facilitate the mechanised retrieval of data. It stands therefore diametrically opposite the humanism implicit in normative or universalist accounts of narrative. Machines clearly do not have an innate predilection for narrative form. Despite having been developed for imperialist, bureaucratic and capitalist (Virilio would add endo-colonial and militaristic) interests, the digital media need to be understood in an evolutionary sense as the first new mode of communication (with the possible exception of the cinema film) to propose that mediation might imply not representation, but communication, and that it might demand communication not despite or via our machines, but communication with them. In this light, the burden of efficiency appears as a counter-evolutionary attempt to restrict the human-computer interface (HCI) solely to those functions that suit the requirements of contemporary capital.

Key among these is the capacity to document the present in order to stabilise the future. The restrictive design of the HCI in such modes as the browser window’s ever-present frame or the single-user desktop and laptop design of the physical machine, is then itself a product not of the acceleration of progress, but of the attempt to stabilise such social formations as individualism and advertising (with its underlying separation of audience and producer) at the precise point, in the meeting of human and machine, at which the evolutionary potential is highest and least controllable. The spatialisation tendency belongs to contemporary capital’s need to plan the future in terms of its stability; to preserve the status quo. This is where narrative’s residual and now marginal position in the new mediascape becomes once more a vital component of the culture. From its position at the margins, narrative can once more rethink itself, not as a binary system of dominance and resistance, but as a dialectical agent given the task of reintroducing time, while at the same time embracing the possibilities of human-computer communication broached and betrayed by the spatialised media. As so often in contemporary culture, the margin is the site of cultural innovation.

III

One example of the kind of work that can be imagined in this frame is an apparently linear single-monitor video work by the American artist Daniel Reeves, now resident in Scotland. Obsessive Becoming uses an array of digital techniques to manipulate still and moving images from the artist’s family archive, gradually unearthing a history of abuse, criminality and abandonment.8 If this were all Reeves undertook, the work would have the literary structure of a Freud case study or a detective novel. But Reeves’ view of this family is neither accusatory nor aetiological. Nor is it an attempt to erase or forget the images or their implied histories. Instead it undertakes an always difficult and, in the most tangible sense of the word, responsible act of forgiveness.

Narrative here serves neither to consign history to the past, nor to project a perfected moment
of closure into the future, but to enact the present – of the artist’s making and the audience’s viewing – as a moment fully informed but at the same time charged with a task, in this instance not quite of healing, but of acceptance. However, where the artist intends, it appears, recognition of the appalling difficulty of life under all and any circumstances, what makes the work transcend mere apology is the commitment it exhibits to forgiveness as something akin to Heidegger’s duty of care.\textsuperscript{10} The tragedy of bigamy, desertion and casual cruelty cannot be denied or placed in parentheses, but must be acknowledged. At the same time, the piece appeals to the sense that any life, no matter how fucked up, is worthy of respect and even love, especially of love, of an unconditional offer of understanding based on shared humanity.

It is this which takes Obsessive Becoming beyond the Heideggerian towards another mode of temporal awareness. Heidegger’s care is essentially spatial: a reaching out and gathering in. Levinas’ ethical ‘first philosophy’ also thinks of this ethical imperative spatially, in terms of the face-to-face encounter where, in its meeting with the Other, the I is bound to recognise its own finitude and the limitations to its freedom.\textsuperscript{11} Reeves however comes closer to what my mother used to call ‘consideration’. When Mum asked us to show some consideration for others, the call was first of all for a kind of environmental awareness: to notice the world and especially the other people around us. However, stepping beyond this first spatial alertness, the being considerate asked us to anticipate – to put together the baby-buggy and the crowded escalator into an ordinary act of kindness. Thus, this alertness was not only to the present but also to the future states toward which it tended. That motherly advice that illuminated my growing years today strikes me as the common wisdom that anticipates Bloch’s post-Heideggerian formulation of the Not-Yet as the typical configuration of the realisably utopian in human affairs.\textsuperscript{12}

When, in the 1880s, Pissarro took to painting peasant girls and women in moments of idleness, he was deliberately attempting to capture such an immanently realisable utopia, a world of leisure achieved after you have done enough work, not the excess demanded by the extraction of surplus value or the pursuit of consumerism in the emergent society of the spectacle. These quiet moments of still and thoughtless contemplation, as in the Jeune Fille à la Baguette (an image of a young girl tapping idly at a bank of rich vegetation with a loosely dangled stick), have been expropriated subsequently by an art market concerned to ideologise Impressionism as a love affair with the actually existing moment of perception. Pissarro’s letters reveal, and Renoir’s most sociable canvases likewise, rather a sense of the unrealised but realisable, exactly the Not-Yet of Bloch’s mid-twentieth-century philosophy.\textsuperscript{13}

At its most regressive, as in Monet, the ephemerality of the moment appears as loss, and enters the predominantly nostalgic sense of beauty that so enraths the constructors of art in the twentieth century. At the brink of the twenty-first, ephemerality need no longer be understood as loss, but as becoming. The much-vaulted sublime, as post-modern icon, stands across the possibility of the future, setting its ahistorical finality athwart the trajectory of emergence. What makes today’s post-narrative, temporal, historical, eschatological creation so singular is neither nostalgia nor sub-
limity but becoming, as adumbrated in ‘divisionisme’, and so triumphantly realised as a new mode of thinking, being and creating in the cinematograph a hundred years ago.

And though individual artists like Daniel Reeves can open the doors to such perceptions, the cultural objects that define what we are becoming are no longer driven by individuality and objectality, by who we are, but by collaborations, conflicts, negotiations and the transgression of the subject-object divide still sacrosanct in Heidegger, Levinas and even Bloch, not to mention Vattimo\textsuperscript{14} and Virilio.\textsuperscript{15} Our understandings of interrelation and temporality today derive from what is characteristic of our time – the urban, the global, the networked: the environmental. Any sociologically persuasive theory must today be profoundly ecological.

In this sense, I suggest that rather than narrative as such we need to understand how it is we inhabit our twenty-first century as temporal beings: the question asked and asked again in Reeves’ video piece. Three modes of being present themselves in the cybercultural discourse: the search, the journey and the ocean. The search engine presents the world as a landscape and itself as a vehicle capable of instantaneous travel to precise positions: an efficiency model. The journey is announced in the words Navigator and Explorer, which propose metaphors of colonisation of an alien world. The oceanic, precisely tuned from Reich to Goldie, articulates contemporary cultural experience as immersion, and so points towards the (progressive) indifferentiation of subject and object. The weakness of this least-worst metaphor is that it remains rooted in spatiality and the denial of time.

When we confront the World Wide Web, as distinct from the discrete or quasi-discrete objects (websites) we may identify within it, we enter a certain, as yet inchoate, mode of time. For all the boast of instantaneity, our actual relations with one another in cyberspace are mediated and as such subject to delays: slow downloads, periodic crashes, cache clearances and software uploads. Where there is something approaching communication, the processes of interpretation, misinterpretation, reply or intellectual or emotional response occupy physiologically measurable timeframes. It is this temporality that we need to adopt in order to reinvigorate the oceanic vision of cyberspace.

Obviously the least teleological or imperialistic, the oceanic thought, in its most widespread form (for example in Kelly’s ‘new biology of machines’ or Negroponte’s Wired column), has become the justificatory ideology par excellence for the legitimisation of free-market economics in savagely deregulated – and as a direct result fiercely monopolistic – globalised trade.\textsuperscript{16} This misunderstanding of complexity theory rests on what should by now be a familiar trope, the narrative universalism that sees the present as the end of history. Because the present is uniquely actual in comparison with past and future, it is presumed to be final, the sum of all preceding interactions. What is rendered opaque and written out of possibility in this account is the likelihood of a future state unlike the present. For the present only presents itself as a structured system from the point of view of its beneficiaries, who form by far the minority of the human population. For the majority of the world’s inhabitants, and especially from the perspective of non-human phyla, organic and mechanic, the present presents itself only as meaningless chaos and devastation.

The consciousness of what is Not-Yet, and indeed the Not-Yet-Conscious, in the light of the connectivities that increasingly regulate our waking and even our dreaming lives, must be under-
stood firstly as hybrid, imbricating human, ecological and technological domains. The three phyla are as mutually interdependent as the members of the human alone. In that interdependence, and in its collapsing of boundaries, there begins to flare the light of another temporality, a complex emergence from the chaos of the present. It is the task of narrative consciousness, now from its newly marginal position, to reconfigure itself as the possibility of change.

This means that narrative can no longer assume its old certainties — the spatial figures of binary opposition and semantic rectangle, or the linear progression from beginning, via middle, to end. The paradoxes indistinguishable from platitudes that haunt the mid-period of this transition (‘In our end is our beginning’) can no longer help, indeed hinder the vision of a mode of being which is not caught in the stasis of geometrical (space) or geographical (place) metaphors. We might even begin to take seriously the Einseinian thesis that the old Kantian division of space from time no longer holds good, if indeed it ever did beyond metaphysical speculation and the interests of the imperial bureaucracies of the enlightenment.

Thus the understandings we must obtain — and the quest is of a form and isomorphic with its object, incomplete and future-oriented — concern not only the shapes of our new media but their proximate and distant interactions with the world, from the phenomenology of the slumping body in front of the VDU to the impacts of digital trading on the fauna of the High Andes. Nowadays, ontologically as well as epistemologically indistinguishable from communication, e-cash is our dominant form of planetary intra-species communication, not storytelling. However, e-cash, though its movements may be narrativised in the daily press, is essentially non-narrative. Though we speak of its movements, we are always aware that the global stock market is a zero-sum game that always balances the books, its ceaseless trading a mask for the stasis of the break-even bottom line. Worse still, if we have any consideration at all, we must acknowledge that what temporality persists in all this fulness is the temporality of decline, punctuated only by moments of panic.

If we take Wittgenstein’s starting point, that the world is all that is the case, we have to argue that the world is not nothing, as Baudrillard argues in later works like The Perfect Crime, but that the world is stuffed to overflowing. Rather than propose nihilism as the solution to the superflux of spectacle, and beyond Adorno’s negative dialectics, we need to commit ourselves to positivity, the increase in connectivity in the interests of emergence, against the nihilism, which is no longer oppositional, but the very form of the dominant itself.

The old narrative models become dangerous when they support the enclosure of narration as object apart from both the subject that reads and the world that embraces. The discrete model of narratives as a plurality of whole and distinct entities has become the cultural type of the escapist experience pursued because it has nothing to do with the world — because, in Kant’s terms, it is without interests. But today the discretion of the object and the disinterested activity of aesthetic appreciation have become very precisely sublime, removed from the hurly-burly of a life-world in which narrative has been buried under and marginalised by the sheer mass of spread-sheets, databases and GIS.

Thus narrative, as it emerges blinking into the digital age, can no longer afford to be whole,
entire and complete. Neither closure nor the concept of a middle defined by its terms can hold good of the new temporal arts. We have known since Lévi-Strauss that the study of origin is a futile pursuit: no archaeology will ever reconstitute the ‘beginning’, for every moment is the concretion of a hundred intertwined, contradictory, even contingent determinants in nets, which only become more overdetermined over time. Moreover, chaos theory stems from the observation that no possible knowledge of initial conditions is accurate enough to predict the unforeseeable unfolding of turbulence and emergence. Thus beginning is not a self-defining term. Nor is the concept of the end, since as ethical principal and thus as aesthetic axiom it is not possible to imagine the world as already complete and unchangeable. Even were it possible to define the human by its origin and conclusion, the middle remains an infinity, and it is that infinity which we inhabit. What distinguishes ethical communication is that it seeks to open up the branching possibilities of what is Not-Yet, rather than to control, define and determine them. In this perspective, new time-based media must take responsibility for the emergence of the future. Certainly, no single actor or action can, on the principles just voiced, be the sole determinant of what next ensues. But equally no one apart from those of us who are living in this very hour can have any influence whatever on the becoming of the future in this present which is ours alone.

By way of conclusion, an apology. There should be more examples and cases in a chapter like this. But since my subject is a historical ‘narrative’ of what emerges next, what is Not-Yet, it defines for its purposes the ‘new’ of ‘new media’ as those media and their forms that have yet to be invented. The conceptualisation of newness not as what has already been achieved (as everybody knows, the new media, if by that we mean the digital and the networked, are already 30 to 60 years old) but what waits unachieved and unimaginable, though only just around the corner. It is that immanence that today sparks the most remarkable new ‘narrative’ sense we have: the phenomenology of the click. It is not that any hyperlink we have already visited has taken us where we want to go, but that the link is the narrow gate through which the future could arrive at any moment.

NOTES


