

Writing Technologies

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Between Narratology, Ludology and Cinematography**

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Writing Technologies, vol. 5 (2013), 1-18
ISSN 1754-9035

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I New Digital Textualities

The construction of hypertext fiction for the computer, the creation of fiction stories for e-readers as well as the more general turn from analogical technologies to digital technologies in the graphic novel and film creation, are all the outcome of the multiple technological convergences that have been taking place, leading to the intersection of artistic modes. Similar cross-over tendencies have been observed in the creation of computer games. As it is hereby contended, electronic games, which are the evolution of non-computer-based role-playing games, such as *Dungeons and Dragons*, have been open to influences from traditional literary fiction and other popular media, such as film productions, verifying their need for redefinition and survival through a common future in popular culture industry. It is this essay's aim to trace the changes that have been taking place in the domain of popular fiction writing at the crossroads with electronic gaming and film productions, leading to the medium's redefinition. To this end, what is ventured here is the investigation of *Discordia*,¹ a 3D online interactive experience which appears on Stephen King's official website. *Discordia* is based on the remediation of King's printed *Dark Tower* series, which have been inundating the market for four decades.² It constitutes an electronic experience which tries to 'simulate'³ its printed counterpart and has drawn on principles coming from distinct genres, technologies and traditions with the aim of introducing something new to the market and the consuming public. More importantly, its hybrid nature has revived discussions concerning the redefinition of the writing and reading process as well as the relationship between the writer, the reader and the text.

A number of controversial issues need to be directly addressed before a satisfying description of this computer experience and its influences can be put forward. Firstly, the question of whether computer games

constitute a 'legitimate' art form has troubled literary critics, computer game designers and the academia for three decades. On the one hand, computer games designer Christopher Crawford, in the revisited Kindle edition of his book *The Art of Computer Game Design*, thirty years after its first publication, suggests a number of reasons to reject his initial optimism that the computer game would turn out to be a dynamic medium that would evoke emotions in the player who came in direct communication with it. In his 'Preface' he firmly declares: 'My grand dreams of computer games as an art form have not come to fruition; games are just as much an artistic wasteland as they were 30 years ago'.⁴ He continues that as game designers have failed to bridge the gap between the game's story and gameplay the story remains unconnected to the purposes of the game.⁵ Additionally, the profits of an insatiable art industry seem to block its entrance into adulthood.⁶ As it turns out, the videogame has failed to live up to the expectations of its creators, answering only to the demands of the consuming public.

On the other hand, media critic Henry Jenkins expresses his hopes that '[g]ame designers will almost certainly develop their own aesthetic principles as they confront the challenge of balancing our competing desires for storytelling and interactivity. It remains to be seen whether games can provide players with the freedom they want and still provide an emotionally satisfying and thematically meaningful experience'.⁷ Furthermore, Gonzalo Frasca's hopeful response is based on the 'simulational' aspect of videogames which confirms their dynamic nature as it focuses on the behavioural potential of the subjects and objects rather than their mere representation. His belief in the aesthetic growth of videogames lies in their ability to carry an ideological overload and enable 'critical debate'.⁸

Another issue of particular interest is the debate between Narratologists and Ludologists as regards videogames' storytelling potential. On the one hand, leading ludologist Espen Aarseth has been struggling for the creation of an autonomous discipline that will examine games and game genres as such, while rejecting the common practice of borrowing existing terms stemming from literary tradition. In his seminal work, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Aarseth draws the dividing line when he suggests that '[t]he adventure game is an artistic genre of its own, a unique aesthetic field of possibilities, which must be judged on its own terms'.⁹ Frasca's major contribution in the debate lies in underscoring the different purposes that the two representational systems serve. He explains that videogames are more like table-top

games rather than motion pictures or narratives. The first are simulations, that is behavioral models sharing the elements of 'ludus' (game) and 'paidia' (play), which Roger Callois had proposed in the 1960s. They model a fictional or a real version of the world while at the same time carrying their ideological overload. By contrast, the latter have as their primary aim to narrate a story using different representational structures to this end.¹⁰ Jesper Juul notes that their main difference is formal, as games are 'played by algorithms' while stories 'belong in the interpretative domain' and presuppose 'contextual knowledge'.¹¹

On the other hand, literary and popular culture critics see the evolution of computer games not only as technological artifacts standing on their own but also as cultural products within a complicated process parallel to other cultural and literary expressions such as narrative fiction and film. Therefore, they strive for a realization of the new artistic expression and the depiction of its uniqueness through its comparison with other media. It is their premise that computer games and conventional literary fiction share some common ground since artifacts of both disciplines try to communicate a story. Janet Murray highlights the new narrative possibilities which digital media release. Her milestone *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*, was one of the earliest works which argued in favor of the computer as the expressive medium for new textual experiences and her Holodeck posed as an alternative narrative experience and a simulation of a fictional world. In her more recent article, 'From Game-Story to Cyberdrama', the image that she creates of the story 'outgrowing the structures of the novel... [like] a painting outgrowing the frame and morphing into a three-dimensional sculpture'¹² describes the inevitable process of storytelling adjusting to the needs of the new media era. In answer to the issue in question, she sees a common space uniting stories and games. What games and stories have in common are the elements of contest and puzzle which participants have to face when both reading a story and playing a game in order to obtain the desired messages and results.¹³

These new textual experiences that are being formed at the intersection between narrative fiction and computer gaming have also accepted influences from the domain of films as cinematic techniques are shared to convey the story in games and forward narrative. Cut-up scenes, motion videos and voice-overs are incorporated while camera techniques, such as shots, angles, framing, lighting and flashback – to name only some – are adapted to enrich the projected result.

Furthermore, as proposed by James Newman, a tendency towards 'auterism'¹⁴ is notable in the marketing and criticism of video and PC games, meaning the tendency to associate the creation of the most popular games with the names of certain videogames designers and producers in an 'attempt to gain credibility by association with "respectable" media'.¹⁵

Of course there are unbridgeable differences which separate these three distinct disciplines. Among others are the differences in the readers'/players'/viewers' interaction with the work, the difference in the scale of the immersion into the world, the extent of 'freedom' with which they are armed and the different types of authorship that are involved in the creation of narrative fiction, computer games and films. Neither the length nor the scope of this essay allows the investigation of these issues. Yet, it is the aim of this essay to showcase that since technology has enabled the co-existence of all new (multi-/hyper-) media applications within a single 'vessel' (mainly that of the computer, the videogame console, the tablet or the smart phone), as the meeting ground after the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies, the videogame constitutes another instance of this convergence which displays and shares characteristics with other mediums of expression. The study of these characteristics is ventured here with no attempt to demarcate the boundaries between literary writing, computer gaming or film productions but with the hope to create the bridges that will facilitate and explain for such artistic and technological convergences through the exploration of diverse digital textualities.

II Pushing the Limits: the Making of *Discordia*

This essay studies the development of the online computer experience *Discordia* as a cultural and artistic artifact, coming about as the result of the remediating power of an original written text able to transform into diverse artistic forms of expression through the use of different technologies. It is examined here as the result of such intersecting forces in electronic literary culture since it successfully combines the tradition of the literary text with the latest technological multi-/hyper-media and digital applications for the best results in picture, graphics and sound that will make the story more realistic and believable and will manage to create an immersive experiences for the gamer. Its combination of literary text and gameplay constitutes the exemplification of the debate between Narratologists and Ludologists. Additionally, the cinematic

elements that can be traced in the game justify theories about connections between videogaming and cinematography. Making use of digital technology and graphic design, it can be claimed to be pushing literary and cinematic boundaries in a constructive way, presenting a new experience for the user in the twenty-first century.

Discordia is not an electronic game in the simple sense of the word. It is an online experience, inspired by the printed eight-volume *Dark Tower* series, and independently produced by StephenKing.com. It can be classified as an exploratory game as it deals with Operator 19's efforts to explore the adventures of the main characters of the print story, transformed into a videogame simulation and represented on the computer interface. It also combines elements of the adventure genre as the players have obstacles to overcome, items to gather and puzzles to solve for the story to flow. Of the many efforts to create a typology of videogames the simplest distinction between 'narrative games' and 'playable stories', provided by Marie-Laure Ryan is adopted here.¹⁶ Being categorized as a playable story, *Discordia* falls within the category of 'paidia' games rather than 'ludus' games. The players do not play to win but rather 'to observe the evolution of the storyworld'.¹⁷ Via Op 19, they are called in to find clues and magical orbs and put them together in order to reconstruct King's fictional world.

By resorting to cutting-edge technologies, the authorial team's efforts have been directed towards the promotion of a new mode of textual production and distribution that would manage to engage the devoted reader once again while, at the same time, attracting younger consumer groups. Although it is a separate product, available when online at King's official website, working like an autonomous living organism that feeds on its constituent parts and its products, it is also part of a much larger project. Their aim was to rebrand the author's existing printed works and adjust them to the latest technological developments, making them in this respect relevant to the present needs of the consumers. As it is claimed on the multimedia section of the website, *Discordia* has 'evolved into a progressive storytelling platform that leverages cutting-edge technologies'.¹⁸ Through the technology of Hyperlinking, which creates paths to other realities, the reader is given the chance to go in and out of diverse interactive digital experiences offered online, establishing a more productive and participatory relationship with the artist(s) and the products.

Adopting a much more tolerant attitude towards the merging of different technologies and expressions can contribute to a better understanding of the needs of consuming man as a cultural being, conditioned by the great potential and the limitations of the technologies available. For Jenkins, '[t]he goal should be to foster diversification of genres, aesthetics, and audiences, to open gamers to the broadest possible range of experiences'.¹⁹ Thus emphasis is laid on the narrative story's repurposing by drawing from the art of electronic games and the cinema while some common narrative features that the computer game shares with the fiction on print technology, such as characters, story and events, are taken into consideration. As Barry Atkins points out, when it comes to videogames, it is important to emphasize not 'plot sophistication' but the 'sophistication of telling'.²⁰ What is more, Aarseth is right to propose that, although adventure games are similar to average literary texts in that '[t]hey produce verbal structures for aesthetic effect' they display other essential 'paraverbal' elements crucial for the study of computer games.²¹ Consequently, besides the verbal dimension, of primary interest are the other 'paraverbal' elements that have been accumulated for the creation of *Discordia*.

III From Alphanumeric Text to Digital Environments: The Contribution of Literature and the Arts

The back story of *Discordia* has been inspired by the *Dark Tower* series. However, transformed into a simulation now, it does not rely on the fixed sequences of events as narrated in the print story. The main idea of the experience evolves around North Central Positronics (NCP), the fictional corporation in the series responsible for the manufacturing of computers, robots, and both magical and chemical weapons. The creative team's hope was for a reworking of the basic concepts of the bad Sombra Corporation and the good Tet Corporation already known in the series to resume their battle in the Mid-World and in present New York City, but this time on the electronic medium, making it pertinent to the modern user as well. Robin Furth, King's associate in many projects, has been responsible for the creative writing of the experience. Her book, *The Dark Tower: The Complete Concordance*, along with the electronic Kindle version of the seven volumes have provided the team with the detailed accounts necessary for the qualitative re-adjustment of the printed texts into digital codes to appear on the game's interface.

As N. Katherine Hayles suggests, 'changing the navigational apparatus of a work changes the work'.²² Therefore, the study of the formal changes

of the work is of paramount importance for the realization of the new faces that electronic textuality has been putting on so far. In laying out the development of new media, Lev Manovich describes the process of transcoding involved as:

[t]he translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible through computers. The result is new media – graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts that have become computable; that is they comprise simply another set of computer data.²³

In the case of *Discordia*, turning the written text into graphics, sound and gameplay has been a very complicated process. Graphics designer Brian Stark is quoted by Vondrak as he describes the complex process of transforming written information into graphics: 'We started by hyper-analyzing every word of the sections that we needed to create. We took detailed notes on everything that needed to be considered and in the end, every last detail described by Stephen in the books was manifested in 3D'.²⁴ After the re-purposing of the written text, digital codes posing as text and graphic designs now carry the great bulk of information, creating the environment for the story to unfold and for the user to move and interact comfortably. Therefore, one envisages the mediation of diverse mediums of expression as well as the intervention of different mediating people for the completion of a great project, a proof of collaborative authorship being at work and of the complicated practices involved in moving beyond the literary text but still resorting to it as the foundation for narrative and representational structures.

To start with, when tracing the narratological influences on the new computer experience, the division of *Discordia's* parts into chapters testifies to its literary inheritance. According to Stark, three chapters of gaming experience are expected. The first completed chapter works as the introductory section in a narrative which traditionally tries to set the scene and introduce information about the heroes' whereabouts, the time frame and the situation. The same heroes, characters, settings and specific past incidents drawn from the *Dark Tower* story are recalled, allowing the reader to feel confident in the new gaming environment. According to Seymour Chatman, the story is conventionally separated into two parts, the 'existents', meaning the characters and the settings, and the 'events',²⁵ meaning the actions and happenings. When two narrated stories share the same existents and events, they probably constitute different re-tellings of the same story. Still, in 'Games Telling

Stories? Juul challenges the oversimplification in Chatman's claim, by stressing the formal-specific differences that characterize transmedia narration. Referring to the conversion of games into stories, he notes that 'the existents and events will be transferred, but not the dynamic systems. Our retelling will not be a game'.²⁶ This difference aside, the first chapter is regarded as the remediation: it is the redefinition of the *Dark Tower* story, which is to say that its re-telling is done with a different purpose; not only to inform *Dark Tower* readers and provide a diverse reading experience but also to offer gameplay.

In the simulated extension of the story, much greater emphasis is placed on the visualization of the story on the electronic medium and narrative interest shifts the informative load of the print text onto extreme visual detail, offered by its advanced graphics. The compactness of the information about places and characters through visual elements and written excerpts intends to briefly familiarize the reader with the back story. Besides, it forms the bridge that will connect the first chapter with the new twists in the story, which will be introduced in the following chapters of the gaming experience to be released in the future. This way 'spatial' and 'temporal immersion'²⁷ is achieved. The visual schemata display the richness of the gameworld while curiosity is sustained in the player, followed by surprise. Additionally, the anticipation of the following two chapters of the experience creates the suspense that will keep the players longer into the gameworld. Also, the investigator's written accounts offer secret information and express his feelings, creating narrative interest and a dramatic dimension. The narration is in the first person, allowing the players to identify with the investigator. The journal entries are written in the present tense, stressing the urgency of the experience and creating feelings of anxiety to the player. Despite the objective style of the descriptions, users are informed about the investigator's personal judgments and feelings, acquiring the right mood. For instance, immediately after closing the journal entry for the kitchen, the player as investigator returns to the 'actual' space to check the rightness of the evidence:

Just entered the Dixie Pig kitchen, where the horrendous animal smell is strongest. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised, since the kitchen was the center of the pig's vilest activities. I've counted three major kill zones, all of them ancient. One is located in front of the sinks, another is splattered on the wall near the entrance to the dining room, and the third is by the

stoves. In addition, I've found two ribcages skewered by an iron spit, and what appears to be a human backbone on one of the steam tables. There's a desiccated Grandfather Flea on a countertop- Jakes' bumbler must have taken out a few vermin on his way through here.²⁸

The players' 'emotional immersion'²⁹ into the experience is further facilitated and sustained through dramatic textual narration.

Another issue that differentiates the two mediated stories is that the hero in the online experience is not Roland the Gunslinger and his team but the player in the role of Operator 19, the investigator who is employed with first-person points of view in order to collect information and memorabilia that will help in the investigation of the massacres that had taken place in Dixie Pig and in the Mid-World as was narrated in the printed volumes. His ultimate aim is to save King, the Rose and sabotage North Central Positronics and the Sombra Corporation. The events and existents of the back story are affecting the experiences of the players who, from the position of the passive readers of the story have turned into participants in the experience and co-creators of meaning as they autonomously explore the gameworld and connect the pieces of the story. What is more, the players' movement in the gameworld and the successful completion of the tasks affects the subsequent unfolding of the game experience. The successful completion of the mission leads to the conclusion of the first chapter and provides the players with the choice to continue the experience in different worlds and with different roles and tasks.

Other narrative conventions that are used to create and prolong suspense in *Dark Tower* also offer great potential for artistic creativity in *Discordia*. Yet, once again the load of information is transferred through the visual element. The successful mix of epic with detective elements as well as the borrowings from fantasy and horror genres as we have known them so far in King's written productions continue to enrich the computer experience. The idea of the investigation in the bloody rooms is indebted to the detective tradition. It is done in loops and matches the episodic scene structure of the game as well as the structure of scenes and events in the organization of chapters in novels. Despite the sequential order of the events, repetition is one of the main characteristics of the game and videogame genres which distinguish them from narratives.³⁰ The players can always return to a previous destination, continue their investigation where they had left it and affect

the unfolding of the game story. Only when the verbal riddle is solved and the first chapter is completed are the players warned that they will not be able to go back to the same places in the first chapter.

Greater attention to the graphic design of *Discordia* reveals that the importance granted to print tradition can be discerned in the design of its 'cover page', appearing before the experience starts on the electronic medium. Despite the digital representations, the structuring of alphanumeric inscriptions onto the 'virtual page' of the computer is reminiscent of that in the print tradition. When starting the experience, one faces the cover page which acts as the cover page of a literary book. The emphasis laid on visuality is once again clear and the allegiance to the Gothic tradition is sustained. The representational techniques employed, such as the inscription of the title onto the interface, the white letters against a dark grey background, sprayed with blood as if on a bloody tomb stone and laid on top of a wider black screen, point to the continuation of the known story and the Gothic tradition onto a new platform but this time enriched with elements and influences from digital design and the cinema. The information related to the game's production reminds one again of the way such information is deployed in the printed edition of narratives or on posters created for the cinema. Digitally depicted pictures readjust the literary text and its conventions as the visual elements outweigh the literary ones.

Beside these contributions from literary tradition, further help from the art of painting is typical in the construction of the digital environment and the establishment of a particular mood as its narrative possibilities rely on their bringing forward 'standard narrative schemata'.³¹ As Ryan suggests, the familiarity of these schemata makes these paintings illustrative. Commenting on their narrative and illustrative mode, she suggests that 'the verbal and visual version blend in the mind of the reader-spectator into one powerful image, each version filling the gaps of the other'.³² In *Discordia*, when entering the Main Dining Room and the VIP Room, the blood-splattered paintings depicting a once-tranquil and prosperous era contrast with the images of massacre and gory blood-thirst the player can see on the game's interface. Paintings of still life, nature, portraits and family scenes cover the walls and possibly make a point about a former state of prosperity in the place. They could be depicting scenes of noble home living and representing several distinct moments in a plot, as in the form of comic strips. It is as if they are telling their own story, moving the player to other dimensions. Along with the high precision digital design, these paintings add to the fantastic

atmosphere created in the game and together with the written texts that are included open up to different strands of the story. They evoke moments in the back story and create psychological connections, affecting the mood of the player.

In his attempt at a visual depiction of terror, Stark sticks to Gothic motifs which create an overwhelmingly dramatic atmosphere, after readjusting elements from narrative fiction for the electronic medium. The views of the Dixie Pig are offered as windows to another time and place, or even to a different reality. Images of dust, mould, spider webs, blood and other bodily fluids in the main dining room of the Dixie Pig are depicted in extreme detail. So striking is the presence of the red colour everywhere in the dining room, matching the blood that was splattered everywhere after the battle given there and after the feast of the vampires. The views of the ruined dining room, the kitchen and the pantry, associated with eating habits, bring up issues of cannibalism and make references to the bloodthirsty creatures that have left their mark in the premises. According to Atkins, the presence of strange dragons and beasts in videogames alludes to the folk tale tradition.³³ Skeletons of an unidentified creature in the sinks and broken ribs left lying in the kitchen make an ironic remark as one reads the 'Tonight's Specials' notice hanging on the wall. The thick red wallpaper on the walls and the stained curtains all create an overdose of gore and reinforce the connections with a Gothic tradition celebrated in haunted, deserted and godforsaken spaces. All this descriptive precision further enhances spatial immersion of the player into the fictional world. Additionally, the game's architectural details in tandem with the techniques indebted to the movie tradition heighten dramatic depiction. The carefully structured vistas in the living room, the VIP dining room, the bathroom, displayed through the NCP monitor, with the paintings hanging in the center support the well-proportioned photography in the gameworld and sustain a balance between life and death, destruction and artistic creation of human or beastly other-worldly nature.

In spite of the combination of different technologies and genres for the creation of fantasy, strong efforts are made to cling onto the real. This realism is effected with the help of the high-tech graphics and soundtracks. On NCP's interface we are informed that we are located in New York City and the car horns and the sirens coming from outside are the proof. Newspapers on the glass and police tape in different places remind us of the massacre that had taken place there. The light coming in from the windows adds to the realism and contrasts to the dark

claustrophobic atmosphere created when looking closely for the magical items and character orbs. The fresh light contrasts with the darkness, the dried blood and the dust and could possibly insinuate that no real danger is close at present. The very careful shading of the objects and the great emphasis on the right proportions of objects in the rooms adds to the overall sense of realism created while experiencing the first chapter of *Discordia*. Finally, the feeling that danger might be away is sustained as the loud music tunes heard in the trailer and the noise of shootings have been pacified. As Geoff Howland insists, the power of the sound should not be ignored in video gaming. 'Sound is just as crucial as any other point in your game'; it is 'more immersive than graphics. While graphics will draw you into a scene, the sound going on in the background will create a reality in the player's mind that can never be done with graphics alone'.³⁴ Thus audiovisual diversity enhances dramatic tension and narrative richness in the experience, making the simulation more life-like.

IV The Contribution of Electronic Gaming and the Cinema

When commencing the experience, one can witness the combination of many artistic genres and traditions. The gamer's gaze is directed to look through the Tet Corporation's monitor. The buttons keep reminding us of the presence and the importance of the medium in the quest. The blood stains on the monitor screen remind us of the human presence and the interaction with technological applications. Vondrak explains how 'the retro-tech themes inherent to NCP served as the basis for the site's design'³⁵ as well as the game's. Looking back in this way at the conventions of retro games reveals the game designers' realization of where the genre came from and where it is heading. Just as the players insert email and password onto the retro screen of NCP Ltd, they can stop the buffering video and let the credits, designed in the cinematic fashion and accompanied by penetrating music, appear flashing on and off the screen.

Discordia's promotional video owes much to the cinematic tradition and technologies. Cinematic conventions such as voice-overs, photomontage and cut-scenes create a different literary-gaming experience that takes over the gamer. These elements inevitably disrupt the gaming experience as the narration of the events comes at the expense of gameplay and immersion into the story. Immediately after entering email and password, the user is exposed to the official credits sequence in a Full Motion Video (FMV) form that works as a full promotional trailer

does for movies, suggesting the strong connections between the two genres and technologies. As Atkins notes, it is 'a method of plot establishment and advancement that makes the most of some of the graphics capabilities of the game engine in the replication of a cinematic experience' (36).³⁶ The credits appear in the beginning, informing the user of the authorial team responsible for this great endeavor: the Metro DMA Production team, Furth as the director and Marsha Defilippo as the producer, supervised by King who, as the executive producer of the project, ensures that all decisions conform to the original purpose and plan of the *Dark Tower* series. Of equal importance is the emphasis laid on the visualization of the project and the promotion of art via the original paintings created by Michael Whelan.

This trailer that precedes the actual experience constitutes the space where different writing technologies come into play due to the great potential of the electronic medium. The self-reflexive attitude of the game creators regarding issues related to textuality is apparent from the very beginning. After the inscription of *Discordia* fades away, the faces of the well known heroes start appearing in original paintings by Whelan. Excerpts of written text on paper and newspaper appear interchangeably, contrasting to other electronic texts on the computer screen. Additionally, personal sketches and handwritten notes on photos and paper in English and Russian lend a sense of realism to the project and bring in an element of curiosity. All these pieces of information in digital, handwritten and hand-painted form already transformed into digital coding, stuck together in a collage-like manner against the notice board of a police or private investigator, collaborate in this synergy of meaning. Like the pieces of a puzzle, one is invited to try to make sense of the clues given before one commences the gaming experience. Additionally, the pictures of closed-circuit cameras in the streets in high definition resolution are another instance of digital technology used in the experience. They also reinforce the investigatory role that the player will have to take on in the first chapter. A snapshot of the new character Arina Yokova and her graduate thesis, entitled *Stephen King Dark Tower Universe: Proof that Mid-World Exists*, is another example of intermingling writing styles and genres made possible through the visuality of the computer medium. Finally, motion is contrasted to the still pictures while the music theme in the background clashes with the voice by King and the Agent GR7 that is to be heard soon. As the Mid-world operation is about to commence, this intriguing digital experience has managed to create high expectations and suspense in the users with this carefully interweaving of technologies in one trailer.

In the first part of the experience, a tutorial commences, which has been influenced by first-person shooter games. It is separated into three levels before the main quest starts and interrupts narratological potential. The player as Op 19 gets some practice in shooting that has the specific ergodic purpose to teach him some shooting skills, taking after Roland the Gunslinger, the main hero of the story. As informed by King, Op 19 has to investigate Dixie Pig, Fedic Dogan and Castle Discordia and bring back any information or magical objects along with a full report to King. This way the kinesthetic pleasure and purpose of videogames is satisfied. The tutorial is highly segmented. Once in the Tet Corporation's Gun and Rifle Range, the voice of Agent GR7 urges Op 19 to interact with the game. He advises Op 19 to stay focused on 'the mouse movements' while the warning that 'high speed might make you dizzy' plays with the simulating conventions of videogaming and reminds us of the presence of the medium while 'acquiring' the skills of a gunslinger.³⁷ The Agent's announcement that danger is close and that Op 19 should have his gun ready creates suspense. The tutorial gets progressively more difficult as the player tests and practices hand and eye coordination while music in the background intensifies suspense.

As soon as the trailer and the tutorial finish, the player is faced with the actual interface standing as the window to another reality and as the barrier between the player and the computer screen. By creating an account and interacting with electronic messages the user admits leaving the 'real' reality and enters the 'virtual' reality in cyberspace. The game's interface, being the user's computer screen, constitutes the actual 'doorway' to the gameworld and to cyberspace. According to Manovich, due to the 'modularity'³⁸ of new media, that is the ability of discrete media elements such as images, sounds, and texts to be arranged and further re-arranged without losing their individual identity, these 'new media objects'³⁹ intersect and find expression on the computer interface that the user faces. According to Howland, when designing a game, the interface is the most important element that has to be taken into consideration as it forms the connection between the player and the game. It comprises texts and all kinds of information that the player sees and can use when playing the game. The interface of *Discordia* frames the first level of the story, separating fact from fiction and the reality of the real world from the virtual reality of the gameworld and, eventually, brings the players back to reality when the experience is over. Before starting the *Discordia* experience, the players are faced with a computer screen, but when starting the experience, the players' gaze is framed

within the smaller retro screen of North Central Positronics. This second level of framing clearly separates the simulated story not only from the players' reality but also from the virtual reality of King's fictional world hosted on his official website in cyberspace and fixes it well into the virtual reality of the gameworld. The fact that the players are armed with only a specific number of points of view in every environment they explore and that they are able to manipulate these views by clicking onto the NCP Ltd screen, can be taken as a comment by the authorial team, concerning issues of freedom and control in the game and film genre. The players' gaze completely follows the camera movement as if those images were really theirs. Although gestures and bodily movement are absent in the first chapter of *Discordia*, godlike views of the world are granted to the players while controlling the views helps control and adjust movement.

In the design of the interface, great emphasis has been placed on the importance and centrality of the electronic medium. At this point, Bolter and Grusin's theory of the 'double logic of *remediation*', revealed through the opposing forces of 'immediacy' and 'hypermediation' makes sense. In particular, although new media strive for a realistic effect through 'immediacy', which 'dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented',⁴⁰ a simultaneous 'fascination with media'⁴¹ is revealed through a tendency for 'hypermediacy',⁴² that is for the merging of diverse media forms together, like 2D and 3D graphics, animation, video and sound. In *Discordia*, transparent immediacy does not seem to be a prerequisite. At all points during the navigation in the different rooms of the first chapter, the players are conscious of the presence of the medium. They are constantly faced with the screen supplied by North Central Positronics. Actually, it is due to *this* screen that the players are given the chance to explore this gameworld and are provided with the specific views of the Dixie Pig and the Tunnel. This strong presence of the medium adds to the game's realism and prioritizes its presence, making it the only reality for the players.

This essay has ventured an examination of all these elements that are employed in the creation of *Discordia* as an innovative end product. Through the application of new technologies and the contribution of diverse artistic forms of expression, such as literature, painting, cinema and music, a re-invented digital experience has come about. Through their symbiotic inter-mediation and their struggle for control, this alternative artistic result opens up the original printed text to new

dimensions, creating new roles and experiences for the participants. The advanced computer technology in the creation of 3D graphics, the digital design on the player's interface along with the application of film technology contribute to the creation of this hybrid electronic remediation of the printed *Dark Tower* while the incorporation of readjusted written texts make *Discordia* a mosaic of artistic and technological practices. Apart from its attempt to re-tell the *Dark Tower* story by providing a simulated version of it, it constitutes a characteristic example of transmedia storytelling within digital environment.

Notes

¹ Stephen King, Brian Stark & Robin Furth, *Discordia: A Dark Tower Experience* (New Jersey: Metro DMA, 2009), www.stephen.king.com/discordia [Accessed 1 June 2013].

² According to David J. Bolter and Richard Grusin, 'remediation' – alternatively termed as redefinition or readjustment – describes the process of old and new media being represented in one another through a 'double logic' that 'wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them'. J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), p. 5.

³ Gonzalo Frasca, videogame critic and computer game programmer provides his definition of what a game or videogame 'simulation' entails. For him, "to simulate is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains to somebody some of the behaviors of the original system"... This model reacts to certain stimuli (input data, pushing buttons, joystick movements), according to a set of conditions'. Gonzalo Frasca, 'Simulation versus Narrative', in *The Video Game Theory Reader* ed. by Mark. J.P. Wolf & Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 223.

⁴ Christopher Crawford, *The Art of Computer Game Design* (Berkeley: McGraw-Hill/Osborne Media, 1984), Kindle e-book (location 87).

⁵ Crawford, *Art of Computer Game Design* (location 92-3).

⁶ Crawford, *Art of Computer Game Design* (location 97-103).

⁷ Henry Jenkins, 'Art Form for the Digital Age: Video Games Shape Our Culture. It's Time We Took Them Seriously', *MIT Technology Review*, September 1, 2000, 2, <http://www.technologyreview.com/article/400805/art-form-for-the-digital-age/> [Accessed 15 July 2011].

⁸ Frasca, 'Simulation versus Narrative', p. 228.

⁹ Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 107.

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- ¹⁰ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, p. 4.
- ¹¹ Jesper Juul, 'What Computer Games can and can't do', <http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/wcgcacd.html> [Accessed 1 June 2013].
- ¹² Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), p. 4.
- ¹³ Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ James Newman, *Videogames* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 12.
- ¹⁵ Newman, *Videogames*, p. 13.
- ¹⁶ Marie-Laure Ryan, 'From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Towards a Poetics of Interactive Narrative', *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 1 (2009), 45-6.
- ¹⁷ Ryan, 'From Narrative Games to Playable Stories', 46.
- ¹⁸ www.stephenking.com/darktower/discordia [Accessed 1 June 2013].
- ¹⁹ Henry Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture', in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, ed. by Noah Wardrip Fruin & Pat Harrigan (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), p. 120.
- ²⁰ Barry Atkins, *More than a Game: The Computer Game as Fictional Form* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 43.
- ²¹ Aarseth, *Cybertext*, p. 3.
- ²² N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 90.
- ²³ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 20.
- ²⁴ John Vondrak, 'The Making of *Discordia*: Stephen King's Legendary Dark Tower Goes Interactive', *Post Magazine*, 1 April 2010, 3, http://www.postmagazine.com/Images/Media/PublicationsArticle/BOXX_discordia_CaseStudy.pdf [Accessed 1 June 2013].
- ²⁵ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 9.
- ²⁶ Jesper Juul, 'Games Telling Stories - A Brief Note on Games and Narratives', *Game Studies* 1:1 (2001), 5, <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/> [Accessed 1 June 2013].
- ²⁷ Ryan, 'From Narrative Games', 54.
- ²⁸ King et al., *Discordia*.
- ²⁹ Ryan, 'From Narrative Games', 56.
- ³⁰ Frasca, 'Simulation versus Narrative', p. 5.
- ³¹ Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Still Pictures', in *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling* ed. by Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln; London: The University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 140.
- ³² Ryan, 'Still Pictures', p. 139.

³³ Atkins, *More than a Game*, p. 43

³⁴ Geoff Howland, 'Game Design: The Essence of Computer Games' C++ Home, http://www.cpp-home.com/tutorials/198_1.htm [Accessed 30 June 2013].

³⁵ Vondrak, The Making of *Discordia*, p. 2.

³⁶ Atkins, *More than a Game*, p. 36.

³⁷ King et al., *Discordia*.

³⁸ Manovich, *Language of New Media*, p. 30.

³⁹ Manovich, *Language of New Media*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Bolter & Grusin. *Remediation*, p. 6.

⁴¹ Bolter & Grusin. *Remediation*, p. 12.

⁴² Bolter & Grusin. *Remediation*, p. 7.