'Gaslight' Narratives in Virtual Landscapes: Narratological Implications of Technologically Mediated and Immersive Media

European Narratology Network International Conference
September 15-16, 2020 Riga

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The 6th International Conference of the European Narratology Network, September 15-16, 2020

Preconference Doctoral Seminar, September 14, 2020

Riga, Latvia

Keynote speaker: TBA

Call for papers

'Gaslight' Narratives in Virtual Landscapes: Narratological Implications of Technologically Mediated and Immersive Media

ENN6, Riga, September 15-16, 2020

The ENN6 conference addresses the fusion of new technologies with unreliable, paradoxical, or disturbing narratives, which draw readers and viewers into a story, geospatially and cognitively, by means of blurring the boundaries between real and virtual spaces or alternative ones. At the vortex of the discourse are *'Gaslight' structures* that undermine or destroy impartiality in narrative perception*,* since the very 'modus operandi' of progressive virtual technologies, under the guise of various 'immersive' scenarios, significantly alters all storytelling devices. It is not only within Cinematic Virtual Reality (VR), Extended Reality (XR) or Mixed Reality (MR) but also within any narrative format blending traditional and new mediums that *Gaslight Narratives* occur as a set of narrative strategies that seek to destabilize the critical faculties of its audience or readers through misdirection, contradiction, and cognitive manipulation both in content and form.

ENN6 will discuss the narrative and technological devices and strategies that undermine logic and reason with the effects of surprise, confusion, self-doubt or disappointment emerging subconsciously out of such transmedial and perturbatory narratives. ENN6 will aim at a set of

suggestions for future exploration in the emerging vectors of narratology warning against the unchecked dominance of 'gaslight' narratives in all forms of media shaping the global political and social climate so as to corrupt the world as we know it, with or without the aid of a virtual apparatus.

The ultimate aim of the conference is to extend the boundaries of narratological discourse, both in its classical and post-classical conceptions, within the framework of the technological diversification of Virtual Reality. The topics listed below are meant as a guideline for possible contributions. Contributions are to be strictly limited to 20 minutes (ca. 2,500 words).

Possible topics:

1. **Theory and methodology of transmedial narratology in the frame of Cinematic VR**

Transmedial narratology, in the sense of a coherent narrative delivered over multiple media types, be it films, text, computer-games, hypertext, or media installations, has served both as a discipline and a method to track migration, metamorphosis, and expression of meaning within and between different mediums. However, transmedial strategies within the discourse of virtual reality technologies deserve further attention, especially with respect to those story structures that have arisen along with the advent of Cinematic VR, initially pertinent to the latter format only. The focus may be on the visual-narrative model that emerges less from the VR technology itself than from a narrative matrix peculiar to cinematic VR that deliberately aims at immersion and emotional engagement.

2. **Archaeology of immersive narrative systems**

Investigation of the "media apparatus", as applied to a number of historical (media archaeological) case studies, and the archaeology of immersive media, may frame the relationship between virtual reality, its software engine, and the creative works produced on those platforms. On one hand, at the center of the investigation, there is an immersive presence, both multimodal and sensory in nature as well as narrative driven, which foregrounds the possibility of historical presence, at least on a metalevel. On the other hand, the peculiar aspect of media archaeology is its heterogeneity that resists the procedures and techniques characteristic of a particular way of constructing narratives in Cinematic VR resulting in a narrative that is not straightforward and where direct immersion is augmented by allegories and metaphors of narrative spatial frames separated in time and form. Papers will be welcomed that interrogate these issues by examining historical instances of immersive systems through the lens of contemporary narratological theories.

3. Cognitive narratology in neurocinematics

Neurocinematics examines the mechanisms by which the audience, as receivers of visual information, reacts to a particular narrative sequence of scenes in a film, and how they affect our conscious and/or our subconscious reading of the data presented. While neurocinematic research may demonstrate that some films exert considerable control over our brain activity, it does not necessarily distinguish between the responses that are within the domain of cognitive neuroscience and that within the exclusive framework of narratology, which may open the way to the new interdisciplinary field of *neurocinematic narratology*.

4. Expanding Vectors of Narratology

Immersive audiovisual and auditory experience, both on large screens and on portable devices, is now within the reach of common end users. The aspiration of this technique is to establish a new type of narrative regime that goes beyond the classic stance of detached spectatorship aiming at *as-if-being-there psychosomatic experientiality*. At the same time, structuralists might argue that these new virtual narrative structures merely imitate the editorial and aesthetic schemata of classic narratives, and that in doing so they often oppose the very type of an experience they attempt to install. Instead of merely tracing traditional structures within the field of virtual-reality technologies, modern narratology should aim at establishing new vectors in the discipline that could account for the narrative structures that some virtual technologies may produce.

5. Gaslighting in Virtual Reality

Traditionally 'gaslighting', (that is various forms of psychological manipulation in which a targeted individual (or group) is forced to question their own perception, and sanity through misdirection, contradiction, and deception), has primarily been discussed as a psychological phenomenon as it occurs in the context of popular culture, films, literary texts, and politics. Yet gaslighting is also a narrative device within virtual reality, where the boundaries between reality and fiction are more easily created as well as enhanced by shifting fields of perception, and as such proposes to be a particular pursuit for future narratologists, since it can occur in various forms of text and media and is not limited to Cinematic VR.

6. In addition, the conference is open for **papers on all topics connected with the study of narrative** either in texts or in the media as well as with questions of narratological methodology.

Proposal submission procedure

      abstracts should contain title, author's name and affiliation
      panels should contain abstracts of all panel participants, title and summary of the panel, name of panel chair
      poster proposals should contain title, author's name and short abstract

      Send submissions via the registration form at www.riseba.lv starting January 6th 2020. The deadline for submissions is **March 31, 2020.**

Preconference Doctoral Seminar

Riga, September 14, 2020

In conjunction with the 6th International Conference of the European Narratology Network, a preconference doctoral seminar on virtual vectors of narratology will be held.

Applicants for the seminar must be doctoral students during the 2021–2022 academic year. At the end of the course, the participants will receive a diploma.

Prospective participants are asked to send a 500-word description of their doctoral research together with their résumés and institutional affiliation via the registration form at www.riseba.lv.   The deadline for submissions is **March 31, 2020**.

The seminar will consist of an introductory lecture, delivered by the leader of the seminar, and of four working sections to which the participants will be distributed according to their particular topics.

The doctoral seminar will be conducted by supervisors, who are experts on particular topics. Each student will present their topic (10–15 min), after which the supervisor's comment on the topics, and a discussion, will follow.

Further information and important dates

Panel proposal submission deadline: March 31, 2020

Abstract submission deadline March 31, 2020

Acceptances will be sent out on April 30, 2020

Registration fee: conference: 165€; PhD students: 85€
(PhD students participating in both, the seminar and also in the conference, will pay 85€ only)

ENN6 is organized by the RISEBA University of Business, Arts, and Technology, Riga Latvia, in cooperation with the European Narratology Network (ENN, www.narratology.net)

The subsequent ENN conference, ENN7, will take place in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2022, organized by Associate Professor Valery Timofeev at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences at St. Petersburg State University